



**Course Title:** The Ethics of Belief: Constructing Your Personhood

**Course Code:** Phil 121 W

**Instructor:** Richie Kim

## Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Tuesdays 5:00-6:15pm PST

Meeting location: Zoom

The live class sessions will be recorded. You can attend the live sessions on Zoom or simply watch the recordings.

## Course Features:

- Live session
  - Lecture with some Q&A: T 5:00-6:15pm (recorded)
  - Bonus time (optional): T 6:15pm, 20-30 mins, for discussions (recorded)
- Activities & Coursework
  - Activities and course materials posted in Canvas
  - Weekly *suneimi* (“to be with”) will take place in Discussions in Canvas

## Course Summary

Anyone with an interest in the topics of this course is welcome, indeed, regardless of whether you have a philosophical background or have taken any philosophy courses before. This course is designed to be challenging, difficult, and (hopefully) rewarding for anyone, from the first-time philosophy student to those more seasoned in the history and methods of philosophy.

Each week, there will be one primary classical or contemporary reading concerning at least one of the following issues: the nature of belief, the ethics of belief, the freedom to believe, responsibility for beliefs, and responsibility for who you are. There will also be weekly introduction videos (by me) that will provide some details about the week’s topics to give you a sense of what I will be drawing from in the reading and what we will be focusing on in the class meeting. And there will be one primary video (by me or from external sources) pertinent to the topic of the week. In addition to the one primary reading and one primary video each week, I will also

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sometimes provide further suggested readings or videos. One should feel no pressure at all to engage with these additional materials. They are provided simply in the case that you might later want to engage in further inquiry into the specific topics.

For the weekly suneimi (“to be with” or “to gather together”, pronounced soon'-i-mee), I will pose a question for conversation. Participation in the weekly suneimi involves posting what I call a “Response & Reaction” (R&R). All are welcome to participate, whether or not you are taking the class for credit. You are to post a Response to the week’s discussion question. And then you are to post a Reaction to the Response of the classmate that is directly above yours. You are highly encouraged to join in on the R&Rs between your other classmates as well! Suneimi is to gather together, and we will do so in healthy conversation. Surely, there will be much to learn from one another in this way.

*\*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

## Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - To earn credit, students are required to participate in 7 of 10 weekly Responses & Reactions: Posting a response to the week’s discussion question and posting a reaction to the response posted directly above yours.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - To earn a letter grade, students are required to participate in at least 7 of 10 weekly Responses & Reactions: Posting a response to the discussion question and posting a reaction to the response posted directly above yours.
    - A = Student has posted 10 of 10 Discussion Responses & Reactions. The posts are reflective and thoroughly address the discussion question and the other student’s post.
    - B = Student has posted 9 of 10 Discussion Responses & Reactions. The posts are reflective and thoroughly address the discussion question and the other student’s post.
    - C = Student has posted 8 of 10 Discussion Responses & Reactions. The posts are reflective and thoroughly address the discussion question and the other student’s post.
    - D = Student has posted 7 of 10 Discussion Responses & Reactions. The posts are reflective and thoroughly address the discussion question and the other student’s post.

- \*Posting in the "General Class Comments and Question" thread does not count towards credit.

*\*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

## Textbooks/Required Materials

No required textbooks. All readings are available on Canvas as electronic files.

## First Activity

The first activity is optional, and each part of the activity below is optional. Please only respond to what you are comfortable enough to share.

(1) Introduce yourself:

- a. Your preferred name (and pronouns)
- b. Where you are from
- c. What industries you are in and/or have been in
- d. Your experience with philosophy

(2) Sharing beliefs that matter to you:

- a. Do you have any substantive beliefs that you did *not* acquire from, and/or do *not* maintain by way of, (good) *evidence as a rational basis*?
  - i. About what you value
  - ii. About what is sacred to you
  - iii. About what is an important practice in life
- b. Are there any substantive beliefs that you are now questioning in your life?

(3) What are you hoping to gain in taking this course?

## Tentative Weekly Outline

For each week, please attempt to have the readings of papers and viewings of videos completed *before* the start of the live class meeting (if you are attending) or before you view the recording.

