

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

Spatiotemporal location: Tuesdays 11:35am-2:25pm EST over Zoom (synchronous instruction)

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

Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm EST (or by individual appointment) over Zoom (link below)
<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/93622984341>

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) Are there specific wrongs that occur when we fail to believe the testimony of marginalized people? (3) Do moral considerations like these matter to what we should believe? (4) 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 for/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 statistics having to do with their race, gender, or sexual orientation and what we should believe in "she said, he said" cases of sexual assault accusations.

Requirements and Grades:

- (1) **Overall 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 attending the seminar difficult for you, please contact me.
- (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 must 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 concise handout (1 page max) that helps us follow your presentation, which you should email to me the night before your presentation so that I can make it available on myCourses.
- (3) **Term paper proposal (15%):** 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 what objections you plan to respond to, 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 before hand, give you reading suggestions, etc. If you email me and don't get a response within 2 workdays, please email me again! You are never bothering me by asking 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 must email your partner (and CC me!) your rough draft on the last day of class (by the start time). Then you must email your partner a mock "referee report" with comments on their draft (and CC me again!) by that Friday. Your report should *very briefly*

summarize the paper and identify its strengths, but then respectfully explain what you think are the main ways in which the paper could be improved. (A sample referee report is 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 by Wednesday, December 16th. Along with your term paper, you must include a short revision letter 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 is on myCourses to serve as a guide.)

SCHEDULE

Topic	Date	Question of the week	Required Reading	Recommended Further Reading	Work Due
Introduction to the course	08-Sep	<i>How is this seminar going to work?</i>	Syllabus		
Practical reasons for belief	15-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 "Equal Treatment for Belief"	<i>Jordan Presentation</i>
Pragmatic Encroachment	22-Sep	<i>Can practical factors affect knowledge or epistemic justification?</i>	(1) Jeremy Fantl & Mark McGrath's "Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification", (2) Blake Roeber's "The Pragmatic Encroachment Debate"	Liz Jackson's "How Belief-Credence Dualism Explains Away Pragmatic Encroachment"	<i>Ljubo Presentation</i>
	29-Sep	<i>(continued)</i>	(1) Mark Schroeder's "Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment", (2) Alex Worsnip's "Can Pragmatists be Moderate?"		<i>Helena Presentation</i>
Moral encroachment	06-Oct	<i>Can moral factors affect knowledge or justification?</i>	(1) Sarah Moss's "Moral Encroachment", (2) Liz Jackson & Jamie Fritz's "Belief, Credence, and Moral Encroachment"	Jamie Fritz's "Pragmatic Encroachment and Moral Encroachment", Renee Bolinger's "Varieties of Moral Encroachment" & "The Rational	<i>Paul Presentation</i>

				Impermissibility of Accepting (some) Racial Generalizations"	
	13-Oct	<i>(continued)</i>	(1) Georgi Gardiner's "Evidentialism and Moral Encroachment", (2) Stephanie Leary's "Bigotry, Bosses, and Bears: A Pragmatist Argument against Encroachment"	Jamie Fritz's "Moral Encroachment and Reasons of the Wrong Kind"	
Doxastic obligations, harms, and wrongs	20-Oct	<i>Do racist beliefs wrong the individuals that they're about?</i>	(1) Rima Basu's "The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs", (2) Mark Schroeder's "When Beliefs Wrong"		
	27-Oct	<i>Do we have moral obligations concerning what we believe?</i>	(1) Rima Basu's "What we epistemically owe to each other", (2) Robert Osbourne's "What do we epistemically owe to each other? A reply to Basu"	Sarah Stroud's "Epistemic Partiality and the Duties of Friendship"	<i>Sophie Presentation</i>
	03-Nov	<i>Is it wrong to not believe the testimony of marginalized people?</i>	Chapters 1 & 2 of Miranda Fricker's <i>Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing</i>		
	Fri Nov 6				Term Paper Proposals
	10-Nov	<i>(continued)</i>	(1) Ishani Maitra's "The Nature of Epistemic Injustice", (2) Emmalon Davis's "Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice"	Aidan McGlynn's "Objects or Others? Epistemic Agency and the Primary Harm of Testimonial Injustice"	<i>Cem Presentation</i>
Connections to #MeToo	17-Nov	<i>How should epistemologists interpret #BelieveWomen?</i>	(1) Kim Ferzan's "#Believe Women and the Presumption of Innocence", (2) Renee Bolinger's	Kate Abramson's "Turning up the Lights on Gaslighting", Andrew Spear's	<i>Val Presentation</i>

			"#BelieveWomen and the Ethics of Belief"	"Epistemic Dimensions of Gaslighting"	
	24-Nov	<i>What can epistemologists learn from the #MeToo era?</i>	Stephanie Leary's "Sexual Assault Accusations and Moral Encroachment"	Georgi Gardiner's "She Said, He Said: Rape Accusations and the Preponderance of Evidence" & "The 'She Said, He Said' Paradox and the Proof Paradox"	
	01-Dec		NO CLASS but rough drafts are due by the start of class		<i>Rough Draft Peer Swap</i>
	<i>Fri Dec 4</i>				<i>Peer Comments</i>
	<i>Wed Dec 16</i>				<i>Final Term Papers</i>

myCourses

All the readings, writing samples, and assignments for this course will be available on myCourses. You will also turn in your term paper proposal and your final term papers through myCourses.

Zooming Protocol

This seminar will be held via Zoom and you will access the Zoom room via myCourses. Please follow these guidelines to ensure that our Zoom seminars run as smoothly as possible:

- (1) **Check equipment:** Please make sure that you have adequate internet and that your microphone and camera are working properly before class.
- (2) **Video:** You are not required to have your video turned on during the seminar, but it is strongly encouraged. If your own audio is glitching, sometimes turning off your video can fix this.
- (3) **Microphone:** To ensure high audio quality, please keep your microphone muted when you are not speaking. When you would like to contribute to discussion, please use the raise hand function in Zoom or physically raise your hand in front of the camera and unmute yourself once you're called on.
- (4) **Silence notifications:** Please make sure all notification sounds on your computer are turned off so they don't interrupt the discussion (email alerts, text message alerts, reminders, etc.)

Virtual Office Hours

Office hours will be held via Zoom on Thursdays from 10am-12pm at the following link: <https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/93622984341> There's a waiting room set up for this Zoom room and I will let students into the room one at a time in the order they arrive. If you can't make my regular office hours, you can email me to set up an individual appointment.

Extensions Policy

Because of the unusual circumstances we're living in, 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.

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).

Metapolicy

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