

## Philosophy as a Way of Life (HONORS 210G-01)

**Instructor:** Alec Stubbs   **Meeting times:** MWF: 2:00PM-2:50PM   **Room:** McCormack M02-0423

**Office Hours:** email me at [alec.stubbs@umb.edu](mailto:alec.stubbs@umb.edu) and we will set up a time to meet!

All information (including readings and assignments) can be found on our website.

### What is this course?

Philosophy is a discipline that tries to ask and answer questions about central human curiosities—what exists, what can we know, what is right and wrong, how we should treat others, how we organize society, and so on.

Doing philosophy also requires the development of critical thinking skills, including the ability to analyze, understand, respond to, and construct arguments. While this course certainly will help you develop those skills, its intentions are more practically oriented. This course is designed to help you think through how you ought to live your life (bold claim - I know!).

By studying various philosophical traditions, from the ancient world to today, we will be examining how philosophers have argued how one ought to live their life. We will be taking a tour through philosophical history up to modern day in order to answer the following kinds of questions:

- What is the best way to live your life? According to what principles should you live?
- What does it mean to live according to a way of life?
- Is a good life one that is lived for ourselves, for others, or for both?
- What is the meaning of life? Does it have meaning?
- What are your values, and what kind of life do they require you to lead?

In many ways, this class will likely be quite different from most classes you have taken or will take. You will be asked to live in accordance with the philosophies that we study, to reflect upon your experiences, and to examine your own life with respect to these ways of life. These “spiritual exercises” are key to experimenting with different ways of living, different ways of interpreting the world, and different ways of finding meaning in one’s life. The intention of our course is to provide ourselves with philosophical tools for our toolkits of life.

### Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, all students will have developed the following knowledge and capacities:

- Students will be able to **identify and express the basic philosophical tenets** of numerous ways of living.
- Students will develop the capacity to **present clear, cogent arguments in favor or against certain philosophical ways of life** and their relation to their own lives.
- Students will be able to **clearly articulate their own values in writing, in person, and in concert** with others.
- Students will build a capacity to **respectfully discuss and debate core philosophical commitments** with their fellow students.
- Students will **live out, reflect upon, and assess the various ways of living** discussed throughout this course.

## Reading Schedule:

All readings will be made available as PDFs on our website. Please print out our readings for each day so that you have them in class with you.

### Week 1: What is a Way of Life?

- Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> – None
- Jan 24<sup>th</sup> – None
- Jan 26<sup>th</sup> – Wallace, *This is Water*

### Week 2: Aristotelianism

- Jan 29<sup>th</sup> – Kaufman, “Aristotelianism”
- Jan 31<sup>st</sup> – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Ch. 1-7
- Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Ch. 1-4

### Week 3: Aristotelianism & Epicureanism

- Feb 5<sup>th</sup> – None (Aristotelian day of practice)
- Feb 7<sup>th</sup> – Crespo, “Epicureanism”
- Feb 9<sup>th</sup> – Epicurus, “Letter to Herodotus”

### Week 4: Epicureanism Cont'd

- Feb 12<sup>th</sup> – Epicurus, “Letter to Menoecus”
- Feb 14<sup>th</sup> – Austin, “Why Can’t We Be Friends?”
- Feb 16<sup>th</sup> – None (Epicurean day of practice)

### Week 5: Writing Workshop

- Feb 19<sup>th</sup> – Holiday
- Feb 21<sup>st</sup> – Writing Workshop
- Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> – First Draft Peer Review Workshop

### Week 6: Stoicism

- Feb 26<sup>th</sup> – Pigliucci, “Stoicism”
- Feb 28<sup>th</sup> – Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, Ch.1, 2, 5, 8, 12, 14, 16, 20, 21, and 33
- Feb 30<sup>th</sup> – Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, Ch. 3, 11, 17, 22, 25, 30, 42, 43, 45, and 50

### Week 7: Stoicism Cont'd

- Mar 4<sup>th</sup> – Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book I Ch. 6 and 12; Book II Ch. 8.
- Mar 6<sup>th</sup> – None (Stoic day of practice)
- Mar 8<sup>th</sup> – TBA

### Week 8: Spring Break

- No readings this week – enjoy your break!

