The advertisement for this subject appears on page 438 of the current (2008-09) edition of the MIT Bulletin. It reads as follows:
9.70 Social Psychology
Prereq.: -
U (Spring)
3-2-7 HASS
Examines interpersonal and group dynamics; considers how the thoughts, feelings and actions of individuals are influenced by (and influence) the beliefs, values and practices of large and small groups. Learning occurs through a combination of in-class activities complemented by participation in small study groups and completion of regular homework assignments. Also involves occasional lectures and demonstrations.

The 9.70-09 Instructional Subsystem

Instructor-in-charge:
Prof. S.L. Chorover

Assistant
Jessica Laviolette

Welcome to 9.70_09!
Where “everything that is said is said by someone.”
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II. The 9.70 Collaborative Learning System

A. "Science Walks on Two Legs": Social Psychology in Theory and Practice

Our conjoint participation in the 9.70 learning system places us in a consensually-shared social situation. (All of the foregoing words are important. Do you understand their meaning in this context?) We will endeavor to organize ourselves into a community of discourse that approximates (albeit in an altogether partial way) a meaningful, real-world research enterprise: Like all scientific communities, we will work with limited resources. Unlike “real” scientific communities, ours will operate under the constraint of predetermined project duration and contractually agreed-upon limits in the amount of time and effort to be contributed to it by the individual participants.

Toward this end, we randomly divide the membership of the class – at the outset -- into subsystems -- study groups -- intended to operate interdependently with others while each remains together as a stable subsystem for the duration of the term, unless or until the participants determine otherwise. This approach creates a “level playing field.” The coursework will provide everyone with first hand opportunities to experience and to exchange ideas about what it means to scientifically investigate (experimentally/experientially) the subject before us on individual, small group and large group levels.

Social Psychology in Action: Collaborative learning is not a spectator sport, and 9.70 is not a lecture class. All enrolled students, like everyone else participating in this iteration of 9.70, are expected to come to every class prepared to play active roles in facilitating the organization and development of the class as a whole into an effective collaborative learning system.

The approach we take follows along lines laid down by its predecessors, and remains open to further development. Suffice it to say that our ever-evolving pedagogical model and scientific approach have thus far proved themselves to be up to the task of enabling students individually and collectively to participate with peers and others in the organization and development of a trustworthy collaborative learning system. Prepare yourself, then, for involvement in a “hands-on” enterprise formally equivalent in most significant respects to any other scientifically credible, ethically appropriate and academically sound “action research” process.

In this class we use a textbook that expertly and engagingly surveys the scientific literature with an emphasis on experimental social psychological findings obtained in diverse social, clinical, field and laboratory contexts. As we proceed through successive research topics, we concurrently observe, interpret and evaluate our own progress toward the goals we have set for ourselves at the outset. By forming ourselves more or less self-consciously into a pedagogically sound, prosocially oriented time-limited instantiation of the scientific inquiry process, we are able to consider the meaning of “conformity” in this context and we identify various modes of creativity and commitment in which beliefs, values and practices advocated by some individual(s) or group(s) lead numbers of people to engage either transiently or more enduringly in more or less prosocially constructive and humanecologically sustainable interactions.

Albeit altogether partial and provisional, the model consensual domain of inquiry that our approach enables us to construct for ourselves is a relatively non-hierarchical one within which all members are more or less unconditionally free to say what they actually feel and think while also agreeing to adhere to a few basic ground-rules pertaining to premises, principles and procedures of inquiry.
By a further hypothesis that we will also explore, many features of human social systems are generic. This means that, on the one hand, certain events are bound to occur and recur and that the patterns and cycles that we observe in one situation are likely to have counterparts in other contexts. On the other hand, everything that happens in the weeks ahead will be uniquely the “one time only” result of the particular manner in which those events arise for us in their own singular and unique ways. Hence, Word to the wise: be prepared to encounter situations in which events turn out to have identifiable conceptual and material counterparts in the organization and development of other human social systems as well.

Insofar as the knowledge and skills acquired through your participation in the 9.70 learning experience ought to prove relevant, mutatis mutandis, in myriad other human social contexts as well. Will this make it easier to define and deal with issues we all perennially encounter – at home and in school, at work and at play, and otherwise – in the course of living our personal and social (e.g. domestic and vocational; academic and professional) lives?

Time will tell.

As the old saying has it: “To Prophesy is extremely difficult. Especially with respect to the future.”

This syllabus, together with your textbook, and other materials to which you will have access, are meant to serve as incentives to motivate and guide your progress through the course of inquiry now getting under way. Please note that our search for an understanding of the subject before us will bring you into direct experiential contact with social psychological situations in many ways and on many levels. Through this exposure you will hopefully learn to find your way around in the maze of social psychological theories (beliefs, values) and practices associated with two different scientific "paradigms." (What is a “paradigm”? See below; See also “Human Systems Schematic” and “Developmental Schemes” Handouts)

B. Modern and Systemic Paradigms: Complementary, not contradiction:

Let’s start out quite abstractly: The epistemological, axiological and methodological entailments of the first – the modern scientific paradigm – is exemplified in and espoused by the textbook.

The second paradigm and its key scientific beliefs, values and practices will be introduced and advocated (professed?) by the instructors. In addition to incorporating many of the theories and practices of the first paradigm into a broader and more inclusive human/ecological framework, the second – systems-oriented -- paradigm affords a generally more reasonable and realistic approach to human inquiry; one that is also more contextual, organic, and action-research oriented.

During the first four weeks of the term we will be examining – comparing and contrasting -- some of the key conceptual and material particulars of these two paradigms.

While the two paradigms that we will be considering differ in a number of key respects, it is not at all our intention to portray them as necessarily altogether and wholly incompatible.

Further to the point, it is important to understand that in introducing and distinguishing between the two paradigms, and endeavoring to describe their respective features, we do not at all mean to
suggest or imply that they are completely contradictory or mutually exclusive. On the contrary, while there are noteworthy differences between them, we will argue that there is really no need to choose between them and reliance on neither paradigm is wholly sufficient to the task of providing us with anything even remotely approaching a singularly and universally true and complete understanding of the subject before us.

In our view, faithful reliance upon some key conceptual epistemological, axiological and material (e.g. practical/methodological) features of each proves to be both necessary and sufficient to make credible, trustworthy and practical sense of scientific experience in the realm of social psychology.

Accordingly, we will be exploring and demonstrating the use of both – or either – in different situations. While this will not suffice to make all things altogether comprehensible, we will argue that by relying on features of both – each as appropriate — we come as close as we presently can to attaining an epistemologically valid, axiologically (including ethically) sound and methodologically effective way of attaining a scientifically credible, ethically appropriate and practically useful understanding of our subject.

These are difficult concepts. Please think about and talk about them among yourselves until they make some sense to you. If this doesn’t do the job, please bring that fact to our attention.

Learning = Changing mental sets and behavior at individual level; changing beliefs, values and practices, worldviews, valuesystems and lifeways at individual and collective levels.

The mix of inherited and acquired particulars that come to characterize the structure and functions of the 2009 iteration of the 9.70 collaborative learning system – the beliefs, values and practices that inform its organization and development -- should not be regarded as immutably fixed. Meaning and power issues will continuously need to be negotiated and redefined among, us (as needed) as we participate together in and take due note of variables pertaining to the process of its formation.

C. Human Inquiry (Science) = Goal directed, task oriented activity involving the organization and development of a more or less random group of persons into a self-organizing “consensual domain” that constitutes – for all intents and purposes a scientifically credible, pedagogically sound, practically effective Collaborative Learning System.

Over the course of the semester, as we proceed, in the posture of serious investigators, through the sequence of topics referred to above and detailed below, the fact of our respective and conjoint participation in and observation of the organization and development of the class itself becomes one of our main foci.

As we participate in the formation of the 9.70_09 collaborative learning system, we closely observe the process and come to see it as “paradigmatic.” That is to say we come to see the process of other contexts comparably-appropriate to the implementation of this mode of human social inquiry. Expect conceptually and materially compound and complex interactions of various kinds to be constantly and recurrently taking place at three levels of organization: the individual, the study group, and the class as a whole.
"Everything that is said is said by someone." Our friend and onetime MIT colleague, Professor Humberto "Chicho" Maturana, was notorious among his peers in the 1970s for saying this to his audiences at the start or every talk or as a way of beginning any new line of would-be serious scientific discourse. Why did he do that? What does it mean? Do you take it to be true? Important? What relevance (if any) do you see in it for us and our present business?

Maturana’s assertion serves us today as a timely reminder that everybody entering into the present situation (or "setting") brings with him/her his/her own mental sets, attitudes, default assumptions, and situational definitions.

Further to the point: the attitudes (thoughts and feelings) and expectations/inclinations that we bring with us (and which have been more or less uniquely shaped by the particulars of our personal and social backgrounds) will, in turn influence our perceptions of and reactions to the present situation. And the latter, in turn, will tend to influence how we experience ourselves thinking, feeling and acting and how we come to be regarded by others. The “social influence process” is, in other words, complex, cyclical and cumulative, with the play of multiple relevant factors everywhere constantly and recurrently ongoing.

Generally speaking, would you agree that “formative experiences” have played and continue to play a significant role in shaping your own evolving personal and social (incl. academic and professional) perspectives? (points of view),

How do your present worldviews, value systems and lifestyles relate to the ones prevailing in your family of origin? Can you grasp the thought that perspectives both inform and are informed by sensations and perceptions? Can you “see” both deriving from and in turn reshaping one another? Do you understand that this interplay limits our available reactions, conditions and constrains the clarity and comprehensiveness of our interpretations, reflects and reinforces our beliefs and values, motivates our effort, limits and enables our comprehension, influences hypotheses; biases inquiries and qualifies conclusions?

How is all of this related to what is going on here? Who knows? Who is to say? (Sez hoo?) Why does it matter?

Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why are we pursuing this line of inquiry into the uncertainties, relativities, partialities and complementarities inherent in a world as filled as ours is with human diversity?

No one should underestimate the difficulty of creating -- in a context such as this one -- a scientifically credible, pedagogically sound and practically trustworthy collaborative learning system. Arguably, arranging a sustainable resolution of the “basic trust/mistrust” crisis is an essential prerequisite for any such outcome. (See: “Developmental Schemes Handout. Page1)

Beyond that, what are some of the substantive and procedural barriers? Given our experience, we enter with some influential "default assumptions" about what a HASS elective class probably means to you (as well as some ideas about what this one aims to be and could be if everybody plays their part. We know that there are many barriers that will need to be overcome in order to succeed.
Beyond that, what are some of the substantive and procedural barriers? Given our experience, we enter with some influential "default assumptions" about what a HASS elective class probably means to you (as well as some ideas about what this one aims to be and could be if everybody plays their part. We know that there are many barriers that will need to be overcome in order to succeed.

But, happily, we are still offering this class because it works. Our longtime experience teaches us that it can be done – and done well – provided only that everyone involved participates appropriately; that all of us are at least provisionally committed to making a good faith effort to overcome our own prejudices and to learn to listen to, hear and trust each other enough to facilitate the emergence among us of a scientifically credible, pedagogically sound and practically effective collaborative learning process – one that encourages attitudes and acts of personal and collective initiative and rewards individual and social responsibility, while rejecting cynicism, freeloading, deception, and cheating.

In a "consensual domain of inquiry," it is critical that "meaning" and "power" come to be more or less equitably shared among the membership. For example, it is customary for everyone participating in such a community to explicitly accept it as a "default assumption" that all reported observations and interpretations offered by different members (or even by the same member(s) at different times) are equipotentially valid and thus equally deserving of serious scientific consideration unless or until effectively called into question and shown to be false or untenable. Precisely because 9.70 is a collaborative learning process, we are all individually and collectively responsible for devising and implementing a mode of self-organization that includes an equitable division of labor in which all members are expected to play each role as appropriate.

In this class, each individual and group has the power and the responsibility to observe and participate honestly and actively in ways that help the system to work openly, fairly and effectively. Do not expect us to tell you what to do. We do not have all the answers. Do not merely comply with instructions without understanding and agreeing with them. Each of us must take control of and responsibility for our own ways of expressing our attitudes and actions.

### D. 9.70 Systems and Subsystems

Constituent parts of the 9.70 collaborative learning system:

- individual students
- individual instructor(s)/assistant(s)
- study groups
- instructional subsystem
- class as a whole

Of course, the system constituents listed above are recurrently interactive and do not exist alone or in isolation from larger contexts and more broadly surrounding systems and levels of organization, development, interaction and influence. These include (but are not limited to) influences deriving from the myriad differences in our personal backgrounds and social experiences and our relations to the class. After all, 9.70 exists within the broader context of BCS and other MIT departments, the School of Science and other Schools, numerous living groups, the Institute academic community as a whole, the Institute’s student bodies and faculties as a whole, the panoply of larger local, regional, national and global jurisdictions and administrative systems.
E. Study Groups

The class will be divided randomly into 5-6 Study Groups.

Why randomly? Please: try to answer this question for yourself before reading further. Be prepared to argue for or against this method of procedure as you see fit.

