

Social Science Honors Sequence
Naturalized Epistemology and the Social Sciences
Tu/Th 12:30-1:50 PM / SSH 100

Professors:

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Course website: <https://eee.uci.edu/12f/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 anticipated. 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 we will have seen, 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: Introduction: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Naturalized Epistemology.
Reading from Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 1: I: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Chs. I-IV
II: Hume, *Enquiry*, Chs. V, VII, IX

Week 2: I: Hume, *Enquiry*, Ch. XII; Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence*, Chs. 1&2 (partial)
II: Loftus, “Make My Memory”

- Week 3: I: Maier, "Reasoning in Humans"; Festinger and Carlsmith, "Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance"
 II: Nisbett and Wilson, "Telling More Than We Can Know"
- Week 4: I: Strayer and Johnston, "Driven to Distraction"; Hall and Johansson, "Using Choice Blindness to Study Decision Making and Introspection"
 II: Williams and Bargh, "Experiencing Physical Warmth Promotes Interpersonal Warmth"; Nelson and Simmons, "Moniker Maladies"
- Week 5: I: **Midterm Examination**
 II: Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Preface & Chs. I-III
- Week 6: I: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. IV-VII
 II: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. VIII-IX
- Week 7: I: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. X-XII
 II: Kuhn, *SSR*, Ch. XIII, Postscript
- Week 8: I: Laudan, "A Problem-Solving Approach to Scientific Progress"
 II: Thanksgiving Break
- Week 9: I: Vos Savant, "Ask Marilyn" Parade magazine columns from 9/9/90, 12/2/90, 2/17/91, and 7/7/91; Denes-Raj and Epstein, "Conflict between intuitive and rational processing"
 II: Skyrms, *Choice and Chance*, Ch. 6
- Week 10: I: No reading
 II: Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief"; Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"
 (Last section only!)

Readings: There are two books for the course: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, by David Hume, and *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3rd Ed.), by Thomas Kuhn. Both are available in the UCI book store, 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: Grades will be determined by one midterm (on October 30) and one (cumulative) final examination (on December 14), each worth approximately ½ 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.

Extra Credit: 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.