### **Week 9: Daoism**

- Mar 18<sup>th</sup> – Wang, “Daoism”
- Mar 20<sup>th</sup> – Laozi, *Daodejing*, Ch. 1, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 18, 25, 34, and 51
- Mar 22<sup>nd</sup> – Laozi, *Daodejing*, Ch. 18, 20, 22, 23, 33, 48, 49, 52, 66, and 78

### **Week 10: Daoism Cont'd**

- Mar 25<sup>th</sup> – Zhuang Zhou, *Zhuangzi*, “The Butterfly Dream” and “Cook Ding”
- Mar 27<sup>th</sup> – Zhuang Zhou, *Zhuangzi*, “The Useless Tree” and “Zhuangzi Drums at Death”
- Mar 29<sup>th</sup> – None (Daoist day of practice)

### **Week 11: Existentialism**

- Apr 1<sup>st</sup> – Cleary, “Existentialism”
- Apr 3<sup>rd</sup> – Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (selections) and Marino, “Kierkegaard, the Danish Doctor of Dread”
- Apr 5<sup>th</sup> – Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (selections)

### **Week 12: Existentialism Cont'd**

- Apr 8<sup>th</sup> – Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”
- Apr 10<sup>th</sup> – TBA
- Apr 12<sup>th</sup> – None (Existentialist day of practice)

### **Week 13: Week of Living**

- No readings this week, but we instead by having discussions in class about the exercises you will be asked to do for your chosen philosophy for the week of living.

### **Week 14: Week of Writing**

- No readings this week, but we instead will be using this as a week of writing. Class will be in session, and we will write together during this week.

### **Week 15: Debate Prep/Debate Week**

- No readings this week, but we will be prepping our debates and starting them on Friday.

### **Week 16: Debate Week & Final Class**

- No readings this week, instead we will have our last debate and a final class!

## Assignments:

- **Reading Questions (20%):**
  - All days that we have readings will have accompanying reading questions. Reading questions are a core part of making sure you have done the reading and are prepared for robust Socratic discussion during the class.
  - All reading questions will be posted by Saturday morning prior to the week of readings.
  - Reading question responses should be written down on a physical piece of paper or printed out and brought to class. These will be collected at the end of each class period where we have a reading, and I will return them to you the following class period.
  - **Two to three sentences will suffice for each question.** But I encourage you to use these as a way of developing your own ideas and opinions prior to coming to class.
  - **You are allowed to miss one day of reading questions.** Essentially, you get a free pass of missing a day of reading question responses before you will start being docked points.
  
- **Desire Maps and Final Ends Reflection (10%):**
  - After reflecting on your desires after the first week of the course, we will have read enough Aristotle to think about the relationship between our desires, means and ends, and the idea of final ends.
  - In this reflection paper, you will be asked to synthesize your desire maps into a reflection paper that takes Aristotle's view of final ends on board to see if what you desire aims at a "final end".
  - Assignment details will be distributed in class on January 26th.
  - This reflection paper **will be due Monday, February 5th**.
  - This reflection should take the form of an 800-word reflection paper.
  - You can find a full breakdown of the assignment here: **TBA**
  
- **What is Happiness Paper (20%):**
  - This paper will ask you to reflect on the first two philosophies of the semester to investigate what constitutes happiness. The goal of this paper is to get you to look closely and in detail at how Aristotle defines happiness, how Epicurus defines happiness, and what you think happiness is. After all, if we are after a good life, we have to come to an understanding of what makes for a happy life.
  - Assignment details will be distributed in class on February 9th.
  - A **first draft** (3-4 pages, double-spaced) of the paper will be due in class February 23rd. We will have a peer outline writing workshop on February 23rd so please come prepared to present your thoughts to small peer groups.
  - The final draft of the paper (3-4 pages, double spaced) **will be due March 8th** on Blackboard.
  - You can find a full breakdown of the assignment here: **TBA**
  
- **Apology (20%):**
  - This paper will ask you to defend a particular philosophy of life that we have explored in class. You will be asked to find resources outside of the readings done for class to integrate into your view of the good life.
  - Assignment details will be distributed in class on April 12th
  - A robust 2-3 page outline of the paper will be due in class April 22nd. We will have a peer outline writing workshop on April 22nd, so please come prepared to present your thoughts to small peer groups.
  - The first draft of the paper (4-5 pages, double spaced) will be due April 26th in class. We will have another peer review day, and you will be doing a deep dive peer review with one other person in our class.