Here is our rationale:

Much of the subject matter is contemporary, controversial and complex. In addressing it we aim to proceed in as scientifically credible a manner as is possible. That means controlling, among other things, for the presence of “invisible loyalties.” Beyond that, please recall what was previously said about each of us coming from a background that is separate and distinct from everyone else’s? Precisely because “everything said is said by someone”, and because each of us enters into this setting (i.e. "this collaborative learning system-in-formation") with certain default assumptions, preconceptions, expectations and attitudes already established, the explicit randomization of study group membership is a procedural step aimed at creating for ourselves a “level playing field.” We know no better way to systematically control for the otherwise powerful sources of bias, including the putative existence of visible and "invisible loyalties (sympathies antipathies)” within this class.

See also the handout “Working Groups”.

Study groups are to meet for 2 hours weekly, starting at once. This enables you to work and study together, independently of the instructors and other students. The workload thus includes attendance at and participation in weekly class meetings lasting a total of 5 hours per week. In addition, the “demand characteristics” nominally include one hour per day or 7 hrs per week, of solo homework.(Time spent watching assigned videos with groupmates or doing assigned readings together, etc. does not count in fulfillment of the weekly study group meeting requirement).

The time and place of study group meetings is to be agreed upon among the members and reported back to the instructors and other members of the class. However certain cautions and scheduling constraints apply. (See below and under F. Study group minutes“.)

Bear in mind that you are supposed to be meeting as a study group. What, precisely, does this mean? Think about this seemingly overly simple question and discuss this with your groupmates. Pick a meeting place and time appropriate to the purposes the group aims to pursue. Schedule and hold weekly meetings REGULARLY at times and in places where interruptions, distractions, etc. won’t arise and impair your ability to concentrate, to remain task-oriented and to listen and talk with each other. Avoid public spaces; avoid "floating" from one meeting place/time to another.

The group should conscientiously negotiate, devise, and implement an equitable way of working together. Recognition of basic social positions (e.g. leading, opposing, following, bystanding) is essential. However, these roles should be played as appropriate by each person and ought not be assigned or played arbitrarily. Best practice is for everyone to behave in every given instance as appropriate. Processing of feedback and serious negotiation may be required to achieve an open and effective learning system. Effort will probably be required to ensure that all members become involved in giving and getting feedback as needed in relation to group process and task. Strive for a fair division of labor and a workable system of checks and balances. Don’t let the same people get stuck with the same routine tasks over and over again (e.g. aim for equitable rotation) . Dividing (“jigsawing”) the workload equitably will enhance the quality of the collaborative learning experience on all levels (individual, study group, and whole-class).
F. Study Group Minutes

Each week, each study group is responsible for preparing and submitting to the instructors – via email – a brief (1-2 page) collaborative report, henceforth referred to as "study group meeting minutes." (Or merely "Minutes").

"Minutes" must be received by both instructors no later than 2 pm on the Wednesday afternoon before the next (Thursday) class. That is why your study group should not arrange to meet later than this on Wednesday afternoons/evenings or at any time before class on Thursdays. On the other hand, weekly study group meetings should not be scheduled to occur too soon after class. More to the point, weekly study group meetings should not be scheduled to take place until everyone has had a chance to complete the assigned homework. It is thus best to try to schedule meetings on Mondays or Tuesdays, if possible.

Between 4 and 6 pm each Wednesday, the minutes submitted will be read and commented upon by both members of the instructional staff. By 6pm, everyone in your group will receive the annotated minutes by return email.

Copies will be also be sent to all members of the study group that is serving as the "steering group of the week." (Pending subsequent general agreement regarding the value of doing so, copies of all group minutes may also be distributed more widely -- i.e. to the entire class).

The steering group pro tempore, will carefully read all of the annotated minutes with a view toward the incorporation of pertinent items into their already-ongoing plans to facilitate the next day’s class meeting. They will also prepare and distribute to the class as a whole a brief summary/overview of substantive or procedural “issues of note” raised in the minutes received (e.g. stressing common themes, general concerns, etc.) as well as a provisional agenda for the next day’s class.

IMPORTANT: The readers of your weekly minutes are looking for information that will contribute to the development of the class into a sustainable collaborative learning system. They are not merely or even mainly interested in “grading” you or in evaluating the quality of your study group’s minutes. Facilitating the learning process here is mainly a matter of each and all of us constantly and recurrently formatively evaluating what is going on. Toward this end, we do not need or want a word-by-word transcript of “who said what” at your meeting. Nor will it suffice for us to receive a mere list of who was present and what was discussed. Rather, you should strive to produce meaningful “process notes” consisting of summary statements, insights, points of agreement/disagreement, queries, requests for clarification, and comments relating to all aspects of the learning experience (problematic issues relating to both process and content should be addressed) Minutes are most valuable in guiding the process when they contain something true and (for you) significant about either the form or content of your 9.70 learning experience. You can help most by reporting (e.g.):

• “What is good and what is not good?” Identify points of consensus and/or disagreement regarding the treatment of topically relevant issues; review and discuss assigned readings/films. Comment on the quality/quantity of the assigned material; etc upon conclusions arrived at by the group and whether meaningful agreement was reached on any significant topic, and what that outcome suggests or implies.

• Talk about the quality of your meeting, the educational value of of your discussions and conclusions; the timeliness/completeness of attendance, the quality (valence/intensity) of group “feeling” – (e.g. positive or negative energy level, etc). Acknowledge, “local and world events” that are having an influence on your life and learning experience. Unless these events and their effect upon you relate quite directly to the subject at hand, please do not dwell on such matters unduly.
• Include concise comments on or answers to substantive or procedural questions posed in the Syllabus; express your opinions about the questions as appropriate; add personal anecdotes and other musings/conclusions/ideas on these subjects, as appropriate.

• Mention comments/questions/criticisms that some or all group members feel strongly about (e.g. organizational, procedural or substantive issues pertaining to homework (readings, films, etc.) or matters relating to study group and/or class meetings.

• Comment as appropriate on the role and performance of the instructional subsystem. In all living systems, from cells to societies, feedback – both positive and negative – is necessary in all aspects and at all levels of organization and development.

Weekly minutes should also include a brief summary statement from each member, regarding the form, content and quality of his/her own 9.70-related activities since the previous class session.

Subject-related conversations and electronic communications between/among study groups and between/among members of the class within and across study groups are encouraged. However, experience shows that an excessive resort to “back-door” lines of communication can engender mistrust and miscommunication. It is always best practice to include a “cc” to everyone who is mentioned in such exchanges.

In sum, weekly minutes will be most useful to the facilitation process (see next section), if they provide honest, and concise, theoretically and practically relevant, substantively and procedurally constructive feedback regarding the organization and development of the class and its subsystems (i.e. your study groups).

G. Facilitation

The first three class sessions will be led / facilitated by the instructional subsystem. The fourth session will involve a presentation (a simulated family interview) in which the instructors and study group #1 will collaborate.

In succeeding weeks, the power and responsibility for continuing this leadership task will rotate weekly through Groups #2, 3, 4 etc. In this way, each study group will have two or more opportunities to facilitate.

We (the instructors) see ourselves as both “players” and “coaches;” accordingly, after trying to get the learning system off to a good start, we will pretty much try to get out of your way as much as possible, while continuing to remain available to guide where necessary. We urge all who facilitate to recall that everyone in the class is on the same level and in the same boat.

While many years of experience teach us that the "demand characteristics" of this leadership role will vary more or less predictably in accordance with topical shifts in the syllabus and our general developmental trajectory. Unpredictable changes in the task should also be expected to occur, as substantive and procedural issues arise at individual, study group and whole class levels of organization and development. The facilitating “study group of the week” will work with the class and with the instructors to define and to deal with issues arising in the collaborative learning process.
During the week leading up to class session at which you and your groupmates are scheduled to serve as facilitators, everyone should be prepared to put somewhat more than the usual weekly modicum of time and effort into the class. For example, in addition to preparing a provisional agenda for the following day’s class. The facilitating group of the week will also be responsible for making and distributing summary overviews and evaluations of each of the following:

1. Significant events at the previous class session (at which they were supposed to be playing the role of observers, bystanders, and recorders). This document should be prepared and distributed as soon as possible after the previous class session.
2. The form and content and usefulness of the submitted minutes.
3. Plans for covering the current week’s main topics and assignments.

As soon as they are completed, copies of the foregoing – together with the proposed agenda – should be forwarded to all members of the class (thus giving everyone some time to read and digest the material before the upcoming class). As a backup, hard copies should be prepared and printed out, and brought to class.

**H. Formative and Summative Evaluations**

There are no problem sets to be turned in, no quizzes, no final exam in 9.70 and yet a grade will need to appear next to your name on the registrar’s official grade report at the end of the term.

How is that grade to be arrived at?

This has been a central problematique of this class for a very long time and remains so today. The process that has evolved and is presently in place may best be likened to the kind of formative evaluation that is familiar to anyone who has ever participated with others in a cumulative design process. Both formative (recurrent, interim, ongoing) and summative (terminal, final) evaluations of individual and group performance must be implemented in collaborative learning situations. In this class you will have an opportunity to acquire a number of valuable learnable social psychological skills, including ways of evaluating individual and group performance in collaborative contexts.

What there is to be learned here about social influences involved in evaluation will be learned mainly in a hands-on and frankly experiential way. This is not the place to enter into a detailed or in-depth discussion of this issue. Suffice it for present purposes merely to say that, whereas, conventional grading practices call for the instructors to evaluate the performance of students on an individual basis, the nature of our subject, and the size and kind and organization of the class make such a grading system wholly inappropriate here. Of course, the instructors will actively participate in the grading process, and will be required to endorse the letter grade that appears next to your name on the official grade report sheet to be submitted to the registrar at the end of the term. But please do not expect that grade to reflect merely or even mainly the instructors’ assessments of the quality of your own individual and collective work in 9.70. The organization and development the 9.70 Collaborative Learning System will proceed through a number of stages or phases (see Developmental Stages handout), and your formative and summative evaluations will be relied upon to both guide our progress and to assess our effectiveness in negotiating our way through the relevant developmental phases. A copy of the latest version of a formative and summative evaluation scheme developed in previous classes is appended: Please see also: “9.70_09 Draft Evaluation Form.”
I. Timesheets

These are not a lot of fun to fill out, but our memories are notoriously fleeting and fallible and experience teaches us to most trust feedback that is prompt and timely and frequently recurrent. Fair warning: you will need all the help you can get in fulfilling your dual tasks of FORMATIVELY and SUMMATIVELY evaluating your 9.70 learning experience. We expect you to use your timesheet regularly, “on line and in real time” to keep track of your work, including attendance at meetings and completion of assignments.

The Bottom Line: It is up to you to keep track of the amount of time and the quality of effort you devote to your performance in this class. This information is to be generated by you and recorded several times per week on your timesheet (and more extensively in your Journal, as appropriate) and may be exchanged and acknowledged within the study group by all members. Experience teaches us that students in this class need to learn to give and take constructive feedback and this means keeping track of the quantity and quality of your participation in real time (or soon thereafter).

J. Final Grades

Your final letter grade will be the result of the formative and summative evaluation process – and will come at its VERY end.

Meanwhile, instead of thinking in terms of letter grades, try to think in terms of the “demand characteristics” of the situation as outlined above and what you take to be the desiderata for a truly high QUALITY of involvement in the 9.70 Collaborative Learning System Lifecycle. Here the key is: successful performance by constituents of the system . If excellence of performance is not achieved at class level, it cannot be achieved at group level; if not achieved at group level, it cannot be achieved at individual level. And vice-versa.

In other words, if the 9.70 learning system works really well at levels that we can directly observe, that will suggest that everyone and all levels are doing good work: including timely, conscientious and constructive engagement with organizational process and task issues. Success of the hands-on pedagogical approach taken here has been demonstrated in years past. It requires that each and every participant accept the power and responsibility of working meaningfully and effectively together with others. The outcome will correlate highly with individual final grades.

In 9.70, striving for success is an ongoing process. It involves:

- Serious attention to and conscientious and timely completion of all reading and viewing assignments;
- Full and faithful and punctual attendance as well as active/constructive participation in discussions – at group level; – at class level.
- Continuous collaborative formative evaluation (as explained above);
- Regular and timely submission of study group minutes (as explained on page 6);
- Facilitation preparation and process;
- Effective participation in design, conduct, completion and presentation of term project(s);
- Development and implementation of a sustainable summative evaluation process and result.
K. Keeping a Journal

Precisely because it has a discernible trajectory, the process of development of your 9.70 learning experience is worth tracking.

“In order to know what I think and feel about something (someone, some group), I need to hear what I have to say about it (her/him/them)”

Accordingly, everyone is expected to keep a journal.

Best to approach this task from the stance of a serious researcher – e.g. a member of an expedition keeping a field notebook. Honesty, accuracy and diligence count! Be faithful and conscientious in making regular and relevant entries. Exercise compassion as well as curiosity. Use your journal to record (and thereby to explore) your own thoughts and feelings about any and all aspects of 9.70 as well as any other topics of social psychological interest.

Since we (the staff) are certainly interested in learning what you think and how you feel about 9.70, it would be easy enough for us to simply require you to make your journal entries available to us for periodic or on-demand inspection. But that would be a pedagogically self-defeating invasion of your personal privacy. What we will do, therefore is trust you to do your part and ask you to be no less conscientious in your journal-keeping than you are in fulfilling other class requirements. Keep your journal with you at all times. Feel free to share parts of its contents with others as appropriate. Be prepared to show (without disclosure of the contents in detail) that it is being well-used for the purposes already outlined.

