How Do You Know Anything?  
A Freshman Seminar

Professor James (Jim) Uleman  
Meyer Hall, Psychology, room ??  
Wed., 2:00-4:30  
Spring, 2018

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What is the nature of knowledge? What kinds of knowledge are there? How is it gained, stored, and retrieved? How accurate is it? This seminar will introduce students to the basics of social and cognitive psychological research. Topics will include introspection, the accuracy of self-knowledge, types of knowledge and memory, memory models, the role of emotion, development of theory of mind, theoretical coherence, the illusion of truth, dual process theories, stereotyping, cultural differences, and spontaneous inferences.

Professor Uleman received the 2013 Ostrom Award for Outstanding Contributions to Social Cognition, particularly for his work on spontaneous social inferences. He's a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science and of the American Psychological Association; has held research grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health; and has taught at NYU for decades. He was educated at Caltech, Michigan, and Harvard.

Textbook: There is none. Readings are available from Bobst and/or posted on NYU Classes, accessible from your NYU Global Home page ➔ Academics ➔ Freshman Seminar.

Grades: Grades will be based on class participation, two 5-page (maximum) essays throughout the semester, the final exam, and a 10-page term paper on a topic of your choice.

The essays: From each half of the readings (Feb. 7 – Mar. 7; and Mar. 21 – Apr. 25), choose a reading of greatest interest to you and write an essay (5 pages maximum; double-spaced; 12-point Times New Roman font) that addresses the following questions. What is one of the major central points? In what way is this surprising or unexpected or new? What is the evidence for it? How is this evidence incomplete? What else would you like to know about this? Choose your topics by the 3rd week of class. Your essays are due at 2 pm on the days the readings are assigned for discussion. Submit them through TurnItIn on the Classes website under Assignments, for the dates the readings are discussed. Late papers are penalized 3 points per day (including weekends) from a total of 100 points.

Term paper: The 10-page term paper (same format as essays) should be on a topic of your choice, from this course. You may expand on one of your essays or take a different topic. Be interesting, clear, and critical! Your topic must be approved by Prof. Uleman by April 18 and the paper is due May 2.

Date  Topics and Readings (to be read before class) and Optional Readings (*)

Jan. 24  Introductions, and a little philosophic materialism from Dennett

Jan. 31 Summarizing Dennett’s (and my) metaphysics


Feb. 7 Cognitive biases, their real consequences, and the limits of introspection


Feb. 14 Self-knowledge


Feb. 21 Types of knowledge as types of memory


Feb. 28 Models of mental representation and memory


Mar. 7  Knowledge of emotional events including trauma


Mar. 14  Spring break, no class

Mar. 21  Truth: Theoretical coherence and the illusion of truth


Mar. 28  Social-developmental of theory of mind


Apr. 4  Dual processes in several domains


Apr. 11  Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination


Apr. 18  Cultural differences in social cognition


Apr. 25  Spontaneous social inferences


May 2  Culture and causality in spontaneous inferences


May 9  Final exam

More topics  Acquiring knowledge through analogic reasoning and induction


Mindsets and their effects on thought
