Practical Philosophy:
The Greco-Roman Moralists
Part I
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Professor Johnson taught at Yale Divinity School from 1976 to 1982 and at Indiana University from 1982 to 1992 before accepting his current position at Emory. He is the author of twenty books, including The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation (2nd edition, 1998), which is used widely as a textbook in seminaries and colleges. He has also published several hundred articles and reviews. He is currently at work on several books, including one on the Christian creed, one on the future of Catholic biblical scholarship, and one on the influence of Greco-Roman religion on Christianity.

Professor Johnson has taught undergraduates, as well as master’s level and doctoral students. At Indiana University, he received the President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching, was elected a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, and won the Brown Derby and Student Choice Awards for teaching. At Emory, he has twice received the “On Eagle’s Wings Excellence in Teaching” Award. In 1997–1998, he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, speaking at college campuses across the country.

Professor Johnson is married to Joy Randazzo. They share seven children, eleven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a Yorkshire terrier named Bailey. Johnson also teaches the courses called The Apostle Paul and Early Christianity: The Experience of the Divine for The Teaching Company.
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Practical Philosophy: The Greco-Roman Moralists

Scope:
How can a person be good when the world all around seems bad? How can someone be wise when the surrounding culture is foolish? How can anyone be healthy when the social atmosphere is sick? Such questions are appropriate for Americans in the early twenty-first century. They are also the questions that preoccupied the moral philosophers of the early Roman Empire. The answers provided by the philosophers of the classical period no longer worked for them. Plato and Aristotle and Epicurus, after all, lived and taught in the small and comprehensible context of Athens. The world of empire was vaster, more complex, and morally much more ambiguous. Philosophy had to shift from theory to therapy. The philosophers of the early empire were concerned with proper thinking, to be sure, but thought was always aimed at proper living. Philosophy became a way of life.

This course introduces the ancient masters of practical philosophy who arose during the period of the late republic and early empire. They need introducing because they tend to be neglected by most students of antiquity. Classicists ignore them because they wrote in the ordinary Greek and Latin of the people rather than in the more elevated style of the poets and dramatists. Historians of philosophy equally neglect them because they do not notably contribute to the great metaphysical and epistemological theories that dominate the story of ancient philosophy. They deserve introducing because they are preeminently worth getting to know. They can still teach us.

Readers looking neither for sublime language nor complex theories but for wisdom have long known that that Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus are worth reading. Those fortunate enough to encounter them either in their schooling or on library shelves have heard these ancient moralists speak with remarkable freshness and force to the basic issues of human character with which we all must struggle. For such readers, the popular philosophers of the Greco-Roman world deserve their self-designation as “doctors of the soul.” Precisely because they focus so precisely on everyday life—the character of the individual and the health of the family—they remain pertinent even today. They analyze the passions of fear and desire, of envy and rage with brilliant insight. They precisely delineate the virtues and vices. They understand the process of moral development and the necessity of moral education. And the great satirist among them, Lucian of Samosata, remains remarkably funny.

Followers of the philosophical ideal appeared in different social locations and roles. Some belonged to formal schools where life and study were part of a common existence. Others were emperors, senators, court advisors, wandering rhetoricians, and schoolteachers. They nevertheless shared a vision concerning the good life that transcended the pleasure, possessions, and power that dominated the desires of most people. They were convinced that a dedication to virtuous living was the way not only to health but also to true happiness. Still, they were themselves completely human, and their ideals struggled for expression in the very structures of society that they found inadequate. Learning how Cicero lived as a senator is as instructive as hearing his thoughts on the good life. Knowing that Marcus Aurelius was supreme ruler of the empire gives his meditations a special significance. Epictetus’s stirring exhortations are all the more moving when we know that he was physically disabled, a slave, and an exile. Plutarch’s encyclopedic learning and cosmopolitan outlook owe something to his social position and priestly status.

The first part of this course establishes the social and cultural context for these teachers. We examine first the changes in society caused by the fact of empire and the reasons that philosophy needed to adopt a more therapeutic approach. We then sketch some of the major philosophical schools from the classical period whose influence was still discernible in the time of empire. A consideration of the major themes and metaphors used by the popular philosophers prepares for a composite portrait of the ideal sage, and its opposite, the charlatan who betrays philosophy’s ideals while mimicking its manner.

The remainder of the course focuses on the specific figures whose lives and thought still affect the way we act and think: Lucian of Samosata, the satirist; Cicero and Seneca, the Roman statesmen; Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, the schoolmasters; Dio Chrysostom, the public speaker; and Marcus Aurelius, the emperor. To show how pervasive were the ideals of character ethics, we then examine the same themes in some contemporary Jewish writers, before concluding with an extended appreciation of Plutarch of Chaeronea and a final reflection on the significance of this missing page in the history of philosophy.
Scope: Comparisons between the ancient Roman Empire and the new American Empire are frequent and easy. The reason is at least partly because there is much between them legitimately to compare. This opening presentation introduces the Greco-Roman moralists in general through such a comparison: They look less like the academic philosophers of today who inhabit universities and think-tanks and more like the talk-show therapists who haunt the contemporary media. Epictetus, meet Dr. Phil. Seneca, say hello to Dr. Laura. In each setting, practical philosophy is most treasured by ordinary folk and most despised by scholars. In each case, philosophy aims at how to live sanely in a confusing and confused world. We begin by suggesting some reasons why we might have more to learn from the ancient sages than from those currently on camera, and we describe our approach to these still lively and enlivening doctors of the soul.

