

PSY471H1S - SEMINAR IN COGNITION: THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE SELF

CONTACT INFORMATION

Course Instructor: Professor John Vervaeke

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Email policy: Please keep all email to no more than five sentences. If a longer email is needed, then we should meet on zoom or in person (when that is possible) instead. I will respond within 48 hours to email, but 72 hours during peak periods, e.g., one week before assignment due dates. I will **not** read email on Saturday or Sundays and these days do not count towards the 48- or 72-hour return time. Please put your course code into the subject line. I will **not** respond to email that does not have a course code in the subject line.

Office Hours: TBA

Office hours start the week of January 15th.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to PSY 471: Seminar in Cognition. This is a seminar course on the nature and function of the self. This seminar will explore how current psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience are transforming our understanding of the nature and function of the self. We will confront claims that the self is an illusion, and we will look at the relations the self has to narrative, intelligence, consciousness, and agency. The course will consist of six lectures, followed by six session of student presentations and discussions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this course you will learn about the experimental and theoretical methods of Cognitive Psychology. You will learn central concepts and constructs used in the study of the nature and function of the self that are drawn from both the philosophical heritage and current psychological theorizing and experimentation. You will learn to think critically about experiments, theoretical explanations, and the important relationship between theory and data. You will come to a better understanding of the phenomenon of the self through a critical examination of the explanations of those phenomena offered by Cognitive Psychology and related disciplines such as Cognitive Science and Neuroscience.

Readings will be from the assigned text, *Handbook of Self and Identity* (available on Amazon in paperback and electronic format), or from the reference list below.

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Jan. 9): Introduction. The importance of the construct of the self to cognitive psychology, cognitive science, and culture in general. The problematic nature of the self. Some core proposal about the self and how to study it. Read chapters 1 and 2 in the Handbook of Self and Identity (HSI).

Week 2 (Jan.16): Background primer: The nature of dynamical systems, intelligence and relevance realization, personality and relevance realization, the centrality of self-relevance to cognition, and the self as the “glue” of cognition via self-relevance. Read Vervaeke et. al. 2012, read Hovhannisyan and Vervaeke, read Sui and Humphreys (2017), Humphreys and Sui (2016), and Sui and Humphreys (2015).

Week 3 (January 24th): Phenomenology and functions of the self. Read chapters 3-5 and 7 in HSI.

Week 4 (Jan. 30): Chapters 11 and 13 in HSI. Read Forman (1996), Letheby and Gerrans (2017) and Nour and Carhart-Harris (2016), Yaden et. al. (2017).

Week 5 (Feb. 6): Neuroscience of the self. Read HIS 28 and 29, Han and Northoff 2009

Week 6 (Feb. 13): Models of the self. Read Metzinger 2008, Gallagher 2013, and Northoff (2015).

Feb 22 READING WEEK NO CLASS.

Weeks 7-12: Seminar presentations.

TEXTS:

Required:

Books: Handbook of Self and Identity. Second Edition edited by Leary and Tangney.
[HSI]

Articles to be found.

Forman (1996). What does mysticism have to teach us about consciousness.

Gallagher (2013). A pattern theory of the self.

Han and Northoff (2009). Understanding the self: a cultural neuroscience approach.

Hovhannisyan and Vervaeke (2021). Enactivist Big Five Theory.

Humphreys and Sui (2016). Attentional Control and the self: The Self-Attention Network (SAN).

Letheby and Gerrans (2017). Self unbound: ego dissolution in psychedelic experience.

Metzinger (2008). Empirical perspectives from the self-model theory of subjectivity: a brief summary with examples.

Northoff (2015). Is the self a higher-order or fundamental function of the brain? The “basis model of self-specificity” and its encoding by the brains spontaneous activity.

Nour and Carhart-Harris (2017). Psychedelics and the science of self-experience.

Sui and Humphreys (2017). The ubiquitous self; what the properties of self-bias tell us about the self.

Sui and Humphreys (2015). The Integrative Self: How Self-Reference Ingrates Perception and Memory.

Vervaeke, Lillicrip & Richards (2012). Relevance realization and the emerging framework in cognitive science.

