

## **ETHICS, PHIL V3701 [Preliminary]**

### **Teaching assistants:**

**Course description:** The course offers an introduction to and survey of ethical theory. We focus on three types of theory in normative ethics (utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics), as well as on some central topics in meta-ethics (reasons, values, rational motivation).

**Reading:** It is essential to do the readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. Please note that the class, while introductory, is rather ambitious. We cover a lot of ground, and difficult material. Many of our readings are so-called classics: they have had and continue to have tremendous influence, and require careful study. Preparation for class is time-consuming.

**Sections:** You are required to attend a section. In-class participation and participation in the discussions in your section count for 10% of your grade.

**Outlines/Analyses of the main argument:** The best way to read carefully is to make yourself an excerpt of the core argument in an article/part of a book. You should address the following aspects of a text: What is the main question? What is the main thesis? What are the premises? What is the structure of the argument? In order to practice this kind of analytical reading, you must submit 10 one-page outlines, each of them covering either one article or chapter/part of a book. You must submit at least 5 outlines in September. Ideally, you continue to make these outlines for the purposes of preparing for class, even after you submitted 10 outlines. The outlines count for 30% of the total grade.

**Midterm exam (after week 8):** The midterm counts for 20% of the grade.

**Papers:** Two papers (6 double-spaced pages each). The papers are response-papers to individual readings. This kind of paper builds on the work that goes into writing an outline. Provide a precise analysis of the argument. Based on this analysis, you should pick one aspect that interests you specifically, and discuss it in detail. You should address one of the readings already discussed in class. For your second paper, you should pick a paper/chapter from the Part V of the syllabus, "Values, Desires, and Reasons."

The first paper must be submitted by October 14th. It counts for 20% of the grade.

The second paper must be submitted by December 9th (no extensions!). It counts for 20% of the grade.

### **Outline of Readings and Topics**

Almost all readings will be available online through Butler Library, either via Courseworks or via JSTOR (log in with your UNI). Three books are ordered at BookCulture: Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (OUP); Kant, *Groundwork* (CUP); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (tr. Ross, rev. Ackrill and Urmson, OUP).

#### ***I. Introduction: Some Meta-Ethical Questions***

##### **Week 1**

G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, §§ 5-13. <http://fair-use.org/g-e-moore/principia-ethica>

#### ***II. Utilitarianism***

##### **Week 2**

Mill, *Utilitarianism*.

Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Part I, 1-49).

**Week 3**

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism."

Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol. 13 (1984), 134-171.

**III. Kant**

**Week 4**

Kant, *Groundwork*, Introduction and Section I (combined with selections from Kant's *First Critique*).

**Week 5**

Kant, *Groundwork* Section II.

Kant, selections from the *Second Critique* (on freedom and determinism).

Christine Korsgaard, "Responsibility and Relationships."

**Week 6**

Kant, *Groundwork* Section III.

**IV. Virtue Ethics**

**Week 7**

Aristotle, *Politics* I.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.7 and 13.

**Week 8**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II.1-6.

Gilbert Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits."

**V. Values, Desires, and Reasons**

**Week 9**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.

David Velleman, "The Guise of the Good."

**Week 10**

P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment." <<http://www.phil.uu.nl/~joel/teaching/strawson.pdf>>

Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil."

**Week 11**

Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5-20.

Harry Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About."

**Week 12**

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (selections).

Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons."

**Week 13**

Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, Chapter VIII "Value," 138-163; and Chapter IX, "Ethics," 164-188.