

Robert Kyle Whitaker

Visiting Assistant Professor
PhD, Philosophy
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AOS:

Epistemology, Philosophy of Religion, Ethics

AOC:

Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind, Virtue Ethics, Feminist Ethics, Medical Ethics, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, C.S. Peirce, Søren Kierkegaard

Employment

Visiting Assistant Professor, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, 2018-2021
Adjunct Lecturer, Carthage College, Kenosha, WI, 2016-2018
Adjunct Lecturer, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, 2015-2018

Education

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
Philosophy Ph.D.
Fall 2013 - Spring 2020 (Graduation May 15, 2020)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
Philosophy M.A.
Fall 2011 - Spring 2013

Murray State University, Murray, KY
Completed 30 hours of coursework toward M.A. in English Lit. (with Philosophy as a Cognate Discipline), degree unfinished in favor of move to Marquette in Fall 2011
Fall 2010 - Spring 2011

Murray State University, Murray, KY
B.A. in Philosophy and Applied Ethics, Psychology Minor
Fall 2005 - Fall 2009

Research

Dissertation: *The Epistemology of Disagreement: Hume, Kant, and the Current Debate*

(See précis below, pp. 8-9)

Committee: Michael Wreen (Director, Marquette); Noel Adams (2nd reader, Marquette); Stanley Harrison (3rd reader, Marquette); Paul Moser (4th reader, Loyola Chicago)

Publications

“Faith and Disbelief,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2019): 149-72.

Articles In Preparation

“Disagreement and Meta-Evidence,” in progress (completed draft)

“A Humean Solution to the Peer Disagreement Problem,” in progress (conversion from dissertation chapter)

“Two Kantian Solutions to the Peer Disagreement Problem,” in progress (conversion from dissertation chapter)

“Disagreement, Perception, and Epistemic Parity,” in progress (conversion from dissertation chapters)

“Epistemic Trust, Testimonial Evidence, and Autonomy” – with Brett Yardley, in progress (completed draft)

Book Reviews

- *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration*, Teresa M. Bejan. Harvard University Press (2017); in *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 2.2 (2018).

- *Thinking about Free Will*, Peter van Inwagen, Cambridge University Press (2017); in *Metapsychology Online Reviews* 21.35 (2017).

- *Early Pentecostals on Nonviolence and Social Justice: A Reader*, ed. by Brian K. Pipkin and Jay Beaman, Pickwick Publications (2016); in *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2.1 (2017).

Conference Activity

Presentations

- “Epistemic Trust, Testimonial Evidence, and Autonomy” – with Brett Yardley
 - Marquette University Philosophy Dept. “Brownbag” Presentation Series, Nov. 13, 2019
- “Disagreement and Meta-Evidence”
 - Marquette University Philosophy Dept. “Brownbag” Presentation Series, April 10, 2019
- “The Epistemology of Disagreement: Hume, Kant, and the Current Debate,” Carthage College,
 Feb. 18, 2019 [Invited]
- “Faith and Disbelief”
 - Perspectives on Faith: 19th Boston College Philosophy Graduate Conference, Boston, MA,
 March 16-17, 2018
- “‘At Home in the World’: A Look at Daniel C. Russell’s Dilemma about Virtue, Attachment,
 and Happiness”
 - Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World Group Session at the 2016 Eastern
 Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Washington, DC, January 6-9,
 2016
- “Implicit Agapism in Peirce’s ‘Neglected Argument’”
 - The Charles S. Peirce International Centennial Congress 2014, University of Massachusetts
 Lowell, Lowell, MA, July 16-19, 2014
- “Christian Philosophy as Stance: Reevaluating Our Approach 30 Years after Plantinga’s
 ‘Advice’”
 - 2014 Society of Christian Philosophers/Society of Continental Philosophy and Theology
 Conference, Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL, March 27-29, 2014
 - Marquette University Philosophy Dept. “Brownbag” Presentation Series, September 9, 2014
- “Toward an Incarnational Hermeneutic”
 - Society for Pentecostal Studies Annual Meeting, Evangel University, Springfield, MO,
 March 6-8, 2014
- “Divine Command Theory, Feminist Ethics, and the Incarnation”
 - Western Kentucky University 39th Conference on Value Inquiry, Western Kentucky
 University, Bowling Green, KY, April 11-13, 2013

- Wisconsin Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, WI, April 20, 2013

“Aquinas and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities”

- Appalachian Regional Student Philosophy Colloquium, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, April 5-6, 2013

“A Not-So-New Response to Plantinga’s ‘New Argument against Materialism’”

- Talbot Philosophical Society, Spring Graduate Philosophy Conference, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA, March 23, 2013

- 2013 Evangelical Philosophical Society Southeast Regional Conference, Anderson University, Anderson, SC, March 22, 2013

Commentary

- Felipe do Vale: “Can a Male Savior Save Women?” – 40th Anniversary Society of Christian Philosophers Conference and Celebration, September 2018

- Justin Mooney: “Debunking Middle Knowledge: A ‘Debunking Argument’ against Molinism” – Wisconsin Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, April 2017

