

Phil 670 – THE ETHICS OF BELIEF (Contemporary Analytic Philosophy)

Spatiotemporal location: Wednesdays, 2:35-5:25pm LEA 927

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

Course Description: The ethics of belief debate has traditionally focused on the following question: if believing some proposition p would benefit or harm you, the *believer*, is that a real reason for you to believe p (in the sense that it matters to whether you ought to believe it)? But recently the ethics of belief literature has turned its focus to questions about how our beliefs might benefit or harm *others*. For example, are there special instances of moral reasons for and against believing things that stem from the duties of friendship, anti-racism, or anti-misogyny? Can our beliefs themselves, independently of our actions, *wrong* other people? Can our failure to believe people's testimony wrong them? And many authors concerned with these moral dimensions of belief have recently focused on a new question: can these kinds of moral considerations be relevant to whether we're *epistemically justified* in believing something and *know* it? This seminar will discuss all of these questions and examine how these questions are related to each other or come apart.

Requirements and Grades:

- (1) **In-class Participation (10%):** The success of our seminar depends on everyone participating in an active and respectful discussion. You are expected to attend class, complete the required readings beforehand, and come prepared with questions or comments.
- (2) **Reading responses (10%):** Over the course of the semester, you must submit 3 reading responses (3-400 words each). These should be submitted via myCourses by 11:59 pm the night before class and should involve some sort of reflection about the material—this may involve a brief discussion of a clarificatory question you have about the reading that you think is important to address, drawing connections between this week's topic and other topics we've discussed in prior classes, or a critical comment or objection that you have about some argument in the reading, etc.
- (3) **Term paper proposal (20%):** You will submit a 2,000-word term paper proposal (through myCourses) that will include a brief introduction to the topic of your paper, an outline of your main argument and the philosophical dialectic you plan to include, as well as a reading list. A "guide-sheet" for the term paper proposals is 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, give you reading suggestions, etc. If you email me and don't get a response within 2 workdays, please email again! You are never bothering me by asking for help—*it's literally 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 mock "referee report" with comments about their draft (and CC me again!). Your report should very briefly summarize the paper and identify its strengths in the first paragraph and then develop a few main critical points that you think would be helpful for the author to address to improve the paper. (Sample referee reports are on myCourses to serve as a guide.)

(5) **Final term paper with revision letter (50%):** Your final term paper should be 5,000-7,000 words and submitted through myCourses. Along with your term paper, you must include a short mock “letter to the editor” that explains what changes you made to your paper in light of your peer’s comments or why you decided not to make certain changes suggested by your peer. (A sample letter to the editor is available on myCourses to serve as a guide.)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10am-12 (or by appointment). Zoom link and sign-up sheet here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Qm5cE26rY5dcyNvE4f4p4UeIOYmQEHsqUuq-7jITPE/edit?usp=sharing>

Extensions Policy

I understand that issues might arise where you need an extension for your work. If you find yourself in this situation, please email me ASAP and we can negotiate an alternative deadline for you. (However, I cannot guarantee the ability to give extensions for the rough draft & peer comments—that depends on the consent of your peer.)

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).

Metapolicy

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the readings, assignments, and policies as the semester progresses. I will only do so fairly, for good reasons, and with plenty of warning.

SCHEDULE

Topic	Date	Main question	Required Reading	Optional Further Reading*	Work Due
Introduction to the course	31-Aug	<i>New class, who/what/how dis?</i>	Syllabus		
Practical reasons for belief	07-Sep	<i>Are there practical reasons for and against belief?</i>	(1) Nishi Shah's "New Argument for Evidentialism", (2) Stephanie Leary's "In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief"	Alex Worsnip's "From Impossibility to Evidentialism?", Susanna Rinard's "Believing for Practical Reasons" & "Equal Treatment for Belief"	

