Social Science Honors Sequence
Naturalized Epistemology and the Social Sciences
T/Th 12:30-1:50 PM/SSPA 1100

Professors:
Jeff Barrett (j.barrett@uci.edu), SST 765    Kyle Stanford (stanford@uci.edu), SST 769
We will both be available immediately after class most lecture days or by appointment.

Teaching Assistants:
Kino Zhou (yutingz3@uci.edu), Sections Wed 2PM & 4PM; Office Hrs Tues/Thurs
3:30PM-4:30PM in SST 792
Sam Eklund (Seklund@uci.edu), Sections Wed noon & Thurs 10AM; Office Hrs Tues
11AM-noon and Thurs 2-3 PM in SST 788
Will Stafford (stafforw@uci.ed), Sections Thurs 2PM & 4PM; Office Hrs Tues/Thurs
11AM-noon in SST 792

Course Website: https://eee.uci.edu/16f/70010

Course Description: This course concerns epistemology—the study of human
knowledge and justified belief—addressed from an interdisciplinary perspective
including methods characteristic of philosophy, history, and the social sciences. We
begin by describing the traditional philosophical view of what knowledge amounts to. Then we will discuss two famous challenges to the idea that we can know anything
about the world at all, due to philosophers Rene Descartes and David Hume. Following
a suggestion by Hume, we will next consider what empirical research in the social
sciences can contribute to our understanding of human knowledge. We will discover
that a number of classic findings of the social sciences reveal that the faculties we rely
on in the acquisition of knowledge are systematically unreliable, misleading, and subject
to deception in myriad ways we never would have anticipated and indeed find hard to
believe even when they are demonstrated experimentally. We will then explore Thomas
Kuhn’s famous suggestion that the theories and methods we use to establish these
scientific results are themselves open to an important skeptical challenge. We will
suggest that the upshot of this investigation is that we cannot acquire any knowledge at
all without making some assumptions about the nature of the world and the processes
of inquiry—and yet, as our own inquiry will by then have revealed, many of the
assumptions we rarely question have been undermined by empirical research. We will
conclude by proposing an alternative picture of human knowledge as an ongoing
process of belief revision and problem solving, according to which it is possible to
provide justification for many of our beliefs about the world even as we constantly
update our assumptions about the nature and reliability of our faculties and methods in
light of ongoing research in the social sciences.

Schedule:

Week 0: Course Introduction: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Naturalized
Epistemology. Reading from Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy (readings
available on course website)
Week 1:  

Week 2:  
I: Hume, *Enquiry*, Ch. XII; Pinker, “Good Ideas” (from *How the Mind Works*, pp. 343-351)  
II: Hoffmann, *Visual Intelligence*, Chs. 1&2 (partial)  

Week 3:  
II: Kruger and Dunning, “Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One’s Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments”; Strayer and Johnston, “Driven to Distraction”; Maier, “Reasoning in Humans”  

Week 4:  
II: Nisbett and Wilson, “Telling More Than We Can Know”  

Week 5:  
I: Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Preface & Ch. I-V  
II: 1st Midterm Examination, in class  

Week 6:  
I: Kuhn *SSR*, Ch. VI-VIII  
II: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. IX-X J&K gone  

Week 7:  
I: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. XI-XIII  
II: Kuhn, *SSR*, Postscript; Laudan, “A Problem-Solving Approach to Scientific Progress”  

Week 8:  
I: Vos Savant, “Ask Marilyn” *Parade* magazine columns from 9/9/90, 12/2/90, 2/17/91, and 7/7/91; Tversky and Kahneman, “The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice”;  
II: 2nd Midterm Distributed: Take Home Exam on Kuhn  

Week 9:  
I: Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, pp. 128-136  
II: Thanksgiving Break  

Week 10:  
I: Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, pp. 109-127; 2nd Midterm Exam due at beginning of class  
II: Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief”  

Readings: There are two books for the course: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, by David Hume, and *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, by Thomas Kuhn. Both are available in the UCI bookstore, and the Hume is also available for free online. All other readings will be made available through the course website, using a distribution system we will explain in class. Reading should be completed before lecture.  

Grades and Exams: Grades will be determined by two midterms and one (cumulative) final examination, worth 30%, 30%, and 40% (respectively) of your final grade. The first (in-class) midterm examination and the final exam will involve answering a number of
essay-style questions, each with equal weight in the final grade. This examination will allow for some flexibility in which questions one answers. The second midterm will be a take-home exam that will involve writing more carefully organized, more detailed, and more polished answers (within fairly stringent word limits) to a smaller number of essay-style questions, with little or no choice in the questions each student must answer. You are welcome to study together for either midterm or both, but you must actually compose your answers to the questions on the second midterm by yourself. A list of study questions will be made available before each of the examinations.

Sections: There is no direct penalty for not participating in section, but consistent, active, smart participation can improve one’s course grade by as much as one-half letter grade.

Academic Honesty: UCI’s policy on Academic Honesty can be found at: http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active_page_id=754. Please note that we take all instances of academic dishonesty extremely seriously, and it is your responsibility to know what constitutes a violation of this policy.