

## PHIL 3400: Ethical Theory

Fall Semester – 2025

Monday/Wednesday/Friday 1:00 - 1:50 PM

Hickory Hall 252

### Professor

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### Teaching Assistant

Neelu Kumari

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### Course Description:

*The systematic evaluation of classical and/or contemporary ethical theories concerning the good life, human conduct in society, morals, and standards of value.*

What does it mean to be a good person? What are our ethical obligations to other individuals and to society as a whole? Is there such a thing as moral truth, or is morality “relative” to individuals or societies? This course deals with ethical theory, the branch of philosophy that addresses such questions. The aim of the class is for students to leave with the ability and desire to examine their own lives and values, developing skills as critical thinkers and intellectually independent members of society.

This course is centered around reading and writing, and **a lot of both** will be expected from you. First and foremost, however, the class is about *thinking*. “I don’t know” is never an acceptable answer: as we will see, it’s not *about* what you *know*. Even if it were possible, I don’t expect you to know it all; I do, however, expect you to think. Furthermore, I don’t expect you to agree with all of the texts, or even with me! In most other classes (math, science, etc.), the professor is giving you the indisputable *facts*; in this class, I ask that you question everything.

### Textbooks and Bibliography:

All required readings are provided here in Canvas in .pdf format.

### Course Projects and Requirements (Evaluation):

1. **A course journal. [25%]** The course journal will be kept all semester long, due at the end of the semester. For each class session, I will give you a response question; a few paragraphs should be sufficient in each case, but journals will be graded on relevance, completeness, and use of course material (your journal responses should show that you have read, and are applying, the assigned reading). **You will keep your journal in Canvas**, and you can find it in the “Course Journal” module on the course page. Journals will be due at the end of the semester, and all entries must be posted by the due date. **Late entries will receive no credit.**
2. **Discussion questions. [30%]** After you complete an assigned reading, you will come up with at least three questions. These can and should range from questions to clarify ideas in the reading (“What does this author mean by X?”), critical questions (“I think that the author is wrong about X, because of Z; how would they respond to this?”), or even questions about application

("Does the concept of X also apply to Z?"). Your questions should be typed up and submitted to Canvas (see the "Discussion Question" module on the course page), and each set of questions is **due before we start discussing the assigned reading**. You can and should draw upon these questions in our class discussions--in some cases, I will even call them out. Discussion questions are graded as "complete" or "incomplete." Off-topic questions will be treated as "incomplete," and late submissions will receive no credit.

3. **Two In-Class Exams [25%]**, consisting of short essays. See the course schedule below for specific dates.
4. **Class participation [20%]** is very important. This includes not only attendance, but also active involvement in class discussion. Draw upon your own discussion questions, and also engage with your fellow students about their questions!

#### Relevant Policies:

1. Attendance means being present for the *entire class*. Either show up on time and stay for the entire session, or don't show up at all; arriving late, or coming in and out during class, is disruptive and will not be tolerated. In case we're unclear: a minute late is still *late*.
2. **The use of AI to generate content for assignments is strictly prohibited.** In this course, I want you to develop *your own* critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete **any part** of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the [Student Academic Integrity policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003). [↗\(https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003\)](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) [\\_ \(https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003\)](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003).
3. Silence cell phones before entering the classroom, out of respect to fellow students and the discussion. Any student interrupting class with a cell phone or other noisy electronic device may be asked to leave the class for the day.
4. **Numerical grading scale breakdown:** At the end of this semester, I will assign you a letter grade based upon the percentage of the total points available for the semester that you have earned. My grading scale is as follows. **A:** 100%-90; **B:** 89.9-80; **C:** 79.9-70; **D:** 69.9-60; **F:** 59.9 or below.

#### Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences:

According to UNT Policy 06.003, "Student Academic Integrity," academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

#### ADA Accommodation Statement:

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at [disability.unt.edu](https://disability.unt.edu).

#### Emergency Notification & Procedures:

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a

university closure, please refer to the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

## Course Outline/Sequence of Subjects:

### Unit 1: Critical Questions

August 18	<b>First Day of Class</b> Syllabus; Introductions; Outline of the Course
August 20	<b>Opening Discussion:</b> What is Ethics? <i>Laying out some vocabulary.</i>
August 22	<b>Reading:</b> Erich Fromm, "Humanistic Ethics" <b>Discussion Questions #1 Due</b>
August 25	Fromm, continued
August 27	Fromm, continued
August 29	Fromm, continued
September 1	<b>Labor Day: No Class</b>
September 3	<b>Reading:</b> Christine Korsgaard, "The Normative Question" <b>Discussion Questions #2 Due</b>
September 5	Korsgaard, continued
September 8	Korsgaard, continued
September 10	Korsgaard, continued

### Unit 2: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

September 12	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I <b>Discussion Questions #3 Due</b>
September 15	Book I, continued
September 17	Book I, continued
September 19	Book I, continued
September 22	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II <b>Discussion Questions #4 Due</b>
September 24	Book II, continued

September 26	Book II, continued
September 29	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book V
October 1	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book VI <b>Discussion Questions #5 Due</b>
October 3	Book VI, continued
October 6	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book VII <b>Discussion Questions #6 Due</b>
October 8	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book VIII-IX <b>Discussion Questions #7 Due</b>
October 10	Books VIII-IX, continued
October 13	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book X <b>Discussion Questions #8 Due</b>
October 15	Aristotle Wrap-Up <i>Midterm Review</i>

#### October 17: Midterm Exam

#### Unit 3: Immanuel Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*

October 20	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Grounding</i> , Preface <b>Discussion Questions #9 Due</b>
October 22	Preface, continued
October 24	Preface, continued
October 27	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Grounding</i> , First Section <b>Discussion Questions #9 Due</b>
October 29	First Section, continued
October 31	First Section, continued
November 3	<b>Reading:</b> <i>Grounding</i> , Second Section, [AK 4:406 - AK 4:432] The AK pagination is found in the margins; AK 4:432 is on the left side of page 19 of the PDF. <b>Discussion Questions #10 Due</b>
November 5	AK 406-432, continued
November 7	AK 406-432, continued

November 10	<p><b>Reading:</b> Grounding, Second Section, [AK 4:432 - AK 4:445]</p> <p>The AK pagination is found in the margins; AK 4:445 is the end of the PDF.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Discussion Questions #11 Due</b></p>
November 12	Second Section, continued
November 14	Second Section, continued

#### Unit 4: Autonomy and Moral Authority

November 17	<p><b>Reading:</b> Christine Korsgaard, "The Authority of Reflection," pp. 1-10</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Discussion Questions #12 Due</b></p>
November 19	Korsgaard, pp. 1-10, continued
November 21	Korsgaard, pp. 1-10, continued
December 1	<p><b>Reading:</b> Christine Korsgaard, "The Authority of Reflection," pp. 10-20</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Discussion Questions #13 Due</b></p>
December 3	<p>Korsgaard, pp. 10-20, continued</p> <p><b>Course Wrap-Up</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Journal Entries Due (11:59 PM)</b></p>
December 5	<b>Reading Day: No Class</b>

#### Week of December 8: Final Exam