

Phil 542: Topics in Epistemology
Fall 2018
W 12:20-2:50pm
South College E301

Higher-Order Evidence

INSTRUCTOR

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Office hours: Monday 2-3pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We often have evidence suggesting that we have made a rational mistake. What is the effect of such evidence? Should it prompt us to revise our beliefs, and if so, how? Questions about “higher-order” evidence have been the subject of much debate over the last ten years. In this class we will talk about some of the basic puzzles and questions for a theory of higher-order evidence, and look in detail at some related questions.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Papers: You can choose between writing two shorter papers (one 5-7 pages and one 8-10 pages) or one long paper (15-20 pages).

- Short papers due by 10/19 for those taking the 2-paper option.
- Long/longer papers due 12/20 for everyone. (Grad students, talk to me if you would like to take an incomplete instead.)

Discussion Notes: Enrolled students will also complete 6 discussion notes, to be completed some time during the semester. I will keep track of these, but I will not grade them. Discussion notes should be about 500 words, and can take many forms.

They can do any of the following:

- Identify a key concept or step in the author’s argument, and give a counterargument.
- Make a connection between the article and something else that we have read.
- Discuss part of the article that you find unclear.
- Give additional arguments to support an author’s point.

They should not:

- Merely summarize (summary will often be part of a good discussion note, but not the entire thing).
- Give your own views on a topic without connecting them to the reading.
- Discuss outside materials (books, movies, news etc) without giving a clear connection to the text.
- Include long quotations.

It is up to you how you write these. It is okay for your discussion notes to always take the same form, or to take different forms each time. Discussion notes are due before class on the day we discuss the article.

Presentations: Students will present the main idea and argument for their final papers during the last class session. This is an opportunity to share what you've been thinking about, and to receive feedback and ideas from the class.

GRADING:

Two paper option:

Short paper	30%
Long paper	70%

One paper option:

Even longer paper	100%
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In borderline cases, grades may be bumped up by excellent class contributions, or bumped down by unexcused absences/disrupting class/not turning in discussion notes.

READINGS:

Questions about disagreement and higher-order evidence have moved in a number of different directions in the literature, many of which are foreshadowed in the first Feldman paper that we'll read. Can evidence make different beliefs rational for you and for me? Should higher-order evidence have an effect at all – and can it ever make it rational to believe that your own beliefs are irrational without also affecting those beliefs? If it does rationalize changing your first-order beliefs, how and why? And should your assessment of your own rationality or reliability be independent of the beliefs that are the target of that rationality assessment?

I can't decide which of these questions is most interesting. So I am going to let the class decide. I've set up 5 modules below. We'll do the first one, and then vote on what to do next. As we reach the end of a module we can also decide whether to finish it or to move on to another one.

Module 1: Setting up the issues

Feldman, R. [2007] "Reasonable Religious Disagreements." In Antony, L. (ed.), *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. Oxford University Press. pp. 194-214

Kelly, T. [2011] "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence", abridged version. In Goldman, A. and D. Whitcomb (eds.), *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings* (OUP): 183-217.

Christensen, D. [2010] "Higher-Order Evidence", *Philosophy and Phenomenological*

Research. 81, 185-215.

Module 2: Permissivism

Kelly, T. [2014] "Evidence Can Be Permissive." In M. Steup, et al., eds., *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Wiley).

White, R. [2014] "Evidence Cannot Be Permissive." In M. Steup, et al., eds., *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Wiley).

Schoenfield, M. [2014] "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What it Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief." *Noûs*.

Christensen, D. [2014] "Conciliationism, Uniqueness and Rational Toxicity." *Noûs*

Module 3: Akrasia

Lasonen-Aarnio, M. [2014] "Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Weatherson, B. [ms] "Do Judgments Screen Evidence?"

Horowitz, S. [2014] "Epistemic Akrasia". *Noûs* 48 (4):718-744.

Worsnip, A. [2015] "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence".

Neta, R. [2018] "Evidence, Coherence, and Epistemic Akrasia". *Episteme* 15 (3): 313-328.

Module 4: How should the conciliatory view be formulated?

Sliwa, P. and S. Horowitz [2015] "Respecting *All* the Evidence", *Philosophical Studies* 172 (11): 2835-2858.

Schoenfield, M. [2014] "A Dilemma for Calibrationism", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Christensen, D. [2016] "Disagreement, Drugs, etc.: from Accuracy to Akrasia." *Episteme*: 397-422

Module 5: Independence

Vavova, K. [2016] "Irrelevant Influences". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Kelly, T. [2013] "Disagreement and the Burdens of Judgment." In D. Christensen and J. Lackey, eds., *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays* (OUP).

Lord, E. [2014] “From Independence to Conciliationism: An Obituary”. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92: 365-77.

Arsenault, M. and Z. Irving [2013] “Aha! Trick Questions, Independence, and the Epistemology of Disagreement,” *Thought*.

Christensen, D. “On Acting as Judge in One’s Own (Epistemic) Case” Marc Sanders Lecture, *Proceedings and Addressed of the American Philosophical Association* (forthcoming)