

# Become your best self

UTRGV

Phil 1310: Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life

Fall 2016

Section 01: T/Th 9:25am-10:40am; ARHU 310  
Section 02: T/Th 10:50am-12:05pm; ARHU 310

Professor: Dr. Mariana Alessandri

Office: ARHU 302 (across from elevators)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-1:30pm; Thursdays: 3-4pm (and appointments)

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## Required Texts (hard copies of the books are required; no e-readers or electronic copies)

Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube [ISBN: 0872206335]

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs [ISBN: 1585100358]

Epictetus, *The Handbook (Enchiridion)*, trans. Nicholas P. White [ISBN: 0915145693]

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington [ISBN: 087220166X]

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher [ISBN: 087220605X]

(All books will be on reserve at the library. All other readings will be posted on Blackboard)

## Course Promises

This class will challenge you to begin the process of becoming your best self by getting to know yourself. Therefore, the motto of the course will be: “know yourself in order to become your best self.” The ancient philosophers believe that the road to the ethical life begins with self-knowledge, and Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard believes that the ethical life is itself a road that some people take and some people may never take. For Kierkegaard, to become yourself is to become an ethical individual, to learn how to love and care for your neighbors.

This course works on two levels: *self-knowledge* through reading and *self-becoming* through community participation. The philosophers we will read all believe that knowing yourself is an extremely important step in becoming an ethical individual. This class will also ask you to ask yourself: what is my responsibility to my family? To my neighbor? To a stranger?

The philosophers we will read in the second half of the semester will help us to figure out what our responsibilities to each other are. We will encounter different theories about what we owe to one another. Throughout the semester you will practice living ethically by serving your community. A **15-hour service learning component** constitutes a large part of this course, and will be the key to beginning to become yourself. Reading philosophy and talking about it are great, but they alone are not enough for the ethical life. We must practice what we preach, and live what we believe.

If you do this class right, by the semester’s end, you will know yourself better and will have started to become your best self. By thinking about yourself philosophically and doing service learning, you will have a clearer understanding of what your community needs and what your responsibility is. By the end of the semester you will not only know yourself better, but you will also understand why Kierkegaard says that becoming your best self is a task for a lifetime.

## Course Trajectory

**Your Self:** In the first half of the semester, we will focus on how the ethical life involves caring for yourself. Although the Socratic phrase “know thyself” has become a cliché familiar to everyone, it is, in fact, harder than it seems. In this course we will spend 7 weeks getting to know ourselves and caring for ourselves by reading the works of Plato, Aristotle, and the Ancient Stoics.

**The Community:** In the second half of the semester, we will focus on how the ethical life involves caring for others. Both Kant and Mill provide specific ways of thinking about our actions and figuring out whether those actions coincide with our priorities and values. Many times, our actions do not coincide with our values, and these philosophers give us the tools by which to measure our actions and/or to amend them. Kierkegaard suggests that though we are born human, we are not yet a “self”—that takes a lifetime of good decisions. He is working from a Christian framework, and Levinas, working from a Holocaust-era Jewish framework, asks about our responsibility to strangers: is it my job to care for someone I don’t know?

## Summary of Requirements

Attendance	10%
Ethics Journal	10%
Pre-Service paper (due Sept 27)	10%
Ethics Notebook Reflective Essay (due Oct 18)	20%
World Hunger Reflective Essay (due Nov 15)	20%
Service Learning Project (15 hours)	10%
Service Learning Reflective Essay (due Dec 11)	20%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

## My Philosophy on Philosophy

The way I see it, my job as a professor of philosophy is to help you learn to read and interpret philosophical texts. If this is your first philosophy course, you will likely feel confused when you read philosophy. It is not like reading a novel, and many people think and say that they are “just not good at it.” I don’t buy it. Becoming a good reader of philosophy takes time and practice, and above all, patience. There are no shortcuts.

There will be reading for homework every night. Reading philosophy usually means *rereading* philosophy. You sometimes have to read the same paragraph four times to figure out what the author is saying. This is not because the author can’t write and it’s also not because you are “no good at it”; it’s because we as a society have become accustomed to simplistic writing in the form of headlines and twitter feeds. (Take my Critical Thinking course for more on why we as a society are losing our ability to read philosophy).

