



School of Psychology

PS336 PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIETY, & HUMAN VALUES

<http://nuigalway.blackboard.com>
<http://psychsocvalues.wordpress.com>

1.0. Logistics

Lecturer: Brian M. Hughes, PhD (brian.hughes@nuigalway.ie)

Module Weighting: 5 ECTS

Availability: 3BA1, 3BA7, 4BA4, 4BA9, 4BCS1, 4BCW1, 4BFS1, 4BTP1, 4BWM1, 1EM1, 2HDP1, 1HY1, 1OA1

Duration: 12 weeks

Term Dates: 9 January–26 March

Class times: Mondays, 11:00–13:00

Class venue: AC216 (off main concourse; bank end)

2.0. Brief Description

In wider society, observers often look to psychology to inform debates on contentious issues. However, it is often overlooked that psychologists themselves will have views on such issues, and/or personality characteristics and ethical dispositions that affect their production and interpretation of psychological knowledge. Further, there are considerable limits on the extent to which empirical scholarship in psychology can or should be considered to be of definitive relevance in debates on public interest issues. Finally, many of the issues relevant to public debate or social policy that psychologists study are also studied by scholars in other academic disciplines.

This module is intended to provide an analysis of: (a) the role of personal values in the production of psychological scholarship; (b) how ethical values might be applied by psychologists; (c) whether psychologists should be seen as 'honest brokers', 'issue advocates', 'science arbiters', or 'pure scientists'; (d) the strengths and limitations of empirical research in public debate; and (e) the relationship between psychology and disciplines cognate to it. Throughout the module, students will be guided in considering specific areas of controversy where psychological expertise is often seen as pertinent (for example, right-to-life politics, religion, libertarianism, child-rearing, gay marriage and adoption, multiculturalism, etc.).

3.0. Module objectives

Following the module, it is intended that students will be able to:

- Appreciate the role of empirical psychology in shedding light on issues of popular concern to society at large
- Acknowledge the role of cultural and personal values in the discipline of psychology
- Critique the assertions of public and academic commentators on social issues that fall under the purview of psychology
- Evaluate the relationships between psychology and other academic disciplines that consider social issues

4.0. Reading:

- Hughes, B. M. (2012). *Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology*. Harlow, UK: Prentice Hall/Pearson.
- In addition, targeted reading lists will be provided over the course of the module.

5.0. Course outline (please note that the timeframe indicated is indicative rather than prescriptive):**Week 1. Orientation to module**

- *Format of module*
- *Requirements for module participation and assessment*

Week 2. Values: What are they; where are they?

- *Moral value systems, political value systems, personal value systems*
- *Are values innate or learned? Do men and women have different values?*
- *How values affect psychologists*
- *Socio-political bias/diversity in psychology*
- *What constitutes a 'social issue'?*

Week 3. Why Psychologists Should Be More Ethical

- *Scientists behaving badly*
- *Where morality comes from, and why psychologists should know better*
- *Why crime happens*
- *Ethical codes for professional psychology*
- *Psychologists as advocates on social issues*

Weeks 4-5. Psychology, Science, and Religion

- *How psychology evolved from moral philosophy*
- *Religion in science...and in scientists*
- *Scientific explanations of religiosity*
- *Scientific explanations of morality*
- *Is science a religion (or is religion a science?)*

Weeks 6-7. Helpfulness, Altruism, and Other Delusions

- *The limits of social relationships*
- *The costs of volunteerism*
- *The negative impact of positive thinking*
- *Why psychotherapy doesn't work*

Week 8. Life, Birth, and Consciousness

- *What we know about being conscious, and the starting point of human life*
- *Is everyone else a zombie?*
- *Should you be allowed to select the sex of your children?*

Week 9. How to Treat Children: The Evidence

- *The nurture myth*
- *Gay and lesbian parenting*
- *Why homework is bad*

Week 10. Bodies, Animals, and Other Objects

- *Who owns our bodies? Should we be paid for organ donations?*
- *Use of (non-human) animals for scientific research*
- *The mythology of cognitive neuroscience*

Week 11. Mortality, Death, and Wishful Thinking

- *Yes, we're all going to die*
- *The psychology of the afterlife*
- *Terror management*

Week 12. Wrap-up

- *Final Q&A*

6.0. Evaluation:

This module is 100% continuously assessed. That is, there is *no end-of-semester examination*. Assessment will comprise four assignments/exercises, which are summarised below. A detailed description of all assessments will be presented separately.

[Details regarding the assessments for this module are subject to minor revisions]

1. Comment Paper (25%):

Indicative word count: 1,000 (c. 3 pages)

Description: A brief paper written on a topic selected from a list provided.

Instructions provided: Week 1

Due date: 16 March 2012

2. Online Group Presentation (35%):

Indicative word count: n/a

Description: Each group will be assigned a topic on which to present. The topics will relate to class content. Each presentation will require the group to summarize some relevant academic papers and to examine the merits in favour of or against a proposition. Groups will be asked to prepare a PowerPoint presentation with additional text and hyperlinks, suitable for posting to the (public) class blog. The blog will be viewable at: <http://psychsocvalues.wordpress.com/>

[Please note: to ensure that all students who eventually enrol for the class are treated equally, the precise logistical arrangements for Online Group Presentations will be announced after the closing date for class registrations.]

Instructions provided: After Week 4

Due date: After Week 8.

3. Research Paper (40%):

Indicative word count: 2,500 (c. 8 pages)

Description: A paper written on a topic selected from a list provided.

Instructions provided: Week 1

Due date: 13 April 2012