

Tutorials: Psychology

PSYCHOLOGY HAS BEEN TAUGHT IN OXFORD since the nineteenth century, and the University of Oxford's Department of Experimental Psychology now occupies an extensive modern building in which distinguished research and lively teaching take place. SCIO's psychology courses offer advanced psychology students the chance to explore the analytical, philosophical, and theoretical bases of their subject, as well as its history and its influence on literature.

Courses do not include laboratory work, clinical work, or classes on statistics, research design, or other technical matters. Students attend lectures in the Department of Experimental Psychology and work in Oxford's extensive libraries in psychology and related subjects to further their understanding of various approaches to the subject, which might include its philosophical underpinnings, and its wider cultural and religious applications.

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Behavioural Neuroscience

This course is concerned both with the neural mechanisms of learning and memory and also an introduction to associative learning theory.

Topics include patterns of memory loss; theories of learning and memory; cellular and molecular mechanisms of learning and memory; memory performance related to genetic manipulation, drug treatments, malnutrition, and ageing; and classical and instrumental conditioning. On completion of this course, you will be familiar with the neural bases of learning and memory and should be able to apply the basic principles of associative learning to human and animal behaviour.

Cognitive Neuroscience

This course is concerned with the relations between the activity of the brain and behaviour. The course covers cognitive and behavioural neuroscience. Topics covered may include: perceptual awareness, identification of stimuli,

visual cues to guide action, selective attention, the selection of action and working memory, emotion, hunger and thirst, and motivation.

Having completed this course you will be familiar with basic anatomical terms, methods in behavioural neuroscience and their advantages and limitations, and the concepts that are current in the field.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychology is concerned with psychological development in human beings, including the biological, physiological, hereditary and environmental influences that affect development. The course covers the period from birth to adulthood with the main emphasis on infancy and childhood. Several major aspects of development are covered including perceptual development, the acquisition of language, cognitive development, social development, and developmental psychopathology. Across a range of topics, we ask what develops and how and why

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it develops. This course is intended to provide an overview and appreciation of core themes in contemporary developmental psychology, bringing together multiple methods including experiments, longitudinal studies, connectionism, comparative approaches, cognitive neuroscience methods, and behavioural and molecular genetics.

Developmental Questions in Science and Religion

This advanced option looks at religion as a domain of cognition rather than just culture. Historically, this approach is known as 'natural theology', and its questions have been inseparable from those pursued by many philosophers and scientists (including the founders of the Royal Society). Recent developmental research has focused on children's knowledge and their 'intuitive' concepts and theories in different scientific domains (e.g., biology, physics, or psychology). In contrast, children's religious concepts are attributed to cultural influences and are generally described as 'counterintuitive' (e.g., Boyer). We will be considering origins and development of core concepts in science and religion by examining different sources of evidence, notably studies of children's ontological and causal assumptions in each domain. What is the relationship between children's assumptions and those of ordinary adults and / or pre-modern philosophers, scientists, and theologians? If children construct a 'natural theological' theory of the world, we ask whether they rely on the same processes that they use when constructing scientific theories. This course may appeal to those students with interests in religion as a human phenomenon (no theological background required), history and philosophy of science (including psychology), and conceptual development in children.

Individual Differences

Individual Differences in psychology among people can take a variety of forms and arise in a variety of ways. The study of individual differences therefore embraces the investigation of both a range of domains of psychology (including cognition, emotion and personality) and a range of influences upon psychology (including behavioural genetic, molecular

genetic, and environmental, gender and cultural). Knowledge about the assessment and origins of individual differences has considerable practical relevance in a wide range of areas, for example in educational, health and clinical psychology and in managing human resources. On completion of this course, you will be familiar with the principal features of contemporary accounts of individual differences in psychology.

Language and Cognition

This course is concerned with how people perceive, comprehend, produce and acquire language. This involves investigating the basic physical, sensory and physiological processes underlying speech perception and production, the organisation of the mental lexicon and manner in which grammar is represented and processed in the human language machine. Often the basic mechanisms underlying language are illuminated by the manner in which language is acquired or lost. Accordingly, this course takes a close look at the manner in which young children acquire language, and at a variety of language disorders, both developmental and acquired. Upon completion of this course, you will be familiar with the principle explanations that have been advanced for a range of phenomena studies in psycholinguistics.