Outline

I. This is a course in ancient philosophy that may defy student expectations.
   A. Courses in Plato and Aristotle have certain predictable features.
      1. The philosophers’ thought is placed in the context of Athenian culture.
      2. Philosophy focuses on the theory of being, thought, and the state.
   B. The philosophers studied in this course do not fit this profile.
      1. They are scattered throughout a highly pluralistic Roman Empire.
      2. They have little of significance to say on the conventional philosophical topics.
   C. In what sense, then, are they philosophers, and why should they be read? Philosophy can be defined as a love of knowing, a love of wisdom.
      1. In this sense, philosophy can answer practical questions, such as “What does it mean to be a human being? How should one live one’s life as a rational creature?”
      2. These are the sorts of questions that these philosophers answer.

II. The role of the Greco-Roman philosophers can be approached through an extended comparison between the Roman and the American Empires.
   A. The American Empire can be compared to the Roman on some obvious points.
      1. Both inherited previous empires through war and negotiation.
      2. Both asserted their dominance through might, trade, language, and culture.
      3. Both served as the main point of attraction and opposition.
   B. The American and Roman Empires also navigated similar transitions.
      1. They shifted from republican to imperial values.
      2. They shifted from small-town virtue to big-city sophistication.
      3. They faced the challenge of alternative lifestyles.
      4. They faced the strain caused by immigration and extension of the franchise.
   C. In twenty-first-century American culture, many experience a sense of anxiety because of cultural changes and challenges.
      1. Although they are increasingly worried about the effect of affluence and luxury, more people’s lives are defined by consumerism.
      2. Although they long nostalgically for traditional values, fewer people actually live by the traditional values with which they identify.
   D. The “great explanations” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries fail to meet the challenge.
      1. The extraordinary success of technology and commerce to improve material life seem to have demanded economic slavery both for the haves and have-nots.
      2. The philosophical and psychological options offered by Marx, Darwin, and Freud fail to provide any depth of meaning.
      3. Organized religion (including Christianity) appears to be in a state of confusion and corruption.
E. Inhabitants of the “American Empire”—whether in the United States or abroad—are increasingly concerned for “character” in the face of these challenges.

III. The philosophy that responds to this spiritual crisis in the United States and in ancient Rome appears in surprising guises.
   A. The forms of academic philosophy and psychology today are remarkably unconcerned with the pursuit of wisdom and are more directed to theory and explanation.
   B. It is in forms of popular philosophy (above all, in print and electronic media) that ordinary people in the American Empire find issues of value and character addressed.
   C. The same is the case in the early Roman Empire: The popular philosophers appeared in a variety of unexpected forms, yet addressed the same issues of value and character in accessible speech.

IV. This course introduces the popular philosophers of antiquity and suggests that they have more to offer those seeking wisdom than many contemporary advisors.
   A. The first part of the course establishes the social and cultural context, major themes and metaphors, and portraits of the ideal sage and his counterfeit.
   B. The second part of the course focuses on the specific figures whose lives and thought still affect the way we live and still offer sound advice on how we should live.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Consider the depressed condition of philosophy in contemporary Western culture: Who is the last outstanding philosopher you can name?
2. How can we account for the remarkable popularity of advisors and “self-help” directors in the contemporary world?
How Empire Changed Philosophy

Scope: Greek philosophy found its distinctive voice in the context of the city-state, especially in the Athens of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.E. But those who sought wisdom in the late Roman republic and early empire (first century B.C.E.—second century C.E.) lived in a very different world. This presentation examines how empire was not, as Alexander the Great had anticipated, simply an extension of Athenian culture to other lands through military and political conquest. It was, rather, the creation of an entirely different world. The rich sense of local culture and citizen participation that had marked Athens was now subordinated to the overarching structures and imperatives of empire. For those caught in the vast middle of society (neither the noble nor the menial), the result was sometimes alienation and anomie. Customary values and practices were no longer adequate. Philosophy offered a way of renegotiating the meaning of life.

Outline

I. A preliminary description of the ancient Mediterranean world as it is understood for the purposes of our investigation provides a setting for the Greco-Roman moralists.
   A. Spatially, we deal with the lands all around the Mediterranean, from Alexandria in Egypt, through Palestine and Asia Minor, and above all, Greece and Italy.
   B. Temporally, we focus on the period from the end of the Roman republic (Cicero) in the first century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E., when Julian resists the Christianization of the empire in the name of philosophy.
   C. In terms of agriculture, diet, industry, technology, and architecture, this world is remarkably stable.
   D. Also stable are certain deep cultural patterns associated with the Mediterranean: patriarchy, patronage, honor/shame, polytheism.
   E. Change is found at the political level, in the invention of empire and in the cultural response to empire.

