The Maps by Which We Steer
The Philosophy and Science of Belief

PHIL 535: Studies in Philosophy of Mind
Spring Term 2024
Purdue University
Instructors: Evan Westra and Daniel Kelly

1. Course Description

Philosopher Frank Ramsey once described beliefs as the "map by which we steer."
Intuitively, beliefs—that Paris is the capital of France, that 5+7 = 12, that theft is wrong,
that Bach's fugues are lovely—are psychological states that aim to depict the world
accurately, so that the believer might move through it smoothly. When they succeed in
accurately depicting their subject matter, beliefs can be evaluated as true (otherwise they are
false). When a believer is confronted with new evidence, their beliefs can be updated
rationally (or irrationally). When paired with other mental states like desires, beliefs can lead
to action that is reasonable (or unreasonable). When made public, beliefs interact with
reputations, signaling important information about the believer's social identity and their
commitment to a group and its values

Despite their centrality to so much human activity, the fundamental nature of these mental
states remains hotly contested in philosophy and cognitive science. In this class we'll explore
a range of approaches to belief, with an eye towards clarifying the many different roles they
appear to play in our cognitive and social lives. In so doing we'll consider perspectives from
researchers working on the foundations of cognitive science, social epistemology, the
psychology of religion, polarization and misinformation, and more.

2. Class Meetings

Class meets Tuesday and Thursday from 12:00 – 1:15am, Room 1248 of Beering Hall.

3. Office Hours and Contact Information

Evan Westra
    Office: 7141 Beering Hall
    Email: ewestra@purdue.edu
    Office Hours: Tuesday after class & by appointment

Daniel Kelly
    Office: 7126 Beering Hall
    Email: drkelly@purdue.edu
    Office Hours: 9:00am – 11:00am Thursday, or by (zoom or irl) appointment

4. Grading

Grades will be determined as follows:

       For Philosophy PhD students

Participation, class discussion:	10%
Outlines (3x)	30%
Prospectus	5%
Term Paper Presentation (including typed up outline of talk)	20%
Term Paper	35%

       For non-Philosophy PhD students

Participation, class discussion:	10%
Conversation Starters (3x):	30%
Prospectus	5%
Term Paper Presentation (including typed up outline of talk)	20%
Term Paper	35%

Grades will be given on the standard 0-100 point grading scale:

100-98:	A+
97-93:	A
92-90:	A-
89-87:	B+
86-83:	B
82-80:	B-
79-77:	C+
76-73:	C
72-70:	C-
69-67:	D+
66-63:	D
62-60:	D-
59-0:	F

5. Assessment Machinery

Outlines
- These will be graded out of 20 points
- A sign-up sheet for particular dates will be circulated in class, and eventually posted on the Brightspace page
- For each required reading paper, one student will do an outline of the paper
  - Submit it via Brightspace the night before class
  - Evan / Dan will print out and bring a copy for everyone in class
  - The author of the outline will use it to introduce and walk us through the paper
- There are Two Steps to these exercises. The main one is writing up an outline of a paper, pulling out its "bird's eye view" structure—sections, main claims of sections, basic arguments offered in support of those claims. Hence the name.
  - How to do it? **Two Steps**:

- **Step 1**: Create an outline of the reading using the standard capital Roman numerals>capital letters>Arabic numerals>small letters>small Roman numerals system to mark different "levels" of indentation in your outline
    - Most word processors will do this kind of indentation formatting and number/lettering for you automatically
    - The outline should be no less than 1 page and no longer than 2 – longer is not better, part of the point is to synthesis, compress, pull out the main bones, claims, arguments of the paper
    - If you've never done an outline before
        - This is a good helpful overview: https://libguides.gatech.edu/c.php?g=54271&p=350394
        - You can also look at this for a helpful model: https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/KellyOutlineIsmaelOnDennett2018.pdf
- **Step 2**: Then on a **second page** in the same document, separate from your outline, do these three things:
    1) Formulate in your *own words* the **main question** you take the paper to be addressing
    2) Identify a sentence or two *from the paper* (i.e. quoted verbatim from the text itself) that best states **the answer** the author gives to the main question you identified in the paper. This will be usually also be the **thesis** of the paper, its main point, its Take Home Message
    3) **Optional**: since you've sunk you head into it, if you've got the space, feel free to take the opportunity to formulate a question or two of your own that the paper provoked

