

Assignment 3: Two strategies for distinguishing science from pseudo-science
Due by 6 pm, October 21st

Arguably, the philosophers of science should be able to explain the difference between genuine science and pseudoscience. This assignment invites you to compare two approaches to drawing this distinction. The most popular view is the Popperian criterion of falsification. As we have discussed in class, and as argued in the readings, this proposal encounters some potentially devastating problems. A “post Kuhnian” alternative is presented by Paul Thagard in his essay, “Why Astrology is a Pseudoscience.” The following questions encourage you to compare these two approaches.

1. What is Popper’s falsification criterion for distinguishing science from pseudo-science? In your own words, explain how this criterion threatened by Kuhn’s account of how “normal science” should operate.
2. Thagard anticipates the objection that his account of the distinction between science and pseudoscience “might suggest a kind of cultural relativism” (p. 51). He wants to avoid this charge. First, outline in premise-and-conclusion form his argument in response to this objection. Second, raise an objection to one of the premises.
3. Briefly explain how Paul Feyerabend (whose ideas are discussed by Godfrey-Smith in Chapter 7) might object to Thagard’s criterion for distinguishing science from pseudoscience.