- Karl Aho: “Charity, Love, and Hospitality as Principles of Interpretation” – Marquette Philosophy Graduate Conference, March 2015

Teaching Experience

As Visiting Assistant Professor:

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

PHIL 1001: Foundations in Philosophy, Fall 2018 - Spring 2021
(three credits, eighteen sections, full responsibilities)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

PHIL 4336: Applied Ethics for the Health Sciences, Fall 2020 - Spring 2021
(one credit, half-semester course, twelve sections, full responsibilities)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

PHIL 2310: Theory of Ethics, Fall 2018, Fall 2019, Spring 2020
(three credits, three sections, full responsibilities)

As Adjunct Lecturer:

Carthage College, Kenosha, WI
PHL 200L: Philosophy of Mind, Spring 2018
(four credits, one section, full responsibilities)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
PHIL 4336: Applied Ethics for the Health Sciences, Fall 2017
(one credit, half-semester course, three sections, full responsibilities)

Carthage College, Kenosha, WI
PHL 1000: Introduction to Philosophy, Fall 2017
(four credits, one section, full responsibilities)

Carthage College, Kenosha, WI
PHL 200N: Epistemology, Spring 2017
(four credits, one section, full responsibilities)

Carthage College, Kenosha, WI
PHL 1200: Art of Thinking , Fall 2016
(four credits, one section, full responsibilities)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
PHIL 2310: Theory of Ethics, Fall 2016 - Fall 2017
(three credits, two sections, full responsibilities)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
PHIL 1001: Philosophy of Human Nature, Fall 2015 - Spring 2018
(three credits, seven sections, full responsibilities)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI
PHIL 4335: Biomedical Ethics, Spring 2016
(three credits, one section, full responsibilities)

Honors/Certificates

- Certified for online teaching through Marquette University's Center for Teaching and Learning, Summer 2019

- Won best graduate student paper for “Aquinas and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities” at Appalachian Regional Student Philosophy Colloquium, ETSU, April 2013

Additional Courses Prepared to Teach

- Epistemology of Disagreement (graduate or undergraduate)
- Epistemology for the Health Sciences (graduate or undergraduate)
- Philosophy of Religion (graduate or undergraduate)
- History and Theory of Ethics (graduate or undergraduate)
- Epistemology for Non-Philosophers (undergraduate)
- Metaphysics (undergraduate)
- Early Modern Philosophy (undergraduate)
- Feminist Philosophy (undergraduate)
- Philosophy of Science (undergraduate)
- Philosophy of C.S. Peirce (undergraduate)
- Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (undergraduate)
- Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (undergraduate)

Service Experience

- Director of Marquette University Philosophy Graduate Student Association (Elected PhD Representative), Summer 2015 - Spring 2016
- Assistant Director of Marquette University Philosophy Graduate Student Association (Elected PhD Representative), Fall 2014 - Spring 2015
 - These positions included membership on the Philosophy Dept. Graduate Committee, a joint faculty/graduate student representative committee responsible for selecting the graduate course offerings in the department.
 - As part of my representative duties, I was also the chair of the committee responsible for the re-institution of the Marquette Philosophy Graduate Conference, held in March 2015 (and recurring annually since).
- Participated in the Philosophy Department Mentor Program as a mentor to an incoming graduate student (Fall 2014)
- Research Assistant for Marquette University Wade Chair, Fr. Harry Gensler (Spring 2014)

Memberships

American Philosophical Association
Society of Christian Philosophers
Society for Pentecostal Studies

Academic References

Dr. Michael Wreen, Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University

Contact: michael.wreen@marquette.edu

Dissertation Director

Dr. Noel Adams, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University

Contact: noel.adams@marquette.edu

Dissertation Reader

Dr. Stanley Harrison, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University (Retired)

Contact: stanley.harrison@marquette.edu

Dissertation Reader

Dr. Paul Moser, Professor of Philosophy, Loyola University Chicago

Contact: pmoser@luc.edu

Dissertation Reader

Dr. Theresa Tobin, Associate Professor of Philosophy & Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
and Student Development, Marquette University

Contact: theresa.tobin@marquette.edu

Former Professor

Dissertation Précis

The Epistemology of Disagreement: Hume, Kant, and the Current Debate

The problem of disagreement in epistemology is the problem of whether rational disagreement between people who have attempted to share their evidence with one another is possible. Most of us regularly find ourselves in disagreements with others, and we often have the sense that our interlocutors, though mistaken in some way, are nevertheless reasonable in holding the views that they do. Occasionally, we may even think that someone with whom we disagree is about as qualified with respect to the issue at hand as *we* are. In such a case, we'd be disagreeing with an epistemic peer: someone who is roughly as intelligent, thoughtful, careful, alert, and so on as ourselves, and who is also as informed about the disputed issue as we are. It is common to think that in such a case of disagreement, both peers could be reasonable in their view, even though they take the same set of evidence to support opposed propositions.