II. In the classical period, Greek philosophy developed in a stable social and cultural setting.
   A. There were, to be sure, conflicts between city-states, like that between Athens and Sparta, as well as the wars with the Persians, to generate crisis, along with a strong sense of local identity.
   B. Athens in the sixth and fifth centuries had a well-developed paideia based in Homer and Hesiod, enriched by the mysteries of Eleusis and Delphi, the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and the historiography of Herodotus and Thucydides.
   C. When Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.) and his student Plato (427–348 B.C.E.) and his student Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) engaged in philosophy, they did so within an already well-established tradition going back to Thales (624–546 B.C.E.).
      1. Despite Socrates’s inward turn (“know thyself”), the grand tradition included an encyclopedic knowledge of the world.
      2. Within the frame of the city-state, philosophers could debate the ideal form of government: Xenophon (430–355 B.C.E.), Plato, and Aristotle all had ambitions to shape politics.

III. Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.) dreamed that his empire would create a pan-Hellenic world, in which the ideals of Athenian civilization would reach all people.
   A. The tools of Hellenization were language (Greek: koine), the institutions of the city-state (polis)—such as the gymnasiun and military academy—intermarriage, and religious syncretism.
   B. The goal was to universalize the intense civic participation that characterized Athens while breaking down the barriers that separated populations. The ideal is expressed by the term cosmopolitan, to be a “citizen of the world.”

IV. Despite the founding of Hellenistic cities and the spread of Greek language and cultural institutions, Alexander’s success was mixed.
   A. Politically, the Greek Empire fell into competing factions and quickly became prey to the stronger will of Rome, which from the Macedonian Wars (214–148 B.C.E.), made Rome master of the Mediterranean.
1. Rome’s colonies, roads, and law stabilized the empire but at considerable cost.
2. Even while a republic, Rome from the second century B.C.E., carried forward the idea of empire, together with the form of Greek culture (thus, Greco-Roman moralists in Rome writing in Greek).

B. The world of Asia was made Greek, but the resulting “Hellenism” was also deeply influenced by the conquered cultures: It was not Athens.

C. The very fact of empire meant that the attempt to franchise local identity was doomed to failure.

V. For many in the Roman Empire, conditions of life made the bright ideal of Hellenism a nightmare of alienation and anomie, calling for a new response from religion and philosophy.

A. Among those conditions were the size of cities, the loss of local self-determination, the presence of military forces, the severe stratification of society, increased mobility, and the threat of coercion.

B. People at the highest and lowest levels of society were least affected by these circumstances, whereas those in the middle were the most affected. The deracinated felt most the loss of local identity and tradition.

C. Greco-Roman religion responded in a number of creative ways to the need for identity.
   1. Intense identification with specific mysteries and cults brought a sense of meaning and community to some.
   2. Judaism saw itself and was seen as a form of philosophy and mystery that drew many adherents.
   3. Christianity developed from the middle of the second century as potentially the most powerful religious movement of all.

D. Philosophy also adapted to the new circumstances of the Roman Empire.
   1. Philosophers sprang up in a variety of social locations and claimed the ancient mantle of the sages.
   2. They understood philosophy primarily in therapeutic terms, to help people find meaning within themselves in an alienating environment.

Supplementary Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. What are the inevitable consequences of franchising a local product or culture?
2. Why are those least affected by dramatic social change the people at the very top and very bottom of a society?
Lecture Three
The Great Schools and Their Battles

Scope: Although the sages of the early empire agreed that the virtuous life was the best life, they disagreed on the best way of accomplishing virtue. To some extent, their differences were based in the teachings that had developed in the various schools of philosophy that grew up in Greece. Each was associated with founders, such as Pythagoras (580–500 B.C.E.), Antisthenes (445–365 B.C.E.), Plato (427–348 B.C.E.), Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.), and Zeno (335–263 B.C.E.), and each had a distinctive set of opinions concerning reality, truth, and virtue. The schools continued to exert some influence in the early empire and remained competitive. Philosophers sharpened their polemical rhetoric as they distinguished themselves from philosophical rivals and from other public speakers, such as the sophists. The most influential traditions for the Greco-Roman moralists were those of Stoicism (derived from Zeno through Cleanthes), with a healthy added dose of Cynicism (derived from Antisthenes through Diogenes).

