Philosophy 124: Truth Even Unto Its Innermost Parts?
The Ethics of Belief

Instructor: Berislav Marušić
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Course Description
The Brandeis University motto is: “Truth Even Unto Its Innermost Parts.” But is it true? Is it right to always believe the truth and to always seek the truth? Is it rational? And what makes belief rational and right? —The course will address these central questions in the ethics of belief by considering historical and contemporary texts in analytic philosophy that address them. We will study the following topics: Pascal’s Wager, evidentialism and pragmatism, the relationship between belief and the will, the nature of reasons for belief, the relationship between beliefs and promises, what it is to believe another person, how belief can contribute to injustice, the nature of bias, and how beliefs can wrong.

Requirements
- First Paper (approx. 4 pages) 25% (Due date: March 15)
- Second Paper (approx. 4 pages) 25% (Due date: May 9)
- Final Exam 25%
- Participation 25%

Readings: All readings will be available on LATTE. Please bring printouts to class.

Laptop Policy: Please do not use laptops or other devices with screens in class.

Learning Goals
General goals are to learn how to carefully read important contemporary texts, to extract and evaluate philosophical arguments from them, to critically engage with and build upon these arguments, and to write clearly about them. The particular goals are to understand how ethical issues come to bear on belief, to reflect on the ethical significance of belief, and to get an overview of the central debates in contemporary ethics of belief.
For more information, see the Philosophy Department’s learning goals at:
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/philosophy/undergrad/learninggoals.html

Academic Dishonesty
Academic Dishonesty will be reported to the Department of Student Development and Conduct. Students are responsible to inform themselves about what constitutes dishonesty.

Disability
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and need to have special accommodations for this class, please see me immediately.

Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)
Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

1/16–1/17 – Evidentialism vs. Pragmatism
   Berislav Marušić, “The Ethics of Belief”

1/22–1/24 – Pascal’s Wager
   Blaise Pascal, Pensées, selection.
   “Pascal’s Wager” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

1/28–1/31 – Evidentialism
   William Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”
   Jonathan Adler, Belief’s Own Ethics, ch.1

2/4–2/7 – Pragmatism
   William James, “The Will to Believe”
   Susanna Rinard, “No Exception for Belief”

2/11–2/14 – Belief and the Will
   Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe”
   David Owens, Reason without Freedom, ch.2

2/25–2/28 – Pragmatic Encroachment
   Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath, “Evidence, Pragmatics and Justification”

3/4–3/7 – The Wrong Kind of Reason
   Mark Schroeder, “The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons”
   Pamela Hieronymi, “The Use of Reasons in Thought”

3/11–3/14 – The Nature of Belief
   Matthew Boyle, “The Activity of Reason”

3/18–3/21 – Promising and Resolving against the Evidence
   Berislav Marušić, Evidence and Agency, selections

3/25–3/28 – Believing Someone
   Elizabeth Anscombe, “What Is It to Believe Someone?”
   Richard Moran, “Getting Told and Being Believed”

4/1–4/11 – Epistemic Injustice and Feminist Epistemology
   Miranda Fricker, Epistemic Injustice, ch.1-2, 7

4/15–4/18 – How Can Beliefs Morally Wrong Someone?
   Berislav Marušić and Stephen White, “How Can Beliefs Wrong?”
   (Background: P.F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”)

4/29–5/1 – Implicit Bias
   Daniel Kelly and Erica Roedder, “Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias”