

PHIL 488 STOICISM AND PHILOSOPHY AS THE ART OF LIVING

Dr. Christopher E. Franklin

W 2-4:30, HAL 307

Fall 2019

“Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth or the best possible state of your soul?”

—Socrates (*Apology* 29d3-e4)

“Guide me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny,
To wheresoever you have assigned me;
I'll follow unwaveringly, or if my will fails,
Base though I be, I'll follow nonetheless”

—Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*

CONTACT INFORMATION

Office: HAL 300J

Office Hours: M 3-5pm, T 12:30-5pm (by appt.), W 8:50-9:50am, R 11:30am-12:30pm, F 3-4:30pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our course has two main and interconnected lines of inquiry. The first concerns how we ought to conceive of philosophy. The Stoics (or at least the Stoics we will be studying) primarily thought of philosophy as a way life. That is, they thought philosophy was not merely or even fundamentally about theory but rather about living well. For them, philosophy manifested itself primarily, not in a well-crafted treatise, but a well-lived life. We will work to understand and evaluate that conception of philosophy. Second (and this will be the majority of the course), we will read closely the works of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, the three great Roman Stoics, inquiring into their accounts moral formation, providence, logic, the will and self-control, friendship, study, solitude, leisure, evil, the liberal arts and more. Our aim is two-fold: growing in our understanding of Stoicism and wisdom.

TEXTS

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Hardship & Happiness*, translated by Elaine Fantham, Harry M. Hine, James Kerr, and Gareth D. Williams (Chicago: Chicago University Press, c. 1st Century A.D./2014). Abbreviated ‘HH’.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, translated by Margaret Graver and A. A. Long (Chicago: Chicago University Press, c. 63A.D./2015). Abbreviated ‘LE’.

Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, and Handbook*, translated by Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, c. 108A.D./2014).

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, translated by Gregory Hays (New York: The Modern Library c. 171-75 A.D./2003)

John Sellars, *The Art of Living: Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*, 2nd edition (London: Bristol Classics Press, 2009).

Brad Inwood, *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

N.B. You will need a copy to Plato's *Apology* but I assume you already own this.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through the course, students will:

1. Demonstrate detailed Stoicism's account of the nature of philosophy and ethics (Department objectives 2, 3, 7; critical responses, paper)
2. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of Seneca's theory of ethics, in particular his account of happiness, friendship, death, and study (Department objectives 2, 3, 7; critical responses, paper)
3. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of Epictetus's theory of ethics, in particular his account of the three-fold division of ethics and his account of the will (Department objectives 2, 3, 7; critical responses, paper)
4. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of Marcus Aurelius's theory of ethics, in particular his of the self and social nature of the person (Department objectives 2, 3, 7; critical responses, paper)
5. Develop critical analysis and reasoning skills (Department objectives 4, 6, 8, 9 critical responses, paper)

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY: LEARNING GOALS

1. Demonstrate the ability to understand and evaluate philosophical questions from a Christian theistic framework. This will require the student to see the relationship between faith and learning and how such a perspective applies to the critical and analytical questions posed by humans in the great search for wisdom.
2. Demonstrate ability to read, comprehend, and evaluate the thought of great philosophers of the past and present in terms of the presuppositions and historical contexts of their claims about the philosophical task as well as the implications of such thought in terms of ethical and social practice. This will require observation of and interaction with primary

source texts that approach the great questions and concerns that philosophers have been asking for many millennia.

