

Tentative Course Outline

Philosophy 4K03/6K03 Seminar in Ancient Philosophy: Stoic ethics

Fall Term, 2016

Instructor: Ryan Middleton
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Office hours: TBA

Course description:

A few years back, in the aftermath of the so-called Great East Japan Earthquake, a reporter asked a woman who'd lost family members to the tsunami why she seemed so reserved. The woman replied by explaining that *she was holding back her tears so that others who had lost more than her could express their grief more freely*. In some ways, this woman's powerful and sagacious response to the tragedy crystalizes the spirit of ancient stoicism.

In this seminar, we will look into stoic ethics and how (or whether) they fit with other stoic tenets. Though diverse in their respective beliefs, Hellenistic stoics tended toward materialism, fatalism, and cosmopolitanism. We will work through some of these ideas, but our focus will remain on stoic ethics—and especially the teachings of Epictetus. Toward the end of the seminar, we will discuss a few perspectives on stoicism today, after reading brief excerpts from the speeches of James Stockdale and from Tom Wolfe's novel, *A Man in Full*. Indeed, some form of modern stoicism might be warranted in today's world, especially in the midst of ongoing conflict and disaster. That claim, however, must be put to the test.

Undergraduates will submit one 20-page paper at the end of term, and graduate students will submit a 30-page paper. As an alternative, however, both undergrads and grad students will be given the option to submit a shorter paper earlier in the term—and later revised—with the promise that it will be submitted for consideration to an academic conference. In addition to the final paper, students will provide paragraph-length summaries for at least 10 of the weekly readings.

Evaluation:

Weekly summaries: 40%
Final essay: 40%
Participation: 20%

Required texts:

Epictetus, *The Handbook (Enchiridion)*, trans. Nicholas P. White

Other texts:

The weekly readings will include texts that can all be found online. However, Long & Sedley's *Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. I is recommended.