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 (10%), a short 2-page summary of a research paper by Liu & Baumeister (5%), two 5-page (maximum) essays throughout the semester (15% each) on topics of your choice, the final exam (25%), and a 10-page term paper on a topic of your choice (30%).

The essays: Your first assignment is due Sept. 26. For this, you’ll write a 3-page summary of the most important points made in a short scientific article on self-esteem and social media: Liu, D., & Baumeister, R. F. (2016). Social networking online and personality of self-worth: A meta-analysis. Journal of Research in Personality, 64, 79-89. doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2016.06.024. It should be double-spaced and 12-point Times New Roman font. I’ll use this to give you feedback on how well you meet “the 5 Cs” (see below).

The other two writing assignments are based on your interests. From each half of the readings (Sept. 24 – Oct. 29; and Nov. 5 – Dec. 10), 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 one week from 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.

As always in your papers, be clear, concise, concrete, and critical (the 4 Cs). Don't worry about statistical analyses you don't understand; editors and reviewers have already check them and found them to be appropriate. What's often missing from undergrad essays is the broader contexts of the studies. This is something you can get from the Introduction and the Discussion (when papers are organized that way, as research papers are). Getting it across may require that you look up some of the references in the papers so you understand something about them, as well as the focal study. The Discussion section also puts the results into context. That's important to report. So there are 5 Cs. Clear means straightforward in language that most people can understand. Concise means omitting unnecessary words and getting to the point, without filler or fluff. Concrete means being specific about what concepts mean, especially how they’re measured or manipulated. Critical means evaluating the work and noting problems, reservations, and unconsidered alternative. And context means addressing the broader issues of why the central question(s) is important and what’s already known about it.

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 Nov. 26 and the paper is due Dec. 10.

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

Sept. 5 Introductions, and a little philosophic materialism from Dennett

Article on Dennett in Mar. 27, 2017 issue of The New Yorker:
http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/27/daniel-dennetts-science-of-the-soul

Sept. 12 Summarizing Dennett’s (and my) metaphysics


Sept. 19 Where we came from: cultural evolution


Sept. 26  
Cognitive biases, their real consequences, and the limits of introspection


Oct. 3  
Self-knowledge


Oct. 10  
Types of knowledge as types of memory


Oct. 17  Models of mental representation and memory


Oct. 24  Truth: Theoretical coherence and the illusion of truth


Oct. 31  Social-developmental of theory of mind


Nov. 7  Dual processes in several domains


Nov. 14  
Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination


Nov. 21  
Thanksgiving recess, no class

Nov. 28  
Cultural differences in social cognition


Dec. 4  
Spontaneous social inferences


Dec. 11  
Culture and causality in spontaneous inferences


More topics:

**Analogic reasoning and induction as a source of knowledge**


**Emotional events including trauma as a source of knowledge**


**Intuition**


**Meaning of words, where do they come from?**


**Meta-cognitions including ambivalence (conflicting attitudes)**


Mindsets and their effects on thought


Music, a case of knowledge through aesthetic experiences.


Visual knowledge

