

Epistemology of Disagreement

Instructor Information

Instructor

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Email

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Office Hours

WAG 319 | TBA

General Course Information

Course Place and Time

WAG 321

T/R 12:30-2:00pm

Course Description

Peter van Inwagen has said that he and David Lewis were equally familiar with all the evidence about the freedom of the will, and yet they disagreed. Can they do so and both be rational? More generally, does the fact that a trusted peer disagrees with you about some topic, *give you reason* to adjust your stance on the topic? Does such disagreement *rationally require* you to adjust your stance? If so, how far? What are the variables that might affect whether and how much one needs to adjust her stance on an issue for which she is in a disagreement? This course will focus on whether there are normative implications to disagreement, and if there are, what those implications might be. Disagreement is pervasive, inside and outside philosophy. How we think about the rational implications of being in a disagreement will have broad applications indeed. This course will tackle these questions with the tools of analytic philosophy and the guidance of some of today's most careful and rigorous thinkers.

Course Objectives

- Find, clarify, and evaluate arguments
- Understand the major choice points in the epistemology of disagreement
- Learn the art of writing a précis.
- Write an analytical and argumentative response papers on the epistemology of disagreement
- Devise philosophical arguments in the context of group discussion and debate
- Practice doing original philosophical research
- Experience the joys of philosophical wonder

Course Materials

Required Texts

- All readings will be available on Canvas.

Course Evaluation

Class Participation:	5%
Response Papers	20%
Précis	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
Term Paper	30%

Grading Scheme

Percentage grades determine letter grades as follows:

<u>Letter</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	100-93	C	77-73
A-	93-90	C-	73-70
B+	90-87	D+	70-67
B	87-83	D	67-63
B-	83-80	D-	63-60
C+	80-77	F	60-0

Class Participation: 5%

You will get the most out of this class through consistent participation. The more participation there is, the more the whole class benefits. Your participation will be evaluated through in-class discussion. Aim to make at least one contribution to class discussion per meeting. I will describe the appropriate forms of such contributions during the first class session.

Response Papers: 20%

Each week, you will bring a hard copy of a response paper to class and email a copy of that same paper to the professor. Response papers are responses to the readings. They are not summaries of the reading, but they will no doubt include some summary material, enough to contextualize your response. These are designed to demonstrate that you are *thinking about* the reading. Your responses can be exploratory or critical or whatever. Just demonstrate that you are thinking. Response papers are 400-800 words. You must include a word count in each response paper. These rules are strict. Failure to include a word count or to write between 400-800 words disqualifies the student from receiving credit. To receive the maximum number of points for this task, you must hand in *10 response papers*. Each paper will be given 100%, 75% or 0%. Your top ten grades will be counted.

Précis: 20%

Précis are to be no longer than 1,200 words and no shorter than 1,080 words (ten percent less than 1,200). The first 800 of these (no less than 720) should be the précis proper; the latter 400 (no less than 360) should be critical. These two sections should be separated clearly. You should list the word

count for each section, together with the word count for the total, at the end of your précis. You may write your précis on either Kelly's "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement" or Christensen's "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News."

The three chief virtues (though not the only three virtues) of a précis are clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness. I need to be able to understand what you are saying, you need to be saying what the author said, and you need to say as much of what the author said as is possible. Do well on these three fronts and you are well on your way to a good précis.

For the critical bit, you should focus on a single issue and somehow engage the argument of the author, whether you are making a case that he or she got it wrong or somehow trying to extend or repair their argument in some way. There is no need for introductions or conclusions, just jump in. Resist the temptation to say what you like about the paper before you engage with it. There is no space for that.

Midterm: 25%

This exam will be an in-class short answer and essay exam, covering the material discussed in weeks 1-8. Be prepared to present and explain the concepts, views, and arguments we have studied.

Term Paper: 30%

You will write a philosophy paper. It must be between 2,500 and 3,000 words. You may write about any philosophical topic you like, so long as it is somehow related (however obliquely) to the subject matter of our course. You will need to do research beyond the reading that is required of you. You would be wise, though you are not obligated, to discuss your term paper with me before doing too much work. I can help you focus your ideas and develop your arguments, and I may be able to direct you to helpful literature.

Course Policies

Technology Policy

Sometimes tech hurts. Research shows that using laptops, tablets, and phones in class is bad for both you and your classmates.

- You don't learn as much
- You don't remember as much
- You take bad notes
- You perform worse on tests
- You distract others & they perform worse on tests¹

Unless you have requested and received permission to do so, the use of phones/laptops/tablets is prohibited except for the use of Canvas—taking Canvas quizzes/surveys, referencing Canvas readings. If your phones/laptops/tablets are out for any other purpose, you will be asked to put them away. If a problem persists, points may be deducted from your Participation grade at my discretion.

¹ <http://dailynous.com/2018/08/15/discourage-laptops-class-slides-can-show-students/>

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is the practice of intentionally or unintentionally using someone else's writing without properly acknowledging the source. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** I regularly discover someone plagiarizing. Do not plagiarize! Again, you plagiarize when:

- You do not make clear exactly what you borrow from a source.
- You do not make clear exactly what the source is from which you borrow.²

If you submit plagiarized work on any assignment you will receive a provisional grade of F for the class and will be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students for disciplinary action.

Further Information

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities. See <https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

Advice on Reading and Writing Philosophy

Reading philosophy is difficult. It is a slow process of sustained intellectual effort. Give yourself ample time to complete the readings. You will benefit by first reading Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy," found in Files on Canvas in the Guidance and Study Aids folder. Writing philosophy is also difficult. Good argumentative writing is concise, clear, simple, and well-structured. You will benefit by reading Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper," found in the Files folder on Canvas.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 1	Introduction and Overview	Christensen - Disagreement as Evidence Optional: Goldman - Testimony and Disagreement	
Week 2	Religious Disagreements	Feldman - Reasonable Religious Disagreements Pittard - Conciliationism and Religious Disagreement	
Week 3	Puzzles about Disagreement	Feldman - Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement	
Week 4	Steadfast View	Kelly - The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement	

² Lewis Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006), 99.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 5	Conciliatory View	Christensen - Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News	
Week 6	Equal Weight View	Elga - Reflection and Disagreement	
Week 7	Steadfast View II	Kelly - Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence	
Week 8	Conciliatory View II	Christensen - Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism	Précis Due
Week 9			Midterm Exam
Week 10	Justificationist View	Lackey - What Should We Do When We Disagree?	
Week 11	Uniqueness	White - Epistemic Permissiveness	
Week 12	Permissivism	Schoenfield - Permission to Believe	
Week 13	Uniqueness vs. Permissivism	White - Evidence Cannot Be Permissive Kelly - Evidence Can Be Permissive	
Week 14	Self-Undermining Objection	Weatherson - Disagreeing about Disagreement Elga - How to Disagree about How to Disagree	
Week 15	Religious Agreement	Kelly - <i>Consensus Gentium</i>	
Finals Week			Term Paper Due