

**Philosophy**  
**University of Southampton**  
**Semester 2, 2013-14**  
**PHIL3038 Ethics of Belief**  
(FHEQ Level 6)

**Module Co-ordinator:** Dr Kurt Sylvan  
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**Credit Rating:** 15 CATS points; 7.5 ECTS points

**General Information:** This is an optional module for all single and combined honours Philosophy students. It has no prerequisites or co-requisites.

**Timetable:** Classes are scheduled for Tuesdays, 12:00-13:00, 07/3027 (Lecture Room F1), and Fridays, 9:00-11:00, 65/1173.

**Aims:** It is commonplace to hear people say such things as, ‘You shouldn’t believe that God exists—look at all the evil in the world’, or ‘You ought to believe that there is life on other planets—it’s entirely probable’, and the like. These judgements concerning what one ought (not) to believe seem to assume that there are norms governing belief, in something like the way that moral norms govern action. But what are these norms? What would account for them? How can belief be governed by such norms if, unlike action, it is not something we have control over? If belief is subject to such norms, what does this tell us about the nature of belief? The aim of this module is to explore such questions and to consider to what extent belief, like action, has an ethics.

**Objectives:** By the end of this module, you will be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the central views concerning the ethics of belief, as well as a solid grasp of the problems facing those views and the arguments in support of them. You must also be able to articulate and defend your own answers to the above questions and to relate the issues they concern to issues in other areas of philosophy.

**Transferable skills:**

This module will enhance your abilities to:

- work effectively as a member of a team.
- manage your time and meet deadlines.
- work independently and without supervision.
- clearly and concisely express your views and those of others both orally and in writing.

**Teaching and Learning Activities:**

Reading the relevant material, attendance at lectures; taking notes; contributing to discussion in lectures; doing research for and writing exams; working with other students in preparing a research project; applying techniques and skills learned both inside and outside the module to your reading and writing.

**Hours of Study:** 33 contact hours, 117 non-contact hours. Total study time = 150 hours.

**Methods of Assessment:**

Your final mark will be based on your performance in:

- (i) One project for which you will work in a small group of (typically) three students and submit a 5000 word piece of written work (40%).
- (ii) Discussion board contributions, due fortnightly, beginning Week 2, on the night before the Friday meeting (20%).
- (iii) One two-hour exam, in which you will be asked to answer *two* questions (40%).

You will have the opportunity to submit a plan with an introduction prior to submitting the group project, for which you will receive written feedback.

Deadlines for assessment tasks are given below under 'Important Dates'.

**Feedback**

*Feedback may be written or verbal.* You will receive:

- Written comments on your plan and on the final group project.
- Opportunity for further discussion with the module coordinator during their office hours or by appointment
- Oral feedback on your exams or any other aspect of your performance in one-to-one voluntary meetings with the module coordinator during Feedback Week

Active participation in class will also help you assess how you are progressing

**Important dates:**

January 2014

Mon 27<sup>th</sup>: Consultation Week begins. NO TEACHING.

February 2014

Mon 3<sup>rd</sup>: Teaching begins.

Tues 4<sup>th</sup>: Research Seminar: Matt Farr (Sydney), TBA, 65/1097, 17:00-19:00. Open to all.

Mon 17<sup>th</sup>: Feedback Week begins.

Weds 19<sup>th</sup>: Staff-Student Liaison Committee Meeting.

Tues 25<sup>th</sup>: Research Seminar: Aidan McGlynn (Edinburgh), "'De Facto' Immunity to Error Through Misidentification?", 65/1097, 17:00-19:00. Open to all.  
**(Optional) plan for group project due.**

March 2014

Tues 4<sup>th</sup>: Staff-Student Pub Quiz. Details TBA.

Tues 11<sup>th</sup>: Research Seminar: Lee Walters (Southampton), 'Autographic and Allographic Art Revisited Once More', 65/1097, 17:00-19:00. Open to all.

Mon 17<sup>th</sup>: **GROUP PROJECT DUE**

Tues 25<sup>th</sup>: Research Seminar: Julian Dodd (Manchester), TBA, 65/1097, 17:00-19:00. Open to all.

Fri 28<sup>th</sup>: Term ends.  
 Mon 31<sup>st</sup>: Deadline for optional submission of dissertation draft.

#### April 2014

Mon 7<sup>th</sup>: **Returning of group projects. (I'll send feedback via email if you'd like.)**  
 Mon 28<sup>th</sup>: Term resumes.  
 Tues 29<sup>th</sup>: Deadline for submission of dissertation.  
 Research Seminar: Debbie Roberts (Edinburgh), TBA, 65/1097, 17:00-19:00.  
 Open to all.  
 Weds 30<sup>th</sup>: Staff-Student Liaison Committee Meeting.

#### May 2014

Sat 3<sup>rd</sup>: Wittgenstein Study Day. Details:  
[http://www.southampton.ac.uk/lifelonglearning/news/events/2014/05/03\\_wittgenstein.page](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/lifelonglearning/news/events/2014/05/03_wittgenstein.page)  
 Mon 5<sup>th</sup>: Public Holiday.  
 Tues 6<sup>th</sup>: Research Seminar: Colin Johnston (Stirling), TBA, 65/1097, 17:00-19:00.  
 Open to all.  
 Fri 16<sup>th</sup>: End of Semester 2.  
 Mon 19<sup>th</sup>: **Exam period begins.**

#### June 2014

Fri 6<sup>th</sup>: Exam period ends.

