Conceptual Foundations For Family Systems Theory
Fall 2009

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Syllabus

Course Description:

This course explores foundational epistemological concepts for Family Therapy Theory. It is designed to provide conceptual tools for those students who wish to pursue the professional specialization of Marriage and Family Therapy within a theological context. Course content focuses on evaluation and critique of three foundational epistemological streams influencing family therapy—personality theory, general systems and cybernetic theory, and postmodern philosophy. Evaluation and critique will be both theoretical and theological, and will include particular attention to theories' interaction with central issue of gender, race, class, and ethics.

Format:

This class is a graduate seminar. Participants are expected to be prepared for class by completing reading. Discussion leadership will be rotated between participants throughout the semester.

Learning Objectives:

> *One day a mystic stopped Nasrudin on the street and pointed at the sky. He meant: "There is only one truth, which covers all." Nasrudin was accompanied at the time by some desiring to be his disciple. They said to themselves, "This weird apparition is mad. Perhaps Nasrudin will take some precaution against him."*
>
> *Sure enough, the Mullah rummaged in his knapsack and brought out a coil of rope. The followers thought, 'Excellent, we will be able to seize and bind up the madman if he becomes violent" Nasrudin's action had, in fact, meant, "Ordinary humanity tries to reach the sky by methods as unsuitable as this rope." The*

madman laughed and walked away. "Well done," said the followers, "you saved us from him."

This story has given rise to the Persian proverb: "A question about the sky warrants the answer of a rope."

Idries Shah

- By the end of the course the students will be able to:

  1. Articulate an historically-informed understanding of three epistemological streams of family therapy theory;
  2. Outline fundamental theological concerns and themes which interact with these epistemological streams;
  3. Demonstrate skill in critically discerning the epistemological foundations for principal therapeutic schools of thought in Family Systems Theory;
  4. Discuss the dynamic interaction between theoretical foundations in family therapy and key theological understandings of existence, creation, and the human person in a moral and relational ecological context;
  5. Demonstrate skill in critically analyzing epistemological issues in current Marriage and Family Therapy periodical literature.

Requirements

1. **Complete all reading.**

2. **50-100 word reflection on required reading each class session (20% of grade):** This paper will be submitted every class session. Late papers will not be accepted. In cases of unavoidable absence, a paper may be submitted by email and must be received the same day as class.

3. **Mid-term essay (30% of grade). Due Oct. 22:** Five page essay describing and discussing your understanding of the material to this point of the semester. Specifically, explain how epistemological and anthropological assumptions guide a vision of human life, human good, and human change. How does this impact how you might do ministry or therapy?

4. **Critical Epistemological Review (20% of grade). Due Nov. 12:** Read a journal article from JAMFT or other professional journal. Write a maximum of five pages describing how the article reflects one of the three streams of epistemology discussed in class. Point out specific places in the article that demonstrate which stream it represents. Finish your review by analyzing the article using another epistemological stand (for instance, if the article is written from a post-modern

point of view, what reservations would someone reading from a modern point of view have? What issues are at stake?)

5. **Final Essay (30% of grade). Due last day of finals.** Write a 10-15 page essay describing your theory and theology of change. Be sure to address questions such as: What do I believe about how change takes place? How does therapy work? What place does religion or spirituality have in this? What does my theory of change say about the nature of the human person? What does it say about how God acts in nature and in people's lives? How do I account for biology, psychology, social/contextual factors, and the life of the spirit? Be sure to cite reading, lecture, class conversations. Part of grading criteria will be how you integrated class material into the paper. Complete your essay by reflecting briefly on how writing this paper influenced how you think about the work of pastoral counseling and marriage and family therapy.

6. **All assignments must be completed to pass the course. Grades will be determined by quality of work on the assignments.**

Texts

Becvar, D. and Becvar, R. (2006). *Family Therapy: A Systemic Integration,* 6th ed. New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Keeney, B. (1983). *Aesthetics of Change.* New York: Guilford Press.

Hubble, M., Duncan, B., and Miller, S. (1999). The Heart and Soul of Change: What Works in Therapy. American Psychological Association. ISBN: 978-1557985576

Anderson, H. and Gehart, D. (2007). Collaborative Therapy: Relationships and Conversations that Make a Difference. NY: Routledge. ISBN: 0-415-95327-8

Supplemental Texts (Library Reserve)

Browning, Don S. *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987.
Gurman, Alan and David Kniskern. *Handbook of Family Therapy,* Vol. I and Vol. II.
McGoldrick, Monica, ed. *Revisioning Family Therapy.*
Piercy, Fred and Douglas Sprenkle, et al. *Family Therapy Sourcebook, 2nd* ed.
Pinderhughes, Elaine. *Understanding Race, Ethnicity, and Power.*

Watzlawick, Paul, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson. *Pragmatics of Human Communications. A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes.*

White, Michael and David Epston. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends.*

Luepnitz, D. (1988). *The Family Interpeted.* New York: Basic Books.

