Rationality and objectivity as epistemic categories, and the roles that they play in structuring select debates within contemporary philosophy.

I want to begin by taking a fresh look at the most influential book of twentieth century philosophy of science, Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn put on the table, in a particularly compelling way, a number of the topics that I want to pursue: To what extent are one’s observations of the world influenced by the theories that one accepts? To what extent is rational adjudication possible between those who differ with respect to their most fundamental theoretical commitments (the interpersonal case), and to what extent might revising one’s most fundamental theoretical commitments be a rational process (the intrapersonal case)? What might explain why natural scientists regularly seem to achieve a kind of consensus that is so conspicuously elusive in other fields (e.g., the social sciences, and-saliently for us--philosophy)?

Van Fraassen on radical belief change. The debate about whether observation is ‘theory laden’, in both its classical guise (Kuhn and Hanson versus the logical empiricists) and its contemporary one (Fodor versus Churchland). The concept of evidence, and various versions of the claim that evidence will inevitably ‘underdetermine’ the choice between rival theories. Williamson on evidence. Issues about rationality and interpretation as they arise in both the philosophy of social science and the philosophy of psychology: debates about Principles of Charity and Humanity, etc. (Davidson, Dennett, Stitch). Bernard Williams on convergence in ethics and in science. Recent ‘transcendental’ defenses of Reason due to Thomas Nagel and Ronald Dworkin.
1. 2/8 Overview

2. 2/15 Kuhn

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [selections].


3. 2/22 Van Fraassen on Radical Belief Change


4. 3/1. The ‘Theory-Ladenness’ of Observation

Excerpt from Norwood Russell Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery*.


6. 3/15. Cognitive Bias


C.G. Lord, Lee Ross, and M.R. Lepper, “Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence”. In the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (1979), 2098-2109.

Thomas Kelly, “Disagreement, Dogmatism, and Belief Polarization” (draft).

Wednesday, 3/22: No Class (Spring Break).


8. 4/5. Rationality, Interpretation, and Principles of Charity.


9. 4/12. Is All Irrationality Ultimately a Matter of Inconsistency?


10. 4/19 NO CLASS.


12. 5/3. Must Reason Get ‘the Last Word’?

Thomas Nagel, “Why We Can’t Understand Thought From the Outside”. Chapter 2 of his The Last Word (OUP, 1997).