

USC Philosophy 416: The Ancient Stoics
4.0 units

Spring 2024

Location: DMC 154

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00–12:20 pm

Instructor: Prof. Ralph Wedgwood

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Office Hours: Thursday afternoons, 3.00–5.00 pm, MHP 107

Course description

This class will explore the philosophy of the ancient Greek and Roman Stoics, covering a period of almost 500 years, from the earliest Stoics (early 3rd century, c. 300 BCE) to the last of the great ancient Stoics, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE).

Our study of their philosophy will fall into six parts:

1. In Part 1, we will cover the *historical background*, and will start with an introductory examination of some classic Stoic texts.
2. In Part 2, we will study Stoic *physics* (which for the Stoics included what we think of as *theology*, *cosmology*, and *metaphysics*).
3. In Part 3, we will study Stoic *logic* (which for them included their *theory of knowledge*, and their response to their opponents, the ancient Sceptics).
4. In Part 4, we will study Stoic *ethics* – their most distinctive and influential contribution to philosophy.
5. In Part 5, we will study the Stoics' notorious *fatalism* – their view that everything that ever happens was *fated* to happen.
6. In Part 6, we will look at the influence of Stoicism on later philosophy.

Reading

Most of the central primary texts will be in:

- Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson, eds., *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* (Hackett, 2008).

You should get hold of a copy of this book (either a hard copy or an electronic copy). All the other required readings will be made available online on the course Blackboard site.

The most important primary texts that will be made available online are selections from the following:

- Epictetus, *How to be Free: An Ancient Guide to the Stoic Life (Encheiridion and Selections from Discourses)*, trans. A. A. Long (Princeton University Press, 2018).
- Seneca, *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, ed. and trans. Robert A. Kaster and Martha C. Nussbaum (Chicago University Press, 2010): *On Anger* (pp. 14–96).
- Brad Inwood, ed., *Later Stoicism 155 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

In almost every class, a handout will be distributed. These handouts will typically contain some additional primary texts that are not these volumes. These additional texts will mostly be taken from the following:

- A. A. Long and David Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), Vol. 1.

We shall also read much of the following secondary text (also available online):

- Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duty, and Fate* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

A couple of additional pieces of secondary literature will also be made available online.

Another recommended introductory secondary text, which should be available from the campus bookstore, is the following:

- John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Routledge, 2006).

After the first week, every class meeting will involve discussion of some passages from the primary texts, which will be assigned to you to read before the meeting. You should bring Inwood and Gerson, *The Stoics Reader* to every meeting of class.

Course Objectives

One primary objective of this course is for you to come to an in-depth understanding of the Stoics' philosophical thought. Since the works of all the older Stoics have been lost, this involves reconstructing their thought from many different pieces of evidence. In this way, this goal will involve reading, understanding, and interpreting a wide range of difficult and complex texts that were written many centuries ago, and presenting and defending your interpretations of Stoic thought both in your written work and in your contributions to our class discussions. Interpreting and defending these texts will also involve thinking critically about the philosophical issues that the Stoics themselves were grappling with.

After taking this course, you will have acquired an understanding of the Stoics' main ideas and arguments. More importantly, (i) you will have improved your ability for independently reading and comprehending challenging texts – in a way that will enable you to see how these texts can be used as evidence, to identify and state the main claims of these texts, and to reconstruct the texts' key arguments in favour of these claims; (ii) you will also have developed your skills at critically evaluating such claims and arguments; and (iii) you will have practised your skills at

giving clear and persuasive arguments of your own – both in your writing and in your contribution to oral discussions – to defend your interpretation and evaluations of these claims and arguments.

Normal prerequisites

The normal prerequisite for this course is two Philosophy courses. (Others may enrol with my permission.)

Assessments and Grading

There will be one take-home **test on the historical background**, **two paper assignments**, and a take-home **final exam**.

1. The *test on the historical background* will focus on part 1 of the course, due at the end of Week 3. (Your answers on this test should amount to about 800 words.)
2. The *first* paper assignment will on parts 2–3 of the course, due at the end of Week 7. (Your paper should be about 2000 words long.)
3. The *second* paper assignment will be on part 4 of the course, due at the end of Week 12. (Your paper should be about 2000 words long.)
4. The *final exam* will cover the first five parts of the course, and will be due during the final exam period after the end of classes. (In total, your answers to this final exam should amount to about 2000 words.)

Suggested paper topics for the paper assignments, along with guidance about how to approach the topic, will be distributed at least two weeks before the due date. You may submit a rough draft at least a week in advance, and I will give you some comments. (You may also write your paper on a different topic if you wish – but only after consultation with me.)

All assessments should be turned in electronically *via* the course Blackboard site.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- 10% for the test on the historical background
- 30% for each of the two paper assignments
- 30% for the final exam

Office Hours

I will be holding office hours on Thursday afternoons, 3.00–5.00 pm. Office hours are an opportunity for you to ask questions about the class or the readings, but they're also a chance to chat about how the course is going, to tell me about your ideas about any of the philosophical issues we're discussing, to test out a plan for one of your papers on me, or to ask for general advice. Don't hesitate to take advantage of this opportunity.

