

Phil 301: Ancient Philosophy
Ancient Moral Psychology: Plato & The Stoics
Prof. Jeremy Reid – Spring 2021

1. Course and Contact Information

Zoom meeting times: M W, 9:30am-10:45pm

Email: jwreid@sfsu.edu

Office hours: W 1–3pm or by appointment

Format: Online, with prerecorded lectures on youtube, and class discussion over Zoom

2. Course Description

This course is designed to give you a thorough introduction to two of the most influential and important theories of mind in western philosophy: Platonism and Stoicism. Both Plato and the Stoics give compelling and bold answers to questions about what it means to be a good person, how character is developed, how our mind works, and what emotions should (and shouldn't) play a part in a happy human life. Though the main focus of this course is on moral psychology, we will also discuss issues related to ancient sexuality, political philosophy, censorship, art, pleasure, love, justice, anger, oppression and what makes a life worth living. This is a class in the *history* of philosophy, so the first priority is to accurately represent the views of the authors we are reading. But it is also a class in the history of *philosophy* and I have assigned these texts because I find the ideas in them deeply compelling and because they have helped to shape my own life. Subsequently, to make this course as rewarding as it can be for you, we will work to *understand* Plato and the Stoics, and then we will *engage* with those ideas in a critical but charitable way, seeing how much they can *apply* in our own context.

3. Emotionally difficult content

Perhaps contrary to its reputation, ancient philosophy is deeply practical and many students find out that there is a lot of material in here which is applicable to their own life and experiences. This will hopefully make the class rewarding for you, both this semester and in your life going forward, but it does mean there will be some weeks where the readings are a lot to deal with and the discussions may be hard. You are not expected to agree with all (or even most) of the positions presented in this class, though my goal for you is to be able to understand them and be able to critique them fairly.

One of the big questions that ancient philosophers struggled with was about the conditions under which a life could be a happy and good life. I'm teaching this part of ancient philosophy through the Stoics, who gave one (very controversial) answer to this question. But in order to try to answer this question and understand the Stoic response,

we have to talk about some pretty tough circumstances people have been through. Some of the stories you'll hear and read about in this class are at once heartbreaking and inspiring: people have turned to Stoicism while being prisoners of war in Vietnam, and in concentration camps during World War II. But people in marginalized groups often find Stoic views (or views that often get "Stoicism") unappealing, and it's important to understand why. Moreover, because issues like protest and anger at injustice will inevitably be at the forefront of your mind for some of you, I wanted to address these issues head on and allow you a space to think through them deeply, formalizing your arguments philosophically. Please remember that I am always happy to talk with you if you would like to go beyond what we cover in class and in the lectures and to offer academic support. If you would like further support, remember the university has great counselling and psychological services, and they are doing online meetings during the pandemic (<https://caps.sfsu.edu>).

While we're here: I wanted to offer a head's up about Unit Two, "Plato on Love and Sex." Unsurprisingly, talking about Plato on love and sex will involve talking about both relationships and sex. You might think that Plato's bad lover is pretty toxic—he is. He may even remind you of an ex you'd rather forget. And while Plato's own view about sex is rather prudish, it's important to be able to think through alternative views and to assess Plato's *argument* for his conclusion, rather than just rejecting it outright. Finally, as you might know, ancient Greece had complex and interesting sexual norms, and Plato's primary examples of love in the *Phaedrus* are unapologetically homosexual lovers. I'm happy for you to use heterosexual examples in your paper if you prefer, but try to spend some time thinking in a context that isn't heteronormative.

4. Format

I have tried to make this course as flexible for you in format as possible. Subsequently, you could get through the whole semester doing the work by yourself, and never meeting with me or talking with your peers in the Zoom meetings: The lectures are in video playlists on youtube, which should hopefully make them easy to access. The idea is that you can follow along on the slides while you're watching, so that what I say matches up with the powerpoints. If you do want human contact, I highly encourage you to join the Zoom meetings on Monday and Wednesday, where I will answer questions and lead discussion about the material—so come to class with questions! I won't prepare any extra material for these classes (which is why they're not required) but they should help a lot in helping you to understand and enjoy the course content.

You should also know that talking with students one-on-one is my favorite part of teaching. I'm sorry we can't do this in person, but do feel free to email me if you want to have a Zoom call in the designated office hours or some other time you are available. I'm always happy to talk, and meeting with me before you start writing your papers is a great way to make sure you're on track to answer the prompt **HINT HINT**.

