

Ryerson University  
Department of Philosophy

**PH 8106: Philosophy of Mind (Winter 2012)**

**Contact Information:**

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**Course Description:**

This course will consider many central issues in the philosophy of mind by focussing on the special case of belief. We start by considering whether a person has **voluntary control** of what she believes and what might hang on such control. We then consider whether **everything possible is believable**. Next, we consider what a person **must** believe, and conclude by considering what a person **ought** to believe. A recurring theme will be that the limits to belief figure in both the objectivity and the subjectivity of belief.

**Evaluation Scheme:**

Grades will normally be determined in the following manner:

Task	Value	Due Date and Submission Information
<b>Short Response Papers</b>  In six of the twelve weeks, you will write a very short (500 word) paper in response to one of the readings for that week, <i>in advance of the class meeting</i> .	40%	Six Wednesdays of your choosing, 12:00pm.  Your papers must be submitted through Turnitin on Blackboard.
<b>Final Paper</b> (14-20 pages) I will distribute suggested essay topics and a grading rubric by the middle of the term.	40%	TBD (probably April 15 <sup>th</sup> , 12:00pm)  Your papers must be submitted through Turnitin on Blackboard.
<b>Contributions to Class Discussion</b>	20%	

**Course Policies for PH 8104:**

**Late Penalty**

- Assignments submitted late without sufficient justification will be penalized at the rate of 10% per day, including weekends.

### Alternate Arrangements

- Students shall inform the instructor, in advance, when they will miss a deadline for (1) medical reasons; (2) compassionate reasons; or (3) reasons covered under Ryerson's policy concerning accommodation of student religious, aboriginal, and spiritual observance. When circumstances do not permit informing the instructor in advance (e.g. in an emergency), the student must inform the instructor as soon as possible. Students who fail to abide by this requirement will be assigned a late penalty. Alternate arrangements may include the setting of a make-up test or assignment; transferring the weight of a missed test or assignment to another test or assignment, or extending a deadline. Ryerson's policy concerning alternate arrangements for medical and compassionate reasons may be found at [www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol134.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol134.pdf). Ryerson's policy concerning accommodation of student religious, aboriginal, and spiritual observance may be found at [www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol150.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol150.pdf).
  - (1) **Medical Considerations:** In order for alternate arrangements to be made on medical grounds, the student must supply the instructor with a *Ryerson Medical Certificate*, or a letter on letterhead from a physician with the student declaration portion of the *Ryerson Medical Certificate* attached. The *Ryerson Medical Certificate* may be found at [www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf).
  - (2) **Compassionate Considerations:** In order for alternate arrangements to be made on compassionate grounds, the student must supply the instructor with documentation supporting the claim, where possible.
  - (3) **Religious, Aboriginal, and Spiritual Observance:** Students are strongly encouraged to notify instructors of an observance accommodation issue within the first two weeks of classes. Requests for accommodation of observance can be made informally or formally to the instructor. Informal requests will be made verbally through private discussion or through an email between the student and instructor. For formal requests, student must submit a clear explanation of the observance and requested accommodation along with a copy of the Accommodation of Student Religious, Aboriginal and Spiritual Observance form, which may be found at [www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/reobservforminstr.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/reobservforminstr.pdf).
- Alternate arrangements will *only* be made on the basis of circumstances that are both (1) legitimate and (2) unforeseeable. Some examples of circumstances that typically fail to meet one or both of these conditions are: extra-curricular activities, employment obligations, multiple deadlines, and computer malfunctions.

### Academic Misconduct

- For detailed information concerning academic misconduct and the relevant penalties, see Ryerson University's *Student Code of Academic Conduct* at [www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf).
- Students should be aware that the instructor reserves the right to conduct an oral examination on the contents of any submitted assignment.

All readings will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course. Students are expected to bring the readings to class each week, in either paper or electronic form. The list of readings below may be revised as the course progresses, depending on the interests of the class and the pace of discussion.

### **The Nature of Belief, an Introduction (1-2 weeks)**

The first class or two will be used to orient students to the philosophy of belief, and to cover some important foundational material. Topics will include the nature of propositional attitudes, the semantics of propositional contents, the metaphysics of mental states, and a survey of several puzzles about belief. The 'possible-worlds' conception of propositions and belief will be introduced.

- Frege, G. 1956. The thought: A logical inquiry. *Mind* 65: 289-311. [originally published in 1918].
- Schwitzgebel, Eric. [Belief](#). In Zalta, E. (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition).
- Stalnaker, Robert. 1976. Propositions. In A.F. MacKay and D. D. Merrill (eds.), *Issues in the Philosophy of Language*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 79-91.

