

Stoic Philosophy and Leadership

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Course Description

“Some things are in our control and others are not. Things in our control include our opinions, pursuits, desires, and aversions... Things not in our control include our health, property, reputation, office...

The things in our control are by nature free, unrestrained, unhindered, and our own; but those not in our control are weak, slavish, restrained, and belong to others. Remember, then, that if you suppose that what is enslaved is free, and that what belongs to others is your own, then you will be hindered. You will lament, you will be disturbed, and you will curse both gods and men. But if you suppose that only to be your own which is your own, and leave that which belongs to others as it is, then no one will ever compel you or restrain you. You will be free.”

These are the opening lines to the Handbook of Epictetus. And we can see in those lines the promise of Stoicism. That promise lies in total freedom from our captivity, our captivity to our professors and our families, our captivity to the expectations of others, our captivity to the Myth of the Modern World. But that promise comes with a price, for the Stoics made no false promises about the difficult path required to attain such freedom.

In this class, we attempt to better understand this ancient school of philosophy. We will spend most of our time reading the classic works the Stoics as well those with Stoic sympathies. Interestingly these vanguards could be found in all walks of Roman and Greek life. Epictetus was a slave, Seneca - a Statesman, and Marcus Aurelius - emperor.

In order to understand the Stoics, however, one must understand, at least in outline, their heroes and their rivals. For the Stoics, there was no greater hero than Socrates. Epictetus implores, “even though you are not yet a Socrates, you ought to live as someone trying to become a Socrates.” So we will consider the hero of Socrates through Plato’s Apology as well as other Stoic Heroes: Heraclites and the Cynics. We will also consider the leading rival philosophic theories to the Stoics and how that can help us better understand Stoicism and its limitations.

Finally, we will consider how this ancient school of thought out to influence one’s life as an officer. What lessons can Stoicism provide for us about how to be a better Naval Officer? Although we will consider other readings as well, our primary source in this endeavor will be the readings of ADM James Bond Stockdale.

Objectives

Through participation in this class, we will engage in philosophical investigation into ancient philosophy with a focus on the Stoics. In order to succeed in such an investigation, by the end of this class you should have developed the ability to:

- interpret historical philosophical texts
- understand the nature and impact of philosophical arguments
- critically evaluate philosophical positions and arguments
- reflect on how these ancient philosophical positions impact your life today and as officers
- reflect on how these positions ought to impact the way you lead
- develop your own philosophical positions and arguments in support of those positions

Course Requirements and Grading

Daily Class Expectations

I expect you to come to class prepared to have a vigorous discussion about the texts, the arguments within them, and most importantly the ideas they present.

This means that I will expect you to:

- 1) Have completed the assigned reading
- 2) Have thought about themes raised
- 3) Be open-mindedly opinionated
- 4) Come with questions and ideas
- 5) Come on time
- 6) Turn off any distractions
- 7) Treat everyone with respect

Honor Concept

You are expected to uphold the Honor Concept.

Grades

Students will be graded on the quality of their writing assignments, presentations, understanding of the material, and on the quality of their participation in written and verbal discussion, particularly the questions they raise.

1. *Written Discussion questions/ Posts:* You should generally come to class with numerous questions. However, on 20 occasions, you are required to post 2 written questions on Blackboard. These questions are meant to critically engage a specific point of the text, not to summarize the text. You need not understand the text completely, that's what class is for. In fact, these questions can be a great way to express your uncertainty about the class, but the question ought to demonstrate engagement with the text. In general, you will be better served by writing them as issues that might be concerns or specific questions of understanding (I'm worried/wondering whether ...) than objections.

If you do more than 20, I will count your best 20 entries for this portion of the grade. You can pick any 20 with one restriction: questions must be posted before TAPS the night before class for the next day. This structure gives you 3 days off. You can earn more days by completing extra credit. Any extra credit completed will be counted as 100%.