Walsh, Froma, ed. (1993). *Normal Family Processes,* 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.

<div align="center">**CLASS SCHEDULE**</div>

Take note: If you are using an older edition of Becvar & Becvar, be sure what you read matches the topic for the day.

Section I: Foundations for Foundations

Sept. 15 **A Theological, Religious and Anthropological Frame**

    <u>Reading</u>

    Syllabus

    <u>Class session</u>

    Lecture and discussion
    Relationship of science/worldview/anthropology: Paradigms and shifts
    Science and theology—Changing images of God, the world, humanity

Sept. 17 **Conceptual and Theological Worlds--Foundations of Analysis**

    <u>Reading</u>

    Browning, *Religious Thought*, chs. 1-2 (Library Reserve)

    <u>Class session</u>

    Testing the boundaries and exploring mutually informing interactions between counseling theory, theological thought and religious life.

Section I: Introduction to Epistemology: Paying attention to the relationship between epistemology, theory of therapy, and expectations of therapy

Sept. 22 **Family Therapy: Epistemological and Paradigmatic Shifts**

    <u>Reading</u>

    Becvar, *Family Therapy* chs 1-3
    Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care, pp. 1-9 (CAMS)*

    <u>Class session</u>

"Modern" assumption and epistemology
Relationship of theory to modern epistemology
Shifts in understanding the world: From Aristotle to Faucoult
Ecological & evolutionary biology
Technology and human self-understanding
Premodern, Modern, Postmodern sensibilities in theology
Thinking in "multiverses"

A Beginning Evaluative Schema for Models of Therapy:

What is social reality according to this theory?
What is the ultimate context of social reality for this theory?
What/who is the human person for this theory?
How is image of family "grounded" in this theory?
How are human and family problems understood in this theory?
How is individual and family change understood?
Who/what is the therapist?
What operational understanding of "creation" is in action for this theory?
What theological issues (ontological, anthropological, etc.) are at stake?

Section II: Personality Theory and Humanism Discover the Family

Sept. 24   **Foundations of Personality Theory and Humanism**

Reading:
Hall, C. & Lindzey, G. *Introduction to theories of personality.* **Chapter 1 (3-23)** (Library Reserve)
Pervin, Lawrence A. *The Science of Personality.* **pp. 1-28; 231-256.** (CAMS)

Lecture and discussion

Sept. 29   **Discussion and Analysis:**

Psychodynamic, Experiential and Behavioral Family Therapies

Reading: Becvar ch. 6, 8, 12

Class session:

Discussion

Section III: Systemic Conceptualizations

Oct. 1   **General systems theory, structural observations, and family assessment**

Reading:

Becvar, ch. 7 & 9, 14
Luepnitz, ch. 3 & 5 (pp. 36-47; 57-68)

Class session:

Discussion and analysis

Oct   6   **Cybernetics I**

Reading:

Keeney, *Aesthetics of Change*, ch. 1 & 2
Luepnitz, *The Family Interpreted,* ch. 11 (ch. 150-167) (CAMS)

Class session

Epistemology and its use in family therapy theory
Form, order, and logical levels and how they affect observation
Recursion, recursion, recursion and recursion of recursion
Dialectical order
Reality and construction
Feminist critique of Bateson

Oct. 8   **Cybernetics, the language of systems**

Reading:

Keeney, *Aesthetics of Change*, ch 3.

Classroom session

Material vs. pattern and organization
Indeterminacy in nature
Chaos theory & entropy
Mind and material
Feedback and change
Logical levels and cybernetics of cybernetics

Objectivity and subjectivity
Autonomy
Systems, calibration and complementarity

Special considerations

Cybernetic epistemology. What theological issues are central to this
manner of thinking and understanding the world:

- At the level of metaphor

- What exists? Who/what is God? Creation?
- What is the nature of the human person?
- What is the nature of theodicy?
- What is the nature of human pain and suffering?
- What is the nature and meaning of wholeness and healing?
- Do any of these concepts have meaning?

