

Phil 772, Seminar in a Classical School: Stoicism

Prof. Jeremy Reid

Course and Contact Information

Meeting time: M 4–6:45pm

Email: jwreid@sfsu.edu

Office hours: W 1–3, and by appointment

Format: Online, with synchronous Zoom meetings

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 and adversity. 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, and ethics are mutually supportive and mutually illuminating, while simultaneously having 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: 40% (submit 13, drop 3 = 10 that count, 4% each)

Leading discussion + handout = 10%

Final paper (5000–8000 words): 50%

With the exception of the first week, each week you will be required to submit a writing assignment. I am going to grade these *hard*, but you get 50% instantly for submitting in accordance with the requirements. They should be *no more than a page*, 12pt Times New Roman (or 11pt Palatino Linotype), single-spaced. Assignments are due by 6am of the day of class; late assignments and assignments over a page get an instant 0. Adjust margins at your

own peril.

For *one* of the weeks, you will be required to prepare a *one-page* handout with questions on the material for that week for the class, so it must be ready **by class** to distribute to the other students. You will also be expected to take the lead in discussion for that week, and I reserve the right to call on you if there are awkward pauses. Note: this is not a presentation.

Greek and Latin

Until very recently, most Stoic texts (especially those of the early Stoics) were not available in English translation. This means that the vast majority of academic scholarship done on the Stoics was done by people who were highly proficient in Greek and Latin. Subsequently, when you are reading through secondary literature on Stoicism, you will *inevitably* come across untranslated and untransliterated Greek and Latin. This trend is exacerbated by the fact that Stoic philosophy is highly technical, and so even more recent scholarly discussion assumes knowledge of a huge number of technical terms.

Here's why this matters: **you cannot do scholarship on the Stoics unless you know how to use Greek and Latin dictionaries.** Of course, ideally, you'd just learn the languages (it is expected that doctoral students will learn the relevant languages if they are writing on a figure who didn't write in English), but for now, you can do what most of us do anyway, which is keep a tab open to the dictionary, and use it frequently. *Do not use Google Translate, for it is garbage for Classical Greek and Latin.*

Here is the link to the Latin dictionary: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?lang=la>

Here is the link to the Greek dictionary: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph>

In the first week, I expect you to learn the Greek alphabet. Starting in week two, at the start of each class, I will give you a few relevant Greek terms which will likely come up in the class or that came up in the readings. I will then (using a random process) call on students to provide the main translations of that word from the dictionary page.

You will not be assessed on this, so nothing hangs on it if you get the answers wrong. But I really do think it's an important skill, and if I were you, I'd keep a file with all the terms that we cover across the semester.

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

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 the *Discourses* and the *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.

Two texts you absolutely should know about but probably don't know about are: [Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, Book VII](#), and [Arius Didymus, Epitome of Stoic Ethics](#). They are the primary sources for many of the technical definitions the Stoics use. They are not page-turners, but they are extremely helpful. (Apologies for the lack of pdfs; you can find an old, but reliable translation of Diogenes Laertius [here](#).)

→ means you really, really need to read this. + means highly recommended but you know how these times be.

Week 1, Jan 25: Introduction, Cast of Characters, and Key Terms

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

Week 2, Feb 1: Epistemology

→ Inwood & Gerson, "Logic and Theory of Knowledge"

→ 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.

+ Brennan, "Part II: Psychology" from *The Stoic Life*

Writing Assignment: State *exactly* the three criteria for a kataleptic impression; afterwards, explain each of the criteria. For all of the criteria, give examples of impressions where one of the criteria is *not* satisfied, but the other two are.

Week 3, Feb 8: Skepticism and Skilled impressions

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

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*.

+ Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*

Writing Assignment: Why do the Stoics think that impressions are *cognitively penetrated*? How is it that the Sage's knowledge *improves* their perceptive capacities?

Week 4, Feb 15: Philosophy of Mind

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

+ 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?

Week 5, Feb 22: Ethics

→ Inwood & Gerson, "Stoicism: Ethics"

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

+ Brennan, "Reservation in Stoic Ethics"

Writing Assignment: What is the 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 1: Virtue in General and *Oikeiōsis*

→ Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Book III

→ Klein, "The Stoic Argument from *Oikeiōsis*"

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

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 8: 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*"

Writing Assignment: The Stoics believe that, ultimately, all of the virtues are just wisdom. How, then, do they distinguish and characterize the individual virtues (like

courage and temperance)? What is the relationship between the individual virtues and wisdom?

Week 8, Mar 15: Happiness and the Sufficiency Thesis

- Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Books IV–V
- Seneca, *Letter 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—meet with me to talk about your final paper]

Week 10, Apr 5: Emotions

- Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Books III–IV (= Graver, *Cicero on Emotions*)
- + Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, Chapter 2 (or: Chapter 5)
- + 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)? Why are “the tears of Alcibiades” a purported counterexample to the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia*, and what is Chrysippus’ response to this case?

Week 11, Apr 12: Anger and Shame

- Kamtekar, “*Aidôs* in Epictetus”
- + Seneca, *On Anger* (or: *On Mercy*)
- + Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Chapter 11 (or: Graver, Chapter 9)

Writing Assignment: Why might a Stoic *trainee* but not a Stoic *Sage* feel shame? If the Stoics endorse some instances of shame for trainees, should they also endorse some instances of anger?

Week 12, Apr 19: Physics and Cosmology

- 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*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- + White, "Stoic Natural Philosophy", in Inwood, *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*
- + 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*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Writing Assignment: The two primary metaphysical entities in Stoicism are the active principle and the passive principle. What are these principles? How do human beings and human agency fit into this metaphysics?

Week 13, Apr 26: Theology

- Baltzy, "Stoic Pantheism"
- + Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, Book II
- + 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?

Week 14, May 3: Determinism

- Inwood & Gerson, "Stoicism: On Fate"
- Frede, "Stoic Determinism" in Inwood, *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*
- + Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom In Stoic Philosophy*, Section VI

Writing Assignment: Why do the Stoics think that physical laws are deterministic? What do they think are the conditions for being morally responsible for an action? Why do the Stoics think that these views are compatible (i.e. why are the Stoics *compatibilists*)?

Week 15, May 10: Love and Friendship

- Gaca, "Early Stoic Eros"
- Epictetus, "On Friendship", from the *Discourses*
- + Cicero, *On Friendship*

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 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.

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).

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>