Examples of Outstanding questions/topics: (A)

- In the handbook Epictetus tells us on page 3 that when one kisses a wife or child, one should remember “that you are kissing a human being; for when it dies you will not be upset.” I worry about how this can be reconciled with what we’ve read earlier about how the number and meaning of one’s relationships play a pivotal role in one’s happiness.
– Considers a specific point, ties it to earlier material, and raises a potential concern.
- In Aristotle's view, the highest happiness achievable for humans is the act of performing excellent rational activity (p. 343-350). Yet I wonder about the possibility of choices that aren't fully rational and whether they too can be an essential element of a flourishing human life? Might spontaneous, impulsive even irrational – actions be an element of what completes the human experience if so can Aristotle’s view could account for them.
– Considers a specific point and raises a question about it.
- I’m confused by Hobbes example of the fool on p. 547. If in the State of Nature, Hobbes believes we should do whatever is in our interests (p.540-545). Why would that principle not continue to hold once a state has been established? Why would we not flaunt the laws that are not in our interest once within the state?
–Raises a question of understanding based on a specific issue and considers how to understand that issue in the light of previous

“Examples of acceptable questions/topics: (B range)

- The Happiness Hypothesis, Haidt talks about the emotion of "elevation." Haidt even considered how merely seeing others do deeds that would lead to elevation could cause a similar reaction in others conducting studies that revealed that people witnessing someone else do a really good deed made them feel good and want to do good deeds as well (199). This past weekend I went to see The Blind Side (which I totally recommend to anyone and everyone), and me, being the softy that I am, experienced these "tears of celebration/elevation" during all scene in which Sandra Bullock's role, Leigh Anne, did something incredible for Michael Oher. It was an incredibly moving story and it really did evoke the emotion of elevation because what the Touhy family did for Michael Oher was truly unbelievable.
–Raises a specific issue and applies it, but doesn’t critically engage it.
- “Hobbes makes the argument that the only way to avoid turmoil and civil war is to have all political and religious authority centered in one man. I was wondering what people’s reactions are to this argument of Hobbes’s argument for an absolute sovereign.”
– This is the start to a good question, but it needs more development. What are you wondering about? Is there a particular aspect of the argument that is strong or weak?

Examples of Unsatisfactory Questions (C range)

- “What does Aristotle mean by ‘virtue?’”—questions that are too vague/large generally
- “By definition, a symposium is “a meeting or conference for the discussion of some subject, esp. a meeting at which several speakers talk on or discuss a topic before an audience”. Plato’s book has around seven other speakers who contribute to this symposium (Phaedrus, Pausanias, Aristophanes, Agathon, Alcibiades, and Socrates). I think that they are more intrigued with the “nature” of love, rather than just the notion of love. Love can take on many forms that are attributes of passions. Socrates talks about the “Love of Wisdom”. So love doesn’t have to be equated as affection. I enjoyed this reading
– Merely a summary of the reading and a statement of preference.
- The authors of In Search of Happiness and Flow operate under the basic premise that Western society today is so commercial and materialistic that its inhabitants have largely lost sight of true fulfillment. Their arguments, however, lack a balanced approach and a nuanced perception of humanity. With these weaknesses they come off as stubborn and self-

- righteous. Schumaker in particular presents his argument in such a patronizing manner that it is hard to focus on the merits of his points.
- A summary of the and a very broad critique
 - “Isn’t Aristotle just talking about the inherent metaphysical fallibility of the human condition”
 - Be clear, not obtuse

I do not assign participation grades for each day or even every week. After Sept 11 and Oct 16, I will let you know how you are doing in discussion so far as well as any suggestions for improvement.

2. Class Participation:

Discussion is a fundamental part of philosophy. Some, like Plato, might go so far as to say it is *the* constitutive element of philosophy. Don’t just sit there – say something. Remember that good questions are more important than good answers. And good arguments are more important than simply remembering the facts. I expect every student to contribute to class every day.

I do not assign participation grades for each day or even every week. After Sept 11 and Oct 16, I will let you know how you are doing in discussion so far as well as any suggestions for improvement.

3. Other assignments

These will be described in detail closer to their respective due dates.

SCHEDULE

SECTION I: Re-Introduction to Stoicism

Thurs Aug 21 – Course Intro
No Reading

Tues Aug 26 – What is Stoicism Seneca's <i>Letters</i> LXXXVIII (only pp. 151-155) <i>Stoic Life</i> Ch 1 (pp. 3-9) Ch 4 (only pp.36-40)	Thurs Aug 28 – Stoicism and Leadership Stockdale "The Role of the Pressure Cooker" (BB) Cosmopolitan Fragment (BB)
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SECTION II: Stoic Heroes (Socrates, Cynics, Heraclitus)

Tues Sep 2 – Socrates
Selections *Apology* (BB)
Discourses Book I Ch 19

Thurs Sep 4 – Cynics
Discourses Book III Ch 22

Tues Sep 9 – Heraclitus
"Becoming God" (BB)

Thurs Sep 11 – *Group Presentations & Discussion*
Seneca Letter XII
Discourses Book II Ch 2
External Goods fragment (BB)

