

PATRICK CRONIN

Dept. of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin, 600 N. Park Street • Madison, WI 53706 • (319) 930-0138 •
pmcronin@wisc.edu • patrickcronin.com

AOS

Epistemology, Philosophy of Science

AOC

Metaphysics, Philosophy of Religion

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	University of Wisconsin-Madison	Philosophy	2026 (Expected)
M. A.	University of Wisconsin-Madison	Philosophy	2017-2020
M. A.	Western Michigan University	Philosophy	2013-2015
B. A.	University of Iowa	Philosophy & History	2010-2012

DISSERTATION

The Rise & Fall of the Pessimistic Induction

Expected defense: April 2026

Committee: Mike Titelbaum (chair), Elliott Sober, and Aja Watkins.

PUBLICATIONS

(2025) 'An A Priori Refutation of the Classical Pessimistic Induction'

Erkenntnis (90), pp. 3049-69.

- Presented as a symposium at the 2022 *APA Central Division Meeting*.

(2017) 'Regularity Theories Disconfirmed: A Revamped Argument and a Wager'

Synthese (194), pp. 4913-33

UNDER REVIEW

A paper that replies to Kyle Stanford's New Pessimistic Induction, 35 pp.

- Presented as a colloquium at the 2025 *APA Central Division Meeting*.
- Accepted upon invitation to present at the 2026 *Northeastern Epistemology Workshop*.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

'The Collapse of Hume's Everlasting Check'

I develop a lesser-known objection to Hume on miracles, based on a critique from his contemporary William Adams. Adams curiously thought that Hume had things backwards: the rarity of miracles couldn't be evidence against them because it is *conceptually necessary* that they are rare. I argue that, surprisingly, Adams was right.

- To be presented as a symposium at the 2026 *APA Eastern Division Meeting*.
- Accepted as a colloquium at the 2026 *APA Central Division Meeting*.

‘A Misleading Induction about Misleading Evidence’

I argue that Frost-Arnold’s new argument against scientific realism violates the principle that hypotheses can’t be disconfirmed by their own successful predictions. We therefore have no meta-inductive reason to think that current bodies of evidence are misleading.

‘Montaigne, Counter-Deference, and Intellectual Humility’

I critically examine what appears to be a counter-deference principle in Montaigne’s *Apology*: whatever experts judge to be the case in matters theoretical, we should not adopt that opinion. I also critically explore insights from the *Apology* to shed light on an intuition that scientific realism is in tension with intellectual humility.

‘Regularity Reconsidered’

Contrary to my earlier *Synthese* paper, I argue that Humean pointillist ontologies may be sufficiently rich to preserve the right kind of probability relationships at the subvenient level of reality. I then criticize Galen Strawson’s source intuition about a random image generator that seems to indicate otherwise.

HONORS & FELLOWSHIPS

<i>Milton K. Munitz Prize</i> , American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Annual essay prize awarded to a scholar at any career stage whose essay deals significantly with metaphysics, cosmology, ontology, scientific forms of religiosity, or empirically informed approaches to the mysteries of existence.	2026
<i>Philosophy Department Scholarship</i> , University of Wisconsin-Madison A summer fellowship awarded to select graduate students at a promising stage of research.	2025
<i>Department of Philosophy Summer Fellowship</i> , University of Wisconsin-Madison A summer fellowship awarded to select graduate students at a promising stage of research.	2024, 2023
<i>Graduate School Summer Fellowship</i> , University of Wisconsin-Madison A summer fellowship awarded to select graduate students at a promising stage of research.	2021
<i>The W. Donald Oliver Essay Prize</i> , University of Wisconsin-Madison Annual philosophy department prize awarded to the best graduate student essay in any area of philosophy.	2020
<i>Graduate School Fellowship</i> , University of Wisconsin-Madison I was the cohort-wide recipient of a one-year fellowship awarded only to those with excellent academic backgrounds, outstanding letters of reference, and a writing sample of the highest quality.	2017-2018
<i>Heraclitean Society Essay Prize</i> , Western Michigan University Annual philosophy department prize awarded to the best graduate student essay in any area of philosophy.	2015

TEACHING EXPERIENCE (PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR)

Introduction to Philosophy

A survey course that includes units on value theory, meaning of life, nature of mind, existence of God, as well as normative and applied ethics.