Special cases of moral reasons for belief: friendship	14-Sep	<i>Do the duties of friendship generate moral reasons for/ against belief?</i>	(1) Sarah Stroud's "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship", (2) Anna Brinkerhoff's "The Cognitive Demands of Friendship"	Simon Keller's "Belief for Someone Else's Sake"	
Special cases of moral reasons for belief: anti-racism	21-Sep	<i>Do the duties of anti-racism generate moral reasons for/ against belief?</i>	(1) Rima Basu's "The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs", (2) Anna Brinkerhoff's "Prejudiced beliefs based on the evidence: responding to a challenge for evidentialism"	(1) Rima Basu's "What we epistemically owe to each other", (2) Robert Osborne's "What do we epistemically owe to each other? A reply to Basu"	
Special cases of moral reasons for belief: #BelieveWomen	28-Sep	<i>Are there moral reasons to believe sexual assault testimony?</i>	(1) Alexandra Lloyd's "#MeToo & the role of Outright Belief", (2) Renee Jorgensen's (Bolinger) "#BelieveWomen and the Ethics of Belief"	Kimberly Kessler Ferzan's "#Believe Women and the Presumption of Innocence"	
Doxastic Wronging Redux	05-Oct	<i>Can beliefs by themselves wrong other individuals?</i>	(1) Basu & Schroeder's "Doxastic Wronging", (2) Enoch & Spectre's "There is No Such Thing as Doxastic Wrongdoing"	(1) Mark Schroeder's "When Beliefs Wrong", (2) Cecile Fabre's "Doxastic Wrongs, Non-Spurious Generalizations and Particularized Beliefs"	
	12-Oct	NO CLASS	FALL BREAK		
	19-Oct	<i>Are there collective doxastic wrongs that individual believers might be complicit in?</i>	(1) Brian Lawson's "Individual Complicity in Collective Wrongdoing", (2) Julia Nefsky's "How you can help, without making a difference"		
Testimonial Injustice Redux	26-Oct	<i>What is testimonial injustice?</i>	Chapters 1 & 2 of Miranda Fricker's <i>Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing</i>	Emmalon Davis's "Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice",	

	02-Nov	<i>Can testimonial injustice occur without prejudice against the speaker?</i>	(1) Ishani Maitra's "The Nature of Epistemic Injustice", (2) Dembroff & Whitcomb's "Content Focused Epistemic Injustice"	Aidan McGlynn's "Objects or Others? Epistemic Agency and the Primary Harm of Testimonial Injustice"	
	Mon Nov 7				Term Paper Proposal (myCourses)
Pragmatic & Moral Encroachment	09-Nov	<i>Can pragmatic and moral factors affect epistemic justification and knowledge?</i>	(1) Jamie Fritz's "Pragmatic Encroachment and Moral Encroachment", (2) Sarah Moss's "Moral Encroachment"	(1) Jeremy Fantl & Mark McGrath's "Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification", (2) Blake Roeber's "The Pragmatic Encroachment Debate", (3) Mark Schroeder's "Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment"	
	16-Nov	<i>Is there good reason to accept pragmatism but reject encroachment?</i>	(1) Stephanie Leary's "Banks, Bosses, and Bears: a Pragmatist Argument against Encroachment", (2) Alex Worsnip's "Can Pragmatists be Moderate?"	Renee Bolinger's "Varieties of Moral Encroachment" & "The Rational Impermissibility of Accepting (some) Racial Generalizations", Jamie Fritz's "Moral Encroachment and Reasons of the Wrong Kind"	
	23-Nov	<i>Can evidentialists stop pragmatic and moral encroachment?</i>	Georgi Gardiner's (1) "Evidentialism and Moral Encroachment" & (2) "Rape, Alcoholism, and Selling Sex: Against the New Ethics of Belief"	Stephanie Leary's "Moral Encroachment and #BelieveWomen"	
	30-Nov		(catch up, tie up)		
	Mon Dec 5				Rough Draft Peer Swap (email)

	Fri Dec 9				Peer Comments (email)
	Mon Dec 19				Final Term Paper & Revision Letter (myCourses)