For each reading, I have provided guiding questions (located next to the daily reading assignment). These questions are meant to give you direction as you read. To become better at reading, it is crucial that you read for yourself. Any fool can tell me what Wikipedia says about Socrates or Kierkegaard; I want you to practice interpreting what you are reading. The class discussions are designed to help you make sense of the reading. The best thing you can do after class is to re-read the same text before moving on to the next day’s homework. This is not a memorization class. Your success or failure will depend on how involved you are in the text and class discussions.

**Text Policy: Whoever brings their text to class (on time) will be marked present. The text is limited to actual paper copies: no e-copies of books or articles allowed.**

## How You Will Become Better at Writing

Good writers weren’t born that way; it takes tons and tons of practice. In this class you will get plenty of practice. On many days, at the beginning of class, you will have an opportunity to write about the reading, based on the guiding questions from the homework. Sometimes I will collect these short writings and review them. They will be helpful for you when it comes to writing your papers. You can always talk to me about particular difficulties that you have with writing. Come to my office hours with something written, and we will read it and I will help you to become better at writing.

To push your writing practice to the next level, you will be writing one short and three long reflective essays. The short essay will be about what you expect from your service learning. The first long essay will be based on your ethics journal, the second will be about solving the problem of world hunger, and the third is about your service learning experience. We will be practicing writing throughout the semester, so you will have an idea about what I will expect from these essays.

**Attendance:** I expect you to come to class and participate fully in it, just as I expect myself to make the lectures intellectually stimulating and interesting. **To get credit for attendance you must have your text with you. If you do not have your text, you are welcome to stay in the room but will be counted absent for the day.**

You can miss a maximum of 4 classes, barring the most serious and exceptional circumstances (e.g., prolonged sickness that requires extensive hospitalization). Students who miss no more than 4 classes will earn 10% for the attendance portion of their final grade, students who miss 5-7 classes will earn 5%, and students who miss 8 or more classes will earn 0%. If you miss class, you must contact a classmate to see what you missed.

**Service Learning Project:** Service learning is a strategy designed to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world. What we study in the classroom is meant to be practiced and lived, and that practice, in turn, will influence how you interpret the text. Book learning and action are meant to complement one another. With respect to this class in particular, your project will be to reflect upon ethics as you serve 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 could never be constructed in a classroom, but that are nonetheless crucial for considering various theoretical issues that we will raise in class.

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. The goal is for you to **serve for 15 hours** (i.e., one hour for each week of class this semester). During the first 3 weeks of class, you must consult with a representative from the organization and talk about what you will be expected to serve, and how you will use your 15 hours. You will need to submit a brief explanation of what you will be doing to fulfill this course requirement along with the contact information for the organization and a person supervising you in case I need to verify your participation. This **Pre-Service Paper** (1-2 pages) should describe your specific goals in conjunction with the organization you are working with. **The Pre-Service paper is due on September 27<sup>th</sup> at class time.** Learn more about service learning opportunities and how to use the Engagement Zone software here: <http://ez.utrgv.edu>

**Ethics Journal and Essay:** For Socrates, the ethical life begins with “knowing thyself.” Aristotle says that treating others well includes treating yourself well, and we will discuss what treating someone well means for the ancient philosophers in contrast to what it might mean today. In order to practice knowing thyself and treating others well, you will be required to keep a **philosophical ethics journal**. Think of this journal as a device that you may use to: 1) reflect on the readings; 2) explore who you are, what your values are, and what you think the good life is, 3) cultivate your actions and character in light of these reflections, and 4) keep track of your ethical development as the course progresses. In this journal you can think freely. You must bring these journals to class every day, and they will be collected at random from time to time. I will not grade them, but

will give them credit or no credit, depending on how thoughtful your reflections are. You need to write an entry *at least* twice a week (once per class period) on anything that relates your life, thoughts, and experiences to the readings and class discussions. This is a physical journal that can be handed in to me altogether, so an actual journal or notebook would be acceptable, but an emailed document or loose paper would not.