Introduction to Ethics

A survey course exploring ethical theories, questions about moral knowledge, and various applied ethical issues including the death penalty and global poverty.

Ethics in Business (3x)

A course that surveys topics including the ethics of bluffing, whistleblowing, sexual harassment, romance in the workplace, sweatshops, advertising, the moral limits of markets, and the social responsibility of corporations.

Contemporary Moral Issues (3x)

An applied ethics course on contemporary topics including abortion, animal ethics, euthanasia, genetic enhancement, drug legalization, gun control, and interrogational torture.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE (TEACHING ASSISTANT)

Introduction to Philosophy (4x)

With James Messina (UW-Madison)
Shannon Nolen (UW-Madison)
Kent Baldner 2x (WMU)

Meaning of Life (2x)

With Anat Schechtman (UW-Madison)
Kathleen Lohnes (UW-Madison)

Elementary Logic

With Peter Vranas (UW-Madison)

Introduction to Ethics

With Russ Shafer-Landau (UW-Madison)

Foundations of a Liberal Arts Education

With Jeff Beneker (UW-Madison)

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS

Assistant to Emily Fletcher

Developed a repository of resources for curricula development that provided mentor support for graduate students: e.g., aid with syllabi, topics, readings, assignments, class activities, and handouts.

2025

Assistant to Elliott Sober

Researched various questions at the intersection of philosophy of science and the First Amendment of the US Constitution. I also compiled bibliographies relevant to those questions.

2018

Assistant to Timothy McGrew

Wrote many short biographies of thinkers who participated in the deist controversy in England for the John Templeton Foundation's *Special Divine Action Project*.

2015 - 2016

REFERENCES

Mike Titelbaum

Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor

Dept. of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin-Madison

(608) 263-3700

titelbaum@wisc.edu

For letter of recommendation, contact: send.Letter.FC04914132@interfoliodossier.com

Elliott Sober

Hans Reichenbach Professor and William F. Vilas Research Professor, Emeritus

Dept. of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin-Madison

(608) 260-8430

ersober@wisc.edu

For a letter of recommendation, contact: send.Letter.890B66AA7D@interfoliodossier.com

Aja Watkins

Assistant Professor

Dept. of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin-Madison

(505) 453-2113

ajawatkins@wisc.edu

For a letter of recommendation, contact: send.Letter.C2D10BDB2A@interfoliodossier.com

Branden Fitelson

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy

Dept. of Philosophy

Northeastern University

(617) 373-3954

b.fitelson@northeastern.edu

For a letter of recommendation, contact: send.Fitelson.D2DB38191C@interfoliodossier.com

Jesse Steinberg

Teaching Faculty

Teaching Letter Writer

Dept. of Philosophy

University of Wisconsin-Madison

(608) 263-3700

jesse.steinberg@wisc.edu

For a letter of recommendation, contact: send.Letter.0BF8206FF@interfoliodossier.com

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

Metaphysics

Metaphysics (Alan Sidelle)
Parsimony in Metaphysics (Nicholas Mantegani)
Freedom and Responsibility (Richard Glatz)
Philosophy of Mind: 80s and 90s (Larry Shapiro)
Dispositions (Jesse Steinberg)
Time, Mind, & Cause since 1900 (Arthur Falk)
Philosophy of Religion (Dan Dolson)

Epistemology and Philosophy of Science

Bayesian Epistemology (Mike Titelbaum)
Theory of Knowledge (Marc Alspecter-Kelly)
Philosophy of Science: Fine-Tuning (Elliott Sober)
Adv. Philosophy of Science (Marc Alspecter-Kelly)
Probability: Philosophical Apps. (Timothy McGrew)
Ockham's Razors (Elliott Sober)*
Incommensurability (Hayley Clatterbuck)*

Language & Logic

Epistemology and Logic (Mike Titelbaum)
Proseminar (John Mackay)
Imperative Logic (Peter Vranas)*

Ethics & Value Theory

Ethical Theory (Michael Pritchard)
The Fact/Value Distinction (Michael Pritchard)
Metaethics: The Moral Universe (Russ Shafer-Landau & John Bengson)
Aesthetics (John Dilworth)
Plato's Philebus: Pleasure, Knowledge, and the Human Good (Emily Fletcher)*
Aristotle's Ethics (Paula Gottlieb)*

History of Philosophy

Hume or Kant? (James Messina)
Adv. History of Philosophy (Anat Schechtman)
The Deist Controversy (Timothy McGrew)

* denotes audited course.