3. Demonstrate ability to comprehend the major issues in philosophy from the aforementioned Christian theistic perspective as well as the ability to interact with the concerns and perspectives of other philosophies, religions, and worldviews in order to develop the skills necessary to think through what one believes and why. This will require the development of skills necessary to evaluate an argument or a belief critically in terms of strengths and weaknesses.
4. Demonstrate basic and maturing research skills. This will include the ability to state theses, show those theses through analysis of primary texts, discuss the possible weaknesses of one's own analysis, and test those theses against the best scholarship.
5. Articulate a worldview that integrates knowledge of philosophy with other disciplines in order to see the consequences of a consistent Christian theistic worldview. Students will recognize the tensions in this integration process rather than accepting simplistic answers and thus will be helped to grow into mature and thoughtful persons.
6. Demonstrate basic research and writing skills. This ability will be assessed through the evaluation of the assigned paper, both in draft and completed versions.
7. Demonstrate basic knowledge of philosophical concepts.
8. Demonstrate ability to research, write, and speak in the content area of Philosophy.
9. Be competitive and prepared for graduate school and seminary opportunities, as assessed by placement data and alumni surveys.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Each student will be allowed 1 unexcused absence. Beyond this, each unexcused absence will result in a 2% loss of the student's total course grade. Excessive or frequent tardiness will count as an unexcused absence. If the student arrives late, it is his responsibility to make sure he is marked 'present.' Excused absences are restricted to authorized college activities, loss of immediate family member, and illness/injury. See the Academic Policies Section of the *College Bulletin* for more information.

Weekly Reflections—33%

Beginning on 9/18-12/4 students will complete before the beginning of class a reflection that addresses each of the following four questions/issues about the reading due that day:

1. What is one thing that struck you as importantly right about the readings?
2. What is one thing that struck you as importantly mistaken about the readings?
3. What is one thing in the readings that is importantly consonant or dissonant with Christian ethics.
4. What is one practice either suggested by the readings or that you came upon that might help us appropriate some truth from the readings.

A couple of words of explanation about these four questions/issues. First, these are meant to be informal, not your final, thoroughly pondered, and defended judgments. Think carefully about these but don't over think them. Second, by *importantly* I am trying to direct your focus to central issues. Don't be pedantic. Moreover, 'important' does not mean novel. Third, in addressing 3 we might discover that we have disagreement about what Christian ethics involves. Don't worry about that. Fourth, a *practice* is an activity that is directly within our control and that is *regularly* engaged in in order to bring about something that is not directly within my control. The practice can be something that grows one in Stoicism or you are welcome to consider a practice that takes Stoic insight to grow one in one's discipleship to Jesus.

For each question you should offer a few brief words explaining or motivating your claim/answer. For questions 1-3 give us the why and for 4 give us a clear description of the practice and its putative benefits. The purpose of this assignment is to provide launching off points into discussion of the readings. So, be prepared to be called on for your answers.

The assignment should be 400-600 words, typed, doubled-spaced and in hard-copy form. I will collect these after lectures, but students need to have completed them prior to lecture.

A Letter to a Friend about Stoicism—27%

In this assignment, you will mimic (though you are free to innovate as well) Seneca's style of address in his *Letters on Ethics*. The aim of the letter is to persuasively report two to three pieces of wisdom you have learned from our reading of the Stoics. You can appeal to all or some (but not none) of our three Roman Stoics. Thus, while in one sense your letter is autobiography—you will be telling your friend what you think you have learned—in another sense the letter is persuasive or exhortatory—you are trying to convey the wisdom you take yourself to have learned *in such a way* that your reader will see its insight. You need not but are welcome to give arguments (Seneca does in many of his letters). But one way or another you are seeking to bring your friend to a place where he too can see the point that Stoics were getting at. What you choose to take from the Stoics is up to you and I hope that one benefit of this assignment will be time devoted to reflection that will contribute to *your* appropriating, in a meaningful way, a little of the vast amount of wisdom the Stoics have to offer us.

We will be able to discuss this more in weeks 4 and 5 once we have read some Seneca, but let me stress here that the style should be more informal than other academic papers you have written and should be focused on relating Stoic wisdom to the challenges and vicissitudes of 21st century American life.

I will grade this assignment by reference to its accuracy (is it derived from a deep understanding of Stoicism), creativity (thoughtful forms of communication), and wisdom (depth of what you have gleaned).

