

**NP486: Stoic Philosophy and Leadership**  
**U.S. Naval Academy (3 Credits)**  
Dr. Marcus Hedahl



Office: Luce Hall 231

Office Hours: MTH4, after class or email--we will find a time that works for you!

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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.

## **Outcomes**

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

- Interpret historical philosophical texts: of the Stoics, their heroes, and their rivals
- Analyze the Stoic approach to: harms, emotions, knowledge, and fate
- Evaluate how these ancient philosophical positions impact your life today and as officers
- Evaluate how these positions ought to impact the way you lead
- Evaluate the limits of a stoic philosophy in the modern world
- Synthesize possible responses to those limitations
- Develop your own philosophical positions and arguments in support of those positions

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

### ***Classroom Expectations I***

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.

## ***Classroom Expectations II***

I expect you will:

- 1) Have completed the assigned reading
- 2) Have thought about themes raised
- 3) Be open-mindedly opinionated with questions and ideas
- 4) Come on time
- 5) Bring your laptop (We will sometimes need them for in class activities) **BUT Turn off any distractions** (in other words, all electronic devices are to be turned off and stowed away prior to the beginning of class.) Laptops are **NOT** allowed unless we are doing an in class activity in which they are required.
- 6) Come to attention at the beginning and end of class & be in a mindset to discuss class material after attention is called
- 7) Treat everyone (myself and your fellow classmates) with respect. **All of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere that respects the rights, safety, dignity and worth of every individual in the class.** This includes, but is not limited to being aware of the impact that your communications, practices, and behaviors have on others, acknowledging and respecting the diversity of ideas, opinions and backgrounds that exist between and among us, and rejecting bigotry and intimidation of any kind.
- 8) Stay awake (*If you have to stand at the back, I understand why. If you are tired, I understand why. If you fall asleep in class, my understanding is likely to exceed its limits.*)
- 9) Refrain from food or tobacco during class
- 10) Exit and enter the classroom only when necessary, in the least disruptive manner possible, and make the time out of class as minimal as possible. (*You're not 7. You don't have to ask for permission to use the head. **But** class is only 75 minutes, you should not need to use the head every class or every week. And, it should be brief. If you are gone from a significant percentage of classes or gone for more than a few minutes, more than once or twice I am going to assume you need me to make you an appointment to see a gastrointestinal specialist.*)

## ***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.

## ***Class Participation***

I do not assign participation grades for each day or even every week. After Jan 26 and Feb 23, I will let you know how you are doing in discussion so far as well as any suggestions for improvement.

## ***Other assignments***

Are available on blackboard.

## ***Late Policy***

Debates and class presentations not accepted late (They will receive a 0).

Other papers marked down 10% per calendar day for up to 4 days, after which they receive a 0.

All policies can be granted exception by the instructor but only by prior arrangement.

## SECTION I: Re-Introduction to Stoicism

Thurs Jan 10 – Course Intro  
No Reading

Tues Jan 15 – What is Stoicism  
Seneca's *Letters*  
LXXXVIII (only pp. 151-155)  
*Stoic Life* Ch 1 (pp. 3-9)  
Ch 4 (only pp.36-40)

Thurs Jan 17 – Stoicism and Leadership  
Stockdale "The Role of Pressure Cooker" (BB)  
Cosmopolitan Fragment (BB)

## SECTION II: Stoic Heroes (Socrates, The Cynics, Heraclitus, and Plato)

Tues Jan 22 – Socrates  
Selections *Apology* (BB)  
*Discourses* Book I Ch 19

Thurs Jan 24 – Cynics  
*Discourses* Book III Ch 22,  
*Discourses* Book III Ch 20

Tues Jan 29 – Heraclitus & Plato  
Heraclitus Fragments (BB)  
Plato's Symposium pp. 1-6; 18-22; 27-34

Thurs Jan 31 – Plato Cont.  
Plato's Symposium pp. 36-54

Tues Feb 5 – Group Presentations  
Seneca Letter XII  
*Discourses* Book II Ch 2  
External Goods fragment (BB)

Thurs Feb 7 – Debate  
Debate: Stoic Harms  
*No new reading*

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

Tues Feb 12 – I'm not so sure  
Hume "The Skeptic" (BB)

