

**Phil 680 – Problems of Philosophy:
The Ethics of Belief and Contemporary Contexts**

Spatiotemporal location: Tuesdays 11:35am-2:25pm (with long break in the middle) over Zoom

Professor: Stephanie Leary (stephanie.leary@mcgill.ca)

Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm (or by individual appointment) over Zoom

Course Description: In this course, we will discuss some general theoretical questions that lie at the intersection of ethics and epistemology and how they arise in the context of contemporary moral issues. For example, some of the general theoretical questions we will discuss are: (1) Can beliefs in and of themselves be morally wrong and/or wrong the individuals that they are about? (2) Do moral considerations like these matter to what we should believe? (3) If so, how: do they bear on how much epistemic justification we need in order to be justified in believing something or do they provide separate, moral reasons against having a belief? And we will examine how these questions arise in the context of contemporary issues such as whether it's permissible to believe something about an individual based on general statistics having to do with race, gender, or sexual orientation and whether we should believe women in "she said, he said" cases of sexual assault accusations.

Requirements and Grades:

- (1) **Participation (10%):** The success of our seminar depends on everyone participating in an active and respectful discussion. You are expected to attend every class, complete all required readings beforehand, and come prepared with questions or comments. If you have extenuating circumstances that make regularly attending the seminar difficult for you, please contact me so that we can discuss potential options.
- (2) **Conference-Style Presentation (15%):** You will give a 10 min presentation that includes (a) a very concise summary of the main argument from one of the week's readings and (b) a focused critique (i.e. develop *one to three* questions/criticisms). You should discuss your presentation with me via email or Zoom no later than the Friday before your presentation so that I know what you will be focusing on. And you must have a clear, concise handout (no more than 1 page) for everyone to follow your presentation (which you should email to me the night before your presentation).
- (3) **Term paper proposal (15%):** You will complete a 2,000-word term paper proposal that will include a brief introduction to the topic of your paper, an outline of your main argument and objections you plan to consider and respond to, and a bibliography. (A "guide-sheet" for the term paper proposal will be available on myCourses so you know exactly what all to include in the proposal.) I'm happy to talk to you about your topic in office hours before hand, give you reading suggestions, etc. If you email me and don't get a response within 2 business days, please email me again! You are never bothering me by asking me for help - *it's my job!*
- (4) **Comments on a peer's term paper (10%):** You'll be paired up with another student to swap rough drafts of your term papers. You will email your partner (and CC me!) your rough draft, and then email your partner a "report" with comments on their draft (and CC me again!). Your report should very briefly summarize the paper, identify its strengths, and then respectfully explain what you think are the main potential problems with the paper or things that could be improved. (A

sample referee report will be provided on myCourses to serve as a guide.)

- (5) **Final term paper and revision letter (50%):** Your final term paper should be around 6,000 words. Along with your term paper, you must include a short revision letter (1-2 pages) that explains what changes you made to your paper in light of your peer's comments or why you decided not to make changes in light of certain comments. (A sample revision letter can be found on myCourses to serve as a guide.)

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, DUE DATES, AND READINGS TBD

myCourses

There's a myCourses site for this course, which will have all the readings and access to the Zoom room for our class. You will also turn in your term paper proposal and your final term papers through myCourses.

Language Policy

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Academic Integrity Policy

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).