IN SUM:: Your journal is precisely that: your journal. Only in the event of disagreements relating to final grades (e.g. between self assessments and peer-evaluations) may we find ourselves forced to ask to examine the contents of your journal.

Punctual and full attendance at all regularly scheduled class meetings, study group meetings and other events is the sine qua non. But “being there” is only the beginning. It takes nothing less than constant conscientious and constructive involvement by everyone at all levels to make the system work

BOTTOM LINE: The educational value of the learning experience and the quality of your final grade will be determined by the quality and amount of time and effort that the membership of this class puts into all the aspects of the task of creating a collaborative learning system that really works. Experience teaches us that diligent journal keeping is a key element in the process. Please act accordingly.
III. Class Materials

A. Required Text


SA is an up-to-date book about the psychology of human interaction, written from the author’s own particular personal and social (e.g. academic and professional) point of view. He is an acknowledged authority on the experimental study of social psychology and a master at making the relevant substantive and technical complexities of the modern scientific literature in the field intelligible to an undergraduate audience.

Topic by topic, Aronson will lead us through the scientific literature relating to the dynamics of social influence in a wide range of both routine and problematical situations. He will also provide us with some theoretically sound and practically useful answers to questions of a kind that most of us will keep on asking about ourselves and other people throughout our lives:

"What makes us who and what we are?" "Why do we like or dislike each other?" "Does watching violence on TV or playing virtually violent video games make children (adults?) more (or less?) overtly aggressive?" "What are "cults?" "What is "terrorism?" "Are there ways to reduce or overcome human aggressiveness, violence, prejudice and discrimination?" "How can basically ordinary people who know right from wrong, blindly follow the commands of someone ostensibly in a position of legitimate authority who directs them to engage in punitive, hurtful, destructive and violent acts aimed at other people and or property, even to the point of committing acts of torture, mass murder and suicide?" "How can basically ordinary people who know right from wrong, collaborate with others in organizing and carrying out such acts?"

In effect, Professor Aronson will introduce us to some key substantive, procedural and ethical issues in experimental social psychology and take us on an up-to-date tour of its large and varied literature.

Pertinently, this up-date of SA integrates relevant developments since the 9th edition back in 2003, including a discussion of President Bush's belief that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction: Was he lying to the American people or did he succeed in fooling himself? Also discussed is the case of Amadou Diallo, an innocent black immigrant gunned down by police when reaching for his wallet.

However, much of the material that you will encounter through the text and otherwise in this class is drawn from classical experiments – some of them decades old. Might the conclusions to be drawn be outdated and of merely historical interest? Or might they be highly relevant to understanding current events?
B. Additional Readings and Viewings

All readings and viewings are best done "solo." Comprehension is key! Take Notes! And try to complete the assignments before you meet with groupmates to discuss the week’s work.

Whether studying materials on line or reading texts or watching films: Please do so closely, carefully, critically, attentively and conscientiously with a view to issues previously or concurrently arising in 9.70. The sequencing of assignments has been done advisedly. Generally speaking, the ordering of items has been arranged to facilitate comprehension. Please make an effort to do the assignments in the order that they are listed in this syllabus.

Some of the material is difficult and dense. Some of it is quite harsh and unpalatable. At times, you may find it necessary to take a break, and at other times you may need to read, watch and/or listen to a given selection more than once. The acquisition of learnable knowledge and skills is a cumulative process. If, after going through the material and giving it the most careful and sustained consideration of which you are capable you still "don’t get it," then discuss it with your groupmates and/or bring it to the attention of the class and the instructors in person or via group minutes.

As you do the readings and watch the films, try to adopt and retain a perspective that is true to your role as a beginning student of the subject before us. Be constantly mindful of differences and similarities in the context in which the material you are reading and watching was produced and the one in which you are encountering it. Focus on the social psychological significance of the issues being raised and their meaning in terms of your 9.70 learning experience. Consider both the media and the messages. Keep track of points on which you strongly agree or disagree with the message or the manner in which it is presented. Don’t be surprised or unduly put off by the fact that some of the material is “old” much of the video imagery is dated and many of the videos are of low production value or poor audiovisual quality. Furthermore, the people and situations portrayed may look strangely different than today’s – characters may sport passé haircuts and outmoded dress styles. But don’t let that distract you from your main task.

Back in 2007, many 9.70 students reported finding some of the assigned readings and videos mildly (and sometimes powerfully) disturbing. They complained that the conclusions to be drawn (e.g. about “human nature”) were generally very depressing. Last term, we aimed to counteract this effect by “deconstructing” the concept of “human nature” and by including some recent findings from the emerging subfield of “positive psychology.” This year we will try to build further on this experience by exploring what it means to be a specifically human being and searching for a humanecologically sustainable definition of the boundaries of human “personhood” in terms of (e.g.”constitutional rights.”)

That being said, it must be added that some important social psychological lessons can be learned from a closer examination of the ways in which disturbing information affects us.

Pay close attention to the way you respond when some item of information disturbs your sense of what is true and important. Try to figure out precisely what it is about the information (message or medium) that makes you feel uncomfortable. And take a few minutes to observe your way of handling the situation (laughter, dismissal, denial, defection, etc.). As you encounter such material and endeavor to come mentally and behaviorally "to grips with it," lots of things may happen. You may experience feelings of disbelief, revulsion, or alienation that make it difficult for you to cognitively and affectively "take in" the information. If this happens, please understand
that your strong affective (fight/flight) reactions are entirely natural and normal. All of us are inclined to defend or distance ourselves from unpleasant information and prefer to avoid situations in which we find the behavior (and thoughts and feelings) of others to be intellectually and emotionally disturbing. But for present purposes it would be best to endeavor to overcome this tendency, lest it impede your understanding of the material.

C. Section Removed

D. Viewing Films

Feel free to watch videos alone or better yet, with groupmates/classmates. In the latter case, you will be able to share your immediate impressions with others. However, the time spent viewing – like the time spent reading – should be allocated to “homework” and may not be used to even partially fulfill the weekly study group meeting requirement.

E. Film Viewing Schedule

The video assignment schedule for 9.70_09 is as follows:

View during week ending:

2-19 B. Capra, “Mindwalk” (1990) (111:00)
3-5 S. Milgram, “Obedience to Authority” (1970s) (51:00)*
3-5 “The Wave” (1957) (46:30)
3-5 R. Boisjoly, “A Participants View of the Challenger Disaster” (1986) (6:30)
3-12 M. Achbar, “The Corporation” (2003)(145)*
4-2 P. Zimbardo, “Quiet Rage, The Stanford Prison Experiment”
4-9 TBA
4-9 Hoebel/Leiterman, “Sociobiology: Doing what comes naturally” (1970s)(21:00)*
4-16 P. Haggis, “Crash” (2006) (122)
IV. Detailed Syllabus

A. Phase 1 DIDACTIC ORIENTATION

Unit 1.1
February 5
Themes: WELCOME: A Definition of the Situation;
Individuals and Groups;
Sets & Settings;
Start of the 9.70/08 Collaborative Learning System Lifecycle
Housekeeping

HANDOUTS

1. Distribute, Request Completion of, collect, review, summarize responses to Preliminary Information Form and Benchmark Questionnaire
2. Syllabus
3. Working Groups (Paper)
4. Human Systems: Aspects and Levels of Organization and Development (Table)
5. Human Systems, A Selection of Developmental Schemes (Pamphlet)
6. Timesheet
7. Study Group roster form
8. Draft formative and summative evaluation form

INTRODUCTION

What is going on here? We (1) introduce ourselves; (2) survey this document and (3) discuss what lies ahead in terms of the subject matter and our approach to it.

Paul Gaugin (French; 1848-1903):
Collection -- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Who and where are we? Where are we coming from? What are we doing here? Where are we going? (Review Benchmark responses).

“Everything that is said is said by someone”
Why is this important?

After reviewing the data submitted in benchmarks, we take a short break. This is partly to give everyone a breather but mainly to enable those who really don’t like the way this is going and think that there may still be able to get into some other subject to avoid further involvement and to leave unobtrusively.

Students remaining after the break will be presumed be making a statement of their provisional respective and collective readiness, willingness and ability to regard themselves and each other as potential "serious students" of the subject before us.
INITIATING THE Collaborative Learning System

Enrolment will be limited to 56. If necessary, a non-stratified lottery will be used to reduce class size to that level. The class will next be divided randomly (see page 8) into Study Groups. 6-7 Groups of 6-7 students each will be optimal. No group should be allowed to exceed a membership of 8.

Group members come together in groups for the first time within the classroom. They introduce themselves to each other, exchange pertinent items of personal data; not yet much more than a random collection of MIT undergraduate students who happen to find themselves in the same boat and are not all equally sure that they are entirely happy with how all this is turning out.

However, with due patience and in due course, all previous study groups in all previous 9.70 classes have managed, in the time available, to agree where and when to hold the first of their regular weekly 2-hour study group meetings. (In past years, the proportion of dropouts at this point has tended to be higher than the fraction of those who drop-out between this point and drop date.)
A. Phase 1 (Cont’d.)

DIDACTIC ORIENTATION

Unit 1.2
February 12

Themes: The Science of Social Psychology and Vice Versa I:
PARADIGM 1:
The Modern Scientific Approach:
Substantive, Procedural and Ethical Issues in Experimental Social Psychological Research

FACILITATION: instructors

PREPARATION/OVERVIEW: TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE ABOVE DATE

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

1.2 – 1 this Syllabus
1.2 – 2 Aronson’s The Social Animal (hereafter SA):
   Front Matter (pp. i-xiii)
   Back Matter (pp. 430-512)
   Chapter 1: What is Social Psychology? (pp. 1-11)

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:
   Viewing time 66 mins.

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

An on-line copy is available at:
http://home.swbell.net/revscat/perilsOfObedience.html
1.2 – 5 Aronson’s The Social Animal:
   Chapter 9: Social Psychology as a Science (pp. 404-429)
THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

1.2 - 1 This Syllabus

Read carefully all the introductory parts up to and including the detailed syllabus for this class session. Glance through the rest, trying to get some idea of what lies ahead.

1.2 - 2 Aronson’s The Social Animal

Peruse the “Front Matter (pp. I-xviii)”: Note the number of the author’s publications and the range of his interests. Check out the dedication and the table of contents; read the author’s Preface: "Why I Wrote this Book", and Acknowledgments. Reflect on the meaning to you of the opening epigram that Aronson borrows from Aristotle’s Politics.

Look through the “Back Matter (pp. 453-548)”: Check out the Glossary (pp. 453-461) How many of the terms do you recognize? Which can you already define? Start getting familiar with the meanings of those technical terms/concepts.

Browse through References (pp. 443-495) and the Indexes (pp. 531-548). Are you beginning to get some sense of the territory to be covered?

Chapter 1: What is Social Psychology? (pp. 1-11) begins with illustrative examples of some of the issues with which scientific social psychologists are concerned. The author defines social psychology as "the study of social influence," and introduces us to what he calls his "first law," that "people who do crazy things are not necessarily crazy."

This "law" is intended to help you to learn to adopt a scientifically credible approach to understanding human behavior in social contexts. It cautions us against the tendency to commit what social psychologists call "the fundamental attribution error" (more about that later). The same caution applies to the problem of understanding other people's behavior when you observe them doing or saying things that appear "stupid," "irresponsible," "hateful," "mean," "insensitive," "bad," "cruel," "evil," etc. It also applies, of course, in situations where people are observed making statements or engaging in actions that might be described as "brilliant," "responsible," "loving," "kind," "sympathetic," "good," etc. By stressing the importance of "Aronson’s first law" to the beginning student of our subject, we aim to emphasize that social psychology takes persons in contexts as its preferred focus and level of analysis. By extension, it emphasizes the multi-deterministic nature of human social behavior and is consistently wary of mechanistic or reductionistic attempts to locate "root causes" in (e.g.) allegedly inborn, genetically fixed or dispositionally inherent attributes of particular individuals Or members of particular groups

Accordingly, in approaching things and events with a view toward the attainment of a scientifically credible social psychological perspective, we will follow Aronson in distinguishing between "dispositional" explanations (which emphasize personal attributes – possibly even "underlying pathologies") and "situational" explanations which focus on the interplay (both universal and specific) of "social influences" comprising “the course of human events” (including the influence on the mental activity and behavior of persons-in-contexts -- and vice-versa!).
1.2 – 3 Video: The Human Behavior Experiments

This recent (2006) film is largely based on of the most famous and ethically controversial of all modern scientific social psychology experiments. Through a number of troubling contemporary counterparts, the film demonstrates the relevance of classic social psychological research on the perils of obedience to authority and conformity to social influence.”

We are back in the 1950s, observing – as if from behind a "one-way screen" as Milgram makes the documentary about his controversial "Obedience to Authority" experiment. The setting is a scientific laboratory in the Experimental Social Psychology Laboratory of a major university. The man in the white coat is identified as the assistant to the director of the laboratory. Milgram here stages a situation in which deception and illusion play a prominent role, with two seemingly unsuspecting volunteers serving as normal human subjects of experimental research in what is deceptively disguised as a routine word-pair learning experiment.

We will revisit the Milgram and Zimbardo experiments later. For present purposes, however, we want you to focus on the fact that the design and conduct of such experimental social psychological studies (1) is based on a version of the modern scientific laboratory model that (2) necessarily and unavoidably requires the experimenter to resort to the intentional deception of the experimental subjects, and which (3) in this instance, wholly failed to obtain from the participants in advance anything even remotely resembling "fully informed and free consent."

