

Phil-70: Of Disagreement and Doubt

Amherst College, Fall 2010

Description.

We are fallible creatures, prone to making all sorts of mistakes. How should we accommodate evidence of our own epistemic imperfection? Should such evidence lead us to doubt ourselves and our beliefs? Or are we rationally permitted to dismiss it? One way in which we might get evidence of our own error is through disagreement. The discovery that someone you respect disagrees with you can make you lose confidence in, and sometimes altogether abandon, your belief in the disputed proposition—but should it? Does disagreement provide evidence of error? Is it epistemically significant, or simply unpleasant? We will approach these questions by looking at current work on the epistemology of disagreement. This will lead us to more general issues about evidence and rationality that are central to both recent and traditional epistemology.

Instructor.

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Requirements.

1. One 5-6 page paper due at mid-semester (30%)
2. One 10-12 page paper due at end of semester (60%)
3. In-class participation and short reading response papers (10%)

Expectations.

Do the following consistently and well: attend, participate, read, and write. Contact me *immediately* if you foresee any difficulties; we will work it out.

Readings.

All articles will be posted online and/or in your course packet. Complete all weekly readings by first meeting of the week, unless otherwise instructed.

(Tentative) Schedule.**Week 1** (T 9/07 & Th 9/9) **Two routes to doubt.**

Sher, G. [2001] "But I Could Be Wrong" in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Summer volume.

Week 2 (T 9/14 & Th 9/16) **First Route: Disagreement.**

van Inwagen, P. [1996] "It is Wrong, Always, Everywhere, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything, Upon Insufficient Evidence" in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*, Jordan and Howard-Snyder (eds.), Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD

Week 3 (T 9/21 & Th 9/23) **Reasonable Disagreements?**

Feldman, R. [2007] "Reasonable religious disagreements" in L. Antony (ed.), *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Oxford University Press.

Optional: Feldman, R. [2006] "Epistemological puzzles about disagreement" in S. Hetherington (ed.) *Epistemology Futures*, Oxford University Press.

Week 4 (T 9/28 & Th 9/30)

White, R. [2005] "Epistemic Permissiveness" in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 19, 445-459.

Week 5 (T 10/05 & Th 10/07) **Conciliationism vs. Non-Conciliationism**

Kelly, T. [2005] "The epistemic significance of disagreement" in J. Hawthorne and T. Gendler (eds.), *Oxford studies in epistemology*, vol. 1. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Week 6 (T 10/12—No Class & Th 10/14)

Elga, A. [2007] "Reflection and Disagreement" in *Nous*, 41(3): 478–502.

Christensen, D. [2007] "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", *Philosophical Review* 116, 187-217

Week 7 (T 10/19 & Th 10/21)

Christensen & Elga continued.

Week 8 (T 10/26 & Th 10/28) **Problems for Conciliationism**

Kelly, T. [forthcoming] “Peer disagreement and higher order evidence” in R. Feldman and F. Warfield (eds.), *Disagreement*, Oxford University Press.

Week 9 (T 11/02 & Th 11/04)

Kornblith, H. [forthcoming], “Belief in the Face of Controversy,” in Feldman, R. and T. Warfield, eds., *Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
(sk anti-kelly considerations)

Optional: Weatherson, D. [2007] Disagreeing about disagreement. Manuscript.
URL <http://brian.weatherson.org/DaD.pdf>.

Week 10 (T 11/09 & Th 11/11) **Some possible solutions and the terrain of the debate**

Christensen, D. [2009] "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy", *Philosophy Compass* 4, pp. 756-67

Christensen, D. [forthcoming] "Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism", forthcoming in *Philosophers' Imprint*.

Week 11 (T 11/16 & Th 11/18)

Elga, A. [2007] “How to disagree about how to disagree” in R. Feldman and F. Warfield (eds.), *Disagreement*, Oxford University Press.

No Classes (Thanksgiving)

Week 12 (T 11/30 & Th 12/02) **Second Route: Background dependence**

Elga, A. [ms.] “Lucky to be Rational” 2008.

Cohen, G. A. [2000] *If you're an egalitarian, how come you're so rich?* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, chapter 1.

Optional: Schechter, J. [ms.] “Luck, Rationality, and Explanation: A Reply to Elga’s ‘Lucky to be Rational’” 2009.

Week 13 (T 12/07 & Th 12/09)

White, R. [ms.] “You just believe that because...”

Optional: Vavova, E. [ms.] “What to believe when you believe that if things had been different you wouldn’t have believed what you now believe” in *Rational Humility and Other Epistemic Killjoys*, Ph.D. dissertation, MIT, 2010.

Week 14 (T 12/14) **Review or catch up.**

To be determined.

Further Readings.

Lackey, J. [forthcoming] "A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance" in A. Haddock, A. Millar and D. Pritchard (eds.) *Social Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lackey, J. [forthcoming] "What should we do when we disagree?" in T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*.

Lewis, D. [1971] "Immodest Inductive Methods" in *Philosophy of Science*, 38(1), pp. 54-63.

Dworkin, R. [1996] "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe it" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 25(2): 87-139.

Foley, R. [2001] *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mackie, J.L. [1977] *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Penguin: New York, Chapter 1.

McGrath, S. [forthcoming] "Skepticism about Moral Expertise as a Puzzle for Moral Realism" in *Journal of Philosophy*.

McGrath, S. [2007] "Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise" in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 3: 87-108.

Pettit, P. [2006] "When to Defer to Majority Testimony—and When Not" *Analysis* 66: 179–87.

Street, S. [2006] "A Darwinian Dilemma For Realist Theories of Value" in *Philosophical Studies*, 127(1): 109-166.

Watson, G. [2004] "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme" in *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays*, Oxford University Press, 219-259.

Shafer-Landau, R. [2003] *Moral Realism: A Defence*, Oxford University Press: New York, Chapter 11, pp. 261-265.