PHIL 1310: Ethics, Happiness, & The Good Life (Fall 2017)
Section 03S: MW 9:25-10:40am (EENGR 1.262)
Section 04S: MW 10:50-12:05pm (ELABS 304)

Professor: Dr. Alexander V. Stehn (alex.stehn@utrgv.edu)
Office hours in ELABS 359: MW 3:05-4:15pm (and by appointment)

Course Description: All of you are university students, which means that you have a rare and extremely valuable opportunity to improve or even reinvent yourselves through higher education. Our course begins by studying some ancient Greek philosophical perspectives on ethics to help you figure out what kind of person you are becoming. As we read and discuss works by Plato, Aristotle, and Epictetus, we will be following Socrates’ two philosophical imperatives to: 1) know ourselves, and 2) care for ourselves by thoughtfully considering questions of how we should live. By reflecting on the nature of happiness and the good life while practicing virtue and friendship, you will also be introduced to philosophy as a way of life.

Of course, our individual practices of the art of living cannot be separated from the broader values that shape our lives together, since we are always caring for ourselves in the context of an entire world full of others. In part two of this course, we will consider two of the most important modern philosophical attempts to develop an account of the fundamental principles of morality: Kant’s duty-based ethics and Mill’s happiness-based ethics. We will consider the concrete implications of taking these two theories seriously with respect to the global problem of extreme poverty, which is also present right here in the Rio Grande Valley. This will enable us to think critically about our personal, social, political, and economic responsibilities to other people.

Since many of us are religious and the Judeo-Christian tradition has also influenced secular thinking about ethics, the third part of the course will examine the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Levinas, who each develop a religious understanding of our duty to genuinely encounter and love our neighbors. Their perspectives will also help us to reconsider the previous parts of the course by rethinking the role that caring for others might play in caring for ourselves.

The overarching aim of this course is to challenge you to become a better version of yourself by developing a more thoughtful understanding of ethics, happiness, and the good life for yourself and others. A 15-hour service learning project will help you achieve this goal by providing the opportunity to integrate theoretical reflection and ethical practice.

Required Texts:

Additional required readings will be made available electronically on Blackboard.

Grading breakdown:
10%—Attendance & Class Participation
10%—Completion of 15 Hours of Service-Learning
20%—Pop Quizzes & Ethics Notebook Entries
20%—Ethics Notebook Essay
20%—Reflective Essay
20%—Final Essay
Attendance: I expect you to regularly attend and participate fully in this class. You should commit to missing a maximum of 4 classes, except in the most serious and exceptional cases (e.g., prolonged illness that requires extensive hospitalization). By keeping this commitment, you will earn 10 points (out of a possible 10) for the attendance portion of your final grade; students who miss more than 4 classes will lose 1 grade point (out of a possible 10) for each absence. Students who wish to drop the course must initiate the drop themselves, since I do not drop students for nonattendance.

Important Note: If you miss class, you are responsible for contacting a classmate to get notes and find out about assignments that you may have missed. If you email me to ask routine questions answered by the syllabus or Blackboard, I will simply refer you to these resources. However, if you have any questions about the course material, please come to my office hours, or email me if that is not possible, and I will help you understand the material and succeed in the course to the best of my ability.

Class Participation: Philosophy classes work best as sites of thoughtful discussion based on careful reading. Before each class, you are expected to carefully read the assigned text while reflecting upon what it means and why it matters, so that you will be ready to actively participate in class. At the very least, students are welcome to attend class when they bring a copy of the assigned reading.

At the beginning of each class, the floor will be opened for questions. Once all questions are answered, I will assume that you have resolved any misunderstandings or confusions from the previous class meeting, and that you can be held accountable for that material. We will then proceed to discuss the day’s assigned reading. There are also ways of participating outside of class, including attending office hours or sending me your thoughts via email. Blackboard can be used for commenting on the readings, asking questions, and having discussions that extend beyond the classroom.

Service Learning Project Hours: Service learning is an educational approach designed to: 1) bridge the gap that often appears between the classroom and the “outside world” and 2) provide opportunities to link philosophical reflection with ethical practice. Your project in this class will be to reflect upon ethics, happiness, and the good life as you serve your neighbors, i.e., community members who are not your friends or family. This service will place you into learning situations where you will encounter new people and have experiences that would never occur in a classroom, but that are nonetheless crucial for considering the theoretical issues that we will raise in class, especially in Part III of the course.

You may perform your service learning in any area that is related to ethics, deals with a moral issue, or is related to fostering a better life for others. You are required to complete at least 15 hours of service learning before the end of the semester, uploading your service learning plans to Blackboard by October 2nd. You can learn more about service learning opportunities and get other support from UTRGV’s Office of Engaged Scholarship & Learning, whose representatives are tentatively scheduled to visit our class on September 18th to provide more information.

Pop Quizzes: To encourage the habit of regularly reading the assigned texts, our class will occasionally begin with a brief, unannounced quiz, followed immediately by a discussion of the answers. There are no make-ups for quizzes, since your lowest two quiz grades will be dropped.