Yaden, Newberg, and Vago (2017). The varieties of Self-transcendent Experience.

Recommended Texts.

Models of the Self edited by Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear.

The Oxford Handbook of the Self edited by Shaun Gallagher

The Self Illusion by Bruce Hood

The Ego Tunnel by Thomas Metzinger.

EVALUATION

Extended topic proposal:

Worth 20% of the final mark.

For the extended topic proposal you will choose a chapter from HSI **other than the assigned readings**, or from the Oxford Handbook of the Self, or a relevant peer reviewed paper from the last ten years relevant to the course argument and material. You will write a 1000 word **critical** synopsis of the paper, and you will write a 500 word proposal for how you are going to do a **30 minute presentation** on your topic. Finally, you will provide a 5-10 source bibliography and 300 words indicating how you intend to turn your presentation into a 3000-word essay. The presentation should be more intensive and directed at the specific chapter or paper while the essay should be more extensive and incorporate the discussion of the specific paper into a larger argument dealing with the topic of the presentation paper. Here is the rubric for the proposal.

- a) Synopsis – clear exposition and explanation of the core argument of the target paper and **significant critical** engagement with that argument- 35%
- b) Presentation proposal – 25%
- c) Bibliography – properly alphabetized and APA format. 5%
- d) Essay proposal -10%
- e) Clarity and originality of writing, argumentation, and use of proper APA style- 25%

Due date: Uploaded to Quercus by Feb. 6th 11:59 pm eastern time.

Seminar Presentation:

Worth 25% of the final mark.

In the seminar presentation you will teach the course for 30 minutes according to what you have proposed to do in your extended topic proposal. Here is the rubric for the seminar presentation.

- a) Clear presentation of the core arguments of the target chapter or paper -25%
- b) Critical interaction with the core arguments of the target chapter or paper – 25%
- c) Answering questions generated by fellow students- 25%
- d) Attendance and participation in presentations of your fellow students on the day of your presentation -25%

Due date: Weeks 7-12. The specific order of presentations will be discussed and finalized during the lectures for the 3rd and 4th week.

Final essay:

Worth 30% of your final mark.

3000 word essay APA style. 200 word abstract (does not count towards word limit) is **mandatory**. Here is the rubric that will be used for the essay:

- 1) 10 marks for choosing and framing a topic developed from your topic proposal and presentation.
- 2) 10 marks for coming up with a clear and challenging thesis.
- 3) 20 marks for critically reviewing relevant empirical research
- 4) 20 marks for critically reviewing relevant theoretical debate
- 5) 20 marks for an integrative argument, incorporating course themes and arguments, for your thesis.
- 6) 20 marks for proper APA format, abstract and overall clarity, style, argumentation, and originality.

Due date: Uploaded on Quercus March 20nd 11:59 pm eastern time.

Final Exam:

Worth 25% of the mark

The exam will consist of two parts. The first part is a short answer section in which you will be given 10 terms or phrases of which you must answer 4. For each answer you will need to provide an explanation of the concept, explain to which theories or debates it is relevant, explain how and why it is relevant, and bring up any relevant criticisms or connections to other course material. Since you may refer to your short essay answers in your long essay answers it is a good idea to answer these questions strategically. Each answer will be worth 5 marks.

The rubric for the short answers will be as follows:

- a) Definition/explanation of the concept: 1 mark.
- b) Explanation of to which theories and/or debates it is relevant: 1 mark.
- c) Explanation of how and why it is relevant: 2 marks.
- d) Relevant criticisms and/or connections: 1 mark.

The second part is a long essay answer. Here you will be given 4 questions and you must answer 1 of these questions. It is important to you state, develop, and defend a particular thesis for you answer. You are making an argument based on lecture material, and the reading as to what the best answer to the essay question is. You may refer to your short answers from section 1 in order to avoid re-explaining a topic. **This is the only internal reference allowed. You may not refer to your long answer in your short answers or to one short answer within another.** It is important when defending your thesis that you consider possible objections to it and respond them. The answer will be out of 30.. The rubric for this answer will be as follows:

- a) 5 marks for clearly stating a clear and challenging thesis.
- b) 10 marks for an argument developing and defending your thesis.
- c) 10 marks for making use of the relevant course material from the lectures and reading.
- d) 5 marks for overall style and clarity of exposition.

