

PHI 420E/591E
Topics in Philosophy/Seminar: Value Theory
The Limits of Morality
Spring 2006

1. Course Web Site: <http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/phi420spring06/index.htm>
Handouts, announcements, and reading assignments will be posted to this web site on a weekly basis.
2. Contact Information:
 - Name: Professor Douglas W. Portmore, Ph.D.
 - Phone: (480) 965-9825 – Note that I check my voicemail only once or twice a week and prefer to be contacted by e-mail.
 - Office: Coor Hall 3362
 - E-mail: douglas.portmore@asu.edu
 - Office Hours: Tuesdays from 1:30-2:30 PM, and other days and times by appointment.
3. Required Texts:
 - Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). ISBN: 0-19-823916-5. This text is available for purchase at the bookstore.
 - Selected journal articles that will be distributed in class or made available through the course web site.
4. Course Description: The topic of the course will be the limits of morality. From the standpoint of normative ethics, we'll look at both whether there is any limit to what we are required to do to promote the impersonal good and whether there is any limit to what we are permitted to do to promote the impersonal good. In other words, we will be looking at whether agent-centered options and agent-centered constraints are defensible. From the standpoint of meta-ethics, we'll look at whether morality is limited in scope or rational authority. Does morality apply to every aspect of our lives, even to everyday mundane decisions such as what to wear? Is the morally ideal life (i.e., the life of a moral saint) the ideal human life? Do moral considerations override non-moral considerations such that what we have most reason to do, all things considered, is always to act on what the balance of moral considerations supports our doing? How do moral considerations and non-moral consideration “come together” to determine what we have most reason to do, all things considered? Can they “come together” at all, or is there an irresolvable duality to practical reasoning?
5. Course Requirements and Grading Policy:

➤ Attendance and Participation:	48 Points
➤ <u>Nine</u> Reading Responses (17 points each):	153 Points
➤ Thesis Statement for the Term Paper (optional):	2 Points
➤ Outline (or Draft) of the Term Paper (optional)	40 Points
➤ Term Paper:	150-192 Points
Total Points:	400 Points

The plus/minus system will be used. Course grades will be assigned according to the following point distributions:

A+ 400-388 Points (100-97%)

A	387.9-372	Points	(96.9-93%)
A-	371.9-360	Points	(92.9-90%)
B+	359.9-348	Points	(89.9-87%)
B	347.9-332	Points	(86.9-83%)
B-	331.9-320	Points	(82.9-80%)
C+	319.9-300	Points	(79.9-75%)
C	299.9-280	Points	(74.9-70%)
D	279.9-240	Points	(69.9-60%)
E	239.9-0	Points	(59.9-0%)

6. Attendance and Participation: For each class session you'll be assigned a grade for your attendance and participation. This will be a function of the following: (1) the extent to which you are present, alert, and attentive; (2) the quality and regularity of your participation in class discussions; and (3) the extent to which you observe proper classroom etiquette—see below. These grades will be converted into points according to the percentages above, 4 points being the highest possible score for a given class session. Thus, students will receive a 4.0 for an A+, 3.9 for an A, 3.7 for an A-, 3.6 for a B+, 3.5 for a B, 3.3 for a B-, 3.2 for a C+, etc. The highest score that you can receive without participating during a particular class is a 3.5 (a B). Typically, I'll subtract a half-point for being late to class and/or for being late returning from a break. If you are absent, you will receive a zero for that class session, and I will not be excusing any absences. However, in calculating your total for attendance and participation, I will be dropping your two lowest scores and totaling the remaining 12 scores, for a total of 48 points possible. I will most likely give some extra credit to those who attend all 14 classes.

Students are expected to participate regularly in class. It is partly the students' responsibility to make the class a lively one. And please note that good participation involves more than just speaking out during class; quality counts just as much as, if not more than, quantity. What you say should be informed and constructive. You should be able to speak intelligently about that day's reading assignment. During class discussions, you should be respectful of others even when they have radically different viewpoints. Do not monopolize class discussions; give others a chance to have their say. And note that asking an intelligent question counts as participation. Most importantly, please observe proper classroom etiquette:

- Please raise your hand and wait to be called on before speaking.
- You should make every effort to avoid coming in late or leaving early. If you ever are late for class, enter in complete silence and avoid walking between the class and the professor. The same holds for returning from a break.
- Never leave during class unless you absolutely must. Leaving for a short break and then returning is not acceptable. The professor is not a TV set, but is a person addressing the class, and it is rude to leave when someone is addressing you.
- Likewise, it is rude and unacceptable to talk with classmates while the professor (or another student who has the floor) is talking.
- Visible and noisy signs of restlessness or inattentiveness are rude as well as disruptive to others. If you cannot sit still or stay awake, you should not be taking a college class and

you will be asked to leave. Do not begin packing up your things or otherwise indicate that you think it is time for class to come to an end; wait for the professor to dismiss class.

- Failing to turn off pagers and cell phones before coming to class is unacceptable.

