What Should I Believe and Why?
Navigating Our World Through Fake News, Outsourcing Information, and Disagreement

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Office Hours
TBD

Course Overview

Today’s world is filled with information, and oftentimes an overload of information, leaving us wondering, what should we believe? This course is a practically oriented philosophy course which looks at common sources of information and asks students to reflect on whether these sources are unreliable or problematic in some way when it comes to learning, attaining knowledge, and growing in understanding.

This course will involve both reading assignments as well as ‘engagement’ assignments, which will require students to go out into the world to evaluate, apply, or reflect on the views they have learned in class. For instance, students may be asked to have a conversation with someone whom they trust and believe what they say on a particular issue and write a reflection on why they are quick to believe what that person says. Students may be asked to identify news articles on their social media and evaluate what counts as ‘fake news’ or not.

This course will run for three weeks, whereby each week will be centered around one main question. The three questions of this course are:

1) How, if at all, should disagreement among informed individuals about a particular issue matter in my forming/revising opinions?
2) How, if at all, should I read the news?
3) What information, if any, should I ‘outsource’ to the internet or others in my community, and what (if anything) should I try to appreciate for myself? When I do outsource, what sources do I select and why do I trust them?

Course Materials

All required readings will be posted for students on Canvas. Student should have reliable access to the internet and will need to be accessing Canvas at least 3 days (ideally 5) each week.
# Course Schedule

## Week 1

### Disagreement

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<td>(ii) Mill, On Liberty</td>
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<td>(iii) Lynch’s article in the Chronicle:</td>
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<td><a href="https://www.chronicle.com/article/Teaching-Humility-in-an-Age-of/240266">https://www.chronicle.com/article/Teaching-Humility-in-an-Age-of/240266</a></td>
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### Discussion Questions

| (i) Do you think all kinds of disagreement are valuable for democracy, as Mill suggests? Try to think up of a case where disagreement might be harmful that Mill might have overlooked. |
| (ii) If there is a lack of consensus among scientists about a particular scientific issue, do you think you should refrain from believing one way or the other? Why or why not? Since there is a lack of consensus among religious experts about what religion is correct (and whether God exists at all), do you think you should refrain from believing one way or the other? Why or why not? |

Due on Canvas by Thursday @11:59pm

### Engagement Activity

| (i) Identify an occasion on which your beliefs or confidence in your beliefs changed, upon learning of another person’s differing beliefs on the same issue. |
| (ii) Identify a belief that you confidently hold despite pervasive disagreement among those you respect intellectually, and explain why you are confident. (If you do not hold any such beliefs confidently, explain why.) |

Write a 1-page reflection paper that includes both (i) and (ii). Reflection paper is due on Canvas by Saturday @11:59pm

## Week 2

### Fake News

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<th>Readings</th>
<th>(i) Michael Lynch Stone article:</th>
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<td>(iii) Bret Stephen’s NYTimes op-ed:</td>
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Discussion Questions
(i) Where is (or should) the line be in journalism and media between factual reporting and opinionated pieces? Can we actually separate the two?
(ii) What do you think the government’s role is in moderating private news sources when it comes to journal reporting (that may include fake news)?
Due on Canvas by Thursday @11:59pm

Engagement Activity
Scroll through your FB (or twitter) feed – or even just your Google/Apple news feed 5 – and identify the first 5 news or reporting links that you see.
(i) Say which you think are probably true vs. not from a credible source (fake news), and then,
(ii) Do some independent digging for corroboration, using a search engine outside your filter bubble (such as duckduckgo.com), and report on the actual results.
Write a 1-page reflection paper which includes both (i) and (ii). Reflection paper is due by Saturday @11:59pm

Week 3 Outsourcing Information

Readings
(ii) Selections from Lynch (2016) The Internet of Us
(iii) Hawley (2014) “Partiality and Prejudice in Trusting”

Discussion Questions
(i) Do you think that mentors, parents, or friends are different from the internet or google when it comes to gathering moral knowledge? Do you think it is less or more problematic to defer to one of these sources (versus the other)? If so, why? If not, why not?
(ii) How does Hawley’s argument concerning partiality in selecting others to trust change how you think of who a reliable source of information is?
Due on Canvas by Thursday @11:59pm

Engagement Activity
Pick a day in which you will talk with several individual people – either in person, on the phone, over e-mail (interpret “talk” broadly). Make a note of each time someone tells you something you trust vs. do not trust. Think about why. Is it about the character of the person speaking? The plausibility of what they’re telling you? Something else – maybe the person’s social role? Reflect on what this single day suggests about your general tendencies to trust or not trust, and on what basis. Put your reflections into a 1-page reflection paper.
Reflection paper is due by Friday @11:59pm
**Grading Policy**

Because this course is an Exploration Course, it is a noncredit course. Noncredit courses do not issue a traditional letter grade (A, B, C, D, F). Instead, students will receive an “L” for successful completion/audit or a “Z” for unsuccessful completion/audit. Students are evaluated based on engagement in Canvas, completion of assignments by deadlines, quality of work produced, participation in discussions, as well as their ability to adhere to academic integrity standards and program policies.

*Some material for this syllabus was adapted from Laura Callahan’s Sample Syllabus for the course, *Epistemology in Practice: Skepticism, Fake News, and the Ethics of Belief.*