

**Princeton University**  
**PHI/CHV 380: Explaining Values**  
Fall 2022  
Thursdays 1:30-4:20 -- Room 301, Wooten Hall  
Updated 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022

Dr. Victoria McGeer  
Wooten Hall, Room 307  
[vmcgeer@princeton.edu](mailto:vmcgeer@princeton.edu)  
258-0167

Office hours: TBA, but I am always available by appointment (email to set up)

### **Course Description:**

This seminar will focus on the philosophy of moral agency and responsibility, blame and punishment. It will examine how human interactions are permeated by evaluative understandings of agency and responsibility, and whether such evaluative understandings are well grounded. It will consider what implications this has for inter-personal relations, as well as for social institutions such as criminal justice. We will approach these issues from a multi-disciplinary perspective, examining how philosophical, scientific and institutional considerations can be brought into useful contact with one another.

### **Required Readings:**

The course readings will be available on Canvas. (To access Canvas, go to: <https://canvas.princeton.edu>). A provisional **schedule of readings** will also be available through Canvas (***please note: this may be updated in the course of the semester.***)

We will read on average 2-3 papers per week. Keep in mind that philosophy articles are generally quite difficult to read and require careful attention to argumentative detail. It is advisable to read through the material more than once. Please leave yourself plenty of time to do the week's readings.

### **Method of Evaluation:**

- Class participation & weekly discussion pieces (3 free passes) 25%
- Two argumentative papers:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> paper      **due Monday, Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 pm**      30%
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> paper      **due Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 pm (Dean's date)**      45%

### **Class participation:**

Because this is a seminar course, a significant portion of your grade (25%) will be based on class participation. Each week I will circulate a set of **discussion questions** focussed on the week's reading. *These can be found in the Assignments Section of the Canvas course website.*

I will expect you to come prepared to speak to these questions during class – especially during the more informal ‘tutorial’ part of the discussion with which we will try to wrap up every session. Bear in mind that the success of a seminar depends on active participation from everyone present!

### **Discussion Pieces:**

To help develop your analytic skills, I will also require you to turn in a written discussion piece at the beginning of each class (online submission to Canvas, Assignments Section). These will generally be due EACH WEEK (exceptions include weeks 1 and 12), but you may take 3 free passes over the course of the semester (*so you will be required to turn in 7 discussion pieces in total, with at least 3 – but preferably 4 – completed before the midterm break*).

The discussion pieces (approx. 250-400 words) will simply consist in a written response to ONE of the discussion questions assigned for the week (i.e. you will choose which of these questions to write on, *even though you will come prepared to speak to all of them in class*).

These discussion pieces won't be graded in any formal way (though I do use a scale of 1-5, with 5 being excellent!); in addition, I will give you some brief written feedback to help keep you on track;

### **Papers:**

The bulk of your grade (75%) will be based on **two papers**, one due at midterm and the other due on the Dean's date. More will be said about writing these papers as the due dates approach. But I will also post some information on Canvas that gives some general advice on how to write a philosophy paper. Even though you will likely have written philosophy papers before, it is worth reviewing this material.

- The **1<sup>st</sup> paper** will be shorter, 5-7 pages (1375-1925 words).  
Topics must be chosen from a list to be handed out in class.
- The **2<sup>nd</sup> paper** will be somewhat longer, 8-10 pages (2200-2750 words).

A list of suggested topics will be handed out, but you may also write on a different topic related to the course material once you have cleared it with me.

*Note: In the final week of the semester, we will focus on your final papers.* If class size permits, you will each give a short presentation of your topic, so we can discuss the ideas together. But if that is not possible, I will hold individual meetings with all of you in lieu of our seminar to give you some preliminary feedback on your paper ideas

### **Late submissions:**

Extensions will not be granted except for VERY good reasons. Late papers will be penalized if no extension is merited (one third of a letter grade for each day late). Please note, for the final paper, the deadline is a University deadline. I am not allowed to accept the final paper later than the deadline (A dean's permission is required to get a late paper accepted).