### **What a Person Can Will to Believe (2 weeks)**

The fact that a person believes some proposition is an objective fact about that person. But for it to be an objective fact, it must be in some way and to some extent independent of that person's will. It cannot be, in other words, wholly a matter of choice whether a person believes some proposition. But if this is so, then in what sense can a person be rational or responsible in believing what she does? And why is there something pathological about being unhappy with one's beliefs but not from (e.g.) one's height or weight? This unit will consider the nature, extent and significance of a person's voluntary control over what she believes.

- Jonathan Bennett. 1990. Why Is Belief Involuntary? *Analysis* 50: 93.
- Hieronimy, P. 2012. Believing at Will. In Hunter, D. (ed.) *Belief and Agency, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Volume*.
- Kieran Setiya. 2008. Believing at Will. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 32.
- Williams, B. 1970. Deciding to Believe. In Keifer, H. and Munitz, M. (eds.) *Language, Belief and Metaphysics*. Albany: State University of New York. Reprinted in Williams, B. (1973). *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **What a Person Cannot Believe (3 weeks)**

Something explains the fact that a person believes what she does. What a person believes must depend on the facts, on the way the world actually is. It is also a contingent fact that a person believes what she does. (More carefully, for a good deal of what a person believes it is contingent that she believes it.) This means that what a person believes must depend on contingent facts about the world. Had those facts been different then the person's beliefs would have been different too. This means that there are things that a person cannot believe. But what exactly are those facts that determine what a person believes and in what sense do they determine or limit what a person can believe? Can we identify those limits? Why not? This unit will consider some ways in which what a person believes depends on the facts and how this dependency limits what a person can believe.

### **Impossibility**

- Frege, G. 1948. Sense and reference. *Philosophical Review* 57: 209-230. [Originally published in 1892].
- Kripke, S. 1979. A puzzle about belief. In A. Margalit (ed.). *Meaning and Use*. (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 239-283.

## Externalism

- Burge, Tyler. 1979. Individualism and the Mental. In French, Uehling, and Wettstein (eds.) *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, IV, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 73–121.
- Chalmers, David. 2002. The Component of Content. In Chalmers, D. (ed.). *Philosophy of Mind, classical and contemporary readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stalnaker, Robert. On What's In The Head. In XXX.

## What a Person Must Believe (3 weeks)

While it is an objective fact that a person believes what she does, there is also something essentially subjective about a person's beliefs, something that marks off her conception of the world from everyone else's. For it to be in some way subjective that a person believes what she does, it must be that what she believes depends on the fact that she is the one believing it. There must, in other words, be things that each person is required to believe but that no one else is required to believe. What could these subjective limits of belief be? This unit will examine the nature of these limits and their ground. We will start by considering standard accounts of what is special in a person's beliefs about herself (so-called *de se* belief.) We will then consider one of two specific puzzles about *de se* belief.

### *De Se* Belief

- Lewis, David. 1979. Attitudes *de dicto* and *de se*. *Philosophical Review*, 88, 513–543.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1986. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: oxford University Press. (Chapter 3.)
- Perry, John. 1979. The problem of the essential indexical. *Noûs* 13: 3-21

#### A Puzzle About Self-Locating Belief

- Elga, A. 2000. Self-locating Belief and the Sleeping Beauty Problem. *Analysis* 60: 143-47.
- Lewis, D. 2001. Sleeping Beauty: Reply to Elga. *Analysis* 61: 171-76.
- Stalnaker, R. 2008. Another Attempt to Put Sleeping Beauty to Rest. In Hunter, D. (ed.) *Belief and Agency*, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Volume.

#### A Puzzle about Action and Belief

- Anscombe, G.E.M. 1956. *Intention*. Oxford: Blackwell. (Selections)
- Hampshire, Stuart. 1975. *Freedom of the Individual*. New York: Barnes and Noble. (Selections)
- Moran, R. 2002. Anscombe on Practical Knowledge. XXX

## What a Person Ought to Believe (2 weeks)

We sometimes say that a person ought to know or ought to believe some proposition. We might say, for instance, that a student ought to know the rules about academic misconduct. Assuming that knowledge requires belief, this means that a student ought to have some beliefs about the rules on academic misconduct. But what is it that a person ought to believe, what sort of requirement is this, and what makes it true that a person ought to believe some proposition? The standard view is that a person ought to believe some proposition just in case her evidence indicates that it is true. This standard view finds support in considerations about rationality and the nature of theoretical deliberation. But it is opposed by a recently developed view according to which what a person ought to believe is determined by her practical obligations. This unit will consider the recent debate over the normativity of belief.

- Feldman, R. (2000). The Ethics of Belief. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 60: 667-95.
- Shah, N. (2006). A New Argument for Evidentialism. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 56(225): 481-498.
- Thomson, J.J. (2008). *Normativity*. Chicago: Open Court. (Selections)