7. Reading Assignments and Reading Responses: The readings for this course are extremely difficult. You are expected to read each article/chapter two to three times. Ideally, each article should be read twice before class: first, a quick read to get a sense of the main thesis and argument and then a second careful read, taking notes on the following: 1) the author's main thesis (or theses) and the arguments offered in its (their) defense; 2) definitions/explanations of key terms, distinctions, and examples that the author uses; 3) any potential objections or counterarguments that the author addresses along with his or her rebuttals; 4) your assessment of the author's arguments; and 5) any thoughts or questions that you have about the reading. It is also a good idea to read the article again after we have finished discussing it in class.

There will be one or two readings (one chapter or article constitutes a reading) assigned for each class, excluding the first. **You are required to turn in "reading responses" for nine of these readings.** Each will be worth 17 points. For a given reading response, you need to briefly summarize the author's main theses and arguments and then respond to them. Your response can take one of many forms, including: (a) a detailed question(s) about some idea (or ideas) in the reading that you just don't understand (e.g., I don't understand Kagan's explanation of *blab*, he says, "*blab, blab, blab,*" but this is unclear because...); (b) an objection to any idea or claim in the reading (e.g., Kagan is being inconsistent: on p. 10 he says *blab, blab, blab,* and on p. 12 he says the opposite); or (c) an endorsement of some part of the author's argument (e.g., Kagan's view of *blab* is exactly right, and here's why I think so...)—these three are not meant to be exhaustive. You should dedicate somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of your reading response to summarizing the given article/chapter and the remainder to your response to it. You may integrate your response as you summarize or you may first summarize and then respond. Choose whichever organizational pattern makes the most sense to you. Note that your summary should be as detailed as is possible within the length constraints. This will require that you write concisely and that you make wise choices about which aspects of the article/chapter are most important and merit more detailed treatment in your summary.

I will be grading the summary portion of your response with regard to both the quality of the exposition and the quality of the writing. I will be asking the following questions: (1) Does the student provide an accurate and charitable interpretation of the author's views and arguments? (2) Does the student fully explain, in his or her own words, key philosophical terms, concepts, examples, and distinctions in an illuminating way? (3) Does the reading response exhibit a clear and logical organizational plan, wherein the ordering of ideas, sentences, and paragraphs have a natural and logical flow to them? (4) Does the reading response exhibit a sophisticated (but unpretentious) writing style, where ideas are presented clearly, concisely, and precisely, such that what's being said is almost never open to misinterpretation and contains almost no unnecessary words, imprecision, or irrelevant content? (5) Is the reading response virtually free of errors in grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation?

Reading responses should be between 750-1000 words (approximately 3-4 double-spaced typed pages) and must not exceed a maximum of 1250 words (approximately 5 double-spaced typed pages). Be sure to record your name and the word count in the upper right-hand corner of the first page. Please leave at least 1½ inch margins all around. Use 12-point Times New Roman or other serif-type font.

A reading response for a given article/chapter is due by 5 AM on the Monday before the Tuesday class in which we are scheduled to discuss it. They should be sent to douglas.portmore@asu.edu as an email attachment in a format that I can read, that is, as either an MS Word document (with a file extension of ".doc") or as a text or rich text document (with file extensions ".txt" or ".rtf", respectively). Be sure that the subject line of your email reads "Reading Response," so that it is not deleted as junk mail. I will

accept late reading responses (in the form of an email attachment or hard copy) up until the beginning of class (3:05 PM) on the day that we are scheduled to discuss the article/chapter in question, but I will deduct one point for lateness. I will not accept reading responses after this time.

8. Policy on Academic Dishonesty and Violations of the Student Conduct Code: Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. The minimum penalty for any act of academic dishonesty is a failing grade for the course. Your conduct will also be reported to university authorities for appropriate action. If you are at all uncertain about what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty, please consult the current university catalog. You should also feel free to consult with me on this matter.

Students are expected to abide by the policies concerning student conduct set forth in the university catalog and the schedule of classes. Misconduct will also be reported to university authorities for appropriate action.

If you ever find yourself in a jam, where you feel like you have to resort to cheating, please come see me instead. I can be quite sympathetic and reasonable.

9. Getting Help: I'm more than happy to go out of my way to help those who are eager to learn. If there is anything I can do to improve the course and help you learn, please let me know. In any case, I hope that everyone will stop by my office at least once during the semester if only to chat. I am also happy to make appointments with students for whom my office hours are inconvenient. Please don't hesitate to schedule an appointment. To do so, you need only e-mail me or talk to me after class.

10. My Expectations:

- a. Students are expected to spend an average of 1-1½ hours outside of class working on class materials for each hour spent inside of class.
- b. Students are expected to abide by the policies concerning student conduct set forth in the university catalog and the schedule of classes.
- c. Students are expected to use a word-processor for all written assignments.
- d. Students are expected to have, or be willing to acquire, basic computer skills. Students will need to be able to use Internet Explorer (or other web browser), Adobe Acrobat Reader, and some sort of word processing software.
- e. Students are expected to do the assigned readings prior to coming to class, and students are responsible for all the material covered in the assigned readings even if not all of that material is discussed in class.
- f. Students are expected to complete assigned work on time. I will not accept late thesis statements, outlines, or drafts. Reading responses may be turned in up until the beginning of the class in which they are scheduled to be discussed. Term papers may be turned in up to a week late, but not without penalty (which will increase for each day late) and not without prior authorization.
- g. Students are expected to be present and on time for every class meeting or to have a very good excuse. Students who miss a class even for a legitimate reason are, nonetheless, responsible for the material covered in that class, and they are also responsible for being apprised of that day's announcements. Students that miss class should obtain lecture notes from a fellow student and see me if they have any questions concerning the material that they missed. They should also check the course web site for any announcements that they may have missed.
- h. Students are expected to participate; it is partly the students' responsibility to make the course a lively one.
- i. Students are expected to be courteous to and respectful of both the professor and their fellow classmates.

