

PS375-15 Evolution and Primate Origins of Human Behaviour

22/23

Department

Psychology

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Adriano Reis e Lameira

Credit value

15

Assessment

40% coursework, 60% exam

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module introduces the principles of natural selection and cultural evolution and it applies these to the behaviours of nonhuman primates, namely (nonhuman) great apes. This will enable gaining insight into the ancestral states, evolutionary precursors and selective drives behind some of the traits that define us today as humans, with a special focus on the evolution of language as operating system and interface of the human mind. In this module, theory will walk hand-in-hand with evidence from anatomy, ecology, palaeontology, geology and primatology (both with wild and captive great apes). Together, they will lead our way towards a deeper understanding of where we come from, who we are as a species and what mechanisms endow the human mind with unparalleled cognitive and communicative horse-power.

Module aims

This module aims to raise students' expertise from beginners level to a level of mastery in their versatility with the theory of evolution. Students will be given a snapshot of, and gain insight into, the most recent and relevant evidence into what may (or may not) have made human ancestors unique in comparison to other primates, namely great apes -- our closest living relatives. Students will gain insight into the depth of the ape mind and be introduced to some of the reasons why we alone might have become the only verbal ape in 3.5 billions years of life on the planet. The origins of language and the human mind remain one of the longest-standing and most challenging

puzzles in science. Learning the theoretical and empirical pitfalls in this field will, thus, beyond a thorough understanding of the human origins within the hominid lineage, equip students to critically evaluate, and possibly challenge, any major theories in psychology and collect the adequate evidence to back-up new working hypotheses.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

The course will cover human and nonhuman hominid (great ape) behaviour, communication, cognition and cultures, and will touch base on a range of topics covering and linking aspects from anatomy, geology, ecology and archeology.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand the theory of evolution, as applied both to biological and cultural traits.
- Understand how theory creates predictions about the natural world and how observation and experimentation may in turn confirm or falsify prevailing (but possibly flawed) hypotheses.
- Understand the prehistoric and prelinguistic conditions at the roots of the human lineage.
- To be able to detect and infer how phenomena that, having operated in our evolutionary past, continue to shape us today.

Indicative reading list

Lewis Dartnell (2020). *Origins: How The Earth Made Us*. Vintage.

van Schaik (2015). *The Primate Origins of Human Nature*. Wiley Blackwell.

Interdisciplinary

The module will cover subjects bridging biology and anthropology, cognition and psychology, ethology and ethnology.

Subject specific skills

Understand evolutionary theory and evaluate comparative nonhuman and human primate data. Know major approaches, methods, protocols (observational and experimental) in comparative and evolutionary psychology. Understand biological and cultural continuities between ape vocal and human verbal behaviour.

Transferable skills

- . Critical thinking.
- . Integration of different strands of evidence into coherent accounts of phenomena in the natural world, namely, of human behaviour.
- . Confidence in working between different, but overlapping, fields of study.

. Self-assurance to explore interdisciplinary research spaces and fill in knowledge gaps.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	12 sessions of 2 hours (60%)
Seminars	10 sessions of 1 hour (25%)
External visits	1 session of 6 hours (15%)
Total	40 hours

Private study description

Independent reading

Costs

Category	Description	Funded by	Cost to student
Field trips, placements and study abroad	Visit of the Natural History Museum of London related to lecture 10, facilitated by external expert	Department	£0.00

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group D

	Weighting	Study time
Literature review	30%	25 hours
Literature review on a topic chosen among given options.		
Presentation	10%	15 hours
1 x 10min presentation on choosen topic among several available		
Online Examination	60%	20 hours
2-hour assessment on all topics covered in lectures and seminars. Students will see example questions in advance of the final assessment.		

- Online examination: No Answerbook required

Feedback on assessment

On oral presentation: feedback form accompanying mark that will give constructive feedback on both format (including slides, props, presentation skills) and on content (data collection, exploration, visualisation, analysis).

On lit review: feedback form that will consider the relevance and breadth of background research, discussion skills, ability to summarise the literature and detect relevant connections and overarching theoretical issues/hypotheses.

[Past exam papers for PS375](#)

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UPSA-C804 Undergraduate Psychology with Education Studies

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)