Outline
I. By the early imperial period, the heritage of Greek philosophy was expressed in a variety of schools, which were less institutions than sets of teachings and practices.
   A. In 176 C.E., the philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius endowed four chairs of philosophy in the city of Athens, recognizing the preeminence of the schools there.
      1. Each had a coherent set of teachings organized around logic, physics, and ethics.
      2. Each had developed a tradition of scholarship that focused on the interpretation of the founders’ teachings.
      3. By the time of the Roman Empire, there had been considerable mutual influence among them.
   B. Plato (427–348 B.C.E.) began the Academy. Platonism has had a long life because there are so many aspects to Plato.
      1. The Dialogues are dazzling literary works covering a wide range of topics; in them, the distinction between Socrates and Plato is not always clear.
      2. Plato’s characteristic themes concerning the one and the many, the world of ideas, the soul, eros, and God are less a set of doctrines than a set of questions.
      3. Plato’s engagement with the political order is found in The Republic and The Laws.
      4. Platonism passes through several stages: A period of skepticism after Plato’s death gives way to Middle Platonism, which is deeply affected by Stoicism, and eventually, Neoplatonism, which returns to a grand metaphysical system. It is the influence of Middle Platonism that we find in the moralists (especially Plutarch).
   C. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) founded the Lyceum, and Aristotelianism has remained the most continuously influential philosophical tradition in the Western world.
      1. Aristotle’s logic provides the basic rules for inductive and deductive thinking.
      2. Aristotle’s metaphysics (hylomorphism) is less dualistic than Plato and less passionately theological.
      3. Aristotle provides antiquity with its most complete discussion of the nature of the passions and moral habits (in the Rhetoric, Eudamonic Ethics, and Nicomachean Ethics).
      4. Aristotle had an encyclopedic range of knowledge and his school continued his tradition of empirical research.
   D. Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.) founded his third community in Athens as The Garden; his was the most distinctive (and most reviled) of the four great traditions.
      1. Epicurus taught by means of sayings (The Sovereign Maxims) that were memorized by followers.
      2. His physics followed the atomic theory of Democritus, and his theory of knowledge relied heavily on sensation and feeling.
      3. His followers formed a close community based on friendship and included women and slaves, as well as males.
      4. His desire for ataraxia meant a withdrawal from political involvement, a stance that generated misunderstanding.
      5. Epicureanism is found in the Roman period (see Philodemus and Lucretius).
E. Zeno of Citium (335–263 B.C.E.) founded The Porch (Stoa), and following Cleanthes and Chrysippus, Stoicism became the most popular form of philosophy in the imperial period (see Musonius, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius).

1. Stoic logic was extremely complex and featured the study of paradoxes. Stoics were optimistic about the possibilities of sure knowledge.
2. Stoic physics emphasized the materiality and rationality of the world, with God understood as this immanent rationality that is the world’s soul.
3. Stoic ethics emphasized living in agreement with nature, because nature reveals divine providence. Virtue is less a matter of knowing than of doing the duty defined by one’s place in the order of things (ta kathekonta).
4. Stoicism made the strongest possible connection between all the virtues (as well as all the vices) and between virtue and happiness.

II. These four traditions were also influenced in various ways by additional philosophical tendencies.

A. Pythagoras (580–500 B.C.E.) was one of the legendary sages of Greece, whose concern for purity in dress and diet, whose ideas about the transmigration of souls, whose theories concerning mathematics, and whose organization of communities strongly influenced Plato and, in the first century C.E., gave rise to Neopythagoreanism (see Apollonius of Tyana).

B. Skepticism was found among early sophists (see Protagoras) and deeply influenced the Academy in the third century B.C.E. In the Roman period, Pyrrho (360–272 B.C.E.) is regarded as the founder of the tradition that either denied the possibility of knowing or simply withheld judgment, and Sextus Empiricus (third century C.E.) is the great systematizer.

C. Cynicism traces its origins to Socrates through his student Antisthenes (445-365 B.C.E.), but Diogenes of Sinope (412/403–324/321 B.C.E.) is the major shaper of this most individualistic and countercultural of philosophies that emphasized freedom (eleutheria) and free speech (parrhesia).

III. The differences among schools of public influence in antiquity gave rise to a vigorous form of polemics that featured not only rational rebuttal but vituperation and slander.

A. Sophists (such as Aelius Aristides) attacked philosophers, and philosophers (such as Dio of Prusa) attacked sophists in return.

B. Philosophers of different schools attacked one another’s ideas and morals (see Plutarch and Epictetus against the Stoics).

C. In protreptic discourses, philosophers could even use such rhetoric as foil for presenting true philosophy.

IV. In the imperial period, moral philosophy was eclectic, despite the dominance of the Stoic-Cynic tradition.

A. There was, in general, less a concern for abstract correctness in theory than for ideas that led to good moral behavior.

B. The Stoic-Cynic influence coincided with the focus of philosophy on character and the doing of one’s duty.

Supplementary Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. Why is it appropriate to think of the debates among philosophical schools in terms of dogmatism and skepticism?

2. How does the use of polemical language in debates among schools also serve as a powerful instrument of group self-definition?
Lecture Four
Dominant Themes and Metaphors

Scope: Greco-Roman philosophers teach in many literary modes. They use letters, discourses, biographies, and collections of maxims as ways of instruction. Certain themes and metaphors constantly recur. The individual is always the focus. The state can’t be changed, but individuals can. Even codes of household ethics concentrate on personal responsibilities. Integrity matters: Behavior counts more than appearances, action should correspond to speech, and speech should correspond to perception. Society may be twisted, but the individual can be straight. Virtue is best learned through imitation of living examples. Two metaphors occur repeatedly in the teaching of these popular philosophers. The first is athletic: The quest for virtue is perceived as an Olympic contest. It requires great effort, training, and endurance. The second is medical: Virtue is health and vice is illness. The philosopher, not incidentally, is the physician of the soul whose teachings and exhortations can transform people from sick to healthy lives.