Also please pay close attention to the ways in which punishment and the dynamics of inaction are reinforced in situations in which mental compliance with and behavioral obedience to directives ostensibly deriving from legitimately credentialed authority(ies) is generally assumed to be the normal, natural and right thing to do.

1.2 – 4 The Perils of Obedience

This text (which appeared in Harper's Magazine 1974) is abridged and adapted from Obedience to Authority by Stanley Milgram, 1974. In it, Milgram summarizes the essential features of the experiment, and revisits his original article Behavioral Study of Obedience, which was published in The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology in 1963. By his own account, Milgram’s experiment was partly inspired by his reading of Hannah Arendt's 1964 book Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. The book (whose subtitle deserves careful consideration) recounts the story of Eichmann’s capture and trial in an Israeli court.

By way of context: Adolph Eichmann was a minor government bureaucrat in Nazi Germany during the 1940s. His job was to organize and supervise a key aspect of the genocidal Nazi program aimed at “the final solution of the Jewish problem,” namely, the transport by trainloads of captive European Jews condemned by Nazi authorities to surrender their goods, separate from their families, and to suffer under inhumane conditions in concentration, labor, and extermination camps, where they were subsequently incarcerated, exploited, worked to death, tortured, gassed, shot, and otherwise killed.

Arendt depicts Eichmann as a psychologically normal and quite ordinary person; a “cog in the machine” – a conventionally honest ambitious middle-class man, a "joiner... a conformist ... a leaf in the whirlwind of time" (p. 32). As his job shifted from (a) forcing Jews from their homes, confiscating their belongings and arranging for them to be transported and killed, to (b) overseeing the whole murderous operation, Arendt reports, "he was troubled but felt duty-bound
to obey his superiors. In fact, he said that not following their orders was the only thing that would have given him a bad conscience."

In Arendt’s view, Eichmann’s decisive flaw was his "almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view" (pp. 47–48). Echoing her subtitle, Arendt concludes that the real "lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us (is) the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil" (p. 252). It seemed to her that "in politics obedience and support are the same" (p. 279) and that "under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not." As it developed, the judgment in Eichmann's trial stated that "the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instrument with his own hands" (p. 247). So, if the one who does evil things turns out not to be a "complete monster," what is to be concluded about responsibility for the evil that was done?

With considerable insight and detail, Arendt further explores the process by which Germany's leaders created social conditions in which "conscience as such had apparently got lost." There were individuals who resisted, she notes, but not many, and "their voices were never heard" (p. 103).

In what sense could this be justly said about Milgram's experiment? About the abuses at Abu Ghraib? About contemporary “behavioral science” and “the human condition”?

Is this tendency to diffuse responsibility increasingly upward in the social hierarchy a good or a bad thing in terms of its implications for the challenge of creating a more sustainable future for humanity in this, the one and only humanly known humanly habitable and humanly inhabited terrestrial planetary biosphere in this particular corner of the present event horizon?

1.2 – 5 Aronson – Chapter 9 on Social Psychology as a Science.
1.2 – 6 Baumrind on the Ethics of Research
1.2 – 7 Milgram’s Reply to Baumrind

Reflect alone and then again together with your groupmates on the beliefs, values and practices entailed by the modern scientific paradigm as it applies to social psychology. Consider the ethics of deception in social psychological experiments. Assume that the findings are – in fact – true; that some people can sometimes be induced to do things to others that they would not at all want those others to do unto them.

Does debriefing suffice as an ethical counterpoise to deception?
Do researchers have responsibility for how their findings are used?
What (if anything) is known about the personal and social characteristics (including backgrounds and upbringings) of those who resisted, refused, defied, disobeyed and defected?

After completing the foregoing assignments you should be able to define the following terms:

- experimental arrangements
- independent and dependent variables
- stimuli and responses
- causes and effects (correlation is not causation)
- technical issues in experimental design: the importance of random assignment
- control versus impact
- mundane and experimental realisms
- cover stories, confederates and lies
1.2 – 8 Jigsaw Groups: an adaptation of this idea underlies our collaborative learning system.

Further information is available on line at: http://www.jigsaw.org/

As we proceed, we are, hopefully, organizing ourselves into a collaborative learning system that will enable us to pursue some common learning goals without resorting to deception.

This article describes something closely related. Indeed, the basic idea of collaborative learning is prefigured by the approach that the authors describe. As you consider the approach, please try to look beyond the specific context of their article (they were working to promote meaningful interactions between students in recently racially desegregated classrooms at primary and secondary levels in the 1950s and 1960s). We are working in a different time, under different conditions and with a diverse group of older students. Is the model applicable to post secondary education? Could it be usefully adapted to suit MIT undergraduate classrooms. Is it appropriate to our present situation in 9.70?

In 9.70, the "jigsaw" method is further embodied in a pedagogical model that we call "Collaborative Learning." In this model, emphasis is on direct, hands-on, student-centered, exploration of conceptually coherent subject matter as preferable to deadly dull rote assimilation and application (or worse yet, mere regurgitation) of factual material contained in text-based narratives, lectures or other presentations.

We begin with (and are still very much in) a frankly hierarchical, text-centered, teacher centered or lecture centered pedagogy, but are already starting to shift into a more genuinely collaborative mode in which student discussion and active work with subject matter is emphasized. One of our key assumptions is that learning at its best and most effective, and easiest and most fun is a self-organizing active, (re) constructive context-dependent process.

Our central aim is to enable you to develop knowledge and attitudes and skills that are conducive to constructive involvement, cooperation and teamwork with others and will serve you well in future endeavors. To succeed, the process demands of all of us a serious exercise in civic responsibility. Within undergraduate education, the approach we are taking has been and is being used by many other educators in fields ranging from reading and writing to mathematics, engineering and the sciences.

Our semester-long course of inquiry into the subject before us is designed to provide many and varied opportunities for you and us to work together to come to new understandings.

As students, you will have the ability (the power and the responsibility) to make many of the choices to be made here. Among other things, collaborative learning encourages us to directly address the way authority is normally distributed in the classroom. Gradually, we will be inviting you to take a more and more active role in facilitating the 9.70 learning process. The kind of experiential education that we are here trying to implement is also happening in other organizational contexts, and not just among students. Why? Do you know of any relevant examples?
There is an extensive literature regarding this approach. A search for "collaborative learning" on the www will produce many relevant instances.

CAVEAT EMPTOR: Involvement in collaborative learning blurs boundaries between education and research. Insofar as we will be acquiring consensually valid knowledge in the classroom, might not the members of this class lay credible claim to membership in a "scientific community" that is essentially "real."

Does the social character of scientific inquiry call into question the validity of the notion of intellectual property?

BRING TO CLASS:
your copy of this SYLLABUS,
your copy of Social Animal,
your JOURNAL,
your TIMESHEET
A. Phase 1 (Cont’d) DIDACTIC ORIENTATION
Unit 1.3
February 19
Themes: The Science of Social Psychology and Vice Versa II:
PARADIGM 2:
Participatory Action Research:
An Alternative "Systems" Approach to Human Inquiry
Substantive, Procedural and Ethical Issues

FACILITATION: instructors

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:
Viewing time 111 mins.

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:
in Ijiri, Y. and Kuhn, R. (eds.) New Directions in Creative and
Co., Cambridge, MA., pp. 201-245

1.5)This is the hardcopy WORKBOOK portion of a hybrid "electronic
book" project intended to promote "sustainability" in a time of
human/ecological crisis.
Front Matter (pp. vii-xx),
Ch. I Overviews (pp. 1-12)
Ch. II Paradigms (pp. 13-39)
Ch. III Timescales (pp. 41-55)

1.3 – 4 Melucci & Chorover (1997) “Knowledge and Wonder: Beyond the
Crisis of Modern Science?” in Flower, R.G., Gordon, T.F., Kolenda, N.,
and Souder, L. (eds.) Overcoming the Language Barrier: Problems of
Interdisciplinary Dialogue, The Center for Frontier Sciences at Temple
University, pp.76-90)

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:
Introductory Notes:

Last week, in readings and film, you saw something of what contemporary, modern, "scientific social psychology" looks like from the vantage point of some leading experimental social psychologists who have done a great deal of important field and laboratory research.

As we have seen, the approach is fraught with epistemological, ethical and methodological limitations, but without meaning, for a moment, to minimize the quality and amount of information thus obtained, we turn to a comparable consideration of the scope and limitations of an alternative (complementary rather than contradictory) approach whose roots lie in work done here at MIT in 1940s and 1950s by Kurt Lewin and his colleagues. We recall the emergence -- in what has since become the Sloan School, of what has since become Action Research (AR). AR emerged out of a growing recognition that insurmountable obstacles prevented social psychologists and others from understanding the behavior of people (persons) and groups (organizations) under artificially contrived quasi-laboratory conditions via conceptually and materially detached "arms length" means of observation (or formal experimentation). This model is still alive and well and – within its limitations – it meaningfully contributes force to the (post-modern?) argument that credible scientific inquiry can – indeed must be done in contexts where the only vantage point available to the human community of observers/researcher is situated someplace within – and not at all outside of -- the system(s) to be studied. There is an almost theatrical quality to the dialogue that has been (still is) going on in some quarters of the academic community between these two "paradigms." According to the entry in Wikipedia, this dialogue nowhere more theatrically and thematically goes on than in

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:

Viewing time 111 mins.

1.3 -- 1 Mindwalk – (1991) (111 mins) a film directed by Bernt Amadeus Capra, based on his own short story, based in-turn on the book The Turning Point by his brother Fritjof Capra, the author of the book The Tao of Physics. The majority of the movie is a conversation between three characters: scientist Sonia Hoffman (Liv Ullmann), politician Jack Edwards (Sam Waterston), and poet Thomas Harriman (John Heard) as they wander around Mont Saint Michel, France. The movie is, in effect, an introduction to systems theory and systems thinking, in which the implications of findings in post-Newtonian physics (e.g. quantum mechanics and particle physics) are also articulated. All of this is also extended and applied to the task of defining and dealing with personal, political and social problems. The notion that a systems approach offers potential alternative solutions for human and ecological problems, is another major focus of the film. But specific present-day problems and the need to seek sustainable solutions for them are not the main focus. Rather, the main point is that there is no one singularly and universally true and correct way to define and deal with human/ecological issues of broad scope and urgent moment. A multiplicity of uniquely different perspectives – each one altogether partial in its particular way -- is needed to view the human condition at all comprehensively. Sonia Hoffman is definitely the main protagonist here and her perspective is basically a holistic, or systems-theory, perspective – a post-modern scientific perspective – partial, complementaristic, relativistic and uncertain.
Thomas Harriman, the poet, -- endeavoring to mediate between scientific and political perspectives, recites the poem "Enigmas" by Pablo Neruda (based on the translation by Robert Bly) at the end of the movie, thus concluding the core of the discussion.
Action Research (AR) articulates quite nicely with the systemic approach.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) – one of the main foci of AR today – emphasizes both the collaborative character of all human inquiry and the inescapable implication of the observer in what is observed. In part, PAR has emerged as a critique of "the standard modern scientific model of social research" which – patterning itself on classical mechanics, insists on keeping "research" and "action" separate and distinct. PAR, by contrast, entails a project organization and development process in which members of the group(s) in which collaborative learning is to be facilitated participate in all phases of the work. In its methodological aspect PAR is perhaps best thought of as analogous to a design process in the sense of being a goal-oriented activity that normally goes through several successive cycles of planning, intervention/action, observation, feedback, assessment (formative evaluation) testing, planning and and revised action – all intimately intertwined in a compositely unified cumulatively reiterative process.

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:


1.3 – 3 Chorover, (1995) "homework: An Environmental Literacy Primer (Version 1.5)This is the hardcopy WORKBOOK portion of a hybrid "electronic book" project intended to promote "sustainability" in a time of human/ecological crisis.
Front Matter (pp. vii-xx),
Ch. I Overviews (pp. 1-12)
Ch. II Paradigms (pp. 13-39)
Ch. III Timescales (pp. 41-55)

“Where is Science Going?”

Read the following passage carefully. Read it aloud, slowly. If necessary, repeat until some relevant social psychological implications occur to you.

"Let us get down to bedrock facts. The beginning of every act of knowing, and therefore the starting point of every science, must be our own personal experiences. I am using the word, experience, here in its technical philosophical connotation, namely, our direct sensory perception of ... things. These are the immediate data of the act of knowing. They form the first and most real hook on which we fasten the thought-chain of science; because the material that furnishes, as it were, the building stones of science is received either directly through our own perception of things or indirectly, through the information of others, that is to say from former researchers and teachers and publications and so on. There are no other sources of scientific knowledge." (Max Planck, (1933) Where is Science Going? Chapter 2. Is the External World Real? p 33.)

Essential Issues:
The inescapability of visuo-spatial metaphors and allusions to commonplace concrete actions
  - What is science? (semantics, technical and traditional uses of the term.
  What is a scientific paradigm?
  - Science (scientific methods, findings, theories, hypotheses, conclusions, etc. as human social products);
• Is there "a" scientific method? One universally applicable and altogether creditable approach to take for all intents and purposes?
• Science and consensual domains, socioculturally defined composite unities; frameworks implying spatiotemporal extensity; what are “frames of reference”? “perspectives,”?

