

PHIL2030: Introduction to Ethics
Fall 2025

Class Meets: Monday & Wednesday 1130am - 1245pm, ASH 380

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Course Description	Course Requirements	Policies
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Course Description

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This course offers a dynamic and accessible introduction to ethical theory, exploring how we ought to live and why morality should matter to us. Drawing on historical and contemporary sources, we examine major philosophical approaches—including hedonism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics—through the lens of real-world dilemmas and vivid thought experiments. Along the way, we engage fundamental questions about moral disagreement, the role of intuition, and the unsettling phenomenon of moral luck.

What Will You Learn?

In this course, you will learn to critically assess competing moral theories, reflect on their own ethical commitments, and develop the tools necessary for reasoned moral judgment in a complex and often ambiguous world.

Main skills to be developed

- Excellence in expository writing
- Mastery of annotating
- Argument analysis
- Develop understanding of core ethical concepts and terms
- Effectively verbalize ideas and criticisms

Learning Outcomes

1. Ability to explain the core arguments and motivations for various ethical positions
2. Ability to isolate and assess the core thesis of a given reading.
3. Understand the relationship between metaethics and normative ethics.
4. Ability to engage in respectful discussion and debate with peers.

How will I learn?

This ethics course prioritizes active learning through structured class sessions designed to develop advanced critical thinking and argumentation skills. Students will analyze assigned readings by reconstructing theses, presenting them to the class, and engaging in in-depth discussions to evaluate them. Guided lectures will delve deeper into the material, encouraging students to actively question assumptions and offer alternative interpretations. Finally, dedicated time for objections and clarifications allows students to refine their analytical skills and engage in respectful debate, fostering a collaborative learning environment where complex philosophical ideas are explored and challenged.

Prerequisites for the course

N/A.

How to succeed in this course

Active Preparation: Thoroughly read and analyze assigned texts before each class, preparing a formal argument reconstruction to facilitate active participation in discussions.

Engaged Participation: Contribute meaningfully to class discussions by questioning assumptions, offering alternative interpretations, and respectfully debating ideas with both the instructor and peers.

Assignment Submission: Adhere to deadlines for all assignments, recognizing that late submissions may impact your grade and hinder your ability to fully engage with the course material.

Come to Office Hours: If you are struggling to keep up, or find the readings extremely challenging, then coming to speak to me directly during my office hours will be helpful. Also, I have snacks.

Course Requirements

Required Materials

There are no textbooks that you are required to purchase for this course. Class materials, handouts, and supplemental resources will be posted on the course website: <https://phil2030.kevinjpatton.com>.

Grades and announcements will be posted on Canvas.

Required Devices

There are no required devices for this course.

Classroom expectations

Your preparation for discussion and participation is extremely important for you and your team. Here are some ground rules:

- **This course thrives on mutual respect and active engagement.** As your instructor, I am committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment where diverse perspectives are valued. I expect you to contribute to this environment by treating each other with courtesy and respect.
- **Remember, learning is an active process.** Your participation in class discussions, activities, and assignments is crucial for developing critical thinking skills and achieving success in this course. Embrace the challenge, step outside your comfort zone, and enjoy the journey of exploring your own thought processes!

Assignments

Assessment of your learning will occur through a variety of venues including the final project, reflection journals, homework assignments, quizzes, application activities, content synthesis, and class/team participation

Annotated Notes: You will be required to submit annotated notes over one of the readings nearly every week. As these will be submitted via Canvas, you can either annotate digitally (e.g. edit in Adobe, Word, Docs) or you may handwrite your notes and then take pictures of those notes and submit those. A handout over this assignment is available on the website.

Argument Reconstruction: Each student will sign up for one of readings for which they will present to the class their best attempt to reconstruct the author's argument. This will be accompanied by a 10-15 minute assessment of the argument by the student. A handout over this assignment is available on the website.

Argument Visualizations: In addition to writing philosophy, students will also be making their own visual aids over the course of the semester. This can take the form of flow charts, pictures, or even comics (in the style of Existential Comics). A handout over this assignment is available on the website.

