

Epistemology of Fallibility

We are fallible beings. When confronted with evidence of our fallibility, what is the epistemically rational response and what explains this? In this course, we will study two topics revolving around these questions: disagreement and irrelevant influences. The first topic has generated a large literature, extending beyond the topic of disagreement itself. We'll follow some strands in that literature. The literature concerning the second topic is more modest, and we will attempt to clarify exactly what's at issue.

Requirements:

Biweekly Reading Summaries	25%
3 Short papers	45%
Development Paper	30%

Reading Summaries

The class will be divided in half. Every other week, you will prepare a 1 page critical summary in which you identify an argument from the week's readings, reconstruct it so it's logically valid, and then critically assess it. (E.g., present a compelling reason for thinking one of its premises is false or raise important questions about the argument.) These summaries must be emailed to me and the entire class 24 hours prior to class. Every participant is expected to carefully read the summaries, coming to class prepared to discuss them. Authors must be prepared to discuss their summaries in class—though, we will not have time to discuss all summaries.

Short Papers

You will write three 5-6 page papers during the term. These papers must focus on a central argument in one of the readings done in the period prior to the deadline. These papers will be held to very high standards. The papers are short because I want you to focus sharply, to be concise, to emphasize precision and direct your attention to what is essential to your chosen topic. The papers must reconstruct a central argument from a reading, and provide a critical assessment of its plausibility. (Reading summaries can provide the basis for short papers.)

Development Paper

Develop one of your short papers into a 10-12 page term paper, making sure to incorporate my comments from the original paper. You should briefly situate your argument within the relevant dialectic and then make your argument (in more detail, if appropriate) and discuss objections.

Alternative 1: Drop the second topic and spread out the readings for the first.

Alternative 2: Drop most of the readings and work through Bryan Frances's new book *Disagreement*. Also, adjust the requirements depending on course level. [Especially suitable for lower-level courses.]

Week 1: Disagreement & Doubt

Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement" sections 1-2

Feldman, "Respecting the Evidence" sections 1-4

[Optional (Good for lower-level courses): Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence" & Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreement"]

Weeks 2-3: Conciliationism

Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"

Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement"

Feldman, "Respecting the Evidence" sections 6-9

Kornblith, "Belief in the Face of Controversy"

Weeks 4-5: Objections to Conciliationism

Kelly, “Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence” section 3 (Ignoring Evidence Objection)

Weatherson, “Disagreements, Philosophical and Otherwise”

Elga, “How to Disagree about How to Disagree” sections 1-7 (Incoherence Objection)

Week 6: Fixed-Point/Epistemic Immodesty Response to Incoherence Objection

Elga, “How to Disagree about How to Disagree” section 8

Schechter, “Rational Self-Doubt and the Failure of Closure” section 4.2

[Optional (Good for more advanced courses): Titelbaum, “Rationality’s Fixed-Point (Or: In Defense of Right Reasons)” & Lewis, “Immodest Inductive Methods”]

Week 7: Epistemic Modesty Defended

Some combination of:

Christensen, “Higher-Order Evidence”

Christensen, “Disagreement, Question-Begging, and Epistemic Self-Criticism”

Christensen, “Epistemic Modesty Defended”

Week 8: In Favor of Epistemic Akrasia

Weatherson, “Do Judgments Screen Evidence?” (Selections)

Lasonen-Aarnio, “Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat”

Week 9: Against Epistemic Akrasia

Greco, “A Puzzle about Epistemic Akrasia”

Horowitz, “Epistemic Akrasia” sections 1-5

[Optional: Stalnaker, *Inquiry* ch.5, Lewis, “Logic for Equivocators” and brief selection from “Elusive Knowledge”]

Week 10: A Happy Compromise?

Sliwa & Horowitz, “Respecting *All* the Evidence”

Week 11: Disagreement & Irrelevant Influences

Cohen, “Paradoxes of Conviction”

Sher, “But I Could Be Wrong”

Week 12: Living up to one’s Epistemic Standards

Elga, “Lucky to be Rational”

Schoenfield, “Permission to Believe”

[Optional: Philosophy TV “Problem of Contingency” Episode w/ Elga, Schechter, & White
<http://www.philostv.com/adam-elga-joshua-schechter-and-roger-white/>]

Week 13: Deflationism: Skepticism or Disagreement

White, “You just believe that because...”

Mogensen, “Contingency Anxiety and the Epistemology of Disagreement”

Week 14: Anti-Deflationism: Higher-Order Evidence

Vavova, “Irrelevant Influences”

Week 15: Anti-Deflationism: Indoctrination and Political Epistemology

DiPaolo & Simpson, “Indoctrination Anxiety and the Etiology of Belief”