The social psychology of everyday life in academic and other contexts where effort goes into the act of taking seriously questions about facts and values and practices associated with both the most conceptually and materially abstract theoretical discussions and the most down-to earth, everyday, and practical processes of decision-making about and means and ends.

• Our personal mental (cognitive and affective; thoughts and feelings; etc.) and behavioral (expressive – reflexive, postural, gestural, verbal, etc) activities have their counterparts in other human systems at levels of organization and development spanning across levels from the neurobiological level of cells and tissues to the psychological level of personal experience and beyond, unto the level of families, and other human groups. This general “systems” (sometimes called “general systems”) view is associated – as aforementioned – with an emerging paradigm which is itself characterized by a tendency to rely on a post-Newtonian, post-modern set of theories and practices: conceptual and material (e.g. epistemological, axiological and methodological) aspects of human inquiry;
  • Modern science and social life (what is "the social psychology of science and vice versa")?
  • The arrow and the helix: Science as progress: e.g. "from speculation to experimentation", or as a cyclical process tending recurrently to lapse into sterility, a series of sequentially punctuated moments of apparently consensually agreeable conceptual and material equilibrium between/among/within competing worldviews, valuesystems and lifestyles;
    • Scientific communities as human social systems.
    • Relations between science and society, between scientific findings and (say) financial interests; on the idea of science as something socially shared (social ownership) and the notion of the private proprietary ownership of ideas;
    • Relevance of social psychology to the problem of defining and dealing with human social problems;
      • Critically examine the idea of "value free science."
      • What are scientific truths? Compare and contrast objectivity and inter-subjectivity?
      • Resolved: science is whatever passes for credible knowledge of the world and its contents in any given human social group at a particular moment of time. Argue pro or con.

The Systems Perspective

What is "a system." What do we have when we have "an understanding" of something in 'systems' terms?"

What do you "have" when you "have an understanding of __________ as a system?"

Here is a relevant "thought experiment":

Think of something about which you can say with some confidence that you "have an understanding of it as a system." Try to identify the component parts or constituents of your understanding of it. Do this before proceeding to the next paragraph!

Here is my own (S. L. Chorover) response. Please compare and contrast it with your own.
First of all, when I say that "I understand something as a system, I am making no claims to anything like complete or comprehensive knowledge of it. My whole notion of what it means to have an understanding of the world and its contents is a notion of something that is and presumably must forever remain altogether partial; incurably incomplete and inextricably perspectively embedded in networks of relationships involving observers in contexts, and things or events or objects or persons-in-contexts observed.

That being said, my conception of the term "system" is closely akin to what psychologists refer to as a "gestalt" (a whole); something discriminable as a composite unified set of interacting components "standing together" (sys="together; stem = "to stand") as a conceptually/materially compound and complex unity in a more or less distinctly "bounded" way; and having some more or less readily comprehensible relationship to things and events outside of and other than itself.

Beyond that, understanding a system means to be able to contemplate it from at least three separate and distinct yet ultimately complementary perspectives. Thus, when I know or understand some things about a system I am able to give a more or less concise, coherent, credible, intelligible and comprehensible account of it in terms of its (1) internal organization, (2) external relations and (3) the process by which it has come to be what it is.

The human brain is the particular system that I have been thinking about as I pondered the foregoing question, and the next question is whether you find my account of "systems understanding" to be in any way similar to or different from what you yourself came up with in your own example. If so, how? If not, why not?

How might a systems view apply to an understanding of the organization and development of the 9.70 collaborative learning system – especially in light of our "internal" vantage point? What do we know (what can we reasonably say) about (1) the constituents (individually/collectively) of the 9.70 system? about their respective and collective composition, modes of organization and the sub-system level relations of parts; 2) about the nature and scope of its external relations; and 3) about its origins (growth, development, maturation ... etc.)

The two Scientific Perspectives we use.

Here is a question to consider and reconsider from time to time as we proceed: to focus on different themes and situations: Do either, both or neither of the two scientific perspectives that we have been exploring offer a theoretically sensible, ethically appropriate and practically realistic scientific approach to the study of human mental activity and behavior in social contexts?

Think about it! And be prepared to discuss with groupmates and classmates.

Define and distinguish between "consensual validation" and "consensual disconfirmation." Consider the roles of both in the organization and development of scientific communities.

The main point of these first two sessions has been to present to you as essentially complementary two quite different scientific frameworks for defining and dealing (in this case) with social psychological reality. By now you should be able to identify, compare and contrast the noteworthy conceptual and material similarities and differences between the two paradigms in question.
Transition to Phase 2

Until now, the instructional subsystem has been pretty much “in control” of the proceedings, playing its (our) normal leadership role in a fairly conventional way. We have been, without question or qualification the major (if not sole) "mover" and you more or less serious students have been encouraged to defer to us as the main locus of power and control of the 9.70 learning system. And while you can expect the influence of the instructors-in-charge to continue to be strongly felt in many ways throughout the rest of the semester, this is the point at which we aim to begin trying to reduce the disparity in power and control between instructors and students. We invite you, the student participants, to begin individually and collectively (alone and together within and between study groups) joining us in exerting leadership in 9.70 – by committing yourselves to the challenge of assuming increasing freedom and responsibility to make everyone’s learning experience the best it can possibly be.

Yes, the instructional subsystem is still – and will continue to be – very influential in determining, interpreting and evaluating the quality of what is going on here, but the contract between us requires this shift and encourages you to constructively influence the course and quality of your present learning experience. What is it to be? What do you think? How do you feel? How are you intending to behave in this situation? We will begin the next – Collaborative Inquiry -- phase of studies by considering the applicability of participatory action research and the human systems paradigm in a concrete social context. In this instance, we consider the use of a systems approach to the diagnosis and treatment in a not uncommon clinical context. The case is that of a 15 year old girl who has been hospitalized with a life threatening eating disorder (anorexia nervosa).

Study Group #1 and the instructors conjointly engage in some thematically relevant "role-playing" And the class as a whole has an opportunity to participate in and observe an interview with “the Kaplan family.”
B. Phase 2

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.1
February 26
Themes: Demonstration: The "Family Systems" Approach:
Family Diagnosis and Treatment in a Case of Anorexia Nervosa

FACILITATION: Study Group #1

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

Remember that assignments should be done before the class meeting and in the indicated orders.

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.1 – 1 Human Systems: A Selection of Developmental Schemes
handout # 4 (which you were given in the first class);

2.1 – 2 Jackson, D. D., The Individual and the Larger Contexts

in Context. (excerpts).

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

Introductory Notes:

Families are increasingly comprehensible in scientific terms as internally rule-governed human social systems. By hypothesis – the thoughts, feelings and actions of all members of such systems are influenced by their (possibly incompletely conscious) tacit knowledge of, sympathy with, and adherence to the beliefs, values and practices intergenerationally prevailing within the family.

What is good and what is not good? Questions like this lead to different answers inside and outside of the family. To be members of families – sui generis – is to tend to agree on various core issues. So long as such consensual agreement exists, it helps to hold the whole transgenerationally evolving system together and, within its boundaries, social/psychological "homeostasis" tends to prevail more or less readily.

"Family homeostasis" – whether it be further defined as "functional" or "dysfunctional" in any given instance, and with respect to certain standards or norms – should not be understood as a statically fixed and changeless state. Family system equilibrium is a dynamic process that recurs in successive transgenerational cycles that are initiated and maintained by means of constantly and recurrently active feedback loops. The term “homeostasis” relates to the tendency of family systems to assume certain "set points." This process involves dynamic rule-governed interactions in which matter, energy and information are selectively exchanged – both inside the system (i.e. among members) and externally, with other surrounding systems.

Deserving of emphasis here is the extent to which the personal mental life and behavior of individuals individually and collectively comprising the membership, generally tends to both
reflect and reinforce the beliefs, values and practices characteristic of the ongoing organization/development of the system as a whole.

This is not easy stuff to "wrap your mind around" – reread it several times; read it aloud if necessary, until you "get it." Evaluate its credibility in terms of your own experience. Can you apply it "mutatis mutandis" to other people, peers, friends and enemies, homes, neighborhoods, towns, linguistic communities, schools, teams, gangs, socioeconomic classes, religions, organizations, etc.?

Prevailing patterns of thought, feeling and action (inaction) within the system are created and maintained (and sometimes changed). But one can have a very good idea of the range of thoughts, feelings and actions that are appropriate for each member of the system (and be able to behave accordingly) without consciously being able to state the rules that are thus understood and obeyed. Like the bike rider who maintains her/his balance reflexively and without thinking ... like the speaker of a native language who adheres to grammatical rules not "known" or explicitly articulated – so, the members of families (and other human social systems) commonly "obey the rules" in ways that tend to maintain the prevailing "homeostasis" Does it make sense to you that this is something we all do quite regularly both without realizing it and without consciously understanding the rules that we are obeying.

Rules governing family homeostasis -- like the syntactic laws governing grammatical utterances - are not ordinarily explicit. But, attentive observers can nonetheless infer something about them by noting the recurrence of particular patterns of family interactions under specified conditions. When we observe the recurrence of certain patterns of interaction in a given context, we can formulate a few hypotheses about the "family rules" that everyone seems to be obeying. These can then be framed in simple terms and put to the family members as hypotheses to be tested against their collective longtime experience and thus be either consensually confirmed or disconfirmed. Is this process in any meaningful sense "scientific?"

In Class: we will have a chance to learn how the "family systems" approach might be used in a clinical context. The setting is the psychiatric ward of a Children’s Hospital. It is lunchtime and regular weekly "grand rounds" is about to begin. Today, the head of the clinic, a noted "family therapist", will be interviewing the "identified patient" (IP; Deborah) together with her parents (Cindy and Abe) and younger brother (Simon) around a lunch table. The IP is a teen-age girl who has been hospitalized with a severe and potentially fatal eating disorder (self-starvation; anorexia nervosa). The interview is structured around lunch to enable everyone to observe how the family members interact with each other and with the IP in a situation where her principal presenting symptom plays a pivotal role. The simulated interview is conducted "behind a "one-way screen" by a family therapist/family systems researcher and various assistants. In addition to helping us to see and understand the family as a homeostatically controlled human social system, this approach enables us to see the difference it makes whether a dispositional or situational interpretation is used to define and deal with serious human problems of broad scope and acute urgency.

By way of background:
- 81% of American 10 year olds report fear of being fat
- An estimated 5-10 million American women and girls struggle with eating disorders; some with tragically fatal outcome. Can you think of any other situations in which the difference between systemic and reductionist definitions of problems was, is, or could be tantamount to the difference between life and death?
B. Phase 2 (Cont’d.)  
COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY  
Unit 2.2  
March 5  
Themes:  
Self and Society: Social Norms;  
Conformity and Deviance  

FACILITATION:  
Study Group #2  

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:  

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:  
2.2 – 1 Aronson, SA: Chapter 2: Conformity (pp. 12-57)  
2.2 – 2 Asch, S.E., Opinions and Social Pressure  

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:  
2.2 – 3 The Wave (video – viewing time 46:30)  

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:  
2.2 – 4 Jones, S., You Will Do As Directed, in Preparing for Obedience  

RE-READ  
(SEE Unit 1.2 – 4)  

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:  
2.2 – 6 Wiener, C., Scientists, Engineers and Public Controversies,  
Part 1: The Challenger Disaster (video -- viewing time 6:30)  

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:  

Introductory Notes:  
We are all members of many different human social groups. A primary social psychological  
 presumption is that our patterns of membership – whether attained by choice, by chance, or by  
coercion – are powerfully influential in shaping our attitudes and behavior.  

Make a list of as many of the systems that you belong to as you can in 5 minutes. Start with your  
family of origin and your memberships in commonly recognized classes or other groups (e.g.  
socioeconomic and ethnic/linguistic/cultural background) and categories (e.g. male/female).  
Indicate cases in which your placement in a given social group reflects your own freely chosen  
definition of yourself and/or the views of you commonly held by socially influential others. In  
each case, indicate whether and if so to what extent your membership is due to  
(a) chance (e.g. “accidents of birth”),  
(b) choice, or  
(c) coercion
The influential power of authority and peer pressure is truly impressive. The classic case study is Solomon E. Asch’s "line length" experiment.

2.2 – 2 Opinions and Social Pressure

Note that variables that increased and decreased conformity in Asch’s experiment were group composition, unanimity, prior commitment, self-esteem, cultural differences, and task difficulty/complexity.

Still deeper and more troubling questions about conformity and obedience to authority arise in everyday real world (e.g. home-life, school-life, work-life) contexts. Can you imagine yourself as a high school student caught up in a popular classroom teacher’s effort to simulate life in a totalitarian society? That is precisely what gives rise to

2.2 – 3 The Wave

It is important here to remind you to monitor your own attitudes and take their influence into account: These videos/films should not be viewed by you as mere entertainment.

The 1970s “docudrama,” The Wave, follows the members of a California high school history class as they are drawn by their teacher into an informal "experiment" in social influence.

There are obvious differences between them and yourselves (e.g. in age, context, dress and deportment, background, etc) but please guard against the tendency to allow superficial disparities to serve as a beguiling basis for "distancing" yourself from them and their predicament.

As a matter of fact, a group of more or less "normal" young people of varying "types" in a California high school classroom in the early 1970’s underwent something like the experience depicted in the film.