Outline

I. The Greco-Roman moralists instructed others through a variety of oral and literary means.
   A. We have no access to private advice, but some public oral performances in the form of diatribes and orations have been preserved.
   B. Moral advice was communicated literally through essays, treatises, meditations, collections of maxims and epitomes, and letters.
   C. The paraenetic discourse by Pseudo-Isocrates called To Demonicus reveals several aspects of moral instruction, including the importance of the imitation of models, the learning of maxims, and concern for reputation (honor and shame).

II. Certain themes and topics are repeated throughout the literature deriving from the popular philosophers.
   A. The dominant themes cluster around the transformation of the individual rather than the society.
      1. The imperial system as such is not challenged but taken as a fact of nature; what can be changed is not the state but the person.
      2. Even the “tables of household ethics” take the Hellenistic oikos for granted and simply try to locate the respective duties that make for right ordering (oikonomía).
   B. The goal of moral instruction is the turning of individuals from a life of vice to one of virtue. Particular emphasis is placed on integrity.
      1. Inward character is more important than social status or physical appearance or wealth.
      2. Correspondence should exist between one’s thoughts and one’s words, as well as between one’s words and one’s actions.
   C. The moralists develop clusters of ideas and language around certain topics that recur with considerable frequency. These are the topoi, or “commonplaces,” that deal with subjects pertinent to moral character.
      1. Such subjects as friendship, speech, anger, envy, greed, and generosity are analyzed as part of a common wisdom that has been built up by many thinkers. Not originality, but truth, is the point.
      2. Often, the relations between virtues and vices reveal startling psychological insight, as when drunkenness, anger, and careless speech are all considered together, or conversely, friendship, equality, brotherhood, peace, and the sharing of possessions.

III. In Greco-Roman moral discourse, powerful root metaphors serve to shape perceptions in subtle ways.
   A. Metaphors are not simply rhetorical ornaments but instruments of thought: Metaphors are modes of cognition.
   B. An implicit metaphor is that of paideia (education/culture/training), which carries with it a number of lesser metaphors (“to learn is to suffer”/progress/ the mirror of memory).
   C. An explicit and important metaphor for moral discourse is that of athletics: The philosophical life is equated with the Olympic games. It requires the same commitment.
D. An even more pervasive and powerful root metaphor is medicine: The philosophical life is equated with the practice of medicine. Therapy is the name of the game.

Essential Reading:
Pseudo-Isocrates, To Demonicus.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why is the intense focus on the character of the individual both a strength and a weakness in Greco-Roman moral teaching?
2. Develop the notion of the topos by thinking of the proverbs and conventional slogans that are used for a contemporary subject, such as business.
Lecture Five

The Ideal Philosopher—A Composite Portrait

Scope: What should the philosopher be like? Some observers in the empire focused on external appearances. The sage’s rough dress, beard, staff, and wallet marked him off as a critic of the larger society. But such superficial marking could easily camouflage inner vice. Those truly committed to the pursuit of wisdom emphasized, instead, inner qualities of character. Close attention to the protreptic discourses by Dio Chrysostom, Epictetus, and the Emperor Julian (331–363 C.E.) enables the construction of a composite portrait of the ideal philosopher. These are compositions that encouraged following the philosophical manner of life. They call young men to a life that is strenuous and altruistic, entirely committed to the pursuit of virtue for its own sake and to the benefit of other people. The ideal philosopher is by no means a scholarly contemplative, but a passionate witness.

Outline

I. Because philosophy was a disputed and sometimes dangerous profession, its practitioners were required to define and defend it.
   A. From Socrates forward, philosophers had to answer the attacks of critics (see Aristophanes, The Clouds; Aelius Aristides, On the Four).
   B. Philosophers were often suspected by the empire and not a few of them were exiled as threats to society.
   C. Philosophy was also threatened by the frequent appearance of imposters (charlatans).
   D. The self-understanding of the philosopher is best gained from protreptic discourses, written to encourage a commitment to the philosopher’s life:
      1. Epictetus’s Discourse III, 22, is a diatribe delivered to his young students “On the Ideal Cynic.”
      2. Dio Chrysostom, Oration 77/78, moves from a discussion of envy to a consideration of the philosopher.
      3. Lucian of Samosata wrote two treatises that positively depicted philosophers worthy of imitation, Demonax and Nigrinus.
      4. The Emperor Julian’s Oration VI and VII take up the ideals of the Cynic life.

II. From protreptic discourses, we can derive a composite portrait of the ideal philosopher in the Roman Empire as understood by the Greco-Roman moralists themselves.
   A. Adoption of philosophy is a choice or even a conversion to a way of life that requires preparation.
      1. The sense of vocation among some is quite literally understood as a call by God that must be obeyed.
      2. The philosopher must have a purity of intention and not undertake the life for unworthy motives.
      3. Because the philosopher’s life is demanding, the preparation of the body is as necessary as of the soul.
   B. The philosopher must himself be a person of virtue, free from the dominant vices that direct most human activity.
      1. The most obvious vice is “love of pleasure” (philedonia), which leads people to live at the level of their appetites.
      2. The most deeply rooted vice is “love of money” (philargyria), which leads people to do everything for the sake of a profit.
      3. The subtlest vice—especially for a public person—is “love of glory” (philodoxia), which leads people to act for a good reputation.
   C. The philosopher’s liberation over vice should manifest itself in freedom and free speech.
      1. Freedom (eleutheria) is possible even when the wise person is under restraints because it is a matter of inner disposition and virtue.
      2. Free speech (parrhesia) is the linguistic expression of freedom, the willingness to speak the truth in all circumstances.
   D. The philosopher’s concern is not only with the self. The profession involves essentially a concern for others, as well.
1. The most important way the sage affects others is by modeling the virtuous life so that they can imitate him.
2. Using speech to correct and instruct others calls for discernment of the appropriate style of speech, harsh or gentle.