Reading Questions: Part of what makes reading philosophy so enjoyable is the fact that it is challenging, and part of what you should learn in this class is that challenging yourself is good. Reading questions will be provided on Blackboard for this purpose. Answering them will improve your reading comprehension, make the pop quizzes much easier, encourage your personal engagement with the texts, and raise the philosophical level of class discussion, but your answers will not be collected for a grade.

Ethics Notebook Entries: For ancient philosophers, the ethical task of taking care of oneself and others was intimately related to the philosophical commandment to “know thyself.” As a way to practice both
of these tasks, you are required to keep an ethics notebook, a bound paper journal completely separate from your class notes. Think of your notebook as a technological device that you may use to: 1) further develop your reflections upon course materials; 2) explore who you are, as well as what you think ethics, happiness, and the good life are, 3) cultivate your actions and character in light of these ideas, and 4) keep track of your own ethical development as the course progresses. Sometimes, I will give you specific topics or assignments to for your notebook, but you should write at least two 10-minute entries per week (one per class) on anything that relates your own life, thoughts, and experiences directly to the course material (notebooks will be collected on 9/20, 11/1, & 11/29).

Ethics Notebook Essay: At the end of Part I of the course, you will re-read all that you have written in your ethics notebook and turn in a 1500-word critical reflection upon what you have learned and accomplished in the course so far (due Oct. 18th).

Reflective Essay: In this 1500-word essay, you will reflect critically upon your responsibility to the problem of extreme poverty in light of the materials covered in Part II of the course (due Nov. 27th).

Final Essay: The first 750 words of this essay will contain a detailed description of what you did for your service learning project hours (much of which you should have already written about in your ethics notebook). The next 1500 words will develop your reflections on your service experience in light of the entire course, with a focus on the material from Part III.

Policy on Extensions & Late Work: All assignments, including papers, are to be completed by the date indicated on the syllabus. I do not mind granting extensions, provided that you let me know well in advance about your scheduling conflict. To ask for an extension, email me (alex.stehn@utrgv.edu) as soon as possible (a minimum of 24 hours) before the due date, briefly let me know why you need an extension, and be sure to propose a specific new due date. Otherwise, your request will likely be denied.

Scholastic Integrity: As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students. Following UTRGV guidelines, I will recommend that you receive either a zero for the assignment or an ‘F’ for the course. In some cases, there may even be a disciplinary hearing resulting in suspension or expulsion from UTRGV. Instead of facing these serious consequences, please ask me for help if you are ever confused about what constitutes scholastic integrity or if you are tempted to violate this policy for any reason.

Core Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated mastery of the core curriculum objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. These objectives for core curriculum classes in Language, Philosophy and Culture are set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Each associated learning outcome (as defined by UTRGV) is listed here along with a brief description of how the outcome will be accomplished and assessed in this course:
**CRITICAL THINKING:** Students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems, to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.

Thinking about ethics, happiness, and the good life offers an ideal opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. Every course text aims to present logically valid arguments (supported by true or at least plausible premises) that carefully consider all of the relevant information to solve both theoretical and practical problems, arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and explore new questions. In other words, classical and contemporary philosophical texts are a model for critical thinking. Teaching students to read, interpret, evaluate, speak, and write about these texts—in the very same critical spirit they were written in—provides ample opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. Critical thinking in the form of reading, interpretation, and evaluation will be assessed by pop quizzes. Critical thinking in the form of writing, interpretation, analysis, and creative response will be assessed by three 1500-word essays.

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language, genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.

This course is reading, writing, and discussion intensive, so much of the course will be dedicated to learning how to read, write, and discuss things in a *philosophical* way. In the context of class discussions, students will speak to their classmates and professor to communicate their interpretations of the text and evaluation of its major claims. In their written essays, students will present well-reasoned and well-organized analyses of ethical theories, apply these theories to particular cases or problems, and demonstrate knowledge of the relevant information necessary to communicate, develop, and support their own philosophical positions.

**PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

Through class discussions and major assignments, students will develop and demonstrate an awareness of how their own values and beliefs correspond or conflict with the various positions taken by philosophers in the course readings. Throughout the semester, students will be required to keep an “Ethics Notebook” that they use to take responsibility for their own thinking in the response to the class readings and their service learning experience. Students will also be responsible for advancing their own understanding of ethics beyond that of a naive relativism and ethnocentrism in order to develop a more reflective understanding of how philosophers seek to include various and sometimes competing moral demands and cultural values in broader theoretical frameworks. More generally, by being asked to give reasons for why they believe what they believe and why they do what they do, students will develop a greater sense of their personal responsibility to articulate, defend, and sometimes actually change their ethical positions and behaviors.