The **Ethics Journal Essay** will provide a summarized description and critical reflection upon what you learned and accomplished through your journal in the form of a 4-5 page essay. This essay will be graded. **Due: October 18<sup>th</sup> in class and on Blackboard.**

**World Hunger Reflective Essay:** In this 4-5 page essay, you will reflect upon your responsibility to the problem of global hunger or extreme poverty in light of the materials covered throughout Part II of the course. More details will be provided. **Due: November 15<sup>th</sup> in class and on Blackboard.**

**Service Learning Reflective Essay:** The first two pages of this essay will contain a detailed description of what you did for your service learning (much of which you should have written about in your ethics notebook). The next 4-5 pages will constitute your reflections on your service experience in light of the entire course, with a focus on the material on Levinas and/or Kierkegaard. This essay is instead of a final exam. More information TBA. **Due: December 11<sup>th</sup> on Blackboard.**

### Final Grades

**A = Excellent (4.0; 90-100)** – If you receive an A in this course, it means you have dedicated yourself to this class- you have been here (on time) every required class period, you have carefully done your reading for the day and brought your text to class, you have written thoughtful essays, and you are a good community member. It means that you offered your thoughts and listened to others. If you receive an A in the course, chances are that you will have successfully begun the Kierkegaardian project of “becoming your best self.”

**B = Good (3.0; 80-90)** – If you receive a B in this course, it means that you have solidly met all of the requirements. It means that you have come to class prepared, you have done the service learning project and you have written good reflective essays, but not top-quality ones.

**C = Satisfactory (2.0; 70-80)** – If you receive a C in this class, it means that you have met all of the requirements of this class, but have failed to do so consistently.

**D = Below Average (1.0; 60-70)** – If you receive a D in this class, it means that either you were a poor community member or you performed below average on your assignments (or perhaps you failed to turn in one or more assignments). If you are aiming for a D, realize that while it is considered passing overall, it is not considered passing in some circumstances, and you should inform yourself about these. If you earn a D, then you have not put aside the requisite attention for this class.

**F = Failure (0.0; below 60)** – If you receive an F for this class, it means that either you missed too many classes, or you did not meet the requirements on this syllabus. Most people who fail this class have missed too many classes. Some people who fail show up every day but fail to turn in any work, so realize you have to do both not to fail.

**Academic Honesty:** 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, 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.

**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](http://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 in an environment 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 18 – Dec 8.

## Calendar of Activities

Sept 1	Last day to add or register for Fall classes
Sept 2	Last day to withdraw (drop all classes) for a 80% refund
Sept 5	Labor Day Holiday, <b>no classes</b>
Sept 14	Census day (last day to drop without it appearing on the transcript)
Nov 17	Last day to drop (DR grade) a class or withdraw (grade of W)
Nov 18 - Dec 8	Online course evaluations available
Nov 24 - Nov 25	Thanksgiving Holiday, <b>no classes</b>
Dec 8	Study Day, <b>no classes</b>
Dec 9 – Dec 15	Final Exams

**Course Drops:** According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor and contact Student Accessibility Services to schedule an appointment to initiate services. It is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Student Accessibility Services before classes start. However, accommodations can be provided at any time.

**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](mailto: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](mailto:ability@utrgv.edu).

**Core Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes:** This course satisfies a core curriculum requirement. 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. Student learning outcomes will be regularly assessed to determine whether THECB objectives are being met by students completing core curriculum classes.

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

**Learning Objectives for Philosophy Degree:** This course may also be taken to fulfill a requirement for a B.A. in Philosophy. Students who graduate with a degree in philosophy from UTRGV are expected to have attained a certain level of intellectual development which is characteristic of the intense study of philosophy. The goals for all philosophy classes that count towards the major in philosophy include, in combination with the particular goals for the course, the following objectives:

1. **CRITICAL THINKING AND READING:** Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing.
2. **HISTORY:** Students will describe the history of Philosophy, by identifying and distinguishing between the major historical and conceptual divisions of philosophy, the positions within those divisions, and major thinkers who contributed to those periods and specializations.
3. **COMMUNICATION:** Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material.
4. **ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW:** Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions.
5. **PERSONAL, CIVIC, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Students will articulate and evaluate their various activities, identities, values, and goals in order to develop a flexible strategy for ongoing personal growth, community engagement, and/or professional achievement.

