

Phil 149: Philosophy of Psychology

Individualism and its Critics

Instructor: Matthew Fulkerson

CSB 001

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Office Hours: MF: Mon and Friday 11-12 and by appt, RWAC 0495

Andy: Wed 12pm-1pm, in RWAC 0439.

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Course Description:

This course is going to be an in-depth examination of the philosophical issues that arise in understanding debates about **individualism** in contemporary psychological science (and the mind sciences more generally).

Individualism refers to the view that psychological states (like beliefs, desires, and other mental processes included conscious experiences) can be fully understood or defined independently of their social, cultural, or environmental contexts. This perspective often emphasizes understanding the individual mind on its own, as a self-contained representational or computational system. The main commitment of the individualist is the idea that we can explain all psychological phenomena by discovering and explaining the operations of the internal cognitive processes at work in each individual nervous system.

Anti-individualism, also sometimes called *externalism*, is not a single view. Most basically, it is simply the rejection of individualism. Such views challenge the idea that psychological states are entirely internal. Different formulations of the view will argue that an individual's mental states are, at least partially, dependent on features of their external environment, including social interactions, culture, and physical surroundings. According to these views, understanding a person's psychology requires considering their embedded context. Anti-individualism has implications for areas such as developmental psychology, social psychology, and situated cognition, where the environment is thought to play a significant role in shaping thought and behavior.

Course Mechanics:

The course will involve several elements. **First**, there will be 4 in-class quizzes, each worth 15% of your grade. These will vary in format, but will be 30 minutes long, and focus on your understanding of the readings and on specific critical thinking skills. **Second**, there is a short critical research paper. You will be given a clear prompt and rubric for writing this assignment, which will be around 6 pages long. **Third**, there is an in-class final exam, which will involve a

short essay format in blue books (you will be given three prompts and must answer two of them—these will be provided ahead of time on the last day of class).

Materials: Everything is on Canvas. All handouts, slides, homework assignments, and supplementary readings (if any) will be made available through this site. It is your responsibility to check this site regularly.

Grading:

Assignments	Value	Date Due
4 in-class quizzes	60%	Dates below
Short Paper	20%	March 14 th , 12pm, in canvas
Final Exam	20%	3/21/25, 11:30-2:30

Course Policies:

To avoid penalties for late assignments, students must provide official documentation explaining why the assignment could not be handed in on time. Late homework without documentation will not be accepted. Late papers without documentation will receive a late penalty of 1/3 letter grade for each day a paper is late, including weekend days (no exceptions). This course adheres to all UCSD standards for academic integrity (<https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu>).

I will use Triton Testing Center (<https://tritontesting.ucsd.edu>) for all in-class quizzes and the final exam for students who need alternate schedules or accommodations.

Canvas boilerplate: Students agree that by taking this course all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin or similar service for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Reading Schedule (subject to small changes):

Week 1: Introduction and Background

M 6th: General Introduction, course mechanics

W 8th: Robert Wilson: “Recent Work in Individualism in the Social, Behavioral, and Biological Sciences”

F 10th: Wilson, continued

Week 2: Methodological Solipsism

M 13th: Fodor: “Methodological solipsism considered as a research strategy in cognitive psychology”

W 15th: Fodor, continued

F 17th: McClamrock: “Methodological individualism considered as a constitutive principle of scientific inquiry”

Week 3: Methodological and ontological Individualism

M 20th: MLK Day, No class

W 22nd: Epstein: “Ontological individualism reconsidered”

F 24th: Discussion; Quiz 1

Week 4: Evolutionary Criticism

M 27th: Ruth Millikan, “In Defense of Proper Functions”

W 29th: Karen Neander, “The Teleological Notion of Function”

F 31st: Discussion

Week 5: Evolutionary Psychology: The case of Self-Deception

M 3rd: von Hippel and Trivers: “The evolution and psychology of self-deception (just the main paper, not the commentary)”

W 5th: Discussion; Quiz 2

F 7th: No Class, UCSD Perception Workshop

Week 6: Functional Analysis and Mechanistic Explanation

M 10th: Roth and Cummins, “Two Tales of Functional explanation”

W 12th: Bill Bechtel, “Looking Down, around, and up: mechanistic explanation in psychology”

F 14th: Discussion

Week 7: Content Externalism

M 17th: No Class: President’s Day

W 19th: Burge “Individualism and Psychology”

F 21st: Discussion, Quiz 3

Week 8: Social Cognition

M 24th: Westfall “Mindshaping and Constructing Kinds”

W 26th: Eickers, “Scripts and Social Cognition”

F 28th: Discussion

Week 9: The Extended Mind

M 3rd: Clark and Chalmers, The extended mind

W 5th: Adams and Aizawa, “Defending the bounds of cognition”

F 7th: Discussion; Quiz 4

Week 10: Ecological and Embedded Psychology

M 10th: Dreyfus, “Why computers must have bodies to be intelligent”

W 12th: Shapiro, “The embodied Cognition Research Programme”

F 14th: Discussion of Final, Short Paper due

Final exam (in-person): Friday March 21st, 11:30-2:30pm.