The Rise & Fall of the Pessimistic Induction

Pessimistic inductions are a family of arguments with the following structure. First, they identify some epistemologically contentious domain. Second, they identify an epistemically negative property that past attempts to theorize about the domain would have if each of them were compared to our contemporary efforts. Third, they cite this historical pattern as a track record that bears inductively on our contemporary efforts to construct and identify accurate theories. Fourth, they perform an inductive inference to conclude that our contemporary situation probably has that negative property too. Finally, they conclude that we should retract our confidence in contemporary theories due to this looming background statistic. This conclusion is supposed to follow even though current first-order evidence favors our current theories. After all, every predecessor in the track record was in its day supported by the best evidence then available and yet has since been discarded. Pessimistic inductions emphasize a simple point: any pronouncement about the epistemic status of current theories must take their own track records into account.

Chapter 1 discusses the nature and ubiquity of pessimistic inductions. They remain some of the most widely cited challenges to scientific realism, with a pedigree that goes back to the 1500s. We find them in Montaigne, Hume, Pareto, and even in Jonathan Swift's classic tale, *Gulliver's Travels*. They have been used against descriptive theories of reference, physicalist and dualist theories of mind, the legitimacy of folk concepts, and even metaphysics more generally. One needn't be a philosopher of science to have a stake in the fate of pessimistic inductions.

Chapter 2 identifies a method known as "epistemological judo" that is indispensable for constructing these inductions. This is a method of historical comparison that cites chronologically later members of the same statistical population to deduce that earlier members exemplify the pessimist's desired negative feature. I show that common forms of judo that produce uniform track records are irrational, since they satisfy the conditions for a no-lose investigation: a process that supposedly can justify a proposition but has no possibility of undermining it. Such investigations are absurd. Yet several pessimistic inductions *require* them and are therefore also absurd. I take this result to warrant further inquiry into other versions of judo. The next three chapters take on that task.

Chapter 3 investigates the *Classical Pessimistic Induction*. According to that induction, past empirically successful theories have typically been radically *false* by current lights; current theories aren't relevantly different; so, they're probably radically false too. I show that this argument's own inferential structure violates three principles of evidence:

- Hypotheses can't be disconfirmed by their own successful predictions.
- We shouldn't cite correlations that disappear in light of known underlying factors.
- Inductions are legitimate only if their samples are random.

By violating those principles, the Classical Pessimistic Induction fabricates evidential significance and then treats the counterfeit as if it confers justification.

Chapter 4 discusses an influential argument by Kyle Stanford called the *New Pessimistic Induction*: past *scientists* have typically been *unimaginative*—they routinely fail to conceive of serious theoretical alternatives that are at least as well supported by the phenomena as the ones scientists actually endorse; current scientists aren't relevantly different; so, they've probably failed to imagine serious alternatives too. I present a dilemma against Stanford's version based on different ways it can use judo. One horn implies that the induction violates the first principle above. The other horn implies that the induction violates the second principle. That enables me to successfully extend the previous chapter's diagnosis to Stanford's induction.

Chapter 5 investigates the most recent version by Gregory Frost-Arnold—the *Misleading Evidence Induction*. It argues that past *evidence* has typically been *misleading*; that current evidence isn't relevantly different; and that therefore our current evidence is probably misleading too. I survey analyses of misleading evidence and argue that however we construe the Misleading Evidence Induction, each interpretation violates at least one of the principles of evidence above. This completes my unified diagnosis of pessimistic inductions.

I conclude that pessimistic inductions against scientific realism all fail for a priori reasons. My treatment of this issue is surprisingly novel. It is novel, in that none of the authors who have written on the topic since the 1500s have offered the treatment that I provide. It is also surprising, since I resolve the issue using only features intrinsic to pessimistic inductions along with simple principles of evidence accepted by all parties.