

# Ethical Theories

## Philosophy 325K (#43015)

University of Texas at Austin, Fall 2014  
MWF 11-11:50  
BEN 1.106

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### Description

Nearly all of us accept that there are some things we morally ought to do, and other things we morally ought not to do. But only a few of us take the time to ask ourselves, in a serious and systematic way, what is it *about* these things that *makes* them the ones we morally ought, or ought not, to do. The aim of this class is to help us understand and evaluate the full range of different possible answers we might want to give to this question. Readings will be drawn primarily from recent and contemporary work in the analytic tradition of philosophical ethics, but will also include some material from the two historical figures who have had perhaps the greatest influence on that tradition Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill.

### Objectives and Prerequisites

PHIL 325K is an upper-level undergraduate course for philosophy majors. Its primary objective is to improve your ability (i) to interpret philosophical texts in a critically engaged way, (ii) to write analytical essays on philosophical figures and themes, and (iii) to devise and assess philosophical arguments in the context of group discussion. *This course has a prerequisite of six semester hours of coursework in philosophy.*

### Primary Text

Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics [NE]* (Westview, 1998).

**Course Schedule (TENTATIVE)** *This schedule is subject to change.*

All of the required readings not taken from *NE* and all of the recommended readings those marked with the symbol \*\* will be available at the 325K CANVAS website.

### Meeting (Week)

### Readings

8/27 (1)

**What Are Ethical Theories?**

### The Good and the Bad

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8/29 (1)

### **The Good**

- *NE* 1-29 (especially 25-29)
- \*\*Shelly Kagan, “Rethinking Intrinsic Value”

9/1 (2)	<b>LABOR DAY HOLIDAY</b>
9/3 (2)	<b>Well-Being</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 29-41</li> <li>• Derek Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best"</li> </ul>
9/5 (2)	<b><i>Discussion</i></b>
9/8 (3)	<b>The Total View</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 41-48</li> <li>• Derek Parfit, "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life"</li> </ul>
9/10 (3)	<b>Equality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 48-54</li> <li>• Thomas Nagel, "Equality"</li> </ul>
9/12 (3)	<b><i>Discussion</i></b>
9/15 (4)	<b>Culpability, Fairness, and Desert</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 54-59</li> <li>• Shelly Kagan, "Equality and Desert"</li> </ul>
9/17 (4)	<b>Consequentialism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 59-69</li> <li>• **David Sosa, "The Consequences of Consequentialism"</li> </ul>
9/19 (4)	<b><i>Discussion</i></b>
9/22 (5)	<b>Utilitarianism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" (chapters 1 and 2, pages 1-18)</li> </ul>

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## Constraints

9/24 (5)	<b>Deontology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 70-78</li> <li>• Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect"</li> </ul>
9/26 (5)	<b><i>Discussion</i> ----- <i>FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE</i></b>
9/29 (6)	<b>Thresholds</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 78-84</li> <li>• Jonathan Bennett, "Whatever the Consequences"</li> </ul>
10/1 (6)	<b>Doing, Allowing, and Intending</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 94-105</li> <li>• **Warren Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Doing and Allowing"</li> </ul>
10/3 (6)	<b><i>Discussion</i></b>
10/6 (7)	<b>Lying</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NE</i> 106-116</li> <li>• Immanuel Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie"</li> </ul>

10/8 (7)

**Promising**

- *NE* 116-125
- H. A. Prichard, "The Obligation to Keep a Promise"

10/10 (7)

*Discussion*

10/13 (8)

**Special Obligations**

- *NE* 125-137
- Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

10/15 (8)

**Duties to Oneself**

- *NE* 145-152
- Thomas Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect"

10/17 (8)

*Discussion*Further Factors

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10/20 (9)

**Demanding Too Much**

- *NE* 153-161
- J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes"

10/22 (9)

**Options**

- *NE* 161-170
- Thomas Nagel, "Living Right and Living Well"

10/24 (9)

*Discussion* ----- **SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE**

10/27 (10)

**Rights**

- *NE* 170-177
- Joel Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights"

10/29 (10)

**Interaction**

- *NE* 177-186
- Earl Conee, "Against Moral Dilemmas"

10/31 (10)

*Discussion*Teleological Foundations

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11/3 (11)

**Foundational Theories**

- *NE* 189-194
- H. A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"

11/5 (11)

**Egoism**

- *NE* 194-204
- Jesse Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism"

11/7 (11)

*Discussion*

11/10 (12)

