

PHIL 1301: Introduction to Philosophy

Time & Location: Monday & Wednesday 3:00pm-4:20pm, TWHC 403

Instructor: Lewis Wang

Office Hours: Monday 9:00am-11:00am at Worrell Hall 301 or virtually by appointment

Course Description

How should we live our lives? This is arguably the most fundamental question in human existence, and philosophers across the globe have grappled with it since ancient times. In this course, we will explore views on what a good life looks like from ancient Greece, India, and China. Along the way, we will discuss topics such as virtue, pleasure, freedom, suffering, and death, as well as how they bear on a good life. We will read works by Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Confucius, Mencius, Zhuangzi, and the Buddha. By exposing students to a range of ancient perspectives on a good life, this course invites them to reflect on their own life and to draw on ancient wisdom as they chart their own paths forward.

Learning Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to get students to seriously engage with the question of how to live a good life and to help them develop their own answers that they can apply to their own lives. In addition, this course also aims to cultivate in students the following abilities:

- The ability to read and understand complex and abstract texts.
- The ability to clearly and concisely summarize the main question, claim and argument of a piece of writing, both verbally and in writing.
- The ability to analyze and evaluate an argument, including its logical structure and its premises.
- The ability to connect wisdom of the past to our life and the current world.
- The ability to keep an open mind to foreign, antiquated, or unfamiliar thoughts and conceptual frameworks.

Required Texts

All readings will be made available on **Blackboard** in pdf format or as links to online open-source texts.

Assignments and Grading

Attendance and Participation (10%)

Participation is a central and essential part of this course. Your participation in the course is important not only for your learning and success but also to create a community of learners. There are multiple ways to participate in this course: answer my questions, ask questions, participate in group discussions, and talk to me in office hours.

Attendance is not graded separately from participation, as one cannot participate in class unless they come to class. I do not take attendance each class (except for the last two group-presentation sessions). Instead, I ask you to keep track of your own attendance. **It is thus very important that you keep a tally of your own absences, including both ones with a reasonable excuse and ones without a reasonable excuse.**

At the end of the semester, you will be required to complete an **attendance and participation self-assessment form**, on which you will be asked to reflect on your own attendance and participation performance

in the course and give yourself a participation grade. This grade will be your attendance and participation grade, unless I think you have under- or over-evaluated your performance.

Leading Discussion (10%)

At the beginning of each class, a pair of students will lead discussion. The leading pair must collaborate to prepare a 5–10 minute presentation at the start of class which explains the key points of the day's reading, reconstructs its central argument, and offers 2–3 discussion questions about it. The leading pair must also submit a ~200 word written summary of the reading, covering the central points of their presentation, by the start of the class they are leading. I will assign pairs in the first week of class. Each student is expected to lead the discussion once during the semester.

Short Reflections (20%)

Each week, you're required to submit two short reflections on **Blackboard**: one on what you learned in the previous week's class, and one on the upcoming week's readings. Both are due by Sunday at 11:59pm MT. There's no requirement on length, content, or format; you can include any thoughts, comments, or reactions to past classes and upcoming readings. The purpose of this assignment is to help you digest what you've read and learned, and to show me that you're engaging seriously with the class and the material. My only requirement is that each reflection must include one question. **Reflections are graded on effort** (that is, you get full credit as you show that you have read the readings and thought about it seriously; I am not grading you based on whether you have understood the reading correctly). **Two lowest reflection grades will be dropped.**

Mid-term Exam (25%)

There will be an in-class, closed-book mid-term exam. The exam will consist of short-answer questions and one essay question. A list of questions will be posted to Blackboard 10 days before the mid-term. Unless there is an emergency, failure to show up to the mid-term will result in a 0 for the mid-term. **If you anticipate that you cannot make it to class on the mid-term date, please contact me in advance so that we can arrange a make-up exam date.**

Group Final Project (35%)