- The final draft of the paper (5-6 pages, double spaced) **will be due May 13th on Blackboard.**
- You can find a full breakdown of the assignment here: **TBA**
- **The Great Debate (10%):**
  - You will be defending your view of a good life alongside those in our class who have chosen the same philosophical school to defend. This defense will take place on **Friday May 3rd and Monday May 6th.**
  - Stay tuned for more details as we approach our final week!
  - You can find a full breakdown of the debate here: **TBA**
- **In-Class Participation (20%):** Finally, in-class participation will be a key component of your grade. You will be asked to engage in philosophical discussion throughout our seminar, work with group members, work through simulations, and be creative thinkers during class. This, of course, requires you to show up to class and be actively engaged.
  - Three times throughout the semester, you will be asked to give yourself a grade based on your participation in class:
    - *A = Excellent:* Almost always showed up, engaged, developed a point of view, clearly demonstrated that you did the readings.
    - *B = Good:* Usually showed up, mostly engaged, had a decently developed point of view, demonstrated that you did most of the readings.
    - *C = Fair:* Sometimes showed up, a little engaged, did not develop a point of view, somewhat clear demonstrated that you did the readings.
    - *D = Poor:* Rarely showed up, not engaged, no developed a point of view, no demonstration that you did the readings.
    - *F = Did Not Show Up*

### Grading:

In an ideal world there would be no grading. As professors, we could provide you with qualitative feedback about how well you have done in the course, and we could pursue knowledge for the sake of its intrinsic value. Unfortunately, I am asked to assign you a grade, even though there seems to be [many flaws in traditional systems of grading](#). Here's how grades will be assigned:

### Grade Percentages:

A = 93 – 100%	B- = 80 – 82%	D+ = 67 – 69%
A- = 90 – 92%	C+ = 77 – 79%	D = 63 – 66%
B+ = 87 – 89%	C = 73 – 76%	D- = 60 – 62%
B = 83 – 86%	C- = 70 – 72%	F = 00 – 59%

### Classroom Expectations

Our class will be what is called a "[flipped classroom](#)", i.e., you will watch short lecture videos and do the readings prior to class. In class, we will work together, and each day will be unique. Some days we will be having debates, others you will be asked to work on creative projects. The goal is that our classroom is a creative environment where we can practice philosophy. Doing philosophy this way requires us to be open and honest with each other. But, we should also cultivate a classroom culture that is safe and kind for folks. The way we arrive at truth is through collaborative knowledge creation, and we can only achieve this by hearing people's true views, beliefs, and opinions. There will be contentious discussions, but I ask you to be respectful of those who contribute. I vow to do my best as a facilitator to be sensitive to a variety of views, backgrounds, contexts, and attitudes.

We will have lots of debates, Socratic discussions, simulations, roleplaying, creative projects, and other learner-centered activities in this class. One step that you can take to be a more active participant is to familiarize yourselves with what are called ["discussion moves"](#). We will be using these discussion moves in our classes to keep the conversation moving and to elicit good philosophical inquiry.

### **“Life Happens” Clause:**

Life can be stressful and strange stuff can happen. To that end, I have a “life happens” policy where any student can contact me via email 24 hours **in advance of a deadline** and receive a 3 day extension—no questions asked. This can be invoked **once per semester**. If there is a bigger issue that requires massive accommodations, we can discuss that as well. However, this specific clause exists to prevent you from feeling the need to lie or divulge any personal information with respect to why an assignment didn’t get done on time. I get it—life happens.

