FYS 023: CAN WE AGREE TO DISAGREE?
FALL 2013

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Office Hours: TR 11:00-12:30, F 9-11:00 a.m.
Class: TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.

OBJECTIVES: In this philosophically oriented First-Year Seminar—it is not a current-affairs or debate course—we will explore the question of what it means for people to disagree in matters of political, moral, and religious concern. When two people disagree about such matters, is one necessarily right and the other wrong, or is each legitimately entitled to his or her own opinion? If I were teaching mathematics, for example, most people would agree that I could legitimately fail a student who insisted that, in a base-10 system, 2 + 2 = 5. If, on the other hand, I were teaching politics (as I do), most people would agree that I could not legitimately fail a student for nothing other than holding a political (or moral or religious) position opposed to my own. Why do we generally accept that both of these points are true? What are the presuppositions of agreement and disagreement? How can reasonable people hold drastically differing and opposed beliefs in matters of politics, morality, and religion? Is conflict grounded in misunderstanding, and thus illusory, or is conflict grounded in understanding, and thus real? We will explore these and related questions in an intensely text-based and discussion-oriented seminar format that will include both analytical essay papers and an essay final examination.

The following quotation comes from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers: New York, 1971, pp. 323-4) and serves as the guiding principle of this course and, indeed, of all liberal education.

It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are "philosophers", by defining the limits and characteristics of the "spontaneous philosophy" which is proper to everybody. This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. "common sense" and "good sense"; 3. popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of "folklore".

Having first shown that everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in "language", there is contained a specific conception of the world, one then moves on to the second level, which is that of awareness and criticism. That is to say, one proceeds to
the question—is it better to "think", without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and episodic way? In other words, is it better to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment, i.e., by one of the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world . . . ? Or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality?

In other words, however unfamiliar, abstract, and even strange the topics of our readings and discussions might appear to you at times, those topics are issues and assumptions already embedded in the ways you understand yourself and the world around you. They're like the back of your head: they're always present even if you cannot see them easily and without assistance.

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REQUIRED TEXTS (EDITIONS IN UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORES):

6. Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, Ch. 7 (with cookies enabled, go to http://researchguides.drake.edu/er.php, to Goldford, to FYS 023, enter the password I give you in class, and download).

The Writing Workshop link is [http://artsci.drake.edu/writersworkshop/wwshop.html](http://artsci.drake.edu/writersworkshop/wwshop.html)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>CLASS TOPIC AND ASSIGNED READING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00</td>
<td>08-24:</td>
<td>Saturday, 5:30-6:30 p.m.: Get acquainted, introduction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>08-27:</td>
<td>Abortion worldviews (Luker, Ch. 7, E-reserves).</td>
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<td>08-29:</td>
<td>The objectivist argument: nature (Plato I).</td>
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<td>02</td>
<td>09-03:</td>
<td>The objectivist argument: nature (Plato I).</td>
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<td>09-05:</td>
<td>The objectivist argument: nature (Plato II).</td>
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<td>03</td>
<td>09-10:</td>
<td>The objectivist argument: nature (Plato III).</td>
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<td>09-12:</td>
<td>The objectivist argument: nature (Plato IV).</td>
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04  09-17:  The objectivist argument: nature (Plato V).
       09-19:  The objectivist argument: nature (Plato VI).
05  09-24:  PMAC session. (Read Plato VII).
       09-26:  Library session: Cowles Library 045. (Read Plato VIII).
06  10-01:  FYS advising session: Parents Hall. (Plato IX).
       10-03:  The objectivist argument: nature (Plato).  Essay #1 due.
07  10-08:  The objectivist argument: nature (Plato).
       10-10:  The subjectivist argument: convention (Hobbes i-xiii).
08  10-15:  Fall Break. Class does not meet.
       10-17:  The subjectivist argument: convention (Hobbes ix-xiii).
       10-31:  Theoretical Perspectivism: Kuhn (I-II).
       11-07:  Theoretical Perspectivism: Kuhn (VI-VII).
12  11-12:  Theoretical Perspectivism: Kuhn (VIII-X).
       11-14:  Theoretical Perspectivism: Kuhn (XI-XIII).
       11-21:  Social Perspectivism: Marx (pp. 48-68).
14  11-26:  Social Perspectivism: Marx (pp. 68-96).
       11-28:  [Thanksgiving Recess]
       12-05:  Course summary and conclusion.
16  12-11:  FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD: WEDNESDAY, 2:00-3:50 P.M.

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COURSE PROCEDURES AND GRADING POLICY:

1) You are expected to attend class regularly, to have read the assigned text material prior to class, and to participate in class discussions. Class will function as a discussion group requiring your active participation as well as mine. You are subject in every
class to my calling upon you to contribute to explaining the assigned reading for the day.

2) You must successfully complete all written assignments: two mid-term analytical essays, each of which should be approximately five typewritten pages in length and will count 25%, and one final analytical essay, ten typewritten pages in length, which counts 50%. During the final-examination period you will present a summary of the argument in your final essay. Failure to complete an assignment is cause for a grade of F for the course, not just for the assignment, and make-ups or extensions are solely a matter of my discretion rather than automatic right.