**Virtues**

- *NE* 204-212
- Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"

11/12 (12)

**Act Consequentialism**

- *NE* 212-223
- John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” (chapter 4, pages 24-28)

11/14 (12)

***Discussion***

11/17 (13)

**Rule Consequentialism**

- *NE* 223-239
- \*\*Richard Brandt, “Some Merits of One Form of Rule-Utilitarianism”

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**Deontological Foundations**

11/19 (13)

**Contractarianism**

- *NE* 240-256
- \*\*Tim Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”

11/21 (13)

***Discussion***

11/24 (14)

**Universalizability ---- *TERM PAPER DRAFT DUE***

- *NE* 256-271
- \*\*Christine Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law”

11/26 (14)

**The Ideal Observer**

- *NE* 271-280
- \*\*Roderick Firth, “Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer”

11/28 (14)

**THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

12/1 (15)

**Reflection**

- *NE* 280-294

12/3 (15)

**Pluralism**

- *NE* 294-303
- Thomas Nagel, “The Fragmentation of Value”

12/5 (15)

***Discussion******ELECTRONICS POLICY***

You are NOT allowed to use laptops during class UNLESS you have requested and received Matt's permission to do so. You are NEVER allowed to use phones (or other handheld devices) during class.

***CONTENT WARNING***

Some of the material covered in this class may be upsetting to some students. Readings, lectures, and discussions will often contain descriptions of violence, disease, death, discrimination, and the like.

***WRITING FLAG and COMMUNICATION COMPONENT***

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. You can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. This Writing Flag course may also be used to fulfill 3 hours of the university core curriculum communication component, which is designed to address the following 4 core objectives: communication skills, critical thinking skills, teamwork, and personal responsibility.

***DISABILITY POLICY***

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement. For further information, please call 512-471-6259.

## Assignments

### Ten Quizzes [2% each]

- At the beginning of exactly 11 of our 14 Friday meetings, there will be a short quiz on the material covered during the preceding Monday and Wednesday meetings of that week. These quizzes are designed to be easy for you if you have (i) attended the preceding Monday and Wednesday meetings and (ii) completed the required readings for those meetings.
- Each completed quiz will be graded on a scale from 4 to 1 (where 4=A, 3=B, 2=C, and 1=D). Each missed quiz due to unexcused absence, for example, will receive a 0 (where 0 = F).
- Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.
- You may make up a quiz grade of D or F by submitting a 2-3 page response paper, no later than two weeks after the date of that quiz, on a topic chosen in advance by Matt. You may not make up more than two quiz grades total.

### Two Short Papers (3-5 pages) [15% each]

- The first paper will be due on **Friday, September 26th**; the second will be due on **Friday, October 24th**.
- Each paper will be graded and returned to you no later than two weeks after it is due.
- Recommended topics for each short paper will be distributed approximately two weeks before it is due.
- Late submissions will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late.
- If you receive a grade of B- or lower on one of your short papers, you may submit a rewritten version of that paper no later than one week after the day it is returned to you. The grade you receive on the rewritten version will replace the original grade.

### One Term Paper (10-15 pages) [40%]

- The first draft of your term paper will be due on **Monday, November 24th**; the final version will be due on **Monday, December 15th**.
- The first draft of your term paper will be graded pass/fail, and will be returned to you with comments no later than **Wednesday, December 3rd**.
- The topic for your term paper will be up to you, but will be subject to Matt's approval and suggested modifications. You must confer with him (over email, during office hours, or by appointment) *at least once* and no later than **Monday, November 3rd** to discuss your proposed term paper topic. *Failure to do so will result in a loss of one full letter grade on your final term paper grade.*
- Late submissions (of either the first draft or the final version) will result in a loss of one-third of a letter grade, on your final term paper grade, for each day they are late.

### Participation [10%]

- The purpose of the Friday discussion meetings is to give you an opportunity to engage with the course material, and with each other, in a more active and collaborative manner than is possible during the lecture meetings. Your participation grade will be based on the quantity and quality of your contributions to these meetings.
- At the end of each (normal) week, 2-4 students will volunteer (or be chosen) to be the designated DISCUSSION LEADERS for the following week. Discussion leaders are expected to be prepared to ask and answer questions related to the material covered during the Monday and Wednesday meetings of that week. They are encouraged (but not required) to confer with each other outside of class either online or in person prior to the discussion meeting they are scheduled to lead. Each student in the class will be assigned to be a discussion leader for exactly 2 discussion meetings during the term.