The weekly *suneimi* (Response & Reaction to the discussion question) is to be completed *after* our live class meeting.

INTRODUCTION

**Week One: The Questions - Issues concerning the Nature and Ethics of Belief**

Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, “Gay Science” (1882), only 341

Reading: Daniel Dennett, “True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why it Works” (1981), only 57-61

Reading: Robert Merrihew Adams, “Involuntary Sins” (1985), only 1-14

Video: Closer to the Truth: “Daniel Dennett, What is Belief?”

Further reading: Barry Maguire, “There Are No Reasons for Affective Attitudes” (2017)

Learning objectives:

- Students will be able to identify the general issues concerning the ethics of mind, the ethics of belief, and the nature of belief, along with the major general positions on these issues
- Students will examine ways in which we appropriately hold morally responsible features of a person that are involuntarily acquired

Topics

- The origin of the debate concerning the ethics of belief
- The nature of doxastic norms and the aim(s) of beliefs
- Varieties of evidentialism and non-evidentialism
- Belief skepticism and instrumentalism about belief
- Responsibility for the involuntary attitudes

ETHICAL ISSUES CONCERNING BELIEF

**Week Two: Motivating the Debate - The Problem of the Phenomena of Bullshit**

Reading: Harry Frankfurt, “On Bullshit” (1986)

Video: Frankfurt interview, “Bullshit! Featuring Harry Frankfurt” (2016)

Further reading: Gerald Allen Cohen, “Deeper into Bullshit” (2002)

Learning objectives:

- Students will understand the differences between bluffing, lying, and bullshitting, at least according to Frankfurt
- Students will scrutinizing the differences between truth as objective and an antirealism about truth in the guise of sincerity and face the dangers of accepting the latter

Topics

- The essential features of bullshit
- The harms of bullshit in society
- Objective truth vs. being truth to oneself
- Comparing the bluffer, the bullshitter, the liar, and the earnest

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### Week Three: Motivating the Debate - An Aspiration Towards Enlightenment

Reading: Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784)

Video: “Age of Enlightenment: Age of Reason Explained” (2021)

Further reading: Emmanuel Eze, “Answering the Question, ‘What Remains of Enlightenment?’” (2002)

Learning objectives:

- Students will rehearse their knowledge of the Age of Enlightenment and the various intellectual revolutions and thinkers
- Students will provide contemporary examples of ‘guardians’ and scrutinize what may be harmful about following their guidance

Topics

- The Enlightenment
- Nonage and its causes
- The threat of guardians
- Three restrictions on freedom in relation to enlightenment
- Three types of reasoning: nonage, private, and public
- Age of enlightenment vs an enlightened age

### Week Four: The Debate - Evidentialism

Reading: William Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” (1877)

Video: TED Talk, Cortney Warren, “Honest Liars - The Psychology of Self-Deception” (2014)

Further reading: Peter Van Inwagen, “Is it Wrong Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone to Believe Anything on Insufficient Evidence?” (2013)

Learning objectives:

- Students will investigate their moral intuitions in relation to powerful anecdotes and thought experiments
- Students will understand the central features of evidentialism about beliefs and its problems and limitations

Topics

- The shipwreck and ship owner
- The duty of inquiry: honestly held beliefs vs being entitled to beliefs
- The duty of inquiry: duty to ourselves and to others
- The connections between action and belief, and a person’s beliefs and the community
- The weight of authority
- The limits of inference

## Week Five: The Debate - Non-Evidentialism

Reading: William James, “The Will to Believe” (1896)

Video: “The Philosophy of William James” (2021)

Further reading: Robert Merrihew Adams, “The Virtue of Faith” (1984)

Learning objectives:

- Students will understand possible limitations of evidentialism about beliefs, and assess ways in which non-evidentialism may fill the lacunae left by evidentialism
- Students will scrutinize non-evidentialist forms of justification of belief, and will become familiarized with classical objections to non-evidentialism

Topics

- Adopting beliefs without evidence
- Justification for beliefs without evidence
- The case of faith
- Our passional nature
- Problems with Clifford’s views
- Problems with James’ views