Blue Book Exams: Students will take four non-cumulative, in-person exams. These exams must be handwritten and will evaluate both understanding of course material and original thought. One week before each exam, students will receive a study guide.

Grading for this Course

The following table represents how you will demonstrate your learning and how we will assess the degree to which you have done so.

Assignments	Total Points Possible	Percent of Total Grade
Annotated Notes	140	15%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adherence color coding standardsAppropriateness of marginal notes		
Argument Reconstruction	20	5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Accuracy of presentation		
Argument Visualizations	100	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">OriginalityAccuracy of the representation		
Blue Book Exams	400	60%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Quality of answers		

Grade	Cutoff
A+	100-97
A	96-93
A-	93-90
B+	89-87
B	86-84
B-	83-80
C+	79-77
C	76-74
C-	73-70
D+	69-67
D	66-64
D-	63-60
F	<60

Semester Outline

Changes to the schedule may be made at my discretion and if circumstances require. It is your responsibility to note these changes when announced (although I will do my best to ensure that you receive the changes with as much advance notice as possible).

Week 1: Foundations	Mon: Syllabus; presentation sign-up Wed: EaNI Ch1	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 2: Scorecard	Mon: No Class - Labor Day Wed: EaNI Ch2	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 3: Hedonism	Mon: EaNI Ch3 Part 1 + Lucretius (Intro, Section 3) Wed: EaNI Ch3 Part 2 + Nozick (Ch10)	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 4: Utilitarianism	Mon: EaNI Ch4 Part 1 + Mill Wed: EaNI Ch4 Part 2 + Thomson	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 5: Exam 1	Mon: Exam 1 Review Wed: Exam 1	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 6: Kantianism	Mon: EaNI Ch5 Part 1 + Sedgwick (Intro) Wed: EaNI Ch5 Part 2 + Korsgaard	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 7: Virtue Theory	Mon: EaNI Ch6 Part 1 + Bowin Wed: EaNI Ch6 Part 2 + Oxford Handbook (Ch25)	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 8: Exam 2	Mon: Exam 2 Review Wed: Exam 2	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 9: Moral Skepticism	Mon: AJ Ayer - Ch6 Wed: JL Mackie - Ch1	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 10: Moral Luck	Mon: Bernard Williams - Ch2 Wed: Thomas Nagel - Ch3	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 11: Exam 3	Mon: Exam 3 Review Wed: Exam 3 Review	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 12: Foreign Aid	Mon: Peter Singer - "Famine, Affluence, Morality" Wed: Garrett Hardin - "Lifeboat Ethics"	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 13: Abortion	Mon: Judith Jarvis Thomson - "A Defense of Abortion" Wed: Don Marquis - "Why Abortion is Immoral"	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 14:	Mon: No Class - Thanksgiving Wed: No Class - Thanksgiving	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 15:	Mon: TBD Wed: TBD	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 16:	Mon: TBD Wed: TBD	Argument Reconstruction: Argument Reconstruction:
Week 17:	Wed: Exam 4; December 17th @10am - 12pm	

Policies

Classroom Policies

Statement on Learning Success

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible.

Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. I also encourage you to reach out to the student resources available through UNO. Many are listed on this syllabus, but I am happy to connect you with a person or Center if you would like.

Grading Policies

As I hope you can see, flexibility is built into the assignments to support your success in this course. If you miss a smaller assignment or don't do as well on a few notes assignments, your grade will not be impacted significantly. Consequently, the final grades are firm, and no additional curve is available.

Late work

Late work will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Generally, except in the case of an excused absence, work submitted after an assigned deadline will not be eligible for full credit. Please communicate with me if you are having problems keeping to the schedule. It is better to talk through problems than ignore them.

Absences

If you are absent on the day that your team meets, you are responsible for providing your team with the necessary information to compensate for your absence. *It is crucial to keep in communication with your team members; you are responsible for letting both us and your team know if you cannot make it to a class.*

Excused Absence: The only absences that will be considered excused are for religious holidays or extenuating circumstances due to an emergency. If you plan to miss class due to observance of a religious holiday, please let us know at least two weeks in advance. You will not be penalized for this absence, although you will still be responsible for any work you will miss on that day if applicable. Check with us for details or arrangements.