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters \(https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019\)](https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019). If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources. For example, to learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see [A&S Student Academic Integrity \(https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity\)](https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity) and the [University of Toronto Website on Academic Integrity \(https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca\)](https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca).

Missed Assignments/Special Medical Circumstances

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <https://registrar.utoronto.ca/policies-and-guidelines/verification-of-illness-or-injury/> For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academics/student-absences>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible. Please note that students can only use the Absence Declaration on ACORN *once per semester*. Documentation must be given to me within one week of missing a term test, in any of the forms mentioned above.

LATENESS PENALTY: 5% per day up to a maximum of 50% off.

Classroom Behaviour

Please be respectful of your fellow classmates. Do not do anything that may disturb them such as carrying on a conversation, texting, playing games, checking social

media, etc. while on Zoom link on in person. Such behaviour is unacceptable. When not speaking please **mute** your microphone, when in person please do not use your phone, etc.

Lecture recordings and course materials

Lecture recordings and course materials (including notes) are not to be shared in any way beyond enrolled students. Lectures and course materials are the intellectual property of the instructor and should be respected as such. You are not allowed to put course materials into the public domain, sell the materials, or give materials to a person or company that is using them to earn money. The University will support me in asserting and pursuing my rights, and my copyrights, in such matters.

Re-marking policy - timeline and protocol

If you would like to make a case for receiving a different mark on a graded assignment, please note that you have two weeks from the date an assignment is returned to you to submit the assignment for remarking. Absolutely no assignments will be re-graded beyond this time limit. Material submitted for remarking must be accompanied by a one-page written explanation emailed directly to me detailing your reasons for why you think you should receive a different grade. Be as specific as possible (e.g. correction of addition errors in calculating a grade, a specific point or step that the grader missed, etc.). Note that in agreeing to resubmit your work for remarking, you are agreeing to a re-evaluation of the entirety of your work; your grade may go up, go down or stay the same.

Accommodations:

Religious accommodation:

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling essays, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (like a test, or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Learning Disability or Accommodation Requirement

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/accessibility-services/>. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and

instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

Accommodation for Personal Reasons

There may be times when you are unable to complete course work on time due to non-medical reasons. If you have concerns, speak to me. It is also a very good idea to speak with an advisor in your College Registrar's office; they can support you in requesting extensions or accommodations, and importantly, connect you with other resources on campus for help with your situation.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Accessibility Needs:

(See above, under Learning Disability or Accommodation Requirement)

English Language Learners (ELL) Program

<https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/english-language-learning>

ELL offers a range of programs/workshops/resources to assist all Arts & Science students who wish improve their English language skills (including reading, listening, speaking, and writing). Please see their website for more information about these resources.

Programs include:

- the Communication Cafe, which meets weekly at five different times and locations for the first seven weeks of each term for practice with oral skills like class discussion and presentations
- Reading eWriting, an online program that helps students engage course readings more effectively.

Writing Help

As a student here at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with a number of resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/>.

- More than 60 Advice files on all aspects of academic writing are available at <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca>
- There is also a series of workshops on different aspects of writing that may be especially helpful for your essays. Check out the dates at: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-plus/>
- **NOTE: Writing Centres offer ONE-ON-ONE consultations – use the schedule at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/> to book your appointments for the semester now, as they get filled up quickly!**

Resources for Writing in APA Style

- Free online resources from APA (e.g., FAQs, tutorials, etc.):
 - <http://www.apa.org/pubs/apastyle/>

Additional Student Life Resources <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/>

In addition to Accessibility Services, there are many other programs, services, and resources that are available to U of T students to help with every aspect of “Student Life” This includes family resources, academic support, extracurricular activities, and more. Resources of particular interest may include:

- Health & Wellness: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/>
- Academic Success: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/academic-success/>.
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