

### D. Ground rules for respectful discussion

Below are some rules that I set in all of my classes to frame both in-class and online discussions. Abiding by these rules serves to expand the pool of possible knowledge that is essential to seeking the truth about things.

- (1) Do not presume or judge what views others may hold based on the argument(s) they offer in discussion, and do not “put words into others’ mouths” (e.g., “By saying that, what you really mean is...”). Speakers may not necessarily embrace either the arguments they make or those that you attribute to them.
- (2) Seek first to understand others’ views/positions, well enough to restate them, before you disagree with them. You cannot disagree with what you don’t understand.
- (3) Try your best to support your own views/positions with reasons/arguments (which usually use the words *because* or *therefore*) rather than with mere assertions or contested claims.
- (4) Be willing to concede weaknesses in your own argument/position, and when it is applicable, admit your own ignorance by saying, “I don’t know” (a.k.a. intellectual humility).
- (5) Be willing to follow where your reasoning/argument leads you, even if you don’t like the implications of your position (a.k.a. intellectual courage).
- (6) Ask any questions you want, so long as they are sincere and not just rhetorical/performative. In my view, there are no stupid questions; and no questions are off-limits. (I may, however, defer answering some questions to outside of class.)

Respect while disagreeing. It is crucial that students speak (or post in online discussion boards and/or chat rooms) so as to maintain an atmosphere of critical but constructive dialogue. This does not mean refraining from critiquing others’ viewpoints, but it does mean doing your best to give reasons for your critique. Although disagreements are bound to arise, we can and should discuss our viewpoints with respect and civility toward others. Indeed, disagreement itself is a form of respect, because it shows you are taking others seriously enough to engage them and their ideas rather than ignore them.

Mutual integrity. I believe that mutual respect is based on mutual integrity, the belief that others, including those with whom you disagree, also desire to do what is right, just, fair, good, etc., just as we all desire.

As a member of [Heterodox Academy](#), “I support open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in research and education.” I myself strive to model the above principles in all situations and appreciate students who respectfully point out to me when I fall short of doing that.