E. As a public nuisance, the philosopher can expect opposition from others, including the state.
   1. Although the philosopher has no enemies, his willingness to challenge conventions means that he meets resistance.
   2. Suffering, therefore, is an inevitable aspect of the philosopher’s life, if only the suffering that comes from being different.

III. The self-image of the philosopher in this period is also revealed by the metaphors and models it uses.
   A. The major metaphors and titles that philosophers use of themselves indicate the strong orientation toward helping others, for example: “physician,” “herald of the gods,” “king,” “savior,” and so on.
   B. The major models that appear again and again are the heroes and philosophers of old who manifest the characteristics of freedom and free speech above all (Herakles, Odysseus, Socrates, Diogenes).

IV. As with all composites, this portrait requires some qualifications.
   A. Some features in the portrait are more important to some philosophers than to others.
      1. Religious motivation is key to Epictetus but not to Lucian.
      2. Free speech is perhaps the essential note to Lucian even if other features are lacking.
   B. There are real differences among the philosophers whose discourses were used to build the composite.
      1. Epictetus and Lucian would disagree not only on the divine call but also on the role of harsh speech.
      2. Dio and Epictetus emphasize the life for others, whereas Lucian and Julian emphasize the happiness of the sage.
   C. There is, however, substantial agreement that the philosophical life is not about thinking a certain way but acting a certain way.
   D. Not all lived up to these ideals. The ease with which the ideal could be camouflaged gave rise to the charlatan.

Essential Reading:
Julian, *Orations* VI and VII.
Lucian of Samosata, *Demonax* and *Nigrinus*.
Epictetus, *Discourse* III, 22.
Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 77/78.

Questions to Consider:
1. How adequately do the three “loves,” of pleasure, money, and glory, cover the possibilities of human vice?
2. What are the implications of philosophy’s understanding of itself as a public profession in service to others?
Lecture Six
The Charlatan—Philosophy Betrayed

Scope: The understanding of philosophy as essentially a manner of life, and therefore, the importance of integrity of character among true philosophers, is clearly shown by the attention given by the sages to the renegades referred to as charlatans (goetai). The polemical attacks of philosophers were directed beyond members of rival schools or those sophists who spoke publicly for pay. Their greatest scorn and contempt was reserved for those who claimed the name of philosopher and even wore the philosopher’s cloak, but whose behavior did not match their professed ideals. The pattern of a public display of virtue and a private life of vice is brutally dissected in these attacks. A particularly sustained and effective dismantling of a charlatan is Lucian of Samosata’s Proteus Peregrinus. The famous Cynic philosopher was nothing of the sort, Lucian claims, but simply someone greedy for public attention, eaten up by the vice of vainglory.

Outline

I. Philosophers in the imperial period had to defend themselves not only against detractors but also against those who counterfeited the genuine coinage.
   A. The distinctive Cynic lifestyle had popularized a social stereotype of the philosopher that was based on clothing and external manner.
      1. The Cynic had a standard garb of rough cloak, sandals, staff, and wallet; had a long beard; wore his hair long; and was not overly fond of washing.
      2. The Cynic typically traveled from place to place, harangued people in the public square, and flouted sexual and dietary conventions.
   B. Among their admirers, philosophers enjoyed respect and a certain amount of authority; for this reason, imitators, those who mimicked the lifestyle but missed the substance, were not wanting.
   C. Just as a composite portrait of the ideal philosopher can be drawn, so also can we construct a composite of the figure known in antiquity as the goes, or charlatan.

II. False philosophers revealed themselves by the way in which they betrayed the proper speech (logos) expected of the philosopher.
   A. They made exclusive claims to the truth and attacks against the positions of other teachers.
   B. They had the tendency to get caught up in theoretical discussions and quibbles about technical terminology rather than in the pursuit of virtue.
   C. They used public speech as a means of flattering rather than as a means of benefit to the hearers (see Dio, Oration 32).

III. Even more harmful were the ways in which charlatans betrayed the proper character (ethos) of the philosopher.
   A. They were hypocritical when they made a show of public virtue while practicing private vice, or when there was a gap between their words and their actions.
   B. The dominant vices were even more grievous when practiced by would-be philosophers than by ordinary people.
      1. Some philosophers preached virtue but themselves lived at the base level of philedonia, or love of pleasure.
      2. Some used their teaching as an excuse to get rich, thus revealing themselves as lovers of money (philargyria).
      3. Many charlatans were enamored of the attention they drew as philosophers and perverted the calling through their love of notoriety (philodoxia).

