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:
Nicole Winter (wintera@uci.edu), Sections M10 & Th4; Office Hrs T9-11 in SSL 334
Bennett Holman (bholman@uci.edu), Sections W9 & W4; Office Hrs W11-12, W3-4 in SST 740
Hannah Rubin (hannahr@uci.edu), M12 & T10; Office Hrs W1-3 in SST 764
Tuesday 4PM Section: Jeff
Thursday 9AM Section: Kyle

Course Website: https://eee.uci.edu/13f/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 of our faculties and methods in light of new research in the social sciences.

Schedule:

Week 0: Course Introduction: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Naturalized Epistemology. Reading from Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy

Week 1: I: Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Chs. I-IV

Week 2:  
I: Hume, *Enquiry*, Ch. XII; Pinker, “Good Ideas” (from *How the Mind Works*, pp. 343-351)  
II: Hoffman, *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: Midterm Examination  
II: Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Preface & Ch. I-V

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

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  

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

Week 10:  
I: Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (final section only!)  
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 one midterm and one (cumulative) final examination, each worth approximately 1/2 of your final grade. Each examination will involve answering ten essay-style questions, each with equal weight in the final grade. The examinations will allow for some flexibility in which questions one answers. A list of study questions will be made available before each of the examinations.
Sections and Paper Assignment: 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. We will also have an optional paper assignment: 1,500-2,000 words, on a topic discussed with and approved by your TA no later than the end of Week 8, and due the final regular course meeting. The grade on this paper will be used to replace either your grade on the midterm or on the final exam if (and only if) doing so would improve your final grade in the course. Note that the paper can only replace a good faith effort on an exam—you may not simply skip one of the exams and write the paper instead (nice try, though).