Topics in Epistemology and Metaphysics:
Epistemology of Disagreement
PHIL 150b, Spring 2017

Tuesday and Friday, 12:30-1:50
Instructor: Ben Sherman
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Office Hours: Monday 11:00-noon, Wednesday noon-1:00 [tentative]

Course Description
This course will examine the major arguments and position in the current debate about epistemology of disagreement, with a special focus on their relevance for responsible decision-making. We will begin by looking at the background concerns that motivated the current debate in epistemology, take a close look at the central positions that emerged in core articles from 2004-2007, and finally look at recent developments in the debate. Students will have the opportunity to present and discuss disagreements that seem important in their own lives, and consider what abstract philosophical positions imply for these real-world disagreements.

Learning Goals
1. Introduce students to a lively and influential strain in current epistemology and metaethics
2. Learn a vocabulary and analytic framework suited to analyzing disagreements, and responding to seemingly intractable controversies
3. Develop informed and well-reasoned strategies and philosophical positions about disagreements and what they mean for human life and practical decision-making

Laptop Policy
No laptops, please, as they are apt to distract from class discussions.

Academic Integrity
All material submitted for a grade should be the student’s own original, independent work. All uses of others’ work should be properly documented through notes and citations. Unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, and any other violation of University policies on academic integrity will result in disciplinary action, which can include grading penalties, suspension, or dismissal. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, contact the Office of Student Development and Conduct, or ask the instructor. More information can be found at http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/index.html.

Disability
Please let me know as soon as possible if you have a documented disability on record at Brandeis. I will be glad to make the appropriate arrangements.

Readings
All required and suggested readings will be available either on Latte or on reserve in the library. Required readings listed in the schedule can be found in the coursepack available in the Philosophy Department office.
Requirements
All students are expected to participate in class discussion and take responsibility for understanding key materials. Grades will be based on three papers and two in-class presentations.
Presentation on a seemingly intractable disagreement: 5%
4-6 page paper on metaethics, rational decision theory or religion: 20%
7-10 page paper on the core debate: 25%
Presentation of an article or analysis of a disagreement: 20%
10-15 page paper: 30%

Class Schedule
All readings can be found on Latte, except those marked “(Disagreement)”, which come from Disagreement, ed. Feldman and Warfield, available at the reserve desk at the library. All required readings can be found in the coursepack.

Tuesday 1/17: Introduction

Unit I: Background—metaethics, rational trust theory, and philosophy of religion
Subject 1--metaethics
Friday 1/20: J. S. Mill, excerpt from On Liberty, ch. 2, “Of Thought and Discussion”
Henry Sidwick, excerpt from Methods of Ethics III.xi.ix
G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica III.45
Bernard Williams, excerpt from Morality: An Introduction to Ethics, ch. 4, “Subjectivism: Further Thoughts”
J. L. Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong 1.8
Tues 1/24: Alan Gibbard, excerpt from Wise Choices, Apt Feelings ch. 9, “Normative Authority”

Subject 2—Rational trust theories
Optional reading: Aumann, “Agreeing to Disagree”
Geanakoplos and Polemarchakis, “We Can’t Disagree Forever”
Tues 1/31: Richard Foley, excerpts from Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others, ch. 4, “Self-Trust and the Authority of Others” (skim 83-89, 99-107; read 108-117)

Subject 3—Religious disagreement
Fri 2/3: Gary Gutting, Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism, ch. 4
Tues 2/7: Peter van Inwagen, “It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence”
Suggested reading: W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”
Fri 2/10: Gideon Rosen, “Nominalism, Naturalism, Epistemic Relativism”
Tues 2/14: Richard Feldman, “Epistemic Puzzles about Disagreement”
Optional reading: Richard Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreement”
Bryan Frances, “Spirituality, Expertise and Philosophers”

Fri 2/17: In-class writing workshop on using disagreement to focus an argument
Feb 20-24: No class, February break

Unit II: Central Arguments in the Current Debate
Tues 2/28: Roger White, “Epistemic Permissiveness”
Fri 3/3: Thomas Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement”

4-6 page paper due

Tues 3/7: David Christensen, “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News”
Fri 3/10: Adam Elga, “Reflection and Disagreement”

Unit III: Topics and problems
Tues 3/14: Sarah McGrath, “Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise”
   Optional reading: Nathan L. King, “McGrath on Moral Knowledge”
   McGrath, “Reply to King”
   King, “Rejoinder to McGrath”
Fri 3/17: Peter Forrest, “The Philosophical Scandal of the Wrong Kind of Religious Disagreement”
   Suggested reading: William James, “The Will to Believe”
   In-class workshop on paper drafts

Tues 3/21: Jennifer Lackey, “What Should We Do When We Disagree?”
   Suggested reading: Jennifer Lackey, “A Justificationist View of Disagreement’s Epistemic Significance”
Fri 3/24: Kieran Setiya, “Does Moral Theory Corrupt Youth?”
   7-10 page paper due

Tues 3/28: Catharine Z. Elgin, “Persistent Disagreement” (Disagreement)
   Suggested reading: Hilary Kornblith, “Belief in the Face of Controversy” (Disagreement)
Fri 3/31: Philip Pettit, “When to Defer to Majority Testimony—and When Not”
   Adam Elga, “How to Disagree about How to Disagree” (Disagreement)

Tues 4/4: Ralph Wedgwood, “The Moral Evil Demons” (Disagreement)
Fri 4/7: Brandon Carey, “Possible Disagreements and Defeat”
   Mid-term paper revision deadline

April 10-18: No class, April break

Fri 4/21: Jason Decker, “Disagreement, Evidence, and Agnosticism”
   Final paper proposals due

Tues 4/25: Igor Douven and Christoph Kelp, “Truth Approximation, Social Epistemology, and Opinion Dynamics”

Tues 5/2: Final discussion

Final paper due date TBD