Conversation Starters
- These will be graded out of 20 points
- A sign-up sheet for particular dates will be circulated in class, and eventually posted on the Brightspace page
- For each required reading paper, one student will do a conversation starter for the paper
    - Submit it via Brightspace the night before class
    - Evan / Dan will print out and bring a copy for everyone in class
    - Once we've gone through the outline, we'll move on to the conversation starter to open up discussion
- The basic idea of a conversation starter should be simple enough, but here's some more specific thoughts
    - Think of your mission here as getting in some reps of the skill of formulating the kinds of questions you'd ask at the Q&A of a talk, of which there are many recognizable genres, including but not limited to
    - Formulating a challenge or objection
    - Spotlighting a facet of the paper that was opaque or that could use clarification

- o Connecting one of the main ideas or claims of the paper to some other issue, idea, perspective, or paper discussed in class
  - o Drawing out an interesting implication
- A prompt idea:
  - o Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a literary critic, made a distinction that has been useful in reading both philosophy and philosophy-adjacent stuff. It's between what she calls a *paranoid reading*, which focuses on what's wrong or problematic about a work of art, and a *reparative reading*, which seeks out what might be nourishing or healing in a work of art, even if the work is flawed.
  - o It may help to keep this distinction in mind when putting together conversation starters. A common thing you might do is of course raise *objections*, which are in some ways the typical fare of philosophy, and so formulating them is a useful skill to continue developing. But you needn't *only* give the articles a paranoid reading. Work on seeing them through a reparative kind of perspective as well, or at least a less critical and more sympathetic and positive one. So also feel encouraged to point out ideas that strike you as interesting, suggestive, or worthy of being developed in more detail, even if they are flawed in some ways, or put to argumentative and dialectical purposes that you disagree with.

Seminar participants will be asked to sign up to write an outline or a conversation starter for three different papers over the course of the semester using the comment function on this Google Spreadsheet.

Final Paper Prospectus
- About a month from the end of the term (March 25th), you'll submit a **prospectus** for your final paper, which is a brief description of the argument you propose to make and how it responds to the existing literature. For a guidelines on how to write a prospectus, see this document, which will also be posted on the Brightspace page.

End of Semester Mini-Conference
- The last four or five class sessions of the semester will be devoted to presenting/workshopping final papers as works in progress. Each student will:
  - o Give a roughly 10ish minute presentation of your term paper project to the class. This should include the usual components, such as a **clearly stated thesis**, overview and elaboration of **the argument**, perhaps responses to anticipated objections, etc., and can be done using handouts or via a PowerPoint presentation.
  - o Get 10ish minutes of questions and feedback from the class

Term Paper
- A final paper on a suitable topic selected from the topics discussed over the course of the semester. It should aim at clocking in about around 3000 words, and include proper in text citations and end of document bibliography, APA style. The paper will be due Wednesday May 1st and should be submitted through Brightspace.

<u>6. Schedule</u>

Below is the reading list. We'll try to stick to this, but might call some changes as we go, depending on how fast we're going, what we're finding compelling, and any other scheduling eventualities that come up. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course Brightspace page.

Date	Topic	Readings
Week 1 (1/9, 1/11)	Why believe in belief?	Background/The basics • Van Leeuwen & Lombrozo, 'The puzzle of belief' • Paul Churchland 'Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes' • Jerry Fodor 'The Persistence of the Attitudes' Intro to *Psychosemantics* • Clark, *Mindware*, Chapter 3, 'Patterns, Contents, Causes' • Stich, 'Deconstructing The Mind'

Week 2 (1/16, 1/18)	The cognitive architecture and evolutionary functions of beliefs	1. Fodor, Modularity of Mind, 'Part IV: Central Systems'
		   a. Stich, 'Beliefs and Subdoxastic States'
		2. Sterelny, *Thought in a Hostile World* Chapter 3, Fuels for Success
		   a. Christensen, The Decoupled Representation Theory of the Evolution of Cognition—A Critical Assessment

