

**SASA004 Social Science and Human Nature: Conceptual and Philosophical Issues (Den mänskliga naturen inom socialvetenskaplig forskning: begreppsliga och filosofiska p),  
7,5 or 15 credits**

**Third Cycle/doktorandkurs,**

*The syllabus is expected to be adopted in June 2013*

**1. Confirmation**

The course syllabus was adopted by the Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University, on xxxxxxxx

This syllabus is valid from 2013-xx-xx

*Department:* School of Social Work

**2. General Information**

The course is offered as an elective course on Third Cycle level for Doctoral students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University. The language of instruction is English.

*Main fields of studies*

Social Work.

The course is relevant to Doctoral students in social sciences.

**3. Outcomes**

On the completion of the course, the student shall be able to

*Knowledge and understanding*

- demonstrate in-depth knowledge of various theories of human nature in the light of different theoretical and philosophical approaches
- demonstrate a deeper understanding of historical, philosophical, and methodological knowledge relevant to theories in contemporary social science
- Show understanding of how research problems can be formulated and evaluated and discussed from social science point of view
- Have knowledge of relevant philosophical assumptions and the relevant historical background to, and also apply them to, their own research.

### *Skills and abilities*

- critically reflect on various theories of human nature
- be able to analyse how different theoretical approaches impact on actual research and various policies
- be able to independently identify a specific problem in the area of the course relevant to their own research/dissertation and discuss the basis of literature and make critical judgement
- make informative, critical and supported written and oral presentations
- demonstrate ability to independently and analytically contribute to research in social work and social science more generally.

### *Making judgement*

- be able to reason and judge how research contributions (articles, studies, policy documents etc.) can be evaluated from different epistemological and ontological point of views
- demonstrate knowledge of ethical principles and apply them in their own field of research by identifying and assessing relevant ethical issues.

## **4. Course content**

The course aims to provide knowledge and understanding of theories of human nature in the light of various theoretical and philosophical approaches. The course also aims to deepen the students' historical, philosophical, and methodological knowledge and strengthen their ability to independently and analytically contribute to research in social work and social science in general.

The course presents, discusses and critically assesses the implicit or explicit conceptions of human nature, prevalent in contemporary social sciences. The course further presents and assesses how conceptions of human nature have impacted on problem definitions, theoretical assumptions and research methodology in contemporary social sciences. In addition, influence of such conceptions on social institutions and society, and how they guide actual research and policy will be critically assessed.

The focus of the course is to critically discuss what is required for such a conception to be adequate, and to tentatively present some features of it, especially with respect to how human beings function and develop emotionally, socially, cognitively, and the relevant social institutions and communication practices.

A further aim is to provide students with various analytical tools for the critical presentation, discussion and assessment of various belief systems. For example, the fundamental ideas of internal and external criticism as the base for conceptual/ontological and methodological evaluation will be presented.

In particular, the focus of the course will be on an explication and evaluation of the dominant biological and cultural approaches, investigating their ontological and methodological differences with an eye to developing a non-reductive basis for the social sciences that takes both cultural variation and biological constraint into consideration. Thus formulating some tentative ideas which might function as the core of a conception of human nature adequate for the social sciences.

The course also provides training in scientific oral and written communication.

This course consists of 8 lectures/seminars:

***Seminar I: Introduction, problem context, historical background and conceptual-evaluative tools.***

This seminar presents the rationale for the course, the historical context of the issues discussed with theories of human development as a case study. The fundamental ideas of internal and external criticism as the base for conceptual/ontological and methodological evaluation will be presented.

***Seminar II-III: Biologizing of human activity?***

This seminar presents the problem situation and focus on locating biological approaches in their historical and contemporary intellectual context, focusing on the implied conception of mind and knowledge and to a lesser extent on the biology. More specifically, it includes a critical discussion of Jean Piaget's theories as a case study, but the main focus is on contemporary evolutionary psychology and its place in the philosophical and scientific tradition. The basic principles of evolutionary psychology and neuropsychology will be presented and discussed. *Social institutions*

***Seminar IV-V: Human beings: Shaped by social life?***

This seminar will locate alternatives to the biological approach like discursive psychology and various kinds of social constructivism in their intellectual traditions, and present their underlying assumptions and guiding principles, including a discussion of the role of social institutions.