## THE NATURE OF BELIEF

### Week Six: Interpretationism about Belief

Reading: Daniel Dennett, “True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why it Works” (1981)

Video: Patricia Churchland, “What is Eliminative Materialism?” (2018)

Further reading: Lynne Rudder Baker, “Instrumental Intentionality” (1986)

Learning objectives:

- Students will evaluate the merits and shortcomings of strong belief realism, the modest realism of interpretationism, and the non-realism of eliminativism
- Students will understand a radical new way we can conceive of and attribute knowledge and beliefs to non-human and non-living beings by learning different predicative strategies for behavior

Topics

- Realism vs Eliminative Materialism
- A middle position: Interpretationism about the nature of belief
- Strategies for predicting behavior
- The physical stance, the design stance, and the intentional stance
- True believers as intentional systems
- Problems with the intentional strategy

## **Week Seven: Realism about Belief & Believing at Will**

Reading: Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe” (1970)

Video: Patricia Churchland, “Neurophilosophy and Free Will” (2015)

Further reading: Eric Mandelbaum, “Thinking is Believing” (2013)

Learning objectives:

- Students will assess the controversial view about the involuntariness of belief, and learn some of the considerations in favor of the view
- Students will evaluate the connections between voluntariness and responsibility, and will be able to identify reasons that involuntariness may make responsibility for belief and personhood implausible to defend

Topics

- The aim of belief as truth: 3 features
- The nature of belief: 5 characteristics
- B-state machines
- A deflationary conception of knowledge in relation to belief
- The thesis: The impossibility of believing upon deciding
- Problems with Williams’ thesis

## **CONSTRUCTING THE SELF**

### **Week Eight: Freedom and Responsibility in Beliefs**

Reading: Pamela Hieronymi, “Responsibility for Believing” (2008)

Video: LeeAnn Epstein, “Kavka Toxin Paradox Explained” (2015)

Further reading: Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, “Free in Belief and Desire” (1996)

Learning objectives:

- Students will identify ways in which we might voluntarism as a necessary condition for all forms of responsibility
- Students will be understand which essential features of beliefs that make them involuntary and how those feature make them something are re

Topics

- Rejecting the underlying assumption of voluntarism
- An account of responsibility as answerability
- An account of voluntariness that excludes beliefs
- Answerability and non-voluntariness about belief
- Why voluntarism seems plausible and must be limited

## Week Nine: Practical Nihilism and Honest Illusions

Reading: Nadeem Hussain, “Honest Illusions: Valuing for Nietzsche’s Free Spirits” (2007)

Video: “Becoming Who You Really Are - The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche” (2021)

Further reading: R. Lanier Anderson, “Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption (2005)

Learning objectives:

- Students will learn of the general impacts of Nietzsche’s philosophical works and be able to apply them to the themes of this course
- Students will evaluate the merits of Nietzsche’s way of facing up to the truths about our reality and dealing with the threat of practical nihilism as the result of our beliefs about values and our lives
- Students will evaluate the possible dangers of adopting honest illusions as is prescribed by Nietzsche

Topics

- Nietzsche’s theoretical nihilism
- The dangers of practical nihilism
- Übermenschen, ‘genuine philosophers’, free spirits
- Valuing and revaluing
- Learning from the artist

## Week Ten: Facing Up to Yourself and Learning How to Be

Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals” (1887), only Preface 1

Reading: Harry Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion” (1992)

Video: Lecture by Harry Frankfurt: “A Life of Learning” (2017)

Further reading: Christopher Hookway, “Epistemic Akrasia and Epistemic Virtue” (2001)

Learning objectives:

- Students will reevaluate what we have encountered in this course by facing up to what might be a troublesome lack of awareness, motivation, and courage
- Students will challenge themselves on their own ambivalences and scrutinize what sorts of whole-heartedness they aim to achieve

Topics

- Even fainter than the love of truth
- Being the victim of lies, it’s betrayal and self-betrayal
- On ambivalence
- On whole-heartedness and self-satisfaction
- Richie’s argument about the responsibility of your beliefs
- Richie’s argument that all facts are friendly