Week 3 (1/23, 1/25) Dan away 1/23	Believing willy-nilly?	3. McKay, R. T., & Dennett, D. C. (2009). The evolution of misbelief. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *32*(6), 493-510. 4. Mandelbaum, E. (2014). Thinking is believing. *Inquiry*, *57*(1), 55-96.
Week 4 (1/30, 2/1)	Karlanfest! On the rational responsiveness of belief	5. Helton, G. (2020). If you can't change what you believe, you don't believe it. *Noûs*, *54*(3), 501-526. 6. Karlan, B. (2022). The rational dynamics of implicit thought. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *100*(4), 774-788.

Week 5 (2/6, 2/8)	Not *all* beliefs! Belief vs. other belief-like attitudes	7. Neil van Leeuwen, ''The Trinity and the Light Switch'
		    a. Neil Van Leeuwen, 'The factual belief fallacy'
		    b. Sperber, 'Intuitive and reflective beliefs'
		8. Munro, 'Capturing the conspiracist's imagination'

Week 6 (2/13, 2/15)	Rational after all? Cultural evolution and social epistemology to the rescue	9. Levy, *Bad Beliefs* (Ch. 2)
		10. Levy, *Bad Beliefs* (Ch. 3)
		    a. Henrich *The Secret of our Success*, Chapter Seven, On the Origin of Faith?
		    b. Kelly Hoburg, A Tale of Two Processes

Week 7 (2/20, 2/22) Dan away 2/20	Not born yesterday? On gullibility and the social nature of reasoning	11. Mercier, *Not born yesterday,* Ch 1-3 12. Mercier & Sperber, 'Why do humans reason? Arguments for an argumentative theory'

Week 8 (2/27, 2/29)	Believing whatever makes us look good?	13. Daniel Williams, "Socially adaptive belief"
		    a. Daniel Williams, "The marketplace of rationalizations'
		14. Sommer et al. "Updating, Evidence Evaluation, and Operator Availability: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Belief"
		    a. Porot and Mandelbaum, 'Belief: Dumb, Cold, & Cynical'

Week 9 (3/5, 3/7)	Belief attribution: mindreading-based accounts	15. Kovacs, 'Belief files in theory of mind reasoning'
		    a. Westra, 'Social cognition and theory of mind [Background]
		16. Phillips & Norby, Factive theory of mind
		    a. Phillips et al., Knowledge before belief
		    b. Westra & Nagel, Mindreading in conversation

Spring Break		

Week 10 (3/19)
Berio visit
No class 3/21
	Belief attribution, language, and culture	17. Moore, 'The cultural evolution of mind-modeling'
		   a. Geurts, 'First saying, then believing: the pragmatic roots of folk psychology.'
		   b. Barrett & Saxe, 'Are some cultures more mind-minded in their moral judgments than others?"

Week 11 (3/26, 3/28)
Berio visit
	Belief and regulative folk psychology	18. TBD
		   a. Zawidzki, *Mindshaping*, Preface & Chapter 7
		   b. McGeer, 'The regulative dimension of folk psychology'
		   c. McGeer, 'Enculturating folk psychologists'
		Westra, 'Symbolic belief in social cognition'

Week 12 (4/2; 4/4) Dan away 4/4	Delusions	19. Bortolotti, *Why Delusions Matter*, Ch. 1 20. Bortolotti, *Why Delusions Matter*, Ch. 2
Week 13 (4/9, 4/11)	Delusions	21. Bortolotti, *Why Delusions Matter, Ch.* 3 22. Bortolotti, *Why Delusions Matter, Ch.* 4
Week 14 (4/16, 4/18)	*Presentations*	
Week 15 (4/23, 4/25)		

Prospectuses are due on Monday 3/25. Please submit through Brightspace. We will get them back to you with feedback in a week or so, so if you have any questions about our comments, you can ask us before with plenty of lead way before in-class presentations begin.

Last day of Class: Thursday, 4/25

Final Papers Due: Wed 5/1

7. Course Policies

Class Sessions
The usual: you are expected to attend class, and if you miss a session please let one or both of us know (ahead of time if possible). We will try to begin on time, and will usually go right up until the end of the class session. Please come on time. Do not pack up your materials until class has been dismissed.

