Philosophy 252: Norms of Belief [revised 11/26/17]
Harvard University, Fall 2017

Instructors:

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Course Description:

Recent work on the norms that govern belief and other doxastic attitudes. Questions to be addressed could include: Are there non-evidential reasons for belief? Is there a distinctively epistemic sense of rationality, and if so, what is its nature? Does belief have an aim, and if so, what is it? Does belief have fittingness conditions, and if so, what are they, and what is their relationship to the question of what one should believe? Can we choose to believe, and what implications does this have (either way) for questions about the norms of belief?

Time and Place: Wednesdays, 1–3pm, in Emerson 307

Course URL: https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/32342

All readings, handouts, and announcements will be available through the course website. You must login using your Harvard ID or using an XID (if you are an auditor without a Harvard ID) to see all of the site’s content. To obtain an XID, visit <https://xid.harvard.edu/xid-apps/> and then contact us so that we can add your XID to the website guest list.

Course Admission Policy:

This is a graduate-level course; undergraduates and students in a graduate program other than philosophy will only be allowed to take the course for credit if they have the proper background. Auditors are welcome, but only if they have an official affiliation with Harvard University or another academic institution in the area.

Readings:

Each week’s readings will be available for downloading on the course website and for photocopying in Robbins Library on the second floor of Emerson Hall.

Requirements:

The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

30% Seminar attendance and participation.

Evaluation will be based on attendance, preparation, and contributions to discussion. For those of you who don’t feel comfortable talking during class, discussing material from the course during office hours may count toward your contributions to discussion.

70% Term paper.

A 15-20 page (double-spaced) term paper is due by 2:00pm on Monday, December 11th. Students are highly encouraged to meet with us during the course of the semester to discuss their final paper topic.
**Electronic Devices:**

The use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc. during seminar meetings is prohibited (except in cases of medical necessity, in which case follow the guidelines given below for students with disabilities).

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:**

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present us with a Faculty Letter from the Accessibility Education Office (AEO) by the end of the second complete week of term, namely Friday, September 15th. Failure to do so may result in our inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential.

**Academic Integrity Policy – Collaboration Permitted in Written Work:**

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.
Meeting and Reading Schedule [some of this may change]:

NOTE: Readings listed in brackets are optional.

**Wed., Aug. 30:** NO CLASS (Monday schedule at Harvard)

**Wed., Sept. 6:** What Does ‘Epistemic’ Mean? (SB)
   Stewart Cohen, “Theorizing about the Epistemic”
   Earl Conee, “The Epistemic”
   [Jack Lyons, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Epistemic Justification”]
   [Matthew McGrath, “Cohen on ‘Epistemic’”]
   [Stewart Cohen, “Replies to My Commentators”]

**Wed., Sept. 13:** Can We Be Responsible for What We Believe? (SR)
   Pamela Hieronymi, “Responsibility for Believing”
   [Pamela Hieronymi, “Two Kinds of Agency”]

**Wed., Sept. 20:** Do Belief and Action Have Different Norms? (SR)
   Susanna Rinard, “Equal Treatment for Belief”

**Wed., Sept. 27:** Are There Practical Reasons for Belief? (Pt. 1: For) (SR)
   Susanna Rinard, “Practical Considerations Can Be Motivating Reasons for Belief”
   Thomas Kelly, “The Rationality of Belief and Some Other Propositional Attitudes”
   [Nishi Shah, “A New Argument for Evidentialism”]

**Wed., Oct. 4:** What Makes Something the Reason for Which One Believes? (SB)
   Ram Neta, “The Basing Relation”

**Wed., Oct. 11:** Do Promises and Resolutions Require Believing against the Evidence? (visit by Berislav Marušić)
   [Berislav Marušić, *Evidence and Agency: Norms of Belief for Promising and Resolving*, ch. 7 (pp. 175–209)]

**Wed., Oct. 18:** Is There Doxastic Agency? (Pt. 1: For) (SR)
   Miriam McCormick, *Believing against the Evidence: Agency and the Ethics of Belief*, ch. 3, ch. 4 (sec. 1 only),
   and ch. 6
   [Miriam McCormick, *Believing against the Evidence: Agency and the Ethics of Belief*, rest of ch. 4 and ch. 5]

**Wed., Oct. 25:** Is There Doxastic Agency? (Pt. 2: Against) (SB)
   [Matthew Boyle, “‘Making Up Your Mind’ and the Activity of Reason”]

**Wed., Nov. 1:** Are There Practical Reasons for Belief? (Pt. 2: Against) (SB)
   Selim Berker, “A Combinatorial Argument against Practical Reasons for Belief”
   [Jane Friedman, “Suspended Judgment”]
   [Andrew Reisner, “Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief”]
   [Mark Schroeder, “What Makes Reasons Sufficient?”]

**Wed., Nov. 8:** Do Self-Fulfilling Beliefs Refute Evidentialism? (SB)
   Andrew Reisner, “A Short Refutation of Strict Normative Evidentialism”
   Andrew Reisner, “Pragmatic Reasons for Belief”
   [Andrew Reisner, “Evidentialism and the Numbers Game”]
Wed., Nov. 15: Are Reasons-To Evidence That One Ought? (SB)
Stephen Kearns & Daniel Star, “Reasons as Evidence”
[Stephen Kearns, “Bearing the Weight of Reasons”]

Wed., Nov. 22: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

Wed., Nov. 29: Does the Promotion of Credal Accuracy Ground Epistemic Rationality? (SR)
[Richard Pettigrew, “Epistemic Utility and Norms for Credences”] [note change in reading]

Term papers are due by 2:00pm on Mon., Dec. 11.