

Course: Theoretical philosophy
Philosophy International Curriculum
Academic Year: 2022/2023
Topic: The Ethics of Belief
Lecturer: Prof. Gabriele Gava (gabriele.gava@unito.it)

Description

The central question of the ethics of belief concerns the norms (epistemic, prudential, moral?) that govern the formation of beliefs. The debate is divided between evidentialists (who maintains that beliefs are only rational when they are supported by evidence) and non-evidentialists (who argue that there are cases in which it is legitimate to believe in absence of evidence in support of our belief). The course will start with an analysis of some classic figures who have defended forms of evidentialism (Locke, Clifford) and non-evidentialism (Pascal, Kant, James). We will then move to the consideration of the current debate.

Class

The course will consist of traditional lectures, followed by intensive discussions.

Each class will be divided in two parts: The first part will be dedicated to explaining the argument in a text; the second part will be dedicated to discussion.

Exam

The exam will have a written and an oral part. You will have to write a short paper (4.000 words) on themes and texts discussed in class. Additionally, there will be an oral exam on the texts discussed in class and an additional volume.

Bibliography

Each week, two texts will be made available through Moodle, which will then be presented and discussed in class. The texts will be presented in the first part of class and will then be discussed together. During class, students will also have the possibility to present the project of their papers:

In class, we will discuss the following texts:

First week:

- B. Pascal, Fragment 'Infinity-nothingness', in *Pensées*.
- I. Kant, 'On having opinions, knowing and believing,' in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Second week:

- William Kingdon Clifford, 'The ethics of belief,' *Contemporary Review* 1877.
- William James, 'The will to believe,' in *The will to believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, New York 1896.

Third week:

- R. Foley, 'Nonepistemic reasons for believing,' in *The theory of epistemic rationality*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- T. Kelly, 'The rationality of belief and some other propositional attitudes,' *Philosophical Studies* 110, 2002.

Forth week:

- P. Hieronymi, 'The wrong kind of reason,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 102, 9, 2005.
- N. Shah, 'A new argument for evidentialism,' *Philosophical Quarterly* 56, 2006.

Fifth week:

- A. Reisner, 'The possibility of pragmatic reasons for belief and the wrong kind of reasons problem,' *Philosophical Studies* 145, 2009.
- Berislav Marušić, 'Belief and difficult action,' *Philosophers' Imprint* 12, 2012.

Sixth week:

- J. Fantl, M. McGrath, 'Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification', *The Philosophical Review* 111, 2002.
- R. J. Bolinger, 'The rational impermissibility of accepting (some) racial generalizations,' *Synthese* 197, 2020.

Additionally, in view of the exam, students will have to study one of the following volumes:

- Jonathan Adler, *Belief's own ethics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002.
- Berislav Marušić, *Evidence and agency: norms of belief for promising and resolving*, New York: Oxford, 2015.