3) NO MATTER WHAT YOUR MAJOR OR CAREER PLANS, YOU SIMPLY MUST BE ABLE TO WRITE AND SPELL. Because a major goal of this course is to help develop your reasoning and writing capabilities, all graded work will consist of formal, polished papers. Each papers will be evaluated in terms of letter grades, but letter grades will then be averaged and weighted in terms of a 12-level point system:

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\begin{align*}
A+ &= 12 & B+ &= 9 & C+ &= 6 & D+ &= 3 & F &= 0 \\
A &= 11 & B &= 8 & C &= 5 & D &= 2 \\
A- &= 10 & B- &= 7 & C- &= 4 & D- &= 1
\end{align*}
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4) Our focus on writing stems from the kind of knowledge about and ability to engage in critical thinking this course seeks to help you acquire. Briefly, our goal is to develop not merely a passive, but an active engagement in critical thinking about disagreement. If you have ever taken a foreign language, you might recall the distinction between the active and passive use of a language, which is not to be confused with the grammatical distinction between active and passive voice. When you are learning Spanish, for example, and you have learned enough to be able to understand someone talking or something you are reading, we say that you have a passive knowledge of the language.

You have truly learned Spanish, however, when you not only can understand someone talking or something you are reading, but when you are able to speak and write the language yourself. When you can speak and write the language yourself, we say that you have acquired the active use of the language. In that sense, the goal of this course is to train you in the capacity to speak and write the language of critical thinking. If you find yourself able to understand discussion and the readings in the assigned texts, then you have acquired the passive knowledge we seek—but you are only halfway to your goal. Your task will be to think about our discussions and readings, and to think about your thinking about our discussions and readings.

The central question will be, can you talk and write your way through the material yourself, doing so well enough that you could teach the material to someone else? When you don't know the material, you write simplistically; when you do know the material, however, you write simply. That is your challenge this semester. Remember the old saying: "I know what I mean; I just can't put it into words"? However, if
you can't put it into words, you don't yet know what you mean! The essay questions you will tackle in this course will be similar to word problems in arithmetic: they will not be trick questions, but you will have to figure out the logic of each question in order to know how to answer it. They are designed to make you think.

5) Final grades are based upon your written work and my evaluation of your class attendance and participation. Particularly because this is a small class, failure to attend class regularly will cause a lowering of your course grade. There is no course grading curve; you might find it helpful—indeed, I would urge you—to study together. Tip: studies show that you will retain course material markedly better if you will make sure to read over and discuss your class notes sometime later in the same day you have had the class. You will remember points you forgot to write down, and you will encounter things you're not quite sure you understood, giving you time to jot down any questions to ask at the beginning of the next class.

6) Finally, academic dishonesty, such as cheating and plagiarism, is strictly forbidden and carries the penalty of automatic F for the entire course, not just an F for the particular assignment. This is the general statement you will find in the Drake Student Handbook (Source: http://www.drake.edu/dos/handbook/academic/, retrieved 8-10-13):

**Definitions:** A student who cheats or plagiarizes commits an offense against the entire University community. Cheating, plagiarism or dishonesty in academic work is cause for dismissal from the University. Cheating is defined as an act or attempted act of giving or obtaining aid and/or information by illicit means in meeting any academic requirements, including examinations. Plagiarism is defined as misrepresenting other’s ideas, phrases or discourse as one’s own.

**Penalties:** The penalty for cheating or plagiarism will vary from incident to incident. Initiation of action that can lead to a penalty is primarily the prerogative of the faculty member involved. The possible penalties include a reprimand, grade penalty, dismissal from the course and a recommendation for dismissal from the University.

**Appeals:** A student may appeal a charge of cheating or plagiarism in accordance with the appeal procedure of the appropriate college.

Each College in the University has its own academic-dishonesty statement at the website above, but the one in the College of Arts and Sciences is helpfully detailed:

Academic dishonesty is an all-encompassing term involving any activity that seeks to gain credit for work one has not done or to deliberately damage or destroy the work of others. It includes plagiarism (the misrepresentation, either by intent or negligence, of another’s ideas, phrases, discourse, or works as one’s own); cheating (the act, or attempted act, of giving or obtaining aid and/or information by illicit means in meeting any academic requirement, including examinations); fabrication (intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any
information or citation in an academic sense in any academic exercise); and facilitating academic dishonesty (intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty). Examples of such cases include, but are not limited to:

copying from the Internet and representing it as one’s own thoughts or work;
copying from another student’s paper, laboratory report, or other report, or computer files or listing and representing it as one’s own thoughts or work;
using, during a test or laboratory experiment, material and/or devices not authorized by the instructor in charge;
without the instructor’s permission, collaborating with another, knowingly assisting another or knowingly receiving the assistance of another in writing an examination or in satisfying any other course requirements;
incorporating into written assignments materials written by others without giving them credit, or otherwise improperly using information written by others (including that which might be stored on computer disks or other technological devices), or submitting commercially prepared papers as one’s own;
submission of multiple copies of the same or similar papers without prior approval of the several instructors involved;
claiming as one’s own work that which was done by tutors or others with no mention of credit to or the assistance of those persons;
deliberately damaging or destroying another’s laboratory experiments, computer work or studio work;
knowingly obtaining access to, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in its entirety or in part, the contents of a test or other assignment unauthorized for release;
substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, to take a test or other assignment or to make a presentation;
intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise;
forgery, alterations, or misuse of University documents;
falsifying information submitted or failure to reveal relevant information in any University application form or offering any false information in any University disciplinary proceeding.

I hope never to have to refer to these guidelines as the semester proceeds, but I will certainly enforce them strictly whenever necessary.