- How does this epistemology intersect with major ways of
  understanding Christian tradition (i.e. Reformed theologies, liberation,
  process, etc.)?

Oct. 13   **A Cybernetic Understanding of Family Therapy**

Reading

Keeney, *Aesthetics of Change*, ch 4.

Classroom session

Self/other distinctions
Description and diagnosis
Cybernetic descriptions, double description
Health and pathology
The nature and person of the therapist
Therapy goals and outcomes
Therapy and ecology
Science of object vs. aesthetic of relationship

Clinical implications & case discussion
Implications for the nature of ministry

Oct. 15   **Cybernetics and Therapeutic Change**

Reading

Keeney, *Aesthetics of Change*, chs. 5 & 6

Classroom session

Patterns and change
Learning: First, second, and third-order change
Unconscious process and calibration
The nature of therapy
Case study

Oct. 20   **Discussion and Analysis (Mid-term essay due)**

Strategic Therapy & Communication Theory

Reading

Becvar, ch. 10 & 11
Luepnitz, ch 7 & 9 (pp. 91-114; 203-223) (CAMS)

Class session

Discussion

Oct. 22   **Critical Reflection: Theological Ethics & the Ethics of Cybernetics**

Reading

Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds*, 91-114; 203-223 (Library
        Reserve)
Becvar & Becvar, *Family Therapy*, pp. 304-318 (ethics).

Class session: Discussion

Oct. 27-29 **Fall Reading Days**

Section IV: Postmodern Shifts

Nov. 3   **Postmodern sensibilities**

Reading:

Lakeland, P. *Postmodernity*, pp. 1-38. (Library Reserve)

*   VanHoozer, K. "Theology and the condition of postmodernity," In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, pp. 3-25. (Library Reserve)

Class session:

Intro to post-modern thinking and theology

Nov. 5   **Therapy as Philosophical Stand**

Reading:

Anderson H. & Gehart, D. (2007) *Collaborative Therapy,* ch. 1 & 2

Class session: Discussion
                 Gender, race, class, and a multi-verse approach to therapy

Nov. 10   **Postmodern Approaches to Therapy**

Narrative & Collaborative & Deconstructive therapies

Reading:

Anderson & Gehart, ch. 3 & 4
Becvar 260-267

Nov. 12   **Discussion and Analysis**

Reading:

K. Gergen, *An invitation to social construction,* pp. 115-141 (CAMS)
Webster, J. (2003). "The human person," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology,* pp. 219-234. (Library Reserve)

Class session:

Analysis and critique of postmodern therapy
Discussion of postmodern therapy and Christian anthropology
Gender, race, class, sexual orientation in social constructivist theory and Theology
Epistemology and social difference
Implications for assessement, treatment, expected outcome

Section V: Integration: Empirically Supported Therapy & Common Factors

Nov. 17   **Empirical Foundations—What works in therapy? (Epistemological Review Due)**

            <u>Reading</u>:

            Hubble, M., Duncan, B., and Miller S. (1999). *The Heart and Soul of Change*, chs 1-3

            <u>Class session</u>: Discussion

Nov. 19   **The Client and Therapeutic Relationship**

            <u>Reading</u>: Hubble, et al, chs 4 & 5

            <u>Class session</u>: Discussion

Nov. 24   **Expectations, Hope, and Models of Therapy**

            <u>Reading</u>: Hubble, et al, chs 6-8

            <u>Class session</u>: Discussion

Nov. 26   **Thanksgiving**

Dec. 1   **Implications of Common Factors for Pastoral Counseling and MFT Practice**

            <u>Reading</u>: Hubble, et al, chs 11 & 14

Dec. 3-8   **Models for Therapy in Religious Contexts**

            <u>Reading</u>:
            Hindson & Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient*, ch. 1 & 8 (pp. 13-24; 171-198) (Library Reserve)
            Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling,* Ch. 4 (Library Reserve)
            Fleck & Carter, Psychology and Christianity, pp. 377-426 (Library Reserve)
            Buckholtz, "Help from Above" http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/02/AR2005120202287.html

Dec. 10   **Integration:**

And so now what? Practice, ethics, and critical reflection in the practice of pastoral counseling and MFT.