5. Assessment

5%	Syllabus and Referencing Test	Fri Jan 31
15%	Paper 1	Fri Feb 12
10%	Exam 1	Mon Mar 1
25%	Paper 2	Fri Mar 19
10%	Exam 2	Fri Apr 23
35%	Final Paper	Fri May 14

Letter grades are assigned as follows: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 60-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 0-59.

There is no extra credit and there are no make-up assignments for this course. You should be working consistently throughout the semester, speaking with me before exams to discuss course content and before papers are due to discuss your drafts. Philosophy is not done well quickly or at the last minute. I designed this course such that you can get through the material at your own speed, but the deadlines are there to stop you falling behind.

Papers are due and exams close at 11:59pm. Late assignments and assignments that do not meet the word count (+/- 10%) will receive a 0. *If you know you will have scheduling conflicts or will not be able to submit an assignment by the due date, contact me as soon as possible so that we can organize extensions.* Plan ahead, drafting your papers in advance of the deadline and submitting well before the final minute.

If you want to appeal a grade, wait 24 hours after the grade has been posted. Then ask for written feedback why you got the grade you did. If you still think the grade you have received is unfair, I will submit your paper with my justification to another professor. What grade they determine is final—this means *your grade could go up or down.*

6. Texts

All assigned texts can be accessed as pdfs on the course website. It is highly recommended that you purchase a hardcopy of Plato, *Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper, as you will be using it extensively for the first 10 weeks of the course. **Do not use a different translation (this is very important).**

Note: these texts are both old and difficult, so you will need to read slowly and repeatedly. They have also inspired people for over two millennia and I love them deeply. Because my job is to help you understand and critically engage with these texts, *reading is not optional.* You cannot do well in this course without doing the readings and citing them extensively in your papers. My lectures are interpretations, and those who challenge my readings with good textual support and philosophical arguments will be handsomely rewarded.

7. Paper topics and exam topics (with tips)

Syllabus and referencing test, Fri Jan 31: 20 multi-choice questions on what's in the syllabus and how to cite Plato's text. These are supposed to be free points for you, to compensate for any grading errors I may make throughout the semester (i.e. this is me rounding your grade up *now*).

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Paper 1, Fri Feb 12: *What does Plato mean by musical education and how does it work? What is gymnastic education and how does it work? What kind of character (soul) would ideally be produced by Plato's education system? (1500 words)*

Pro-tips:

- Focus on *Republic*, Books 2–4.
- Remember that gymnastic and musical education have different psychological effects. Think about how these effects (explained in Books 2–3) are the basis for the virtues (explained in Book 4).

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Exam 1, Mon Mar 1: 20 multi-choice questions about Plato's *Republic*. Anything in that text and the *Republic* lectures is fair game.

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Paper 2, Fri Mar 19: *What are the different kinds of lover Plato identifies? Explain why Plato thinks some lovers could harm your character and some lovers could improve your character. Is Plato right about the effects of love? Is Plato right about the harmful effects of pleasure? (2000 words)*

Pro-tips:

- Make sure you read my "Plato on Love and Sex" paper (especially if you are interested about what Plato would say about heterosexual lovers and women). It was written for an introductory audience and clarifies lots of common misunderstandings my students have had in the past.
- The non-lover is not a kind of lover.
- Almost nobody thinks that Plato is completely right or completely wrong; try to explain why you think he gets right, and pinpoint exactly where he goes wrong, showing plausible alternatives.
- You are welcome to use personal examples if you show how they support or undermine Plato's points.
- It's ok to talk about sex in an academic paper on this topic—I promise I won't be

offended or blush if you use the words to talk about the things.

- Remember Plato recognizes that *his own cultural audience* thinks his view on sex is crazy and unfeasible, so don't play the "different context" card to explain why he might think differently to you.

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Exam 2, Fri Apr 23: 20 multi-choice questions about the Stoics. Anything in the Stoic texts from Unit 3 and those lectures (i.e. before the interviews) is fair game.

Pro-tips:

- The Stoics are *pedantic* about terminology. Choose your words and read the questions *very* carefully.