### **Email Response Policy:**

During weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. I will try my best to hastily respond to your emails. Outside of those hours and during weekends, although I will be checking my email, response times cannot be guaranteed to be as quick. Therefore, if you are in need of a quick response, please try to contact me during the week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.—outside of these hours, I should be able to respond to you within the next day. I will also expect the same from you – **you** will not be asked to be available at all times to respond to **my** emails either. If I email you outside of those hours, I will not expect an immediate response either. I think this goes a long way to creating a culture of a healthy work-life balance – we all deserve more free time to play and enjoy our lives.

### **Laptops in the Classroom:**

There is a lot of (heated) debate about the pros and cons of having laptops in the classroom. A [popularly cited study](#) shows a difference in course performance in favor of those *not* using laptops in the classroom. [This more recent one](#) shows that laptops are distracting. [Another popular study shows](#) that laptop use hinder learning among those *nearby* laptop users, and [an additional study](#) suggests that there are learning advantages to taking handwritten notes over typed notes. So, what does this mean? It isn’t conclusive, but it seems like the best practice to *not* use laptops in the classroom. To that extent, **we will not be using laptops and phones while in our class**. You should focus on being present, being aware of others, contributing to our Socratic discussion, and using traditional paper and pen/pencil methods of notetaking.

I also understand and respect that, for accessibility purposes or various other learning reasons, it may be important for you to have a laptop in class. To that end, if you have an accommodation for a laptop in the classroom, please let me know and we will make sure that you are able to use it. Additionally, *if you can make a compelling case as to why using a laptop in the classroom*, we can work out a solution. So—I will ask you to please not use laptops in the classroom unless you meet any of the previous two conditions.

### **Students with Disabilities and Accommodation Needs:**

If you are student with a disability or are in need of accommodations, please note that you can seek resources through The Ross Center for Disability Services. As they note: “The Ross Center for Disability Services is the entity that approves and coordinates academic accommodations. If you are a student at UMass Boston and have a disability, you may be eligible for accommodations available through the Ross Center. We also provide connections to services in our office, and both on-and off-campus. The Ross Center invites you to call

617.287.7430, email [ross.center@umb.edu](mailto:ross.center@umb.edu), or visit the office in Campus Center, UL Room 211, and inquire about eligibility and procedures.” Once you meet with the Ross Center, please speak with me about your accommodation needs as soon as you can!

### **Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s work without proper attribution. It is a serious issue that you will be responsible for avoiding. Any works that you draw from, previous work you have written, texts, videos, and podcasts that you draw from, all of these must be cited in your written work in order to avoid plagiarism. Therefore, in this class, please note that you should always cite the material from which you draw either quotations or ideas. The best way to cite material is by providing a source and a page number if it is a text (see <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>). If you cite material, you must not only provide an in-text citation, but you must also provide a full bibliographic citation at the end of your work. Please take time to review the [Student Code of Conduct](#) on this issue.

The emergence of tools like ChatGPT means that plagiarism is even more difficult to spot than before. The use of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT is allowable in our class *only insofar as they are used for ideation and outlining purposes*. ChatGPT and other LLMs **should not** be used to write your whole paper, and if you do use ChatGPT to give you feedback or help you outline, you need to cite its use. **But be wary, LLMs like ChatGPT are not always accurate, can provide “hallucinations” of texts, and can lead to false information.** This is a tough issue right now, and there are not good ways to track plagiarism using LLMs. So, suffice it to say, using LLMs to completely write your papers is plagiarism, full stop. Using them to ideate or help you think through issues is not plagiarism for the sake of this course. But just know, you should write for yourself, because it is your education and your life, not an AI’s.

### **Mental Health Services Available via UMass Boston:**

College can be a stressful time (and it shouldn’t have to be!), and I encourage you all to take advantage of the many resources we have at UMB to help in any circumstance. For mental health needs and concerns, you can go to the Counseling Center in the Quinn Admin Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Room 7, or visit [https://www.umb.edu/healthservices/counseling\\_center](https://www.umb.edu/healthservices/counseling_center). You can also call them at 617-287-5690.