IV. Lucian of Samosata provides a devastating account of a real-life contemporary philosopher (Proteus Peregrinus) in terms of a betrayal of philosophy’s ideals.
   A. Lucian’s Passing of Peregrinus is the main source for the figure whose life (100–165 C.E.) was filled with adventure and traveling and, eventually, a dramatic exit.
B. Lucian interprets the entire career of Peregrinus as exemplifying the vice of *philodoxia*, or love of glory, and offers it as a warning against imitation.

**Essential Reading:**
Lucian of Samosata, *The Passing of Peregrinus*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Compare a contemporary political career to that of Proteus Peregrinus. How does the contemporary world evaluate “celebrity”?
2. In what manner is the concept of the charlatan alive and well in contemporary culture, especially in the realm of journalism?
Lecture Seven
Philosophy Satirized—The Comic Lucian

Scope: Lucian of Samosata (120–180 C.E.) is one of history’s great humorists, the ancient world’s equivalent of Jonathan Swift or Mark Twain. He wrote in a bewildering variety of styles and always brilliantly. His works include serious compositions (such as How to Write History), along with satires and parodies aimed at all the exquisite absurdities of life in the empire. In his savage attacks on religious tomfoolery and the pomposities of pretend philosophers, Lucian most resembles the American journalist H. L. Mencken. As with Mencken, a deep anger at the distortion of genuine human values fueled Lucian’s glittering lampoons. His statements on philosophy are, consequently, complex. He attacks the charlatans, such as Proteus, and he pokes fun at the pretensions of solemn moralizers. But as his tractates Nigrinus and Demonax demonstrate, he also had a great respect for what he considered to be an authentic philosophical spirit. Much like a mirror in a funhouse, Lucian reflects the truth about philosophy even as he slightly distorts it.

Outline

I. Lucian of Samosata (ca. 120–180 C.E.) is a comic writer of great range and complexity.
   A. He is the greatest satirist of the ancient world. He directly influenced Erasmus, Rabelais, Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, Hume, and Montaigne and is the spiritual ancestor of Mark Twain and H. L. Mencken.
   B. His life was one of restless wandering. Although he was married and had a son, he traveled across the empire (Syria, Asia Minor, Athens, Egypt) and shifted careers several times (sculptor, rhetorician, bureaucrat).
   C. He was a brilliant observer of society at every level, and his voluminous writings encompass many topics.
      1. Many of his works are straightforward demonstrations of his rhetorical prowess at several levels of seriousness (The Fly, Anacharsis, The Ass, Lover of Lies, The Dance, How to Write History).
      2. He was a shrewd observer of contemporary religious and philosophical phenomena (The Syrian Goddess, Alexander the False Prophet, Passing of Peregrinus), as well as other social realities (see On Salaried Posts in Great Houses and Apology).
      3. In dozens of his works, he makes either passing or sustained reference to specific philosophers (real or fictional) and the ideals of philosophy. His attitude is complex.

II. Lucian is a merciless and brilliant exposé of the failings of philosophers and philosophy.
   A. His general themes include the bombast, logic-chopping, and pompous professionalism of philosophers and their petty quarrels. Most of all, he delights in exposing their frequent hypocrisy (see Timon).
   B. In Philosophies for Sale and its sequel, The Fisherman, Lucian provides first an attack on all philosophers, then a defense of philosophy itself in her own name.
   C. Aspects of the theme of hypocrisy are developed in The Eunuch and Dialogues of the Courtesans.
   D. In Hermotimus, the travails of a philosophic seeker reveal a deeper skepticism about the entire enterprise.

III. At the same time, Lucian often shows a grudging respect for individual philosophers and for what he regards as the essence of philosophy.
   A. In Alexander the False Prophet and The Double-Indictment, Lucian admires the atheism of the Epicureans and their skeptical attitude toward religious claims.
   B. In Dialogues of the Dead, he consistently admires the members of the Cynic school: Antisthenes, Crates, Diogenes, Menippus.
   C. In Downward Journey and Zeus Catechized, he portrays the Cynic Cyniscus positively as a ready wit and keen observer.
   D. In The Fisherman, he has philosophy herself identify the essence of the life in freedom (eleutheria) and free speech (parrhesia).
   E. In Anacharsis, he makes philosophy an essential part of education (paideia).
IV. Lucian’s fullest positive appreciation of philosophy is found in his portrayal of two (probably fictitious) philosophers.

A. *Nigrinus* may have ironic elements, but it contains a straightforward moral message and portrays conversion to the philosophical life as a result of a protreptic discourse.

B. *Demonax* takes the form of a biography concerning “the best philosopher of which I know,” and probably expresses Lucian’s own ideal.