The letter is due by 5pm on 12/17 and must be submitted to my email address in a word doc. You *must* name the file as follows: Your Last Name Letter (so Jane Doe will name the file of her letter: Doe Letter). The word count for the letter is 1500-2000 words. Given that it is a letter, no official citation of the works is required, though it is possible to commit other forms of plagiarism (e.g., pretending you came up with Seneca's ideas).

Research Paper—30%

This a research paper whose topic must focus on Stoicism. The aim of this paper is to articulate a clear, interesting, and properly focused thesis and to offer cogent defense of that thesis. While the topic must focus on Stoicism, as you will discover, they discussed *most* philosophical topics and thus you will have a wide range of topics to choose from. I strongly suggest that your paper focus on methodological and ethical issues will read about or issues that *immediately* arise from them, but you could, should you desire, take up questions about their logic or physics. The paper can focus on the history of philosophy (how the idea of will develops in our three thinkers), exegetical (what Epictetus's theory of the will is), or evaluative (is Epictetus's theory of will plausible). Regardless, as with previous papers you have written for me, the two most important features are your thesis and defense of your thesis.

Unlike other papers you have written for me, this paper has a significant research component. You need a minimum of 10 scholarly sources, at least three of which must be primary Stoic sources and at least two of which must be secondary scholarly sources. A rough outline of the process of writing such a paper consists of (i) selecting your topic, (ii) gathering sources on this topic, (iii) reading these sources, (iv) creating a thesis that flows out of these readings, and (v) writing a paper that states, motivates, explains, and defends your thesis. You are encouraged to consult with me at every stage of this paper.

A great place to start your research is [here](#), with the *Cambridge Companion to Stoicism*.

The paper is due at the beginning of lecture on 12/11 and must be submitted to my email address in a word doc. You *must* name the file as follows: Your Last Name Paper (so Jane Doe will name the file of her paper: Doe Paper). The word count for this paper is 3000-4000 words (excluding notes and bibliography).

See the handout **How to Write a Philosophy Paper** on my.gcc for clearer guidelines concerning what the paper requires, how best to satisfy these requirements, and how I will grade the papers and see the handout **Minimal Standards for Written Work** posted on my.gcc concerning more details about the formatting requirements. Any work that fails to meet *any* of the minimal standards will automatically receive a third of a letter grade penalty and will receive an additional third of a letter grade penalty for each 24 hour period from the time the student is informed of the problem until the student turns in a properly formatted work.

Paper Presentation—10%

Each student will given a 20 minute presentation of the paper he or she has written. The presentation cannot be a simple reading of the *paper* but most offer a distillation of the main ideas (though you are, should you like, welcome to read this distillation). The form of the presentation is up to the student. They can offer a handout, use power-point, read their notes, etc. The presentation should make clear the significance of the project, the thesis, and the main contours of the student's argument. The presentation will be followed by a 10-15 minute Q/A in which I get the first crack at you—eh hem—I mean, in which I get to ask the first polite question.

Each student must attend every student's presentation.

Computer Policy

Computers are not allowed. Digital technology *is* how Socrates *appeared* to the Athenians: corruptor of the youth and creator of false gods. As Socrates was meant to be, so digital technology will be in my classroom, banished. However, if you have a concern about this policy, please contact me.

Honesty

College policies with regard to honesty in taking tests and writing papers will be strictly followed. The college administration and faculty are very concerned about cheating and take active steps to prevent it. **Any student caught cheating on or plagiarizing any assignment will receive a 0 on the assignment.**

See the college's policy on Academic Integrity in the 2019-2020 college *Bulletin*. The use (or possession) of former examinations from this course in preparing for tests is considered a violation of the GCC honesty in learning policy as stated in the college *Bulletin*.