For the final project, you will work in **small groups** (~3 people) and bring what we discussed in class back to your life in **a creative format** on any topic relevant to a good life. The project can take (but is not limited to) the following formats: a small story, a mini-play, a podcast, a vlog, a song, a poem, an interview, a short film or documentary, a painting, an op-ed, or a research paper. The point of this assignment is that I want you to express what you have thought about regarding a good life in your preferred way of expressing it, in a way that is closest to your life. There is no length or size requirement on the project (unless your group decides to write a philosophy paper, in which case it needs to be at least 3500 words and it must be on a philosopher we did not read in this course). At the end of the semester, each group must submit the output of the project as well as a document explaining what the project is meant to express philosophically regarding a good life. Furthermore, each group will give a 10-minute presentation of its project in the last week of the class (for which attendance is **mandatory unless there is a reasonable excuse**), and others will raise questions in the Q&A. **Groups must run their project idea by me by Nov 11th, and preferably well before that.**

Grading Scale

94 - 100 = A
90 - 93.99 = A-
87 - 89.99 = B+
84 - 86.99 = B

80 – 83.99 = B-
77 – 79.99 = C+
74 – 76.99 = C
70 – 73.99 = C-
60 – 69.99 = D
Below 60 = F

Course Policies

Technology Requirement

Some course content is delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the Web and a stable web browser. You will need to have access to a computer/laptop. If you do not have word-processing software, you can download Word and other Microsoft Office programs (including Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more) for free via UTEP's Microsoft Office Portal. Click the following link for more information about [Microsoft Office 365](#) and follow the instructions. If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP [Technology Support](#) as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students. **Please do not contact me for this type of assistance.** The Help Desk is much better equipped than I am to assist you.

Electronics Policy

You are welcome to use laptops or tablets for the purpose of taking notes or accessing course materials. Please do not do things unrelated to the class with your electronic devices. Remember: not paying attention in class will ultimately affect your own performance and grades. **No use of phone is allowed during class time. If you have an accommodation, a medical need, or an urgent situation that requires you to have your phone accessible, please let me know.**

AI Policy

No use of AI is allowed in this course **except for the final group project.**

For the final group project, use of AI technologies or automated tools, such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, is **only allowed with proper attribution given for its use.** Students must properly cite and give full credit to the program used upon submission of every relevant assignment. For example, text generated using ChatGPT must be cited:

Chat-GPT(version). Date of query (year/month/day). "Text of your query." Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>

A short paragraph describing how the tool(s) was/were used for the assignment must be included.

Course Drop & Incomplete Grade Policy

I will not drop you from the course. However, if you feel that you are unable to complete the course successfully, please let me know and then contact the [Registration and Records Office](#) to initiate the drop process. If you do not, you are at risk of receiving an "F" for the course.

Incomplete grades may be requested only in exceptional circumstances after you have completed at least half of the course requirements. Talk to me immediately if you believe an incomplete is warranted. If granted, we will establish a contract of work to be completed with deadlines.

Scholastic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as one's own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the [Office of Community Standards](#) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit [HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline](#).

Accommodations Policy

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students who become pregnant may also request reasonable accommodations, in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations and University policy. Accommodations that constitute undue hardship are not reasonable. To make a request, please register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact CASS at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

Appropriate Classroom Behavior and Respectful Discourse

Our goal as a community is to create an environment where all members of the class can participate, ask questions, test ideas, and learn from each other. Our community members should:

- **Engage Ideas, Not Individuals:** Critique arguments, assumptions, interpretations, and evidence rather than people.
- **Use Evidence and Reasoning:** Support claims with appropriate evidence, course materials, scholarship, data, or other credible sources whenever possible.
- **Listen to Understand:** Approach differing viewpoints with curiosity and a willingness to understand the reasoning behind another person's perspective.
- **Recognize Complexity:** Many issues do not have simple answers. Students are encouraged to consider competing explanations, identify assumptions, and examine their own thinking.
- **Practice Intellectual Humility:** Be open to revising a position when new evidence, perspectives, or insights emerge.
- **Demonstrate Respect:** Disagreement is appropriate in an academic setting. Personal attacks, ridicule, intimidation, harassment, or dismissive behavior are not.