- Can you see yourself behaving as any of the students behaved?
- Is the story believable to you?
- Are the characters and contexts recognizably real?
- Which of the adults or students did you find it particularly easy (or hard) to identify or empathize with? Why?
- Does anything in the film remind you of some personal experience?
- How do you deal with things like "peer pressures," "obedience to authority," etc.?

Two weeks ago, you read Aronson’s defense of deception in experimental social psychological research (in SA Chapter 9). Do the methods of the formally experimental Asch and Milgram experiments and/or the less formally scientific "experiment" or exercise done by the classroom teacher in The Wave, bring up any troubling ethical issues for you?

2.2 – 5 The Perils of Obedience

We have been here before (the Milgram Experiment), but this time around we take a different (a deeper and more detailed) look at how social influences induce conformity in various contexts. We have already seen how ready, willing and able people are to abjure their own responsibility and obey directions from "responsible" and ostensibly legitimate academic/professional authorities.
2.2 – 6 Scientists, Engineers and Public Controversies

Aronson discusses the idea that we can understand the behavior of "uninvolved bystanders" as an instance of conformity (e.g. The Case of Kitty Genovese).

What is it like for scientists and engineers when they get caught up (as they not uncommonly do) in situations where their personal desires to be faithful in fulfilling scientific, technical and social responsibilities are directly contradicted and overruled by corporate superiors enunciating the primacy of the short term ("bottom-line") organizational interests and objectives of the company? Sometimes, lives are literally on the line.

As a case in point we ask you to please consider, as seriously and protractedly and deeply as you presently can, the experience reported by Roger Boisjoly. At the time, he was a senior engineer employed by the principal launch contractor and, as such, was involved in the last minute debate about whether or not to launch the Challenger space shuttle on that frosty morning. Try to imagine yourself in his shoes: Here you are, engaged with others in pursuing your professional career; working in a field in which you are duly credentialed and (presumably) well-experienced. And that is how you've come to find yourself in this altogether “real world” social context in which the decision to launch or not to launch is about to be made. Among the “deciders” – all of whom presumably are comparably expert, informed, capable and institutionally qualified and accredited engineers, managers, etc. For his part, Boisjoly recalls being much concerned by the possibility of a system failure at liftoff due to the unusually low temperature conditions at the launch site at that time. Today, in the aftermath of the disaster, we know of the likely role of "O" ring failure in causing the fuel tank to leak and explode in the fierce fireball that killed seven astronauts, including one of our own:-- MIT graduate, Ronald McNair. At very least, we all owe it to them to be serious students here. What do you imagine it was like to have been there? What would you have done if you’d found yourself in his shoes? Have you ever been in any such situation?

Further Questions to Consider

What lessons regarding obedience to authority and conformity to peer pressures do you take away from your exposure to these readings and films?

What roles do rewards and punishments play in producing conformity?
What is deviance?
What is groupthink?

After completing the foregoing assignments, you should be able to define, differentiate and use the following terms:

- compliance
- obedience
- identification
- assimilation
- internalization

Compare and contrast and illustrate by example the characteristics of informationally "open" vs. informationally “semipermeable” vs, informationally "closed" human social systems. Can you apply any of these concepts to situations involving your own membership in a particular group or set of groups?
Class Work:

Responding positively to Social Influence:
conformity, compliance, identification, empathy, internalization

Responding negatively:
deviance, reactance, rejection, negation, denial, disavowal, disaffection, isolation, alienation,
frustration, anger, aggression, destructiveness, violence, substance abuse, psychopathology,
sociopathy.

Formative Evaluation Notes: (See the DRAFT evaluation form.)

We are almost 1/3 of the way into the term (!) it is not too early to do some interim stock-taking:

How are you/we doing?

What was your initial impression of the material and the class as a whole? What is your present
impression?

How are you finding the homework assignments? Are you doing the work conscientiously?

Are you and your group members working well together?

Is the 9.70 collaborative learning system developing satisfactorily, in your view?

Have you been able to notice – at the individual, study group and whole class levels – the
emergence (or lack thereof) of any organizational and developmental issues or crises described in
the handout on "stages and phases of development in human systems?" If so, please give some
examples. If not, why not?

If this were to suddenly be the end of the term, what would be fair for you (your group
members/classmates) as a final grade?
B. Phase 2 (Cont’d.)

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.3
March 12
Themes: Mass Media and Communication;
Education and Indoctrination;
Propaganda and Persuasion

- "the engineering of consent"
- defining and enforcing norms
- education and indoctrination;
- self and society;
- individuals living/working going to school
  in fields and contexts
- who is/am "I"?; who is/are "we"?
- allegiances, alliances;
- movements, coalitions, blocs

FACILITATION: Study Group #3

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:
2.3 – 1 Aronson, SA: Chapter 3: Mass Communication,
Propaganda, and Persuasion (pp 58-115)

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:
2.3 – 2 The Corporation, (video viewing time 145 mins)

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

Introductory Notes:

Over the years, the focus of this unit has evolved to keep pace with the times and the emergence
of relevant social problems at the nexus where mass communication, propaganda and persuasion
intersect with actual and virtual realities of everyday contemporary life and technology. Previous
classes have thus studied how iconic images propagated via the “mass media” influence us by
encouraging us to conformity with prevailing conceptions of (e.g. “gender identity). The
constancy across classes has been an effort to understand the process wherein words and acts and
images presented in compelling ways (via mass media and otherwise) manage to develop in target
audiences a belief in the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain attitudes (thoughts and
feelings) and particular patterns of behavior (actions) on the part of at least some members of the
intended target audience; getting them to believe in, and trust the claimed importance, value and
utility of whatever it happens to be that the purveyors are selling. All this “marketplace jargon” is
introduced, in part, because we have found that the aforementioned nexus cannot even begin to be
seriously approached, observed or discussed with a view toward meaningful comprehension with
without taking properly into account the influence of the fact that our contemporary political
economy is increasingly marked by the emergence of extreme concentrations of wealth and
power in the hands of large for-profit corporations organized to maximize self interest. We argue
that left unbridled by public regulations, this highly competitive accumulation of economic
influence in a relatively few private hands has proved (and continues to prove) itself to be a
manifestly malign and harmful to long ongoing effort of some individuals and groups to achieve a more sustainable and more democratic polity.

More recent classes have been exploring some social psychological issues associated with the increased concentration of corporate political and economic control over the form and content of contemporary media technology as a whole (including the messages sent). Wary of the tendency for large conglomerations of capital in a few hands, we stepped back a bit further last year, in order to ask how our worldviews, value systems and lifestyles are systematically shaped by persuasive media communications and commercial "messages" whose form and content are carefully contrived to reflect and reinforce the interests and objectives of relatively small but extremely powerful corporate entities.

Last year we organized this unit around the viewing of a recent (2003) film called The Corporation\(^1\). As its name implies, the film explores (from a critical vantage point the nature and rise of the dominant institution of our time. Footage from pop culture, advertising, TV news, and corporate propaganda, illuminates some aspects of the social influence that is exerted upon us by large and powerful corporate entities. In part, the film confronts the little know fact that for most intents and purposes, corporations have acquired the legal status of “personhood.” That is to say, the US Supreme Court has ruled that corporations are entitled to be treated as "persons." (Sometimes, corporate personhood has been further qualified as “juristic” or “legal” or “artificial,” but the point for present purposes is that the judicial branch of our federal government has ruled that, (e.g.) constitutional guarantees of “equal treatment of all persons under law” applies to corporations and entitles them to be treated no differently from you or me or any other person (we the people). We will explore this lamentable “category mistake” and consider some of its implications for our present economic and political predicament.

By way of context, consider the following statistics:

- In 1983, 50 corporations controlled almost all of US news media; today there are 6 major media outlets.
- The average American adolescent watches 3-4 hours of TV daily; sees 20,000-40,000 commercials/yr.
- The average height/weight of American women is 5’4”/140 lbs.
- The average height/weight of the American woman model is 5’11”/117 lbs.
- 80% of American women report being dissatisfied with their appearance.
- Media corporations have spent $111.3 billion lobbying lawmakers and federal regulators since 1996.
- Between 1995-98, media companies (excluding telecoms) gave more than $30.9 million to candidates for federal political office and party committees.

\(^1\) Directed by Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott; produced by Mark Achbar and Bart Simpson; edited by Jennifer Abbott; written by Joel Bakan; with narration written by Harold Crooks and Mark Achbar; narrator: Mikela J. Mikael. It is based on the book The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power, by Joel Bakan, "Winner of 24 international awards, 10 of them audience choice awards including the Audience Award for documentary in world cinema at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival."
• An estimated $2 billion is spent annually to target juvenile consumers.
• At 3 years of age, 1 American child in 5 is making specific requests for brand-name products.
• Channel One’s in-classroom broadcast, featuring 2 minutes of commercials for every 10 minutes of news is compulsory on 90% of school days in 80% of classrooms in 40% of US middle and high schools
• Cigarette manufacturers spend over $9.57 billion/year (> $26.2 million/day) on advertising.
• Almost 500,000 children are estimated to have become regular smokers during 2002.
• Mass media comprise the main source of health-related information for a majority of adolescents.

2.3 – 2 The Corporation

The film does not depict the origin and development of the strange and mischievous idea of “corporate personhood.” (In point of fact, it was in the mid-1800s that the corporation was first recognized as a legal "person" with constitutional rights. We have references to this strange history for anyone wishing to trace the case law) Instead, the film grants for purposes of argument the idea that the corporation is a person and goes on to ask, the disturbingly interesting question: "what kind of a person is it?"

Noting that, the “corporate personality” is dominated by a spirit of financial self-interest and disregard for the rights of others, the filmmakers try to more precisely pinpoint the exact nature of the "psychopathology" of the "corporate person," by consulting a general mental health checklist based on the actual diagnostic criteria developed by the World Health Organization and the American Psychiatric Association (whose diagnostic and statistical manual – DSM-IV – is the standard diagnostic tool of psychiatrists and psychologists in the U.S.).

Point by point, through numerous case histories, drawn from a broad universe of corporate activity, the film documents instances in which the pursuit of profit leads corporations to harm workers, human health, animals and the biosphere. It depicts the for-profit corporation as preeminently self-interested, inherently amoral, callously "rational" and necessarily deceitful; as a "person" who does not suffer from guilt, yet can mimic the human qualities of empathy, caring and altruism. More to the point, the film identifies the operational principles that legally require for-profit corporations to behave anti-socially. We might choose to argue whether the institutional embodiment of laissez-faire capitalism fully meets the diagnostic criteria of a "psychopath". But it remains undeniable that for more than 100 years, the remorseless rationale of "externalities" has been invoked to excuse the myriad unintended consequences of economic transactions – many of which have led to illness, death, poverty, pollution, exploitation and injustice.

Financial markets exist to create wealth. As the film shows, even world-scale disasters can be profit centers. Carlton Brown, a commodities trader, recounts with unabashed honesty the mindset of gold traders while the collapsing twin towers crushed their occupants. The first thing that came to their minds, he tells us, was: "How much is gold up?"

Corporations can exist indefinitely have no built-in limits on what, who, or how much they can exploit for profit. In the fifteenth century, the enclosure movement began to put fences around formerly common grazing lands so that they might be privately owned and exploited. Today, just about every molecule on the planet – including the water that falls as precipitation – is up for grabs. In a bid to "own it all," corporations are controlling natural resources, patenting animals and plants, and commodifying bits and pieces of human DNA.
Are there any things so precious, vulnerable, sacred or important that they must be managed in the public interest? Or is everything to be reduced to mere units of economic exchange? Should the public insist that governments draw regulatory boundaries to protect the public against corporate exploitation? Should governments be inviting corporations into domains of exploitation from which they were previously barred? What is your view of "corporate personhood"?

In social systems of all kinds and sizes, various means (mass media appeals, propaganda and persuasion) are developed for the purpose of encouraging conformity by individuals to prevailing mental and behavioral norms. Can you come up with some pertinent examples? After doing the assignments, you should be able to:

- define "mass communications;"
- identify some of the factors that may reinforce (or undermine) the perceived credibility of communications;
- understand how advertising and/or media appeals achieve "the engineering of consent?"
- define "emotional contagion;"
- define "corporate personhood;"
- compare and contrast: reason and passion; prosocial, asocial, and/or antisocial influences;
- understand why it is so difficult to distinguish between education and indoctrination;
- define and distinguish between the primacy effect and the recency effect;
- better understand what is going on in your world.

Think About the Following Questions and Issues:

With particular respect to yourself, consider

- The impact on you of televised news events and "docudramas"
- The impact on you of televised commercial messages
- Your susceptibilities to "Infotainment"
- Your ways of coping with "information overload"

Collect some examples of "persuasive" and "unpersuasive" newspaper/magazine adverts; identify the persuasion tactics at work in the ad (attractiveness, identification with fame/beauty/power; credibility, use of vivid images, appropriateness to context, etc.).

How might things be different if “corporate personhood” were to become a thing of the past; if corporations were required to limit their activities to those explicitly defined in their charters and were otherwise prevented from unduly influencing our political process?