Date	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reading: to be completed in time for class discussion.</b>  <b>Use these reading questions for guidance</b></p>
8.30	Do you know any good people who are unhappy? Any bad people who are happy?
9.1	Why be good? Reading: Plato's Republic: How One Should Live" (Blackboard)
9.6	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (70a-86c) Q. What does Socrates take to be the flaw in the way Meno argues?
9.8	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (86c-100b) Q. Do you think Meno has changed by the end of the dialogue?
9.13	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (17a-28b) Q. What do you think Socrates is trying to achieve? <b>Service Learning Information Session</b>
9.15	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (28b-42a) Q. Why won't Socrates quit philosophy?
9.20	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk. I—Happiness and Being-at-Work) Q. What does Aristotle mean by "end"? What does he say is the end of human beings?
9.22	Aristotle (Bk. II—Virtue and the Mean) Q. What does Aristotle mean by saying that virtue is a mean? Do you agree with 1104b30?
9.27	Aristotle (Bk. VIII—Friendship and Community) Q. What does Aristotle mean by saying that friendship is a kind of virtue? <b>Pre-Service-Learning paper due electronically on Blackboard and paper copy in class</b>
9.29	Aristotle (Bk. IX—Friendship and the Self) Q. What are the implications of Aristotle's notion that "a friend is another self"?
10.4	Aristotle (Bk. X—Pleasure and Happiness) Q. Do you agree with Aristotle's description of pleasure?
10.6	Intro to Hellenistic Phil: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Cynicism Reading: Epicurus, <i>Letter to Menoeceus</i> (Blackboard) Q. What does Epicurus mean by "pain from want" and how can you go about removing it from your life?
10.11	Epictetus, <i>The Handbook</i> (§1-§28) Q. Why does Epictetus suggest that we eliminate desire?
10.13	Epictetus, <i>The Handbook</i> (§29-§53) Q. What does Epictetus mean by "you must be one person?"
10.18	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (pp. 1-26) Q. What is the difference between satisfaction and happiness, for Mill? <b>DUE: Ethics Journal Essay (Bring to Class &amp; Upload to Blackboard)</b>
10.20	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (pp. 27-41) Q. What is the difference between means and ends?
10.25	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (pp. 42-64) Q. Where does moral obligation come from, for Mill?
10.27	Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (pp. 7-17) Q. What is the difference between "in accordance with duty" and "from duty"?
11.1	Kant, <i>Grounding</i> (pp. 19-33) Q. What is Kant's "categorical imperative"?
11.3	Kant, <i>Grounding</i> (pp. 33-44) What does Kant conclude from the idea that humans are <i>ends in themselves</i> ?
11.8	Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (Blackboard)
11.10	O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (Blackboard)
11.15	<b>Due: World Hunger Reflective Essay;</b> Read Kierkegaard, <i>Practice in Christianity</i> (pp. 233-257) (Blackboard)
11.17	Kierkegaard, <i>Works of Love</i> "Our Duty to Love the People we See" (Blackboard) Q. Why does Kierkegaard think it's wrong to love the "imaginary idea" of the person?
11.22	Kierkegaard, <i>Works of Love</i> "You Shall Love" (Blackboard) Q. Who is your neighbor, according to Kierkegaard?
11.24	Thanksgiving: no class
11.29	Levinas, selections from <i>Ethics &amp; Infinity</i> (Blackboard) Q. What is the "face"?
12.1	Levinas, selections from <i>Is it Righteous to Be?</i> (Blackboard) Q. Why is ethics "against nature"?
12/6	Summary of the Course and Review for the Service Learning Reflective Paper

**\*Service Learning Reflective Essay Due on December 11 by Midnight (upload to Blackboard; no paper copy required.)**