Fourth and Final Sawyer Seminar Conference:

**Expertise and Disagreement**

Northwestern University  
August 28th - 29th, 2015  

All talks are free and open to the public.  

Please [REGISTER HERE](#), and contact Sandy Goldberg with any questions or comments.  

Talks will be held in:  
University Hall, Room 122  
[1897 Sheridan Road, Evanston IL 60208]

**Friday, August 28th**

10:30 a.m. Coffee and snacks  
10:45 a.m. Welcome  
11:00 a.m. **Aaron Panofsky**, Institute for Society and Genetics, UCLA  
Title: “Misbehaving Science: Controversy and Knowledge Production in Behavior Genetics”  
12:30 p.m. Break for lunch at local restaurants  
2:15 p.m. **Miriam Solomon**, Department of Philosophy, Temple University  
Title: “Scientific Disagreement in the Medical Context”  
3:45 p.m. Break with light refreshments  
4:15 p.m. **John Beatty**, Department of Philosophy, University of British Columbia  
Title: “Apparent Consensus and Unapparent Disagreement”  
5:45 p.m. Reception with light refreshments, beer & wine (all are welcome)  
7:00 p.m. Dinner at a local restaurants
Saturday, August 29th

10:45 a.m.  Coffee and snacks

11:00 a.m.  Branden Fitelson, Department of Philosophy, Rutgers University
     Title:  “When is Evidence of Evidence Evidence?”

12:30 p.m.  Break for lunch at local restaurants

2:15 p.m.  Catherine Elgin, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University
     Title:  “The Realm of Epistemic Ends”

3:30 p.m.  Break with light refreshments

4:15 p.m.  Jeryl L. Mumpower, George H.W. Bush School of Public Service and Administration, Texas A&M University
     Title:  “A Social Judgment Theory Perspective on Expert Judgment and Expert Disagreement”

5:45 p.m.  Drinks at local establishments

Discussants-at-large:
Matthew Kopec – Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Canberra
Baron Reed – Philosophy, Northwestern

Main Organizer:
Sanford Goldberg – Philosophy, Northwestern

Organizing Committee:
Fabrizio Cariani – Philosophy, Northwestern
Steve Epstein – Sociology, Science in Human Culture, Northwestern
Casey Johnson – Philosophy, University of Connecticut at Storrs
Jennifer Lackey – Philosophy, Northwestern
Nicholas Leonard – Philosophy, Northwestern
Uri Wilensky – Computer Science, Learning Science, Center for Connected Learning and Computer-Based Modeling, Northwestern
Abstracts:

John Beatty, “Apparent Consensus and Unapparent Disagreement”

Perhaps the most familiar notion of “consensus” involves some sort of counting – e.g., vote tallying – resulting in unanimity or a majority. But consensus is a heterogeneous category. And some important forms, as practiced, are quite different from this. I will consider a form of consensus that goes by various names, referring to its various aspects: “decision by interpretation,” “apparent consensus,” “nemine contradicente,” “joint agreement.” It is not about counting, not about unanimity or a majority. What especially concerns me here is the manner in which this form of consensus represents the epistemic state-of-play of the community in question, without revealing differences between community members with regard to the issues under consideration. Such apparent consensus can therefore mask considerable disagreement. I will discuss contexts and senses in which such decision procedures are, and are not, advantageous for groups of experts. I will illustrate differences between such consensus practices, and the more commonly analyzed unanimity and majority practices, with reference to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Kate Elgin, “The Realm of Epistemic Ends”

Extrapolating from Kant, I suggest that thinkers be construed as legislating members of realms of epistemic ends who collectively establish the norms that govern their epistemic practices. I describe the relations in which members of intellectual communities must stand to one another for their conclusions to be creditable. I argue that when these conditions are met responsible disagreement is an epistemic asset.

Branden Fitelson, “When is Evidence of Evidence Evidence?”

One of the early motivations for contemporary conciliatory approaches to disagreement comes from Feldman's idea that disagreements between peers yield "evidence of evidence" (regarding the claim at issue in the disagreement). Feldman defended a general version of the thesis that "evidence of evidence is evidence". Various objections and replies to Feldman's thesis have appeared in the literature in the last several years. I will survey this dialectic with an eye toward clarifying the conditions under which Feldman's thesis holds.


This paper addresses questions of expert judgment and disagreement from the perspective of the psychology of judgment and decision making, specifically from the viewpoint of Social Judgment Theory. It focuses on disagreement in the context of public policy problems that contain scientific or technical components. For many policy problems, the facts do not "speak for themselves." As definitive evidence is unavailable, we turn to scientific and technical experts to go beyond the data, to make inferences about the nature and severity of the problems, and to recommend potential solutions. Disagreements in these contexts center on inferences or predictions about the current or future state of some environmental criterion variable that is, at least in principle, independently and empirically observable. Why do scientific and technical experts in these circumstances so often disagree? This question is fundamental. Hammond argued that traditional
explanations for such disagreement – incompetence, venality, and ideology -- are incomplete. Characteristics of the human judgement process itself can be responsible for persistent disagreements even among competent, honest, and disinterested experts. When experts' judgement processes can be described by additive models involving a common set of cues, Social Judgment Theory provides a set of methods for characterizing judgmentally based disagreements. The validity and usefulness of such representations depend on several prerequisite conditions: (a) experts must agree on a problem definition, (b) experts must have access to the same information, and (c) experts must use the same organizing principles to combine elements of information into judgments. When these conditions are not met, methods for diagnosing and treating disagreement are poorly understood. As a start towards developing a better understanding, sources and types of expert disagreement are discussed and categorized.

Aaron Panofsky, “Misbehaving Science: Controversy and Knowledge Production in Behavior Genetics”

The field responsible for claims about genetic influences on intelligence, personality, criminality, mental illness, and almost every other behavioral trait—is the quintessentially controversial science. It has spawned debates ranging form the nature of genetic causation to the causes of social inequality. I will trace three successive controversies, beginning in the 1960s, that transformed the social and epistemological organization of behavior genetics. I will show the reciprocal relationship between disruptive controversy and the disorderly social structure of behavior genetics. I will trace four implications of this history for knowledge production in the field: fragmentation and narrowing of the intellectual agenda, undermining what counts as legitimate scientific criticism, a repetitive and provocative research style, and tolerance for genetic explanations of racial intellectual differences.

Miriam Solomon, “Scientific Disagreement in the Medical Context”

Scientific disagreement is, on the whole, good for science and bad for medicine. It is good for science because it can produce useful criticism, divide cognitive labor and distribute knowledge. It is bad for medicine because expert disagreement typically reduces medical authority, making the practice of medicine too vulnerable to commercial or political interests. I discuss an example, the case of disagreement over screening mammography guidelines, to show both the production and the management of disagreement in the medical context. Four general ways of managing disagreement in the medical context are discussed.