Differences of opinion are a normal and valuable part of higher education. You are not expected to agree with one another. You are expected to express disagreements in ways that are respectful, evidence-based, and relevant to the course. Personal attacks, harassment, intimidation, disruptive behavior, or actions that interfere with the learning of others are inconsistent with the expectations of this course and the broader UTEP community. Learning occurs most effectively when people feel welcome, respected, and able to engage thoughtfully with challenging ideas.

Course Schedule (may be changed with due notice)

8/24: Syllabus & Introduction

- Required Readings:
 1. SYLLABUS

8/26: Plato's *Republic* 1: the Ring of Gyges

- Required Readings:
 1. Plato, *The Republic*, Book II, up to 367e

8/31: Plato's *Republic* 2: the City-Soul Analogy

- Required Readings:
 1. Plato, *The Republic*, Book II, 367e to the end

9/2: Plato's *Republic* 3: Virtue as Health

- Required Readings:
 1. Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, 427d to the end

9/7: Labor Day, no class

9/9: Plato's *Republic* 4: Allegory of the Cave

- Required Readings:
 1. Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII, up to 520d

9/14: Aristotle 1: The Function Argument

- Required Readings:
 1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, §1-7

9/16: Aristotle 2: Ends, Happiness, and the Good

- Required Readings:
 1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, §8-13

9/21: Aristotle 3: Virtues and the Mean

- Required Readings:
 1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II

9/23: Class Cancelled (Instructor out of town due to a conference)

9/28: Aristotle 4: Happiness Again

- Required Readings:
 1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, §6-8

9/30: Epicurus 1: Hedonism

- Required Readings:
 1. Epicurus, "Principal Doctrines"

10/5: Epicurus 2: Death

- Required Readings:
 1. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

10/7: Epicurus 3: Is Epicurus Right about Death?

- Required Readings:

1. (tentative) Marcus Willaschek, "Death and existential value: In defence of Epicurus"

10/12: In Class Mid-term Exam

10/14: Buddhism 1: Suffering

- Required Readings:
 1. C. W. Huntington, "The Life and Death of the Buddha", in his *What I Don't Know about Death*
 2. Jay Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*, Ch.6, 71-77

10/19: Buddhism 2: The Cause and Cessation of Suffering

- Required Readings:
 1. *Dhammapada*, selections
 2. Jay Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*, Ch.6, 78-82

10/21: Buddhism 3: The Path

- Required Readings:
 1. *Dhammapada*, selections
 2. Jay Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*, Ch.6, 82-89

10/26: Buddhism 4: The Bodhisattva Ideal

- Required Readings:
 1. Jay Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics*, Ch.8

10/28: Confucianism 1: Virtues and Character

- Required Readings:
 1. Kongzi (Confucius), *The Analects*, selections
 2. Mengzi (Mencius), *Mengzi*, selections

11/2: Confucianism 2: Ethics and Social Roles

- Required Readings:
 1. Kongzi (Confucius), *The Analects*, selections
 2. John Ramsey, "Confucian Role Ethics: A Critical Survey"

11/4: Confucianism 3: Is Human Nature Good or Evil?

- Required Readings:
 1. Mengzi (Mencius), *Mengzi*, selections
 2. Xunzi, *Xunzi*, selections

11/9: Mohism

- Required Readings:
 1. Mozi, *Mozi*, selections

11/11: Confucianism 4: Debating Rituals

- Required Readings:
 1. Kongzi (Confucius), *The Analects*, selections
 2. Mozi, *Mozi*, selections
 3. Xunzi, *Xunzi*, selections

Note: final project idea due on 11/11

11/16: Daoism 1: The Way

- Required Readings:
 1. Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, selections

11/18: Daoism 2: Wandering About

- Required Readings:
 1. Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, selections from Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 6

11/23: Daoism 3: Death

- Required Readings:
 1. Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, selections from Chapters 18, 22 and 32

11/25: Project working day, no class

11/30: Group Project Presentation 1

12/2: Group Project Presentation 2

Group Final Project Submission due 12/4, 11:59pm MT