Thurs Feb 14 – Stoic Knowledge  
*The Stoic Life* Ch 5 /6 (pp. 51-74)

**Paper # 1**  
**Due**  
**COB**

#### SECTION IV: Rival – Aristotle (Emotions)

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|---|--|
| Tues Feb 19 - Aristotle<br>Aristotle NE I 4-5; II<br>II Ch 4,6 VII Ch 12-13 (BB)  | Thurs Feb 21– Stoics on Emotion<br><i>The Stoic Life</i> Ch7 (pp. 82-112)  |
| Tues Feb 26 Anger and Anxiety<br><i>Stoic Warriors</i> , pp. 65-73, 89-91 (BB)<br><i>Discourses</i> Book II Ch 13<br>Seneca “On Joy” (BB) | Thurs Feb 28 – Grief and Hope<br>Seneca “On Consolation” (BB)<br><i>Stoic Warriors</i> , pp. 143-149 (BB)<br>Seneca <i>Letters</i> V |
| Tues Mar 5 Progressor Emotions<br>“Tears of Alcebeides” (BB)  | Thurs Mar 7 – Bringing it all together<br><b>Midterm</b>   |

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

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| Tues Mar 19 – Pleasure<br>Hume “The Epicurean” (BB)<br><i>Selections</i> | Thurs Mar 21 – It is what it is<br><i>The Stoic Life</i> Chapter 14 (pp. 235-241)<br><i>The Stoic Life</i> Ch 17 (pp. 288-304)<br>Seneca <i>Letters</i> CVII |
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#### SECTION VI: Stoics Leading, Teaching, and Living

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| Tues Mar 26 – Crisis Leadership<br>Stockdale “Leadership ...” (BB)<br>Secret of Motivation (BB)                   | Thurs Mar 28 – Teaching / Mentoring<br><i>The Stoic Life</i> Ch 10 (pp. 154-168)<br>Seneca <i>Letters</i> XLVIII   |
| Tues Apr 2 – Heroes<br>Stockdale “Heroes & Heroism” (BB)  | Thurs Apr 4 – Preparation for oneself and others<br><i>Discourses</i> Book III Ch 12, 16<br>Seneca “On the Happy Life”<br><i>Selections</i> (BB) <b>Paper #2</b><br><b>Fri COB</b>           |
| Tues Apr 9 – Stoic Exemplars<br>Roosevelt “The Strenuous Life”<br>Mandela “Long Walk to Freedom”<br>Ch 58-60 (BB) | Thurs Apr 11 – Stoic Exemplars<br><i>Redding TBD</i>   |
| Tues Apr 16 -<br><u><i>Debate: Stoic Leadership</i></u>   | Thurs Apr 18 – <u><i>Group Presentations &amp; Discussion</i></u><br><i>Stoic Warriors</i> 109-112, 116-118 (BB)<br><i>Stoic Warriors</i> 122-129 (BB)<br><i>Stoic Warriors</i> 134-138 (BB) |
| Tues Apr 23 – A Modern Stoicism?<br>“Issues in Modern Stoicism” (BB)  | Tues Apr 25– The Eternal Return<br>Hume “The Stoic” (BB)   |
| Tues Apr 30 – Bringing it Together<br><i>No new reading.</i> <b>Paper #3 Due COB</b>                              |  |

### **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.

Plato, *Symposium*, Trans. by Seth Benardete, University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Seneca. *Letters from a Stoic*, Translated by Robin Cambell, Penguin Books, 1969.

### **Grade Percentages**

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

**\*\* See attachment**

### **Dates**

Class Tues Feb 5	*Group Presentation
Class Thurs Feb 7	*Debate
COB Thurs Feb 14	Paper #1 Due
Class Mar 7	Midterm
COB Fri Apr 5	Paper #2 Due
Class Tues Apr 16	*Group Presentation
Class Thurs Apr 18	*Debate
COB Tues Apr 30	Paper #3 Due
Date TBD	Final

\* Each student will be assigned either:

A) Group Presentation on Thurs Feb 1 & Debate on Tues Apr 24  
or

B) Debate on Thurs Feb 8 & Group Presentation on Thurs Apr 19