Schedule of topics and assignments

Part 1: Introduction to the study of the ancient Stoics

Week 1

1. Introduction to Greek philosophy c. 300 BCE – 180 CE
2. Writers, texts, and sources
The Stoics Reader, pp. 1–10
Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chaps. 1–3 (pp. 3–34)

Week 2

3. Introduction to Stoicism 1: The idea of inner freedom
Epictetus, *Encheiridion* (in Long, *How to be Free*)
4. Introduction to Stoicism 2: How to achieve inner freedom
Epictetus, Selections from *Discourses* (in Long, *How to be Free*)

Week 3

5. Introduction to Stoicism 3: The nature of the passions
Seneca, *On Anger*, Book 1 and Book 2.1–17 (pp. 14–46)
6. Introduction to Stoicism 4: Taming the passions
Seneca, *On Anger*, Book 2.18–36 and Book 3 (pp. 46–96)
Take-home test on the historical background

Part 2: Stoic physics

Week 4

7. Stoic theology
The Stoics Reader, pp. 51–85
8. Stoic physics
The Stoics Reader, pp. 85–97

Week 5

9. Stoic metaphysics and cosmology
The Stoics Reader, pp. 85–97 (continued)
10. Spirit / soul
The Stoics Reader, pp. 97–101

Part 3: Stoic logic and theory of knowledge

Week 6

11. Impressions and assent
Brennan, *The Stoic Life* Chap. 5 (pp. 51–61)
12. Belief and knowledge
The Stoics Reader, pp. 47–50; Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 6 (pp. 62–81)

Week 7

13. Responding to the Sceptics
The Stoics Reader, pp. 25–47
14. Stoic logic and semantics
The Stoics Reader, pp. 11–25
First paper assignment due

Part 4: Stoic Ethics

Week 8

15. The philosophical background to Stoic ethics
Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chaps. 3–4 (pp. 21–48)
16. Passions and motivation
Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 7 (pp. 82–113)

Week 9

17. Goods and indifferents
The Stoics Reader, pp. 124–150; Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 8 (pp. 119–133)
18. Following nature, virtue, and happiness
The Stoics Reader, pp. 113–24; Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 9 (pp. 134–153)

Week 10 (no class on Thursday)

19. The theory of *oikeiōsis*
The Stoics Reader, pp. 151–64; Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chapter 10 (pp. 154–168)

Week 11

20. Appropriate acts
Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chapters 11–13 (pp. 169–230)
21. Hierocles on our duties to others
Selections from Hierocles, in Inwood, *Later Stoicism: 155 BCE to 200 CE* (pp. 480–505)

Week 12

22. The “feminism” of Musonius Rufus
Selections from Musonius Rufus, in Inwood, *Later Stoicism: 155 BCE to 200 CE* (pp. 166–188), *The Stoics Reader*, pp. 177–84
23. Debates about the Stoic theory of the passions
The Stoics Reader, pp. 164–175
Second paper assignment due

Part 5: Stoic fatalism

Week 13

24. Fate and necessity
The Stoics Reader, pp. 101–112
25. Freedom and responsibility
Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 14 (pp. 235–269)

Week 14

26. The “lazy argument”
Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 15 (pp. 270–287)

Part 6: Stoicism after Hierocles

27. Marcus Aurelius
Selections from Marcus Aurelius, in Inwood, *Later Stoicism: 155 BCE to 200 CE* (pp. 510–549)

Week 15**28.** Stoic influences on later thought

A.A. Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition", in Brad Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), Chap. 14 (pp. 365–392)

29. Stoicism today

Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, Chap. 17 (pp. 309–321)

Final exam period

Take-home exam covering the whole course

Statement on Academic Conduct

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Late Work and Incompletes

All work is expected to be completed and turned in on time. Incomplete work is work not completed due to documented illness or some other emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester. Arrangements for an IN and its removal should be initiated by the student and agreed to by the instructor prior to the end of the fall 2016 semester.

Academic Accommodations

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

Reporting Sexual Misconduct and for those experiencing stress around issues of gender or protected class (including sexual assault):

If you become aware of incident of sexual misconduct please connect with one of the following departments immediately:

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity and Title IX – (213) 821-8298

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://eeotix.usc.edu/>

Department of Public Safety - 213-740-6000 or Emergencies 213-740-4321

Student Resources and Support

College can be a stressful time, and challenges to one’s mental health can interfere with optimal academic performance. Seeking help and support is smart and effective. These resources can help students manage personal concerns that threaten their emotional or academic well-being.

For those experiencing psychological distress:**Counseling and Mental Health Services (CMH) - (213) 740-9355– 24/7 on call**

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://ooc.usc.edu/how-to-use-help-hotline/>

Additional support services:**Campus Support & Intervention – (213) 740-0411**

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://campussupport.usc.edu>

Asian Pacific American Student Services (APASS) – (213) 740-4999

<http://apass.usc.edu/>

Center for Black Cultural and Student Affairs (CBCSA) – (213) 740-8257

http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/black_cultural_center/

First Generation Plus Success Center (FG+SC)

<https://firstgenplussc.usc.edu/>

LA CASA – (213) 740-1480

<https://lacasa.usc.edu/>

LGBT Resource Center – (213) 740-7619

<https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/about/>