Abstract
The dissertation explores the impact of motivated reasoning, a tendency for reasoning to proceed with the goal of construing evidence in ways that are supportive of a desired conclusion, for normative discussions in the epistemology of disagreement and political philosophy. The introduction provides a brief overview of the psychology of motivated reasoning and its consequences. One of these is belief polarization, a tendency for the beliefs of people who initially disagree to move toward the extremes after the persons view the same body of evidence. Another is that deliberation in groups with internal disagreement is an effective means of epistemic improvement. The introduction also provides overviews of the epistemology of disagreement and the role of disagreement for political legitimacy, and details the contributions of the four articles to these debates.

Article 1 responds to arguments for the conclusion that belief polarization is a rational phenomenon. It argues that, when disagreement is salient, the biased processing of evidence that results in belief polarization is incompatible with rationality, and the resulting polarized beliefs are neither reliably formed nor supported by the evidence, properly construed.

Article 2 discusses the epistemic significance of political disagreement. It shows that motivated reasoning about politically salient propositions implies that a political opposite’s familiarity with relevant evidence and their intellectual virtues are inversely correlated with their perceived probability of being right, conditional on disagreement. This presents us with a puzzle in determining how significant such disagreements are, one that cannot be escaped by denying that political disagreements in general are epistemically significant.

Article 3 discusses the impact of the beneficial effects of collective deliberation in groups with internal disagreement for the epistemic significance of discovered disagreement. It argues that these benefits can provide one with epistemic reason to maintain confidence in the face of discovered disagreement when doing so promotes epistemically fruitful deliberation.

Article 4 discusses the impact of motivated reasoning in defense of our political or cultural values for the legitimacy of democratic decision-making. It addresses the extent to which democratic authorities should be responsive to mistaken factual beliefs in the public when these beliefs are the result of motivated reasoning in defense of controversial doctrines, and whether factual beliefs, even when supported by our best science, are excluded from public reason if they are entangled in a cultural dispute.