Some philosophers, however, have questioned this common assumption, arguing that because of the nature of evidence, reasonable disagreements between peers who have shared their evidence are not possible. One way of arguing for this sort of view is to say that evidence, of metaphysical necessity, can support only one of a competing set of propositions, a principle known as the Uniqueness Thesis (due to Richard Feldman). But the Uniqueness Thesis, I argue, is false, as it is far too strong, has counterintuitive consequences (even on weaker versions), and assumes things at issue in the disagreement debate. We may also note against such a view that reasonable disagreements may be possible by way of *private* evidence: evidence that cannot be shared. Such evidence may include the felt truth of some proposition, or the seeming to one that some piece of evidence supports p rather than $\sim p$. I argue that private evidence may be a reasonable justification for maintaining one's view in the face of disagreement, and whether it will be or not depends on the confidence one has in one's own private seemings, on the evidential value of disagreement itself, and on the confidence one has in the peer status of one's interlocutor.

I also spell out something that has been implicit in the disagreement literature: that what I call "evidential seemings," seemings of the form "It seems to one that E supports p ," are analogous to perceptual seemings, such as the familiar experience of being "appeared to greenly" when standing in front of a green expanse. Evidential seemings share broad structural similarity with perceptual seemings, including being non-doxastic, pre-theoretical, sui generis, basic, generative of prima facie justification, and resistant to non-circular justification themselves. I argue that such seemings have evidential significance, and that this significance does not disappear on the discovery of disagreement, though the seemings do remain defeasible. The question is whether and when they are defeasible by higher-order evidence in the form of disagreement.

I consider and reject several ways in which disagreement may defeat one's evidential seemings, such as by providing evidence of the contingency of one's belief (à la Gideon Rosen), by creating epistemic symmetry between peers so that a peer has no way to identify which peer's seemings are correct (à la David Christensen and Adam Elga), or by constituting *meta-evidence*: evidence that there is evidence for p (à la Richard Feldman). I conclude that the fact of disagreement itself does not necessarily provide counterbalancing evidence regarding what one should believe about p , and that meta-evidence may not in fact constitute evidence for a subject that is directly relevant to the disputed proposition.

However, I do hold that there is something important about meta-evidence: insofar as one is dealing with a perspective that is constituted by certain features of epistemic excellence, the views of a person with that perspective may count as evidence for a disputed proposition. Prolonged disagreement with such a person may yield defeat of one's evidential seemings in the form of what I call the Parity Problem: in the context of peer disagreement, both parties may be aware that things would seem just the same to them as they do if in fact the other party were correct and they were mistaken. This presents a localized skeptical problem that affects what one should believe about p in the context of such a disagreement, not because of the unique nature of disagreement itself, nor because of an inability to weigh one's own seemings more heavily than one's peer's, but rather because peer disagreement under Parity puts one's own evidential seemings into conflict. The question then is when another's judgment is trustworthy enough to provide such defeating meta-evidence, which is a question about peerhood.

Peerhood, contra several commentators in the disagreement debate, is about relative equality along a number of "peer factors," including things like intelligence, carefulness, time spent considering the evidence, sobriety, etc. The bulk of the disagreement debate thus far has centered on what the epistemically responsible action is when one finds that one is disagreeing with a peer. Two main positions have developed, each with its own varieties: the Conformist view, which holds that one ought to conform one's view to one's peer's view, and the Nonconformist view, which holds that one may be justified in maintaining one's own view. I argue that both views, as presented, have problems. Conformist views (e.g., David Christensen, Richard Feldman, Adam Elga) place too much emphasis on the evidential value of disagreement itself, mistakenly taking the fact of disagreement to have some defeating power that it does not in fact have. They also tend to assume (e.g., Christensen) that peer disagreement is epistemically similar to disagreement with a superior, which is unwarranted. Nonconformist views (e.g., Thomas Kelly, Marc Moffett, Michael Bergmann), on the other hand, tend to underestimate the significance of epistemic parity produced by long disagreement with someone one takes to be a peer. In such cases, though one may be justified in maintaining one's view, we lack a sufficient explanation for how this is so. Thus, the strength of the Conformist view is parasitic on the power of the Parity Problem. Likewise, the burden of the Nonconformist view is to overcome that problem and provide a clear explanation of how one remains justified in one's view in cases of prolonged disagreement after full disclosure of evidence with an apparent epistemic peer.

I propose and discuss three possible solutions to the Parity Problem, one inspired by David Hume, and two inspired by Immanuel Kant: (1) Practical considerations stemming from the underdetermination of one's views by the available evidence as well as one's larger epistemic goals can justify maintaining one's view. I explore this option with the assistance of David Hume, who helps us to see that it can be epistemically appropriate to maintain a view even when one knows that it cannot be demonstrated to be the uniquely rational conclusion to draw on the basis of some evidence set. Alternatively, I draw on Kant's theory of judgment to argue that judgments that someone else is an epistemic peer may be classified as either (2) empty regulative theoretical judgments, or (3) non-theoretic judgments (analogous to judgments about taste). In either case, I argue, rational disagreement under Parity may be possible. I conclude with a critique and defense of these solutions, and some reflections on where they leave us with respect to the peer disagreement problem.