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

Students will demonstrate increased awareness of cultural diversity, both in terms of how it poses a problem to any philosophical attempt to develop an overarching ethical theory and in terms of how any ethical solution to practical problems must successfully understand and navigate the diversity of values and cultures in the world. The course is structured to present the philosophical development of thinking about ethics, happiness, and the good life as it grows out of particular places, cultures, and religions (e.g., Ancient Greece, 18th century Germany, 19th century Britain, Christianity as the effective state religion of 19th century Denmark, 20th century Jewish philosophy after the Holocaust, and contemporary U.S. culture). Students will also develop their sense of civic engagement and social responsibility by completing 15 hours of service learning and reflecting on its meaning, value, and significance in their final essays.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at ability@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

**Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Violence:** In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.
Mandatory Course Evaluation Period: Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available Nov. 15 – Dec. 6.

Final Note Regarding Schedule: This syllabus is composed in good faith, with a schedule that will guide us throughout the term. Still, the professor reserves the right to make adjustments to this schedule as deemed necessary for the overall needs of the course. Any changes will be communicated as far in advance as possible during class time or on Blackboard, but you are responsible for knowing if any changes have been made.

Tentative Schedule: (*Indicates text available on Blackboard*)

**Part I: Ancient Philosophy as a Way of Ethical Life & The Care of the Self**

Introduction: Ethics, Philosophy, and the Good Life

- **Mon, 8/28** Course Overview
- **Wed, 8/30** Why be good? Reading: *Plato, The Republic (352b-362c)*
- **Mon, 9/04** NO CLASS: Labor Day
- **Wed, 9/06** Plato, *Meno* (Translator's Intro.; 70a-86c)
- **Mon, 9/11** Plato, *Meno* (86c-100b)
- **Wed, 9/13** Plato, *The Defense of Socrates [aka Apology]* (Trans. Intro; 17a-28b)
- **Mon, 9/18** Plato, *The Defense of Socrates [aka Apology]* (28b-42a)
- **PRESENTATION: More Information on Service Learning**

**The Life, Death, and Philosophical Legacy of Socrates**

- **Wed, 9/20** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bk. I—Happiness and Being-at-Work)
- **Mon, 9/25** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bk. II—Virtue and the Mean)
- **Wed, 9/27** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bk. VIII—Friendship and Community)
- **Mon, 10/02** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bk. IX—Friendship and the Self)
- **DUE: Plans for Service-Learning (Upload to Blackboard)**

**A Stoic Guide to The Good Life**

- **Wed, 10/04** Intro to Hellenistic Philosophy: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, Cynicism
- **Reading:** *Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus*

- **ASSIGNED: Ethics Notebook Essay**

- **Mon, 10/09** Epictetus, *The Handbook* (Translator’s Introduction; §1-§18)
- **Wed, 10/11** Epictetus, *The Handbook* (§19-§37)
- **Mon, 10/16** Epictetus, *The Handbook* (§38-§53)
- **Wed, 10/18** Introduction to Part II of Course

- **DUE: Ethics Notebook Essay (Bring to Class & Upload to Blackboard)**
Part II: Modern Philosophy, Moral Theory, & The Bounds of Responsibility
The Nature of the Moral Law & Our Moral Duties
Mon, 10/23  Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (pp. 7-17)
Wed, 10/25  Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (pp. 19-33)
Mon, 10/30  Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (pp. 33-48)

The Greatest Happiness for the Greatest Number
Wed, 11/01  Mill, *Utilitarianism* (pp. 1-26)

DUE: Ethics Notebook with a Minimum of 18 Entries (Bring to Class)

Mon, 11/06  Mill, *Utilitarianism* (pp. 27-41)
Wed, 11/08  Mill, *Utilitarianism* (pp. 42-50)

What is Our Moral Responsibility to People in Extreme Poverty?
Mon, 11/13  *Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”*

ASSIGNED: Reflective Essay

(Concentrate on §1 [pp. 294-296] AND 319-335)

Part III: Religion as an Ethical Way of Life & The Care of the Other
"Religiously" Speaking, How Should I Live?
Mon, 11/20  *Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity* (pp. 233-257)
Wed, 11/22  *Kierkegaard, “Our Duty to Love the People we See”*
Mon, 11/27  *Kierkegaard, “You Shall Love”*

DUE: Reflective Essay (Bring to Class & Upload to Blackboard)

Ethics As Responsibility to/for the Other
Wed, 11/29  Selections from *Levinas, *Ethics & Infinity*

DUE: Ethics Notebook with a Minimum of 27 Entries (Bring to Class)

Mon, 12/04  Selections from *Levinas, Is it Righteous to Be?*

ASSIGNED: Final Essay

Course Wrap-Up
Wed, 12/06  Celebration of Learning & Review

DUE: Final Essay (Upload to Blackboard)

Mon, 12/11  Section 04S: Uploaded by no later than noon
Wed, 12/13  Section 03S: Uploaded by no later than 9:45am

“The ancient Greek philosophers, such as Epicurus, Zeno, and Socrates, remained more faithful to the Idea of the philosopher than their modern counterparts have done. ‘When will you finally begin to live virtuously?’ said Plato to an old man who told him he was attending classes on virtue. The point is not always to speculate, but also ultimately to think about applying our knowledge.”

—Immanuel Kant