# Philosophy of Psychology

## Prof. Nicolò Maria Gaj

### **COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The main aim of the course is to critically investigate the most important schools of contemporary psychology by using the conceptual tools provided by the philosophy of science. For this purpose, an analysis of the various psychological paradigms will be preceded by the illustration of the basic concepts of the general philosophy of science and the philosophy of human sciences. The course also includes an in-depth investigation. This year’s topic is robot ethics.

*Intended learning outcomes*

At the end of the course, students will be able to critically outline the concepts learned and demonstrate a firm grasp of the specificity of the epistemological point of view presupposed by a critical examination of the various psychological positions. They will also be able to argue for or against the various psychology models studied. Students will also examine some introductory issues concerning robot ethics.

***COURSE CONTENT***

The course presents the fundamental elements of the general philosophy of science, philosophy of human sciences, and philosophy of psychology and includes an in-depth investigation of robotics ethics.

MODULE 1: *General Philosophy of Science*

Unit 1: Scientific theories

What scientific theories are

The relationship between the notions of theory, hypothesis, and law

Unit 2: Explanation and prediction in science

Deductive-nomological vs. inductive statistical explanations

Philosophical interpretations of the notion of probability

Explanation and prediction

Unit 3: Justification in science

Logical positivism from the first to the third phase

Popper’s rejection of the inductive method

Inductivism vs. anti-inductivism: Reichenbach vs. Popper

Popper’s hypothetico-deductive method

Corroboration and rational prediction: Salmon’s criticism of Popper

Theory-ladenness and evolutionary epistemology in Popper’s thought

Post-Popperian philosophy of science: T. Kuhn and P. Feyerabend

Theory-ladenness: moderate vs. radical versions

Unit 4: The dynamics of science

The dynamics of science: comparison of Logical positivism, Popperianism and Post-Popperian philosophy of science

Unit 5: Scientific realism

Truth and verisimilitude in Popper’s thought

Realism vs. anti-realism in science

MODULE 2: *Philosophy of the Human Sciences*

Unit 1: Historical development and contemporary perspectives in the debate between the human and the natural sciences

Explanation vs. understanding: the debate’s rise in the 19th Century and contemporary perspectives

Analytic philosophy: ordinary language philosophy vs. the causalistic approach to the sciences (neo-positivism and cybernetics)

Unit 2: Explanation in the human sciences

Popper’s situational logic

G.H. von Wright’s practical inference

Deductive-nomological explanation model and practical inference: similarities and differences

MODULE 3: *Philosophy of Psychology*

The debate on the scientificity of psychoanalysis: Grünbaum vs. Popper

The epistemological status of psychology according to W. Wundt

The epistemological foundations of behaviorism

The epistemological foundations of the cognitive sciences

The epistemological foundations of constructionism

The epistemological foundations of the systemic-relational approach

MODULE 4: In-depth investigation: *Robot Ethics*

***READING LIST***

Gaj, N. (ed.). *Essays on the philosophy of science*. Anthology of essays available at Centro Stampa, Catholic University, Largo Gemelli 1.

Gaj, N. (ed.). *Robot ethics*. Anthology of essays available at Centro Stampa, Catholic University, Largo Gemelli 1.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Classroom lectures and group discussions.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

The examination takes place in written form. It consists of seven open questions, the first six out of the three modules of the course and the seventh on the topic of the fourth module. At the discretion of the Examination Committee, an additional oral test may be given in addition to the written test. The oral test consists of a question on the course content, which can raise the grade up to a maximum of three points and does not entail the lowering of the written grade.

The exam aims to assess the degree to which students have succeeded in understanding the contents of the course and in identifying the specificity of the epistemological point of view when examining the various psychological models. To this end, specific consideration will be given to the ability to explain and critically elaborate the arguments presented and to argue and critically assess problems.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

No prerequisites are required.

In case the current Covid-19 health emergency does not allow frontal teaching, remote teaching will be carried out following procedures that will be promptly notified to students.

*Meetings*

Students are required to get in contact via email: [nicolo.gaj@unicatt.it](mailto:nicolo.gaj@unicatt.it). Both in-person and online meetings are possible.