If you have to be absent, use your resources wisely. Ask your team and other classmates to get a run-down and notes on any lessons you miss. If you find there are topics that we covered while you were gone that raise questions, you may come by during office hours or schedule a meeting to discuss. Email specific questions you have in advance so that we can make the most of our time. "What did I miss?" is not specific enough.

Names and Personal Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name, unless they have added a "preferred name" with the University Registrar:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/registrar/students/transcripts-and-records/update-your-personal-information.php>

I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc). Please advise me of any changes early in the semester so that I may make appropriate updates to my records. For instructions on how to add your pronouns to Canvas, visit:

<https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Canvas-Basics-Guide/How-do-I-select-personal-pronouns-in-my-user-account/ta-p/615336>.

University Resources for Students

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. There are also a range of resources on campus:

Services for Students with Disabilities

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact the Accessibility Services Center (ASC). Please refer to ASC's website for contact and more information: <https://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/accessibility/index.php> If you are already registered with SSD, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

Counseling and Mental Health Center

The Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) serves UT's diverse campus community by providing high quality, innovative and culturally informed mental health programs and services that enhance and support students' well-being, academic and life goals. To learn more about your counseling and mental health options, visit:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services/index.php>

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, call Crisis Services 24/7 at [402.554.2409](tel:402.554.2409).

Undergraduate Writing Center: <https://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-arts-and-sciences/writing-center/index.php>

Libraries: <https://www.unomaha.edu/criss-library/index.php>

ITS: <https://www.unomaha.edu/information-technology-services/index.php>

Food Pantry

Experiencing food insecurity? You're not alone. UNO offers a food pantry to help students in need. For information on eligibility and how to access this resource, please visit:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/maverick-food-pantry/index.php>

Important Safety Information:

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, contact Student Safety:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/student-safety/index.php>

Title IX Reporting

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UNO is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Emergency Operation Plan

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from UNO Public Safety.

<https://www.unomaha.edu/emergency/response-plan.php>

- In the event of a fire, the elevators will not be operational. If you require assistance going down stairs, you are to make your way to the designated stair towers where emergency personnel will assist you

University Policies

Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by UNO's standards of academic integrity. **Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UNO.** Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/campus-policies/academic-integrity.php>

Course Dropping / Withdrawing Policy

If you decide that dropping / withdrawing from this course is in your best interest, please be aware that there are specific deadlines for doing so. For information on those deadlines, visit:

<https://www.unomaha.edu/registrar/students/after-enrollment/adding-swapping-dropping-or-withdrawing-from-a-course.php>

AI Usage Policy

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI)—including tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and others—have made it easier to generate summaries, outlines, and even full essays. These tools can be helpful **learning aids**, but they can also undermine your **philosophical development** if used inappropriately. Philosophy requires close reading, clear thinking, and original analysis—skills that cannot be outsourced. Here is the policy governing AI use in this course:

Permitted Uses

You may use AI tools in the following ways, with proper disclosure:

- **Idea Generation:** Brainstorming possible topics or questions for your final paper.
- **Clarification:** Getting help understanding difficult terms or passages from the readings.
- **Writing Feedback:** Checking grammar or clarity, as long as the underlying content is your own.

If you use AI in any of these ways, you must include a brief note at the end of your assignment (e.g., "Used ChatGPT to clarify the distinction between moral and epistemic luck").

Prohibited Uses

The following uses of AI are not allowed and will be treated as academic dishonesty:

- Submitting AI-generated content (in whole or part) as your own writing.
- Using AI to write your exposition or argumentative paper drafts.
- Relying on AI to summarize course readings instead of doing the reading yourself.
- Asking AI to generate responses to assignment prompts and lightly rewording them.

These actions violate the purpose of philosophical education and will be handled as violations of UNO's academic integrity policy.

- If you are **unsure** whether your use of AI is appropriate, ask me **before** submitting the assignment.