SECTION III: Rival – Skeptics (Impressions, Assent, and Knowledge)

Tues Sep 16 – I'm not so sure
Hume "The Skeptic" (BB)

Thurs Sep 18 – Stoic Knowledge
The Stoic Life Ch 5 (pp. 51-61)
Ch 6 (only pp. 62-74)

Tues Sep 23 Mar – Know Good
Discourses Book I Ch 28
The Stoic Life
Ch 9 (only pp. 142-151)

Thurs Sep 25 – Bringing it Together
Debate: Stoic Harms
No new reading

SECTION IV: Rival – Aristotle (Emotions)

Tues Sep 30 - Aristotle
Aristotle NE I 4-5; II
II Ch 4, 6 VII Ch 12-13 (BB)

Thurs Oct 2– Stoics on Emotion
The Stoic Life Ch7 (pp.82-110)

Tues Oct 7 Anger and Anxiety
Stoic Warriors, pp. 65-73, 89-91
Discourses Book II Ch 13
Seneca “On Joy” (BB)

Thurs Oct 9 – Grief and Hope
Seneca “On Consolation” (BB)
Stoic Warriors, pp. 143-149
Seneca *Letters* V

Tues Oct 14
Midterm

Thurs Oct 16 -- Progressor Emotions (a twist)
“Tears of Alcebeides” (BB)

SECTION V: Rival – Epicureans (Fate) – Oct 21/23; 28/30

Tues Oct 21 – Pleasure
Hume “The Epicurean” (BB)
Selections

Thurs Oct 23 – Fate
The Stoic Life Chapter 14 (pp. 235-240)

Tues Oct 28 – So be it
The Stoic Life
Chapter 15 (only pp. 242-260)
Seneca *Letters* CVII

Thurs Oct 30 – I am more than my will
The Stoic Life Ch 17 (pp.288-302)

SECTION VI: Stoic Leadership

Tues Nov 4 – Crisis Leadership
Stockdale “Leadership ...” (BB)
Secret of Motivation (BB)

Thurs Nov 6 – Teaching / Mentoring
The Stoic Life Ch 10
Seneca *Letters* XLVIII

Tues Nov 11
NO CLASS – Veteran’s Day

Thurs Nov 13 – Preparation for oneself and others
Discourses Book III Ch 12, 16
Selections Seneca “On the Happy Life” (BB)

Tues Nov 18 – Heroes
Stockdale “Heroes & Heroism” (BB)

Thurs Nov 20 – *Group Presentations & Discussion*
Stoic Warriors 109-112,116-118
Stoic Warriors 122-129
Stoic Warriors 134-138

SECTION VII -- “Stop talking about the good person, go be one”

Tues Nov 25 – A Modern Stoicism? Tues Nov 27

Issues in Modern Stoicism (BB) NO CLASS –Thanksgiving

Tues Dec 2 – Bringing it Together Thurs Dec 4 – This too shall pass

Debate: Stoic Leadership Hume “The Stoic” (BB)

No new reading

Texts

- Aurelius, Marcus. *The Emperor's Handbook: A New Translation of The Meditations*, Trans. by David Hicks, Scribner, 2002.
- Brennan, Tad. *The Stoic Life*, Oxford, 2005.
- Epictetus. *The Discourses, The Handbook, Fragments*, Trans. by Robin Hard, Everyman, 1995.
- Seneca. *Letters from a Stoic*, Translated by Robin Cambell, Penguin Books, 1969.
- Sherman, Nancy. *Stoic Warriors: The ancient philosophy behind the military mind*, Oxford University Press, 20005.

Grade Percentages

1. Class Participation/Questions:	15%
2. Group Presentation #1:	5%
3. Group Presentation #2:	5%
4. Reflection Paper #1:	5%
5. Reflection Paper #2:	10%
4. Debate #1:	10%
5. Debate #2:	15%
6. Midterm:	15%
7. Final:	20%

Dates

- Class Thurs Sep 11 – Group Presentation
- COB Friday Sep 19 – Reflection Paper Due
- Class Thurs Sep 25 – Debate
- COB Friday Oct 3 – Debate Report out Due
- Class Thurs Oct 16 – Midterm
- Class Thurs Nov 13 – Group Presentation #2
- COB Friday Nov 21– Reflection Paper Due
- Class Tues Dec 2 – Debate
- COB Friday Dec 5 – Debate Report out Due
- Date TBD – Final