

Phil 772, Seminar in a Classical School: Stoicism

Prof. Jeremy Reid

Spring 2024

Course and Contact Information

Meeting time: Tue 3:30–6:15pm

Email: jwreid@sfsu.edu

Office hours: Sign up on my door

Format: In-person

Description

Stoicism as a philosophical school is currently undergoing a contemporary revival, but the popular resurgence of Stoicism often ignores or downplays the framework that makes it a robust and systematic approach to many philosophical issues, rather than a “life hack” for dealing with hardship, adversity, and negative emotions. The goal of this course is to supplement the more familiar Stoic texts (Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca) with more rigorously argued texts from antiquity, especially those by Cicero, and to introduce students to some important recent scholarship on Stoicism by specialists of ancient philosophy. All going to plan, we will come to understand Stoic philosophy as a whole: understanding how their metaphysics, epistemology, natural philosophy, theology, psychology, theory of emotions, and ethics are mutually supportive and mutually illuminating, while simultaneously developing a critical awareness of which Stoic claims depend on deeply controversial positions, and exploring the parts of their view can be adapted in a modern context.

Assessment

Weekly writing assignments: 50% (submit 13, drop 3 = 10 that count, 4% each)

Final paper (5000–8000 words): 50%, **due 11:59pm Sun May 26—no extensions.**

Writing assignments should be no more than one page single-spaced. Assignments are due by 11:59pm the day before class.

For the final paper, see my “How to Write a Good Graduate Term Paper” on Canvas.

Readings and Course Schedule

The two most accessible collections of Stoic fragments are in Long & Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, and Inwood & Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*. We will be using the latter throughout the course, but you should be sure to check the Long & Sedley collection when you are researching your papers, as it contains have relevant information about all of the class topics, with different texts, alternative translations, and helpful (though not uncontroversial) discussion of all passages.¹ It is arranged thematically, which makes it very easy to find other relevant texts.

Given that Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius (and to a lesser extent, Seneca) seem to be pretty well read, I am going to focus our scholarly attention on texts you are less likely to stumble across and that, frankly, are more argumentatively satisfying. That being said, if you have not done so already, I would encourage you to aim to read both Epictetus' *Discourses* and Marcus' *Meditations* cover-to-cover over the course of the semester; you will no doubt see new connections between those texts and what is assigned each week

+ means the reading is optional, but students aiming to continue onto PhD programs should absolutely be doing all of the readings. Note that often the + readings provide a *different* interpretation of the Stoic view, as I am trying to give you a sense of some of the debates.

Week 1, Jan 30: Introduction, Cast of Characters, and Key Terms

Inwood & Gerson, "Stoicism: Lives of the Stoics"

Epictetus, *Handbook*

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (excerpts on Canvas)

Week 2, Feb 6: Epistemology

Inwood & Gerson, "Logic and Theory of Knowledge"

Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, chapters 5–6

+ Frede, M. 1999. 'Stoic Epistemology' pp. 295-322 in K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfield, and M. Schofield eds. *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Writing Assignment: State *exactly* the three criteria for a kataleptic impression; explain each of the criteria, and provide an example.

¹ When reading academic articles, you will likely see *three* ways of citing collections. IG = Inwood & Gerson; LS = Long & Sedley; SVF = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. The last one, the SVF, is the collection of all of the extant fragments from the Old Stoa compiled by von Arnim—but note that all of these are in Greek and Latin without translation.

Week 3, Feb 13: Skepticism and Skilled impressions

Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, Book II

Shogry, "Creating a Mind Fit for Truth: the Role of Expertise in the Stoic Account of the Kataleptic Impression"

+ Moss & Schwab, "The Birth of Belief"

Writing Assignment: How are concepts involved in shaping our perceptual experiences? Why do the perceptual experiences of the expert differ from the non-expert? Give an example of something an expert might be able to perceive that a non-expert could not. Explain why an expert might be able to form more kataleptic impressions than a non-expert.

Week 4, Feb 20: Philosophy of Mind

Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, Chapters 2–4 (pp. 17–55 of the pdf)

Shogry, "What do our Impressions Say?"

+ Sorabji, "Perceptual Content in the Stoics"

Writing Assignment: Describe how the Stoics understand the physical nature of the soul. What is the hegemonikon? What is the relationship between the senses and the hegemonikon? Explain, in physical terms, what happens when someone forms an impression of a tree.

Week 5, Feb 27: Value

Inwood & Gerson, "Stoicism: Ethics"

Plato, *Euthydemus* and *Laws* II (excerpts)

Brown, "Socrates in the Stoa", in Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Socrates*

Writing Assignment: What is the Stoic criterion for something being a *good*? What is the criterion for something being an *evil*? What is the criterion for something being a *preferred* indifferent? What is the criterion for something being a *dispreferred* indifferent? Give examples of each, with explanations for why they satisfy the relevant criterion.