***Seminar VI: The Domestication of biology: A synthesis of biological and social factors?***

This seminar will discuss a possible synthesis of the different approaches and present tentative ideas for an adequate conception of human nature.

***Seminar VII: Evaluation.***

This seminar will use tools for the evaluation of theories and explanatory frameworks, based on ideas already presented. Several case studies will be provided as illustration

***Seminar VIII. Student presentations***

The course will end with a seminar, where students are required to present, in the seminar and in a paper, a particular problem they are working on related to the course content; suggesting ways to resolve the problem and argue their own solution(s).

**5. Assessment**

The course presents a variety of pedagogical tools making the course student-centred, thus enhancing student participation in the creative process of learning. The course consists of a combination of lectures and seminars. The lectures have an interdisciplinary focus and students are encouraged to actively participate based on own interests and reading and analysis of the course- and other relevant literature. Students give oral and written presentations of the literature and the specific topics related to their own research in seminar(s). Participation in seminars is mandatory.

Examination will be based on

- active participation in lectures/seminars
- individual oral presentations
- course papers and critical reflections on the course literature, and their own fields of research (A course paper consisting of 10 pages for 7,5 credits and 20 pages with more in-depth discussions for 15 credits).

It is mandatory to participate in seminar VIII (presentations) and in 4 out of 7 other seminars. Absence is compensated by written tasks (summaries of literature).

Re-examination is offered after the end of the course. If necessary, a second re-examination is arranged at a later date.

## **6. Grading scale**

Marking scale: fail, pass

For the grade of Pass the student must show acceptable results. For the grade of Fail the student must have shown unacceptable results. At the start of the course students are informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus and about the grading scale and how it is applied in the course.

## **7. Entry requirements.**

Admitted to Doctoral studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University. Other students may be accepted according to agreement.

## 8. Required reading

See appendix

## 9. Additional information

## -10. Appendix

### Tentative Suggested Readings

Bowlby J. 1988. *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. Tavistock professional book. London: Routledge. 177 pages

Collins, R. 1994. *Four Sociological Theories*. New York: Oxford University Press. 295 pages

Cosmides, L. and J. Tooby. 1995. From evolution to adaptations to behavior: Toward an integrated evolutionary psychology. In R. Wong (ed.). *Biological perspectives on motivated activities*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. 57 pages

Erneling, C. E. 2010. *Towards discursive education. Philosophy, technology and modern education*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. Selected sections 100 pages

Erneling, C. E. 1993. *Understanding language acquisition. The framework of learning*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. 210 pages

Erneling, C. E. and D. M. Johnson (eds.). 2005. *The Mind as a Scientific Object. Between Brain and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press. Introductions and Afterward. 25 pages.

Geary, D. C. 2007. Educating the Evolved Mind. In J. S. Carlson and J. R. Levin (eds.). *Psychological perspectives on contemporary educational issues*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. 99 pages

Gellner, E. 1985. *The Psychoanalytic Movement. The cunning of unreason*. London: Granada. 223 pages

Hacking, I. 1999. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 223 pages

Harré, R. and F. Moghaddam . *Psychology for the Third Millennium. Integrating Cultural and Neuroscience Perspectives*. London: SAGE. Selected chapters. 285pages, selections 100 pages

Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, S. J. and Ara Norenzayan. 2010. The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 33, 6-135, 82 pages.

Johnson, D. M. and C. E. Erneling (eds.) 1997. *The Future of the Cognitive Revolution*. Introductions and Afterword. New York: Oxford University Press. Introduction and Afterword., selected papers. 70 pages

Lewontin, R. C. 1991. A Reasonable Scepticism. In *Biology as Ideology*. Concord, Ontario: Anasi. selected sections, 16 pages

Payne, M. 2005 *Modern Social Work Theory*. New York City: McMillan. 250 pages

Stevenson, L. 2009. *Ten Theories of Human Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press. 233 pages

Tooby, J. and L. Cosmides. 2005. Conceptual foundations of evolutionary psychology. In D. M. Buss (ed.). *The handbook of evolutionary psychology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. 43 pages

Vygotsky, L. 1978. *Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 133 pages

Wallace, B. 2010. *Getting Darwin Wrong*. Exeter: Imprint Academic. 172 pages.

**Recommended readings:**

Morss, J. R. 1990. *The Biologising of Childhood. Developmental Psychology and the Darwinian Myth*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Earlbaum. 234 pages

Selected articles: 300 pages