Over the course of a day (or week?) try to identify and take note of instances in which you encounter an effort by an individual or group to influence your thoughts, feelings and actions. Include "live" encounters with salesclerks and other strangers; with friends, families, group members, classmates, roommates, housemates, etc. In the case of media appeals, look for commercial and non-commercial messages coming from as broad as possible variety of mass media sources (TV, radio, print, billboards, product packaging or labeling etc.). Take note also of corporate logos and instances of “brand placement.” Discuss whether the attempts in question were successful in influencing you -- and if so how and to what extent --- and if not why not.
B. Phase 2 (Cont’d.)  
COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.4  
March 19  
Themes: The Social Construction of Reality:
- perception and evaluation;  
- the psychology of attribution;  
- the dynamics of social action (and inaction)  
- individuality/commonality: compare and contrast the view of self and society as separate and distinct with the systemic view of their irreducible interdependence

FACILITATION: Study Group #4

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.4 – 1 Aronson, SA: Chapter 4: Social Cognition (pp. 116-179)


2.4 – 3 Hardin, G. (1968) The Tragedy of the Commons  
with commentary by Crowe, B  
(1969) The Tragedy of the Commons Revisited  
also on line at: see also: http://www.constitution.org/cmt/tragcomm.htm

2.4 – 4 Macy, J.R., (1983) Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age (excerpts)


2.4 – 6 Assadourian, E., Engaging Communities .pp 151-165. in “State of the World 2009 – Innovations for a Sustainable Economy, ; Worldwatch Institute

2.4 – 7 Calder, J.S., Mobilizing Human Energy pp. 166-179 in “State of the World 2009 – Innovations for a Sustainable Economy, ; Worldwatch Institute

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.4 – 2 The Tragedy of the Commons

What is self-interest? What is social responsibility? These questions arose with particular poignancy last week. Hardin’s classic article has nothing to say about corporations as such, but it poses some essential questions about relations between self and society.
Hardin identifies self-interest with selfishness and greed. Arguably, the choice of herdsmen (as one of the first occupations humans have taken) is rather inappropriate to illustrate a behavior that is characteristic of less ancient cultural patterns. However, the contemporary idea of "maximizing personal (or corporate) self-interest" is particularly typical for the current economy of cut-throat competition in pursuit of profit.

Without doubt, this relation between self-interest and selfishness presents a major conflict and may readily lead one to feel a sense of abject despair for the human condition. This is particularly true when the "tragedy" is framed – as it is by Hardin -- in the customary dualist (either/or) mode. Under these conditions, the two ethical alternatives that offer themselves are either utilitarianism or deontology. In other words, one will either accept the necessity of behaving selfishly (because that is an inevitable consequence of pursuing and maximizing one's utility), or will adopt a "disinterested moral obligation" regardless of self-interest (which is the definition of deontology).

However, from the systemic perspective this counter-position of self- versus common-interest can be seen as an omnipresent dialectic; one that expresses and embodies the tension that follows upon a realization that the existence and integrity of the individual system depends on its belonging to and interrelatedness with more inclusive systems. Does this tension imply that individual and common (or communal) interests are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable? Or do the systemic interrelations entail an interconnectedness of interests? Giving and taking can be conceived of as complementary processes in eco-systemic interaction of individuals with each other and with the surrounding environment (social and natural). Transformed, (we argue) the relationship can become “win-win”.

This latter perspective is rarely attained however. How come? Here is one hypothesis: our cognitive capacity to reason clearly and our behavioral capacity to act effectively is impaired by our affective response to so much "bad news." Indeed, this is precisely the thesis presented in the following selection:

2.4 – 3 Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age

This important book, now sadly out of print, was written in 1983, in the midst of an escalating nuclear arms race between the US and USSR. In it Macy uses the fear of nuclear annihilation to show quite precisely how we deal with information that is threatening to our personal security. She offers an explanation of what has been called "the dynamics of inaction." Arguably, her 1983 thesis has contemporary relevance. Do you see it as applicable to current events? If so, how? If not, why not? Compare and contrast her perspective with those of Rowe, Assadourian and Calder.

Making Sense of the World:

Our attention is thus drawn to the question of how we choose to make sense of the world. And this is the essence of what Aronson means by "social cognition." Consider the following questions and issues:

- What does it mean to say that rational thinkers are cognitive misers?
- What are the effects of contexts on judgments, perception, attractiveness, reference points?
- What is "priming"?
- What is meant by "construct accessibility"?
- What is impression formation?
- Can you identify some common "impression management" techniques?
- What effects follow from different ways of framing situations/decisions?
Aronson has quite a lot to say about "heuristics." Define and distinguish between:

- judgement heuristics
- representative instances
- availability heuristic
- attitude heuristic
- halo effects
- false consensus effects
- categories and stereotypes

Define “human nature.”
Describe and discuss "the self-fulfilling prophesy”
How do social outcomes relate to social expectations?

What is meant by "reconstructive memory"?
How does this relate to
- the questionable validity of "memories recovered from childhood?"
- to the unreliability of eye witness testimony?

Define "confirmation bias","hindsight bias," "actor-observer bias," "self bias," "self-serving bias."

Professed attitudes (as measured e.g. by responses to questionnaires) are neither highly predictive of nor highly correlated with respondents’ observed behavior in the relevant situation(s). Explain.
What is "the fundamental attribution error"?
Explaining something (away) as “human nature” is an instance of the fundamental attribution error. (True or False?) Explain.

There are other ways of committing the ultimate attribution error (attributing things or events to God’s will and/or nature’s intentions, fated genes, etc.) But when it comes to taking the cake for achieving the epitome in simplistic mechanistic reductionistic “explanations” it is hard to beat the perennial favorite©(normally said in a tone of definite finality and with an air of enlightened resignation in the face of irrefragible fact that “you can’t change human nature.” As if to say: “Oh, well, what do you expect; its just human nature ...”

3.5—3.7: Crowe and Rowe take a different view. Meanwhile, Assadourian and Calder envision conditions in a world where the interests of the individual and the community are anything but irreconcilable and contradictory.

Note: In any given situation, people will generally behave in accordance with their understanding of their social roles. Do you agree with this statement? Are you aware of yourself acting differently in different situations? Perhaps one reason we attribute other people’s behavior to underlying personality traits is that we have both a tendency to stereotype, and only limited opportunities to observe them in but a few contexts or situations (e.g. teammate, classmate or teacher). Consider your own behavior. In what respects are you aware of playing different roles in different situations? Give some examples. How can you manage to do so while also remaining "yourself"? If all of your personas were to gather together in a room to discuss the kind of person you really are, would they all agree in their assessments of you? What would they be likely to say about you?
SPRING BREAK  March 26  NO CLASS

Midterm Formative and (Interim) Summative Evaluations Due

Formative Evaluation Note: By this point in the term, prior groups of facilitators should have helped the class to develop a pretty good idea of what the evaluation document(s) should contain.

Theme: Liking, Loving, and Interpersonal Sensitivity

READ by yourself:

2.8 – 1  Aronson, SA: Chapter 8: Liking, Loving, and Interpersonal Sensitivity (pp 356-403)

Questions to Think About:

(In lieu of study group and class meetings this week, feel free to discuss these questions with your family members, friends etc.)

- What causes one person to like or dislike another?
- What is the reward theory of attraction?
- How are we influenced by praise and criticism? by flattery; by doing and asking or being asked for favors?
- How are we influenced by socioculturally defined "personal attributes" – e.g. competence, beauty, attractiveness (and their opposites)?
- How are your attitudes toward others (e.g. potential dates or mates) influenced by the opinions of your peers?
- What role does the perceived differential attractiveness of others play in influencing how you relate to them?
- What do the "adolescents" of your acquaintance value? ("young adults"; "mature persons"; "old folks")?
- How does the concept of "distance regulation" relate to your experience in social life (home-life and work-life)?
- How do similarities/differences in attitudes between members of "dating" couples relate to their "distance regulation" processes?
- Compare and contrast the ways in which power and intimacy influence social relations.
- What is "love"? Compare/contrast platonic (companionate) and erotic (passionate) love.
- What do we find "attractive" in encounters with potential "significant others"?
- Consider relations between self-esteem (on the one hand) and liking and being liked (on the other).
- What is the gain/loss theory (of attraction)?
B. Phase 2 (Cont’d.)  
COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.5  
April 2  
Themes:  
Evaluation: "Us and Them":  
Justifying Ourselves and Judging Others  
(both as individuals and collectivities)  
Attributional Biases, Socialization and Self Justification  

FACILITATION: Study Group #5

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

READ OR VIEW by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.5 – 1 Aronson, SA: Chapter 5: Self-Justification (pp 180-251)  
VIEW Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment-- ().)  
2.5 – 4 Zimbardo, P. Response to the German Movie "Adaptation" of The Stanford Prison Experiment. website also on line at:  
http://www.apa.org/monitor/mar02/filmcritic.html  
2.5 – 5 Osherow, N., (1964), Making Sense of the Nonsensical: An Analysis of Jonestown  
also on line at:  
http://www.guyanaca.com/features/jonestown.html  

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.5 – 2 A Study of Prisoners and Guards in a Simulated Prison  
This is the original published report of the (in)famous social psychology experiment conducted at Stanford University in 1971. The experiment raises important scientific and ethical questions about research involving human subjects.  
2.5 – 3 VIEW Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment-- ()  
2.5 – 4 READ -- Response to the Movie "Adaptation" of The Stanford Prison Experiment  
In 2001, a group of German movie-makers, apparently seeking to capitalize on "the reality TV" aspect of the Stanford study, made a movie "adaptation" of it full of gratuitous sex and violence. In this website, Zimbardo responded to the distortions involved.
2.5 – 5 An Analysis of Jonestown

In November 1978, close to 1000 members of a “cult” settlement in Guyana, under the direction of the Reverend Jim Jones, fed a poison-laced drink to their children and drank it themselves. Their bodies were found lying together, arm in arm. How could such a tragedy occur? The images of an entire community destroying itself, of parents killing their own children, appears incredible. The media stories about the event and full-color pictures of the scene documented some of its awful horror. Here, a social psychologist endeavors to illuminate the causes and to explain the processes that led to the tragedy. Does his analysis “make sense” to you? Does this event teach us anything of contemporary relevance?

Questions to Consider:

- What is "role socialization?"
- What is self-justification?
- Is dissonance reduction "rational" or "irrational"?
- What is "inadequate justification"?
- How does dissonance arise after a decision?
- How does dissonance theory relate to the justification of effort?
- What is meant by "the psychology of inevitability"?
- What is "learned helplessness"?
  Can you relate "learned helplessness" to the arguments made by Macy (see last week?)
- Describe "victim blaming"
- Self-Justification – dealing with cognitive dissonance
- Introduction to dissonance theory
- Dissonance and Dissonance Reduction
- What are "foot-in-the-door" techniques?
- Relate dissonance theory to gambling, low-balling, smoking, immoral behavior
- Relate dissonance theory to inadequate rewards
- What is meant by "inadequate justification"?
- Compare and contrast internal and external justification
- Inadequate rewards and education
- Compare and contrast mild versus severe initiation
- Relate dissonance theory to feelings of self-esteem
- Evaluate some critiques of dissonance theory

Keep a record of instances in which you find yourself experiencing dissonance and engaging in efforts to reduce it.

- What does Aronson mean when he says that "people cannot live by consonance alone?"
- Relate dissonance theory to making mistakes (esp. in MIT classrooms).

Research on self-justification and other issues has led to the development of powerful techniques for influencing people’s attitudes and behavior. These techniques can be used for good or ill. What defenses do we have against unwarranted attempts at social influence? Does it help to know something about the purposes/intentions of those who possess the relevant knowledge and skills and the resources to use them? At an earlier point in the term, we considered the use of mass media and other powerful means of behavior control/modification to influence human attitudes and behavior in our society. Recall “The Corporation” video. How (if at all) has your view of the issues raised in that film and discussion been affected by what you have been learning in this class?
B. Phase 2 (Cont’d.) COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.6
April 9

Themes: Violence: "In Our Genes?" Biological Determinism
(Likewise Poverty, Racism and Crime?)
Is it just "Human Nature?"
Or is “human nature” just a useful social excuse
for the otherwise inexcusable?

FACILITATION: Study Group #6

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.6 – 1 Aronson, SA: Chapter 6: Human Aggression (pp. 252-299)

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.6 – 3 The Sopranos (select an episode that is particularly full of Macho sex and violence etc.). Prepare comments.

2.6 – 4 Sociobiology: Doing what comes naturally? (video – viewing time 21 mins.)

READ by yourself before and during the viewing! then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.6 – 5 Sociobiology: Doing what comes naturally?
transcript of soundtrack

Chapter 1 (pp. 1-10); Chapter 5 (pp. 77-109); Chapter 7 (pp135-174)

2.6 – 7 Sociobiology Study Group, Biology as a Social Weapon

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:
Introductory Notes:

What determines (causes, creates, conditions, constrains) human behavior in social situations?

Is it nature or nurture? Is it "in our genes"? Or is it the product of the particulars of our lives, our social experiences? Each of us influenced by the conceptual and material atmosphere created by the worldviews, value systems and lifestyles prevailing within the parental subsystems of our families and by the other social groups we belong to.

Why does it matter? Because THE WAY A PROBLEM IS DEFINED INFLUENCES THE CHOICE OF WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. By way of illustration, we focus on the colossal human social problem of violence.

Consider the following statistics:
- the average young American sees 200,000 acts of violence (16,000 murders) on TV by age 18;
- 26% of girls in grades 9-12 report having experienced physical or sexual abuse or date-rape.
- 60% of reported rapes involve children under 18 years old;
- 21% of high-school males took a weapon to school in the last 12 months.

