

Theory of Knowledge: Philosophy 220
Instructor: John Douard, J.D., Ph.D.
Office hours by appointment
Class time: 9-12 A.M. Saturday

Texts: *Three Conversations About Knowing*, Jay Rosenberg, Hackett, ISBN: 978-0-87220-536-9 (paper).

Disagreement by Bryan Frances, Wiley Publishers, ISBN: 978-0-7456-7227-4

Infotopia, Cass Sunstein, Oxford U. Press, ISBN: 10: 0195340671

Additional papers TBA.

Course Description:

What are the conditions that must be satisfied to justifiably claim that our beliefs constitute knowledge? That is the fundamental question that a philosophical theory of knowledge (epistemology) must answer. A problem for any theory of knowledge, however, is that human beings are fallible. We sometimes, perhaps often, make mistakes when we claim to know something. As error-prone creatures, we must be able to recognize when we hold mistaken beliefs if we are to correct those mistakes. Very often, we recognize we are mistaken when we are confronted by people who disagree with us. When that happens, are we rationally required to revise our beliefs to reflect the corrections disagreement has brought to our attention? When do those who disagree with us have the authority to point out where our beliefs are mistaken? Are there explicit procedures for assessing disagreement with the aim of revising our beliefs where such revision would result in more robust beliefs? When is *agreement* with others warranted? When is it reasonable to resist belief-revision in face of disagreement? Disagreement is ubiquitous in daily life, and it often seems unpleasant. But at least some disagreements can result in an exhilarating growth in our knowledge by revealing errors. There is a way of viewing our imperfections as an important facet of knowledge-producing practices. We can think of imperfection in musical terms: in improvisational music, performers make mistakes, and adjusting to mistakes results in new creative musical riffs.

Course Overview:

Course assignments: There will be five quizzes in this course: one every two weeks beginning with the second week. You will be expected to write three 5-6-page papers. And there will be a final exam. The grade breakdown is as follows:

Quizzes: 10% of the grade. (2 points per quiz.)

Papers: 20% each, for a total of 60% of the grade.

Final exam: 25% of the grade.

Class attendance and participation: 5% of the grade.

I will give numerical grades to each assignment and provide its letter-grade equivalent. **Late work will be accepted at my discretion and will result in a grade reduction of one letter grade. If you have any problems attending class or finishing your work on time, contact me immediately so we can try to work something out that would be fair.**

PAPER DUE DATES: 2/21; 3/28; 5/2.

PLAGIARISM IS, OF COURSE, PROHIBITED. *Definition:* In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source. The sources must be cited in the text and all direct quotes must be put within quotation marks. Even if you put somebody else's ideas in your own words, you must cite to the text from which the idea was acquired. This definition applies to texts published in print or on-line, to manuscripts, and to the work of other student writers. If you plagiarize any of your work, it will be reported to the University Committee on Student Integrity, which has a procedure for dealing with it. At that point, your grade will be out of my hands. Do not try to parse the definition of plagiarism. Use your common sense.

Absences must be reported through the Student Self-reporting Absences System.

Week 1 (1/24):	What is a theory of knowledge for?	No reading.
Week 2 (1/31):	Traditional issues about knowing	Rosenberg
Week 3 (2/7):	But I Could Be Wrong!	G. Sher handout
Week 4 (2/14):	Genuine and illusory disagreement On Bullshit, Harry Frankfurt.	Frances: pp. 1-56;
Week 5 (2/21):	Types of disagreement: peers vs. experts	Frances: pp. 57-86
Week 6 (2/28):	Disagreement with one vs. disagreement with many.	Frances: pp. 87-100; Sunstein: pp. 21-43.
Week 7 (3/7):	Steadfastness or conciliation?	Frances:pp. 105-156

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 14-MARCH 22

Week 8 (3/28):	Religious beliefs Feldman: "Reasonable religious disagreements" handout.	Frances: pp.157-74;
Week 9 (4/4):	Special issues	Frances: pp.175-207
Week 10 (4/11)	Disagreement in Science	Lugg
Week 11 (4/18)	Moral disagreement	George; Christensen
Week 12: (4/25)	Failures of deliberating groups	Sunstein: pp. 45-102
Week 13: (5/2)	Many working minds: Wiki/blogs	Sunstein:pp.147-225.
Week 14 (5/9):	FINAL EXAM	