Perception

As one of the oldest topics in psychology, the study of perception is concerned with how we perceive the world and how we use the patterns of energy reaching our senses to guide our actions. For humans, vision is the most important sense (as well as the one most widely studied), but the study of perception is also concerned with the other senses (audition in particular) and the similarities, differences and interactions in the processing of sensory information through the different modalities. The principal source of evidence we use to understand perception comes from study of human performance - measuring how good we are at using sensory information and the extent to which our perceptions correspond to the reality of the surrounding world. However, physiological research over the last thirty years has also provided insights into the underlying mechanisms and the more recent computational studies have given us with a

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powerful tool for modelling sensory and perceptual processes. At the conclusion of this course, you will be familiar with the major theories and explanations in the field of perception as well as techniques used to study sensory processes.

Memory, Attention, and Information Processing

This course will provide an overview of a number of contemporary research areas in human memory, attention, and information-processing including the disciplines of cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, psychophysics, neuroimaging, neurophysiology, and computational modelling.

The course will consider a number of everyday activities such as learning new facts, remembering a recent event, looking for someone in a crowded room, or deciding how likely it is that your team will win the football next week. We will discuss topics ranging from why we forget, to limitations in doing two things at once, to solving problems. Relevant research will show how scientists can investigate the behavioural limitations and neural underpinnings of our cognitive performance. Throughout the course, stress will also be placed on the applicability of these findings to everyday life. You will gain an understanding of how the brain stores information, how we can retrieve, manipulate, and utilize the information to



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perceive and interact with the world around us.

Philosophy of science and philosophy of psychology and neuroscience

See philosophy handout for tutorial description.

Psychological Approaches to Literature

Since the inception of modern approaches to psychology in the late nineteenth century, psychological theories have been applied to the interpretation of culture, and of literary texts in particular. This series of tutorials will focus on psychological approaches to literature, including those of Freud, Jung, Klein, Winnicott, Holland, Lacan, and Kristeva, and more recent approaches emerging out of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. As well as theoretical topics, there will be opportunity to apply the theory to close reading of particular texts.

Psychological Disorders

This course covers a range of psychological disorders. This course is not clinical. Highlighted in the tutorials are issues relating to the definition of abnormality and the classification of psychological disorders. The course will cover a number of psychological disorders (e.g. depression, schizophrenia, eating disorders, phobia, etc) and will be considered according to classification, epidemiology, theories within this disorder, and treatment approaches. In this course you will become familiar with the current theories and treatment and are encouraged to draw links between findings in differing disciplines for insight into risk mechanisms.

Psychology of Religion

The course aims to provide an overview of the main issues in psychological study of religion that reflects contemporary developments in psychological theory and research. It also aims to stimulate an interest in psychological findings about religion and encourage the perception of scientific psychology as relevant to explaining religious experience/behaviour.

On completion of the course, students will have:

- a) been introduced to the main psychological accounts of human religious behaviour as

distinct from those offered by other disciplines.

- b) become aware of the main methodological developments in modern scientific psychology and of their relevance to critical appraisal of the early and non-psychological accounts of human religious experience.
- c) acquired a more complete understanding of specific religious phenomena and critically examined the usefulness of the empirical approach to religion.
- d) enriched their transferable skills by handling information from a variety of sources.

Social Psychology

Social psychology is concerned with the relations between the individual and the social environment, where the latter includes not just other people but the patterns of activity which we recognise or experience as institutions, social organisations and cultures. These relations can be examined at various levels including the perceptions individuals have and the evaluations they make of their social environment, the interactions that occur between individuals, among groups of individuals and between groups, and the attempts individuals and groups make to influence one another, as well as their responses to influence. Topics covered include: co-operation and aggression; communication of feelings, intentions and attitudes; conformity, persuasion and attitude change; decision making in groups; attraction and the formation of close relationships; stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. At the end of the course you will be familiar with the dominant theories and methods within social psychology as well as classic and contemporary research topics.