2.6 – 1 SA: Human Aggression

In Aronson’s view, how is aggression best defined?

How Much aggression is due to frustration? What role does social learning play? Are we living in the midst of an epidemic of "domestic violence?" What chances do we have of reducing violence?

- Distinguish between hostile and instrumental aggression
- Define and evaluate the "catharsis" hypothesis
- Identify possible causes of aggression: neurochemical, biological, hormonal
- What’s wrong with testosterone?
- How do alcohol and other "recreational" drugs influence social propensities toward aggressiveness?
- What about the role of pain and discomfort?
- of frustration and aggression?
- How influential is social learning? Can education help in reducing violence (strengthening alternative behaviors, learning to adopt different perspectives, building empathy toward others, etc.)?

2.6 – 2 Media Violence

The classic study of the influential effects of TV violence on the aggressive behavior of children, (The Effects of Observing Violence by L. Berkowitz), was published in Scientific American in 1964. Since then, numerous authoritative inquiries have confirmed his basic findings and drawn additional attention to the problem. A well-documented recent example is the November 2001 report of the Committee on Public Education of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

2.6 – 3 The Sopranos (or some other widely-viewed example of a graphically and repeatedly (not to say gratuitously) violent TV program).
As you prepare to watch the program, try to assume the perspective of a human-like alien from the far-off planet Pacifica where people are accustomed to living in relatively violence-free
societies. Pretend that you have just arrived on earth on a mission to learn about conditions of human life here and that, based on what you are about to see on TV, you must shortly transmit a preliminary report describing your observations and conclusions, thus far, relating to the behavior of earthlings and how they think and feel and act and why they behave the way they do. After watching the program, prepare some notes for your report.

And what about the often-heard argument being put forth currently (e.g. by various "sociobiologists" and "evolutionary psychologists") that the root causes of human violence are "in our genes"?

2.6 – 4, 5 Sociobiology – view the video and read the transcript (two channels of communication are better than one)

This film was made in the aftermath of the publication of E. O. Wilson’s controversial Sociobiology: The New Synthesis (1975). It presents a particularly garish and generally “hyped-up” one-sided version of the genetic/biological determinist argument. Bottom line and key take-home message: aggression and violence (among other behaviors are “in our genes.”) (This seems a good place to remind you to take a critical approach to this and all of the other material you are encountering in this class.) In addition to watching the movie, it’s important that you carefully read through the transcript both before and during the viewing!

What are we to believe about the root causes of social violence? What evidence is there that we are genetically pre-programmed to transgenerationally pursue the survival of our "selfish genes?" From a social policy perspective, what differences does it make how we choose to answer such questions? And where does the truth lie? By one contemporary formulation, truth is a relationship of correspondence between persons and statements and states of affairs. Thus when the state of affairs described by a particular statement or set of statements demonstrably corresponds to the state of affairs actually observed or observable by persons comparably situated in the pertinent context, we may say of the relevant statement(s) that it is (they are) true.

The following two texts present a contrasting view:

2.6 – 6 From Genesis to Genocide
2.6 – 7 Biology as a Social Weapon

By a hypothesis easily confirmed by direct observation, human mental life is systematically related to behavior. In attempting to account for our actions, we need to distinguish between (1) questions about the truth/falsity (correspondence/noncorrespondence) of propositions pertaining to persons, situations, states-of-affairs, etc. and (2) questions about the beliefs and values (right or wrong) that determine our actions. Alas, we sometimes assert what we do not know and sometimes do not know what we assert. In any case, what we think and feel and say influences how we act.

For example, suppose we see people all around us behaving in greedy, aggressive, competitive, violent and self-seeking ways. Some would say that "it only goes to show" that people are greedy, aggressive, competitive, violent and self seeking "by nature." The latter is, of course, just one example of a more general "human nature" type of argument. (Recall "Aronson’s first law".)

Again we ask: What is "human nature"? In the course of living and learning, each of us develops our own "theory of human nature" – our own way of thinking about "what people are basically like," independent of the particulars of their lives and experiences.
What is your "theory of human nature"? (Describe your view of what "people are really like" and why. To what extent do notable “genetically determined” differences of biological origin (sex, skin color, eye color, etc.)

What is usually meant by the phrase "you can’t change human nature?"

If the true nature of "human nature" is inferable from human behavior, and is inherently fixed and unchangeable, what conclusions follow about (e.g.) the prospects for reducing the deleterious social effects of so much greedy, aggressive, competitive, violent and self-seeking behavior?

What is "biological determinism?" Consider this week’s readings and videos: can you find in them a clear example of the use of a biological determinist ("that’s human nature") argument as a "social excuse"?

What are "self-fulfilling prophesies?" How do they work in the case of biological determinist arguments? Give some examples.
B. Phase 2 (Cont’d.)  COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.7
April 16
Themes: Overcoming Prejudice and Discrimination
"You've Got to be Taught":
Acquiring and Acting on Stereotypes

FACILITATION: Study Group #7

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

READ by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.7 – 1 Aronson, SA: Chapter 7: Prejudice (pp. 300-355)

VIEW by yourself or with others then DISCUSS in your study group:

2.7 – 2 PBS "Frontline", A Class Divided (video -- viewing time 54 mins.)

2.7 – 3 Crash, film by Paul Haggis (video -- viewing time 122 mins.)

THINK OVER by yourself then DISCUSS in your study group:

Introductory Notes:

We have already encountered "The Tragedy of the Commons." Here we consider the social-psychological construction of prejudice and discrimination, and attempt to evaluate the role of fear, scarcity; socioeconomic inequality in promoting or combating prejudice.

Picture yourself living and working (going to school) in a social context in which meaningful and powerful exchanges within between and among human individuals and groups are marked by more or less pervasive and constant competition for scarce (finitely limited) human/ecological resources. What would you expect to be the situation with regard to the prevalence of inter-group mistrust, prejudice and discrimination?

Central to the ages old misgiving about the depravity of “human nature” is the belief that people, left to themselves, are prone to create conflict and chaos. By this way of thinking, unless there is a "ruler", or "rulers" of some kind to control and check them, people will revert into asocial behavior and violence. This view denies the possibility of individual responsibility as an inherent human trait, and it is essentially congruent with doctrines of Social Darwinism that have roots in ancient religious arguments that deny the possibility of free will.

More than a millennium ago, a monk named Pelagius pointed out how readily such doctrines can be used to justify and reinforce the predatory and licentious behavior of people. As we have already seen, this pessimistic view of "human nature" has been updated in sociobiological and evolutionary psychological discourse.
A hundred years ago, Peter Kropotkin, argued that humans are naturally endowed with an inclination to mutual help and care, and emphasized the importance of solidarity, considerateness and cooperation in evolution. Mutuality and community best epitomize the eco-systemic interrelatedness and interdependency of the individual and his or her social and natural environment. Kropotkin demonstrated that authoritarian regulation results in reproduction of irresponsibility and asocial behavior, rather than promotion of individual responsibility. This argument has been repeatedly asserted, and, obviously, repeatedly forgotten (or suppressed). For us, however, the main theme remains that of "social possibility" rather than "biological determinism."

The formation of prejudice – like that of conformity, etc. – is best understood in terms of other issues and crises that normally arise during various phases or stages of organization/development in groups: (Cf. issues related to "Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing").

"Is there a "prejudiced personality"? Some experimental social psychologists have identified "the authoritarian personality" with persons who presumably are neurobiologically, psychologically and socioculturally inclined (e.g. mentally and behaviorally) to exhibit net positive tendencies toward conformity in hierarchically organized human social systems. One implication is that some people can become socialized to accept without question the legitimacy of authoritarian relations between (for example) leaderships and memberships. We have already encountered instances of this in conformity to group norms (The Wave), and in obedience to authority (Milgram).

We have also noted that changing circumstances can result in changing attitudes: (e.g. segregated and integrated housing: the prejudice-reducing effects of meaningful equal-status contact across (e.g. racial/ethnic/religious) lines; jigsaw classroom, etc.

A great deal of evidence suggest that powerful direct and vicarious effects can result from formally legislated or mandated social rearrangements. Yet the lineaments of prejudice remain. Why?

2.7 – 2 “A Class Divided”

This video deals with what began in 1968 – in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. – as an Iowa elementary school teacher’s idea for a classroom "experiment" intended to teach her all-white and relatively socio-economically non-differentiated students a lesson about prejudice. Instead of using skin color, she distinguished between two groups on the basis of eye color. Some highly instructive extensions of the work into other institutional contexts are also described.

2.7 – 3 “Crash”

This recent (2005) "intensely fascinating" film set in present-day Los Angeles, tells interlocking and cross-cutting stories involving a diverse group of people living and working in a contemporary American big city: whites and blacks, Latinos and Anglos, Asians, Iraqis, Iranians, women and men, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, politicians, cops, criminals, shopkeepers, bureaucrats, etc. literally and figuratively colliding with each other in a series of more or less violent encounters, most of which are defined by prejudices based on and involving erroneous assumptions (stereotypes) that prevent them from actually seeing the other person standing before them, thus creating conditions conducive to the tragic unfolding of self-fulfilling prophesies.
Questions To Consider:

- What is "prejudice?"
- What are "stereotypes?"
- Is there a "prejudiced" personality?
- Can prejudice be overcome?
- Prejudice and group stereotypes: What are some common social and psychological effects of stereotypes?
  - How does being the object of prejudice affect self-esteem?
  - How does self-esteem relate to cognitive competency (e.g., academic or athletic performance?)
- Compare and contrast the social effects of racial profiling and gender stereotyping.
- What is "victim blaming"? What are self-fulfilling stereotypes?
- Prejudice and scientific measurement/management (how do social biases enter into tests of intelligence, achievement, aptitudes etc?)
  - Can you identify some subtle and not so subtle effects of both hostile and benevolent prejudice?
  - What is meant by the statement: "prejudice is a nonconscious aspect of ideology"?
  - Consider the role of media vis-à-vis representations of perpetrators and victims of prejudice.
- Relate what you have learned about relations between covert mental attitudes (cognitive and affective) and overt behavioral expressions to activities aimed at promoting and combating racism, sexism, ageism, etc.
B. Phase 2 (Concluded)  COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

Unit 2.8
April 23
Themes:  Humanecological Sustainability
as a Social Psychological Problem:
Can Personal and Social Values Coexist
in a More Multidimensionally Harmonious,
More Humanecologically Sustainable Society?

FACILITATION:  Study Group #8

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

REREAD
  2.8 – 2  E. Aronson and D. Bridgeman (1979) Jigsaw Groups and the
  Desegregated Classroom: In Pursuit of Common Goals
  (See Unit 1.2 – 8)
  2.8 – 3  Assadourian, E., Engaging Communities ,pp 151-165. in “State of the World
  2009 – Innovations for a Sustainable Economy, ; Worldwatch Institute
  2.8 – 4  Calder, J.S., Mobilizing Human Energy pp. 166-179 in “State of the
  World 2009 – Innovations for a Sustainable Economy, ; Worldwatch Institute

THINK OVER by yourself  then  DISCUSS in your study group:

Introductory Notes:

What is "human nature?"
How would you describe/define:
  • relations between humanity and nature?
  • individual rights and social responsibilities?
  • legal, moral, political and economic arguments regarding the concept of "corporate
    personhood?"
  • "humanecological sustainability" as a social psychological problem.

We will revisit some of the questions raised by the film The Corporation (which we viewed and
discussed in Unit 2.3), primarily the issue about corporation as a person. We'll examine the
social-psychological and humanecological consequences of this bizarre characterization afforded
to an institution.

Another important issue here is the prevailing sense of alienation – of disconnection between the
individual and the large-scale social structures like corporations and other institutions which often
seem to operate in a manner that excludes any possibility of individual influence, thus creating a
feeling of helplessness and despair.

Think of instances when you feel like that. Does MIT as an institution sometimes incite such
feelings? What other institutions, bodies, organizations have similar impact on you? Do you ever
think you should and could do something about it?
What are some possible positive alternatives to this state of alienation, disconnection and
helplessness? What conditions and human relations can enable the re-connection of individuals in
social structures?
Need to end this phase on a more positive note.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T Group Process Issues (evaluations):

Relate the foregoing to your experience with the 9.70 "collaborative learning system". Does the class integration/connection present an example of a "re-connected", "de-alienated" social structure – particularly because the dissolved authoritarian relations enable better communication/decision conductivity up and down, and – what is essential – shared responsibility, which is emphatically absent in typical large scale structures (like the corporation).

For effective communication it is important to have clear, concise, constructive and timely feedback.
C. Phase 3 FINAL PROJECTS:

Unit 3.1 FORMING/STORMING
April 30
Tasks/Issues: Identifying and Organizing End-of-term Projects;
Refining Evaluation Criteria

FACILITATION: TBA

C. Phase 3 (Cont’d) FINAL PROJECTS:

Unit 3.2 STORMING/NORMING
May 7
Tasks/Issues: Working on Projects;
Production and Distribution of Evaluation Forms

FACILITATION: TBA

C. Phase 3 (Concluded) FINAL PROJECTS:

Unit 3.3 PERFORMING
May 14
Tasks/Issues: Presenting Final Projects (juried?)
Completing Evaluations and Final Grading
Collaborative Learning System Lifecycle CLOSURE

FACILITATION: TBA