#### July 2014

Weds 16<sup>th</sup>-  
 Thurs 24<sup>th</sup>: Graduation Ceremonies.

#### August 2014

Mon 18<sup>th</sup>-Friday 29<sup>th</sup>: Supplementary exam period

### **Readings**

All readings are available through the following Drop Box folder:

<https://www.dropbox.com/l/zysNj30GcIIPESriXy76Be>

I've divided the readings into **required** and *recommended* readings. I'll discuss the required readings extensively in the lecture and break down the issues for you. The recommended readings are purely optional. I mention them just for those who might be interested in exploring the topic in more depth. I may cite them in passing in the lectures (and I will certainly explore the topic in more depth). But I won't presuppose familiarity with them.

### **Schedule of Topics:**

#### **Week 1: Consultation Week**

I'm in the office during my office hours. Feel free to arrange a meeting at another time if these times don't work for you. Just send me an email and I'll be happy to find a time!

**Week 2: Introduction and the Original Evidentialism/Pragmatism Debate**

Feb. 4: *Introduction to the Ethics of Belief*

**Required:** Marusic, B. “The Ethics of Belief.”

*Recommended:* Chignell, A. “The Ethics of Belief.”  
(<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-belief>)

Feb. 7: *The Original Evidentialism/Pragmatism Debate*

**Required:** Clifford, W. K. “The Ethics of Belief.”  
James, W. “The Will to Believe.”

**Week 3: Evidentialism vs. Pragmatism: The Contemporary Scene**

Feb. 11: *Evidentialism*

**Required:** Shah, N. “A New Argument for Evidentialism.”

*Recommended:* Parfit, D. “State-Given Reasons.”

Feb. 14: *Pragmatism*

**Required:** Leary, S. “In Defence of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief.”

*Recommended:* Schroeder, M. “The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons.”

**Week 4: Pragmatic Encroachment**

Feb. 17: *Theoretical Arguments, Part I*

**Required:** Fantl, J. and McGrath, M. “Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification.” Hawthorne, J.

*Recommended:* Selections from Knowledge and Lotteries.

Feb. 21: *Theoretical Arguments, Part II*

**Required:** Schroeder, M. “Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment on Knowledge.”

**Week 5: Doxastic Voluntarism, Part I**

Feb. 25: *Supposed Relevance (and Falsity)*

**Required:** Alston, W. “The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification.”

*Recommended:* Feldman, R. "The Ethics of Belief."

Feb. 28: *Arguments for Irrelevance*

**Required:** Hieronymi, P. "Responsibility for Believing."

*Recommended:* Ryan, S. "Doxastic Compatibilism and the Ethics of Belief."

**Week 6: Doxastic Voluntarism, Part II**

March 4: *Sophisticated Defences*

**Required:** McHugh, C. "Exercising Doxastic Freedom."

*Recommended:* Weatherson, B. "Deontology and Descartes' Demon"

March 7: *Judgment and Introspective Knowledge*

**Required:** Moran, R. Selections from Authority and Estrangement

*Recommended:* Boyle, M. "'Making up Your Mind' and the Activity of Reason."

**Week 7: Chisholm and Firth on the Ethics of Belief**

March 11: *Firth on Chisholm*

**Required:** Firth, R. "Chisholm and the Ethics of Belief."

March 14: *Chisholm on Firth*

**Required:** Chisholm, R. "Firth and the Ethics of Belief."

**Week 8: Some Extremes**

March 18: *Permissivism vs. Impermissivism*

**Required:** Kelly, T. "How to Be an Epistemic Permissivist."

*Recommended:* Feldman, R. "Reasonable Religious Disagreements." (Skim.)  
Schoenfield, M. "Permission to Believe."

March 21: *The Knowledge Norm and Scepticism*

**Required:** Unger, P. Selections from Ignorance.

*Recommended:* Greco, D. "The Impossibility of Skepticism."

**Week 9: Conservatism and Coherence**

March 25: *Conservatism*

**Required:** Christensen, D. "Conservatism in Epistemology."

*Recommended:* Fumerton, R. "Conservatism: Theft or Honest Toil?"

March 28: *Coherence*

**Required:** Broome, J. "Normative Requirements."

*Recommended:* Kolodny, N. "Why Be Rational?"

**Week 10: The Aim of Belief**

April 29: *Part I*

**Required:** Velleman, D. "The Aim of Belief."

*Recommended:* Wedgwood, R. "The Aim of Belief."

May 2: *Part II*

**Required:** Sosa, E. Selections from Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge.

**Week 11: Epistemic Instrumentalism?**

May 13: *Against the Instrumental Model*

**Required:** Kelly, T. "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique"

*Recommended:* Foley, R. Selections from Working without a Net.

May 16: *Against the Instrumental Model*

**Required:** Berker, S. "Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions."

*Recommended:* Firth, R. "Epistemic Merit, Intrinsic and Instrumental."  
Fumerton, R. "Epistemic Justification and Normativity."

**Week 12: Revision Week**