Selecting theories
Critical realism
Theology and therapy

Important Policies

Grading: Grade Scale and Philosophy

A	96.6-100
A-	93.6-96.5
B+	90.6-93.5
B	87.6-90.5
C	85.6-87.5
C+	83.6-85.5
C	81.6-83.5
C-	79.6-81.5
D	70.6-79.5
F	Below 70.6

Attendance

Learning is a complex activity that requires conceptual and experiential participation by those who wish to learn. Student attendance and participation is fundamental to the way the learning environment is structured for this course. Attendance and participation is required to earn a passing grade. While circumstances may require an adult learner to miss class occasionally, absence from more than 10% of the classroom experience will affect student learning and (consequently) the student's grade. Extreme circumstances, such as health problems, family concerns, etc. must be discussed with the professor ***prior*** to multiple missed classes. Students unable to attend at least 75% of classes are advised to drop the class prior to the registrar's WP deadline, or receive a failing grade.

Form for Writing Assignments

All papers submitted for grades must be written in APA approved style and be double-spaced.

> Major research papers, book reviews, etc. should include a cover sheet with the assignment title, your name, and the class for which you are writing.
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> Weekly assignments should include at the top of the first page your ***name, title of the assignment, and the date the assignment is due.*** These papers are to be folded in half (vertically) with your name and mailbox number on the outside. This allows returning them to you through campus mail.

All sources used in writing assignments must be cited appropriately and according to APA style. ***Failure to cite sources is plagiarism. You must give credit for quotes and ideas used in your writing. Papers submitted for grades that demonstrate plagiarism will receive a failing grade, and students will be subject to the seminary policy regarding plagiarism.***

Inclusive Language is a Seminary Policy

Learning is fundamentally concerned with communication, self-expression, and personal and social transformation. Learning respects individuals, their feelings, their value and worth, and their particular potential for contribution to common knowledge and community virtue. Learning is fundamentally and intentionally inclusive.

Since all learning is inherently ethical and political, and theological discourse has been traditionally patriarchal and gender exclusive, the Seminary has established a policy, in the interest of constructing an inclusive and egalitarian community, that the language (symbols, metaphors) used in our class discussions and written work shall be gender inclusive and respectful of all persons and groups as valued human creatures of God.

Racism also permeates our society and is detrimental to any learning environment. We need to use language, symbols, and metaphors that honor our commitment to racial inclusiveness.

In Times of Trouble, Growing Numbers of People Take Comfort in Faith-Based Therapy

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR READINGS

9/17
Browning, Don S. *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987, 1-31. (Library Reserve)

9/22
Doehring, Carrie. *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, 1-9. (CAMS; Library Reserve)

9/24
Hall, Calvin S. & Gardner Lindsey. *Introduction to Theories of Personality.* New York: John Wiley & Sons. ch. 1 (3-23) (Library Reserve)
Pervin, Lawrence A. *The Science of Personality.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996, 1-28; 231-256. (CAMS; Library Reserve)

10/1

Luepnitz, Deborah Anna. *The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice.* New York: Basic Books, 1988, 36-47; 57-68. (CAMS; Library Reserve)

10/6

Luepnitz, Deborah Anna. *The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice.* New York: Basic Books, 1988, 150-167. (CAMS; Library Reserve)

10/20

Luepnitz, Deborah Anna. *The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice.* New York: Basic Books, 1988, chs. 57-87; 97-108. (CAMS; Library Reserve)

10/22

Graham, Larry Kent. *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, 91-114; 203-223. (Library Reserve)

11/3

Lakeland, Paul. *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, 1-38. (Library Reserve)

VanHoozer, Kevin J. "Theology and the condition of postmodernity: A report on knowledge (of God)" In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology,* edited by Kevin J. VanHoozer, 3-25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. (Library Reserve)

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Gergen, Kenneth J. *An Invitation to Social Construction.* London: Sage, 1999, 115-141. (CAMS, Library Reserve)

Webster, Jr. "The Human Person." In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology,* edited by Kevin J. VanHoozer, 219-234. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. (Library Reserve)

12/3-8

Hindson, Ed and Howard Eyrich, eds. *Totally Sufficient: The Bible and Christian Counseling.* Fearn: Christian Focus, 2004, 13-24; 171-198. (Library Reserve)

Townsend, Loren L. *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling.* Nashville: Abingdon, 2009, ch. 4. (Library Reserve)

Fleck, J. Roland and John D. Carter, eds. *Psychology and Christianity: Integrative Readings.* Nashville: Abingdon, 1981, 377-426. (Library Reserve)

Buckholtz, Alison. "Help From Above: In Times of Trouble, Growing Numbers of People Take Comfort in Faith-Based Therapy." *Washington Post.* December 6, 2005. Also found at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/02/AR2005120202287.html.