11. **Term Papers:** Everyone taking the course for credit must write a term paper, although the requirements will differ depending on whether you're an undergraduate student or a graduate student—see below. Students may, if they wish, turn in a thesis statement and/or an outline in order to get some feedback from me. Doing so is entirely optional, but undergraduate students are strongly encouraged to do so. And note that I will not accept thesis statements or outlines after the due dates given below. All and only graduate students may turn in a draft in place of an outline if they so wish. Those who feel like they need detailed instructions on how to write a philosophy paper should read my “Tips on Writing a Philosophy Paper” at <http://www.csun.edu/~dp56722/tips.htm>.

- **Undergraduate Students:** Write a 1,500-2,500 word thesis-defense paper (approximately 6-10 pages) on one of the paper topics that I will provide. (Rarely, and only in cases where the student has demonstrated exceptional abilities, will I allow an undergraduate student to write on a topic of their own choosing.) Although this will be a thesis-defense paper, some of the paper topics will require little more than an explication and critical assessment of some portion of the required readings. Undergraduate students are not expected, nor encouraged, to do any readings outside of those that have been assigned for the course.
- **Graduate Students:** Write a 3,000-4,000 word thesis-defense paper (approximately 12-16 pages) on either one of the paper topics provided by me or on one proposed by yourself that meets my approval and that relates directly to the issues being discussed in the course. Graduate students may be expected or encouraged to do some additional readings for their term papers depending on their topics.

12. **Important Dates:**

- 01/17/06: First class.
- 01/31/06: Class cancelled.
- 03/14/06: No class – Spring Break
- 03/21/06: Paper Topics distributed.
- 04/11/06: **Thesis Statements Due (optional).**
- 04/18/06: **Outlines/Drafts Due (optional).**
- 05/02/06: Last class. **Term Papers Due.**

13. **Possible Additional Readings:**

In addition to Shelly Kagan's *The Limits of Morality*, we will be reading some subset of the articles/chapters listed below. I provide this list mainly so that graduate students might know where to look for additional readings.

- a. Frances Howard-Snyder's "Doing versus Allowing Harm." <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/doing-allowing/>
- b. Alison McIntyre's "Doctrine of Double Effect." <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-effect/>
- c. Samuel Scheffler's "Prerogatives without Restrictions." <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1520-8583%281992%296%3C377%3APWR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>
- d. Douglas W. Portmore's "Position-Relative Consequentialism, Agent-Centered Options, and Supererogation." <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/resolve?ET113203>
- e. Douglas W. Portmore's "Are Moral Reasons Morally Overriding?" http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/Are_Moral_Reasons_Morally_Overriding.pdf
- f. Susan Wolf's "Moral Saints." <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-362X%28198208%2979%3A8%3C419%3AMS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>
- g. Michael Bratman's "Kagan on 'The Appeal to Cost'." <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0014-1704%28199401%29104%3A2%3C325%3AKO%22ATC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z>
- h. Michael Slote's "Shelly Kagan's *The Limits of Morality*." <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0031-8205%28199112%2951%3A4%3C915%3ASKTLOM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-8>

- i. Shelly Kagan's "Defending Options." <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0014-1704%28199401%29104%3A2%3C333%3ADO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>
- j. Seana Shiffrin's "Moral Overridingness and Subjectivism." <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0014-1704%28199907%29109%3A4%3C772%3AMOAMS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-G>
- k. Sarah Stroud's "Moral Overridingness and Moral Theory." <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/doi/pdf/10.1111/1468-0114.00056>
- l. Owen McLeod's "Just Plain 'Ought'." [http://www.springerlink.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/\(u3npxreom4c3rnukg5kf355\)/app/home/content.asp?referrer=contribution&format=2&page=1&pagecount=0](http://www.springerlink.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/(u3npxreom4c3rnukg5kf355)/app/home/content.asp?referrer=contribution&format=2&page=1&pagecount=0)
- m. Roger Crisp's "The Dualism of Practical Reason." *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society.*
- n. David Copp's "The Ring of Gyges: Overridingness and the Unity of Reason." *Social Philosophy & Policy.*
- o. Susan Wolf's "Above and Below the Line of Duty." *Philosophical Topics.*
- p. Ruth Chang's "Putting Together Morality and Well-Being." *Practical Conflicts: New Philosophical Essays.*
- q. Selections from Samuel Scheffler's *The Rejection of Consequentialism.*
- r. Selections from Samuel Scheffler's *Human Morality.*