

# PHIL 1306: Introduction to Ethics

Fall 2025 Syllabus  
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:30pm-3:45pm  
Location: FN 2.302

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Instructor: Songyao Ren  
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Office: 4.634  
Office Hours: Thursday, 4pm-5pm

## Course Description

What is a good life? What makes an action morally right? Is there a single true morality? In this course, we will study three central ethical theories that offer answers to these questions—utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics—and explore their implications for contemporary moral issues. We will also reflect on the nature of disagreement among these normative theories and consider what such disagreement suggests about the possibility of a single true morality. Readings will include both historical and contemporary sources from Western and Eastern philosophical traditions.

## Course Materials

There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be provided electronically through *eLearning*.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain major ethical theories, including utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics.
2. Critically evaluate moral arguments and recognize common logical fallacies in ethical reasoning.
3. Develop and defend their own positions on ethical issues using clear, well-structured arguments.
4. Engage respectfully in discussions and debates about morally complex and potentially controversial topics.

## Course Assignments

### (1) Quizzes: 30%

There will be three quizzes, each available on eLearning for a 48-hour window: from Tuesday at 5:00pm to Thursday at 5:00pm. Once you begin a quiz, you will have 20 minutes to complete it. Each quiz consists of 10 multiple-choice questions and is worth 10 points. **No make-up quizzes will be offered!**

**Quizzes will open on: 09/23, 10/21, 11/18**

### (2) In-Class Debate: 20%

You will participate in a structured, in-class debate as part of your engagement with key ethical issues. You will choose your topic and position, and will be expected to prepare arguments, respond to counterarguments, and collaborate effectively in teams. Your performance will be assessed based on participation, clarity of reasoning, and application of ethical concepts.

### (3) Final Presentation: 10%

You will give a brief presentation (5 minutes) on your final paper project. I will provide a list of suggested topics, but you are welcome to propose your own.

### (4) Final Paper: 40%

You will write a 4-page (double-spaced typescript) paper on an ethical issue of your choice. Papers must be submitted through eLearning by **December 9th**. A list of suggested topics will be provided, but you are welcome to propose your own. The paper will be evaluated based on clarity, accuracy, and quality of reasoning and argumentation.

## Course Policies

### **Late Paper/Extension/Make-Up Policy**

Written assignments are due at the time and date specified in the assignment instructions. Papers will be penalized by a full letter grade for each day they are late after the date specified. Extensions for extenuating circumstances must be requested at least one week before an assignment is due.

### **Grading Policy**

The final grade that you get for this class is non-negotiable (except for arithmetic errors) and will not be rounded up under any circumstances.

### **Academic Integrity**

The instructor expects from students a high level of academic honesty and will not tolerate plagiarism and cheating. Violations will be reported. Please familiarize yourself with UTD’s policy: <https://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/dishonesty/>

**Be Prepared for Class**

In order to be successful, please read the assigned readings, ideally two or three times, and come to class prepared to discuss questions and comments pertaining to the readings.

**Accommodation Policy**

This course is designed with all students in mind, but we are not all the same. The instructor would like to work with each student so that the course and its requirements fit with their abilities. If you would like to discuss such matters, please contact the instructor during the first week of class. Under UTD policy, for an accommodation to be officially considered, a student must register with Student AccessAbility. Please contact their office here: <https://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess/>

Grading Scale	A+ 98-100
	A 93-97
	A- 90-92
	B+ 87-89
	B 83-86
	B- 80-82
	C+ 77-79
	C 73-76
	C- 70-72
	D+ 67-69
	D 63-66
	D- 60-62
	F 00-59

**Tentative Schedule**

Date	Topic	Readings
08/26	Course Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Reading</li> </ul>
08/28 09/02 09/04 09/09	Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bentham, <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i>, chapters 1, 3, &amp; 4</li> <li>Foot and Thomson, “Dilemmas”</li> <li>Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, chapter 2</li> </ul>
09/11 09/16	Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Godwin, “The Archbishop and the Chambermaid”</li> <li>Rawls, “The Separateness of Persons”</li> <li>Nozick, “The Experience Machine”</li> </ul>
09/18	Debate: Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Reading</li> </ul>

09/23 09/25 09/30 10/02	Deontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kant, <i>Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals</i>, sections 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
10/07	Writing Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper”</li> </ul>
10/09	Debate: Deontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Reading</li> </ul>
10/14 10/16 10/21	Contemporary Perspectives on Utilitarianism and Deontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nagel, “Moral Luck”</li> <li>• Wolf, “Moral Saints”</li> </ul>
10/23 10/28 10/30 11/04	Virtue Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, Books 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
11/06	Debate: Virtue Ethics	
11/11 11/13 11/18 11/20	Confucian Virtue Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Analects</i>, selections (1.1-1.2, 1.4-1.7, 1.16, 2.1, 2.3-2.4, 2.7-2.8, 2.19-2.20, 3.4, 3.7, 3.22, 3.26, 4.1-4.6, 4.10, 4.14, 4.17, 5.7-5.10, 5.12, 5.26-5.28, 6.3-6.5, 6.11-6.12, 6.18, 6.20, 6.30, 7.5, 7.16, 7.22, 9.3, 9.11, 9.18, 10.1, 10.9, 10.14, 10.19, 10.22, 11.4, 11.7-11.13, 11.22-11.23, 12.1-12.5, 12.7, 12.10-12.12, 12.16-12.17, 12.19-12.20, 12.22)</li> </ul>
11/25 11/27	Fall Break, Thanksgiving Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No class</li> </ul>
12/02 12/04 12/09	Final Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Reading</li> </ul>