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Paper 3, Fri May 14: *Why do the Stoics think that (a) anger is always irrational and that (b) it is always bad to act from anger? How do the Stoics think we can minimize anger in our life? Making reference to the assigned course materials, explain whether the Stoic response is a good response to oppression, hardship, and injustice. (2500 words)*

Pro-tips:

- You should have different answers to (a) and (b).
- Remember this is a course in ancient philosophy, so at least half of your paper should be on the Stoics—present their view thoroughly before you move onto the contemporary material.
- You are welcome to use personal examples if you show how they support or undermine positions discussed in the course materials.
- Remember privilege can manifest in different ways in different historical periods—feel free to Zoom with me if you are not sure how to talk about race, gender, slavery, and power in ancient Greece and Rome (it's complicated).
- If you are interested in what the Stoics might say about mental health and psychological disorders, please read chapter 5 of Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, especially the section "Melancholic Loss of Virtue."
- Word will autocorrect "indifferents" to "indifferences"—Word doesn't know about Stoicism, so don't let it tell you what to do.
- Don't just say "it's human nature to get angry"—the Stoics disagree.

8. Recommended Schedule of Readings

Unit 1: Plato's *Republic*

Plato's *Republic* Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8O85xxJ1h6oNHmGNow8pUPie7-KjySz8>

Mon Jan 25: Plato, *Republic*, Book 1

Wed Jan 27: Plato, *Republic*, Book 2

Fri Jan 31: **SYLLABUS AND REFERENCING QUIZ**

Mon Feb 1: Plato, *Republic*, Book 3

Wed Feb 3: Plato, *Republic*, Book 4

Mon Feb 8: [How to write a paper in ancient philosophy—no reading]

Wed Feb 10: Plato, *Republic*, Book 5

Fri Feb 12: **PAPER 1 DUE**

Mon Feb 15: Plato, *Republic*, Book 6

Wed Feb 17: Plato, *Republic*, Book 7

Mon Feb 22: Plato, *Republic*, Book 8

Wed Feb 24: Plato, *Republic*, Book 9

Mon Mar 1: Plato, *Republic*, Book 10 and revision; **EXAM 1**

Unit 2: Plato on Love and Sex

Plato's *Phaedrus* Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8O85xxJ1h6pMPb5hR-jvYpWksdWefv61>

Wed Mar 3: [Greek cultural context on sexuality—no reading]

Mon Mar 8: Plato, *Phaedrus*, up to 243e

Wed Mar 10: Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a–257b

Mon Mar 15: Plato, *Laws*, Book 8, 835b–842a

Wed Mar 17: Reid, "Plato on Love and Sex"

Fri Mar 19: **PAPER TWO DUE**

SPRING BREAK

Mon Mar 29: NO CLASS—EXTRA BREAK

Wed Mar 31: NO CLASS—CESAR CHAVEZ DAY

Unit 3: Stoicism

Stoicism Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8O85xxJ1h6qqBWWqUe2tkgeqCt9pKSj0>

Mon Apr 5: Epictetus, *Handbook*

Wed Apr 7: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books 4–5 & Selections

Mon Apr 12: Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, Chapter 2

Wed Apr 14: Seneca, *On Anger*, Book 1

Mon Apr 19: Seneca, *On Anger*, Book 2
Wed Apr 21: Seneca, *On Anger*, Book 3
Fri Apr 23: **EXAM 2**

Unit 4: Engaging with the Stoics on oppression, hardship, and anger

Stoic Conversations Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOdAJUXc2wg&list=PL8O85xxJ1h6qqBWWqUe2tkgeqCt9pKSj0&index=9&t=125s>

Mon Apr 26: Sherman, *Stoic Warriors*, Chapter 4, "A Warrior's Anger"; Stockdale, "Courage Under Fire"

Wed Apr 28: Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, part 1

Mon May 3: Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"

Wed May 5: Lili Loofbourow, "[Why Christine Blasey Ford Isn't Allowed to be Mad](#)";

Emma Gray, "[Christine Blasey Ford Didn't Have the Luxury of Being Angry](#)";

Stacey Abrams, "[Concession](#)" [Speech for the 2018 Georgia Governor's Election](#); Alexandra

Ocasio-Cortez' [response to Ted Yoho](#)

Mon May 10: Lorde, "The Uses of Anger"; Cherry, "[Anger is not a bad word](#)";

[Kimberley Jones during BLM protests](#)

Wed May 12: Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Chapter 11, "Seneca on Anger in Public Life"

Fri May 14: **PAPER 3 DUE**

9. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

10. Disability Access

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

11. Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpsaem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/

- Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208;

<http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>

- For more information on your rights and available resources:

<http://titleix.sfsu.edu>