Week 6, Mar 5: Virtue in General and Oikeiōsis

Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Book III

Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Chapters 12.2 & 13.3

Klein, "The Stoic Argument from *Oikeiōsis*"

Writing Assignment: Explain the theory of *oikeiōsis*. How does the theory of *oikeiōsis* inform ethical deliberation (e.g. how might our bodies, our friends, our country, and people in distant lands be *targets* (*skopoi*) of virtuous actions)?

Week 7, Mar 12: The Individual Virtues and Our Roles

Cicero, *On Duties*, Books I & III

Gill, "Personhood and Personality, the four personae theory of Cicero's *De Officiis*"

+ Cicero, *On Duties*, Book II

Writing Assignment: The Stoics believe that, ultimately, all of the virtues are a unity. How, then, do they distinguish and characterize the individual virtues (like courage and temperance)? What is the relationship between the individual virtues and knowledge? Is it possible to have one virtue without having the others?

Week 8, Mar 19: Happiness and the Sufficiency Thesis

Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Books IV–V

Seneca, *Letters* 23 & 85

Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Chapters 18–21

Writing Assignment: It is *very* intuitive to think that (a) that external goods (health, wealth, reputation, success, etc.) are necessary for one's happiness, or that (b) there are degrees of happiness. Why would a Stoic think that (a) is wrong? Why would a Stoic think that (b) is wrong?

[SPRING BREAK]

[Week 9: EXTRA WEEK OF BREAK—work on your final paper]

Week 10, Apr 9: Emotions

Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Books III–IV (= Graver, *Cicero on Emotions*)

Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, Chapter 2

Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Chapter 10

Writing Assignment: What are the *two* reasons that we should not assent to impressions that generate *pathê* (i.e. why are *pathê* both *epistemically* bad and *prudentially* bad)? Do the Stoics think that the Sage lives an unemotional life?

Week 11, Apr 16: Anger and Shame

Seneca, *On Anger*

Kamtekar, "Aidōs in Epictetus"

Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Chapter 11

+ Reid, "Stoic Forgiveness"

Writing Assignment: *On Anger* Book II includes a description of the three stages of an emotion (*pathos*). Describe each of the stages. Which of the stages are up to us (i.e. in our control)?

Week 12, Apr 23: Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy

Inwood & Gerson, "Stoicism: Physics"

Sedley, "Hellenistic Physics and Metaphysics: Stoic Physics and Metaphysics", pp. 382–411 in K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfield, and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*.

Furley, "Cosmology: The Early Stoics" pp. 432–451 in K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfield, and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*.

Writing Assignment: For the Stoics, what exists? What subsists? Explain each category with examples. What are the two ultimate principles (*archai*) of Stoic metaphysics?

Week 13, Apr 30: Theology

Cicero, *On the Nature of the Goods*, Book II

Baltzy, "Stoic Pantheism"

Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, Section VII

Writing Assignment: Explain the place of God in Stoic physics. Is the Stoic God *immanent* (a part of the world) or *transcendent* (apart from the world)? What is the relationship between human reason and divine reason? How do you think the providence of God (i.e. God's activity in the world) works in Stoicism?

Week 14, May 7: Stoic Compatibilism

Inwood & Gerson, "Stoicism: On Fate"

Frede, "Stoic Determinism" in Inwood, *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*

Bobzein, "The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem"

Writing Assignment: Why do the Stoics think that determinism is true? What do they think the conditions are for being responsible for an action? Why do the Stoics

think that these views are compatible (i.e. why are the Stoics *compatibilists*)?

Week 15, May 14: Love and Friendship

Epictetus, "On Friendship", from the *Discourses*

Gaca, "Early Stoic Eros"

Brady, "How Stoic Sages Work in Concord to 'Make' Friends"

Writing Assignment: How would a Stoic Sage date in San Francisco in the 21st century? (Suggestions: What kind of people would they date? When would sex be involved? What's the relationship between sex, friendship, and romantic love? Would they be monogamous? Is gender relevant to their decisions? Would they get married?)

Hard copies

It is not required to buy hard copies of any of the assigned books, as pdfs are supplied.

That being said, we will be reading substantial portions of the following books (the first will be used especially often), and you may wish to buy hard copies. Amazon links are for reference—you are free to use other suppliers.

Recommended:

[Inwood & Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*](#)

[Cicero, *On Moral Ends*](#)

[Cicero, *On Academic Skepticism*](#)

[Cicero, *On Duties*](#)

[Seneca, *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*](#)

[Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*](#) (= Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Books 3 & 4)

We will also read substantial excerpts from the following books. They would be good to have around if you don't like reading big pdfs, and they also have other chapters that will likely be very helpful to you—but they are a touch pricey:

[Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*](#)

[Brennan, *The Stoic Life*](#)

[Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*](#)

[Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*](#)

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. Don't use ChatGPT.

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).

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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>