Class Participation
Classes will be mostly discussion with some occasional lecture mixed in, when appropriate, all focused on the topics raised by the readings. Students are encouraged to ask questions and participate in the conversation – this is usually the best way to get a grip on some very abstract issues and ultimately to understand philosophy. Conversations may get animated, and in the course of our frank discussion of ideas we will likely not always agree with each other. But we will all keep the atmosphere respectful, inclusive, and, ideally, fun.

We also realize that not everyone is equally outgoing or talkative in class; hence, in part, the written parts of the participation grades. However, actually talking it out is almost always enormously useful. Also, a consistent record of participation always helps a student's final grade if it is on a borderline at the end of the semester. On the other hand, students who have not been present and engaged throughout the semester will not get the benefit of the doubt in similar borderline cases, and in particularly egregious cases will have their grades dragged down.

Screens
Bold proposal: dare to give yourself a break from the internet and free will-sapping technology of distraction for 75 minutes! We would prefer that you exercise enough self-restraint to keep from texting or looking at your smartphone for the 75 minutes that class is in session, but since a formal prohibition would be too difficult to enforce, this remains a preference. Use of laptop computers and iPads during lectures will not be allowed without special dispensation. We are not inflexible; talk to us if you have good reason, special needs or extenuating circumstances. But in general there's a very good case for staying off screens while in class.

Emergencies
(See end of Syllabus for full Purdue attachment on Emergency Procedures and COVID guidelines). In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. Information about emergencies changes in the course can be gotten by contacting either instructor via email or phone, or by consulting the course website (see above for that information). Purdue's Emergency Procedures Handbook and other important emergency planning information is available online at: http://www.purdue.edu/emergency_preparedness/

To obtain updates regarding an ongoing emergency, and to sign up for Purdue Alert text messages, go to: http://www.purdue.edu/emergency/

Plagiarism
With the advent of the internet, plagiarism has become an increasingly serious problem at universities around the country, particularly in classes like this one, where papers determine a substantial part of the grade. Plagiarism and cheating on exams undermines the integrity of the academic community. When undetected, it gives the perpetrator an unfair advantage over students who are graded on the basis of their own work. In this class we will do our best to detect plagiarism and cheating. Students who are aware of violations by others should bring this to our attention. This is the right thing to do. It is also in your own self-interest.

In order to avoid plagiarizing from a source, both **direct quotations and paraphrases or summaries** of material found in traditional print media or on the internet must be acknowledged. If you have any questions about how this definition will be interpreted, please do not hesitate to discuss the matter with us.

With each assignment, a handful of students may be selected at random to submit their work to iThenticate, an online service that maintains an enormous database of papers that it uses to check for instances of plagiarism.

There will be zero tolerance for plagiarism in this course. Plagiarized papers will receive a 0, the student will automatically fail the course, and their name will be handed over to the university authorities. For more on the Purdue University policy on plagiarism, see the following websites:

- http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html
- https://www.purdue.edu/innovativelearning/teaching-remotely/integrity.aspx

Nondiscrimination Statement
Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. Purdue's nondiscrimination policy can be found at http://www.purdue.edu/purdue/ea_eou_statement.html.

Students with Disabilities
Purdue University strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center at: **drc@purdue.edu,** by phone: 765-494-1247, or at the website: https://www.purdue.edu/drc/students/index.php

External Sources
Using sources not listed on the syllabus in researching and writing papers is fine, as long as they are both to the point, and are properly cited. And at all times, when in doubt, ***cite your sources***! It is the best way to avoid being accused of plagiarism.

This is probably the best place to make this point, too: Wikipedia can be useful for getting a very broad grasp of positions and debates, but when it gets into details, especially on philosophic topics, it can just as often be horrible—sketchy, convoluted, misinformed, and often simply wrong. If you wish to consult online resources, we suggest you use some of the other, much better sites. Most prominent is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, but others are useful as well:

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://plato.stanford.edu/
- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://www.iep.utm.edu/
- Philosophy Compass: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17479991