Policy on late assignments:

Do not ask for exceptions on late work; I accept no excuses except Provost excuses. Without a Provost excuse, late work is assigned a 0. It is crucial that you realize that failure to turn in an assignment you finish before the deadline constitutes turning in the assignment late. Failure to remember to bring the assignment or failure to print out the assignment in time are not excuses: they are confessions of negligence

Disability

Accessibility & Accommodations: It is Grove City College's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on a disability, please let me know immediately so that we may discuss options. You are also welcome to contact the disability services office to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations. The Disability Services Coordinator may be reached at 724-264-4673 or DisabilityServices@gcc.edu

Counseling

If you are experiencing undue personal or academic stress at any time during the semester or need to talk to someone who can help, you should contact the Counseling Center at 724-458-3788 or email Mrs. Hummel, staff assistant, at mhummel@gcc.edu.

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS (schedule subject to change)

I. Introduction

8/28 Introduction to Stoicism

Reading: *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction* (the whole thing)

II. Philosophy of Philosophy

9/4 The Nature of Philosophy

Reading: Plato's *Apology*, *Art of Living*, Preface to Second Edition, Introduction, chs. 1-3

9/11 The Nature of Philosophy (cont.)

Reading *Art of Living*, chs. 5-7, Conclusion

III. Seneca

9/18 Happiness

Reading: *On the Happy Life* (HH); Letters 66, 67, 71, 76, 92, 118, 120 (LE)

9/25 Nature of Philosophy, Training, and Progress

Reading: Letters 15, 16, 20, 75, 78, 89, 94, 95, 123 (LE)

10/2 Leisure, Study, and Retirement

Reading: *On Leisure* (HH); Letters 2, 8, 45, 49, 65, 68, 84, 88, 112, 108 (LE)

10/9 Freedom, Wealth, Fame, and Death

Reading: I have grouped the following readings thematically for your convenience. First read Letter 80 (LE). Then read:

Freedom: Letters 5, 18, 37, 80, 87, 110, 119 (LE)

Inner Self: Letters: 28, 56, 69 (LE)

Emotions: Letters 11, 13, 23, 59, 116 (LE)

Death: Letters 4, 24, 54, 61, 70, 82, 99 (LE)

10/16 Friendship, Influence by others, and Theology

Reading: *On Providence* (HH); Letters 7, 10, 50, 51, 103 (LE); *Constancy of the Wise person* (HH)

IV. Epictetus

10/23 Ethics and Physics

Readings in **Ethics**: 1.1, 1.3, 1.6, 1.22, 1.28, 1.30, 2.11, 2.17, 2.19, 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 3.12, 3.24, 4.1, 4.11

Readings in **Physics**: 1.9, 1.12, 1.14, 1.16, 2.8, 2.10, 3.17, 3.26

10/30 Action Theory and Social Relations

Readings in **Emotions** and **Motivation**: 1.7, 1.8, 1.11, 1.17, 1.18, 1.19, 2.1, 2.2, 2.18, 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26, 3.3, 3.8, 3.9, 3.13, 3.19, 3.20, 4.7, 4.9

Readings in **Social relations**: 1.13, 1.21, 1.23, 2.22, 3.11, 3.16, 3.18, 4.2

11/6 Nature of and Growth in Philosophy

Readings about the **Nature of Philosophy** and **Education**: 1.15, 1.26, 1.27, 2.4, 2.5, 2.14, 2.16, 2.21, 3.10, 3.21, 4.4, 4.8

Readings in **Moral Growth** and **Training**: 1.4, 1.10, 1.20, 1.24, 1.25, 1.29, 2.9, 2.13, 2.18, 3.15, 4.12

Readings: *Handbook* (entire thing)

V. Aurelius

11/13 Readings: Books 1-4

11/20 Readings: Books 5-8

11/27 **Thanksgiving break**

12/4 Readings: Books 9-12

VI. Presentations

12/11 Presentations

Paper Due

12/12 7-9pm Presentations (note that is our time scheduled for the final exam)

12/17 **Letter to a Friend due**