Essential Reading:
Lucian of Samosata, *Demonax*.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why are freedom and free speech the essential hallmarks of the Cynic philosopher?
2. How do Lucian’s compositions reveal his deep ambivalence concerning philosophy?
Lecture Eight

Cicero—The Philosopher as Politician

Scope: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) is one of the most well known figures of Roman antiquity, because of the public character of his career as a politician and because of his extensive private correspondence with friends and family. Although not entirely admirable in his own character—he was vain and ambitious, for starters—he shows us the real-life struggle between high ideals and human frailty. Cicero flourished during the waning days of the Republic and fought to maintain its traditions in the face of growing tendencies toward empire, represented by Pompey and Caesar, whose rivalry fatefully caught Cicero in its web. In the span of five years, he tasted the height of power (as consul in 63 B.C.E.) and the humiliation of exile (in 58 B.C.E.); thus, he took the opportunity of a short retirement in 47 to 44 B.C.E. to write the majority of his philosophical works. Cicero is important for translating Greek philosophy into Latin, but he is significant above all for showing how even a politician can serve the cause of philosophy.

Outline

I. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) is the most well known ancient figure and illustrates several aspects of Greco-Roman philosophy.
   A. We know him so well for a number of reasons: He played a key public role in the pivotal period of Roman history; many of his literary compositions and letters are extant; he is discussed by ancient historians, including Plutarch; his writings influenced Christian thinkers, including Augustine and Jerome; he grew to popularity with the Latin fathers of the Church; and he found his way into Western education—reading Cicero became a staple of education in humanities well into the twentieth century.
   B. Cicero embodies several dimensions of philosophy in this period: the shift from republic to empire (which Cicero foresaw and considered a disaster), the danger of exile, the eclectic nature of philosophy, and the deep interest in morality.
   C. He is important not least because by chronicling and cataloguing so much of the entire range of Greek philosophy (with modifications of his own), he established a philosophical vocabulary for the Latin-speaking world.

II. A sketch of this man’s very public life provides a context and key to his philosophical efforts.
   A. Cicero was a “new man,” born to wealth in the equestrian order.
      1. He married several times into greater wealth.
      2. Plutarch describes him as being a man who was driven by philotemia (love of honor)—driven by ambition to be a noble, honorable, and important person.
      3. Cicero was educated in philosophy and rhetoric in Greece and Rome; in Athens, he studied under the heads of the leading schools: Philo, the head of the Academy; Diodorus, the Stoic; and Phaedrus, the Epicurean.
      4. At age twenty-seven, he took time out from his career to spend time in Athens studying again with the Epicureans and Platonists, and he continued his studies in Rhodes with the Stoic philosopher Posidonius. His was not a casual interest in philosophy.
      5. He made his way through the Cursus Honorum (the round of public positions leading to the role of consul) because of his rhetorical and political skill.
      6. The bulk of his works are rhetorical, either in theory or the speeches he gave as prosecutor or defender in actual cases.
   B. The high point of Cicero’s career was his time as consul (63 B.C.E.), when he saved the republic by quelling the Cataline conspiracy. But caught up in the rivalry between Pompey and Caesar, then the Triumvirate, he was exiled, controlled, and marginalized. The Republic and Laws (45–42 B.C.E.) participate at a distance.
   C. He wrote almost all his philosophical works between 46 to 43 B.C.E., before his final fatal entry into the political battle. After the death of his daughter in 45 B.C.E., he wrote most of his philosophical works in a creative frenzy between 44 to 43 B.C.E. Philosophy was both consolation and a legacy for a better day.
When he tried to reenter the public realm, by attacking Mark Antony, in the orations entitled *The Philippics*, Cicero turned the powers against him and was beheaded. His severed head was put on display in the Roman forum.

Cicero’s philosophical writings are encyclopedic in scope, eclectic in substance, and derivative from Greek models (see his use of the dialogue).

A. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero claims that Romans had “always shown more wisdom” than the Greeks in everything that they decided to take up from the Greeks.

B. He wants to translate Greek philosophy into Latin as a service to the Roman public, believing that, with his rhetorical skills, he can produce a better translation than those of others before him.

C. His political writings (*Republic* and *Laws*) imitate the same works by Plato, but show originality by working with the actual history and constitution of the Roman state. As an exile, he is writing these books in the hopes that his ideas will have an effect on his fellow Romans. For Cicero, to be a philosopher is not simply to change oneself, to become virtuous, it is to have an impact on the lives of others—this is the Stoic view.

D. His works in logic (*Academica*, *Topics*) show his devotion to a moderate skepticism characteristic of the New Academy.

E. The same attitude is revealed in physics (mainly devoted to religious issues). In *De Natura Deorum*, *De Divinatione*, and *De Fato*, he positions himself between the dogmatism of the Epicureans and the Stoics. We cannot know with certainty, but probable knowledge enables us to follow the path of nature reasonably.

Cicero’s writings in ethics place him in the company of Greco-Roman moralists.

A. Two lost works (*Consolatio* and *Hortensius*) focused on philosophy as a mode of life rather than simply a body of knowledge. The *Hortensius* was the protreptic work that converted St. Augustine to Platonic philosophy.

B. His major works are *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (comparing Epicurean, Stoic, and Aristotelian ethical views), *Tusculan Disputations* (dealing with fear of death, pain, and distress of mind), and *De Officiis* (written for his son and devoted to practical ethics).

C. His appreciation for Stoicism is shown in *De Officiis* and *Paradoxa Stoicorum*.

1. Cicero wrote *De Officiis* for his son, whom he encouraged to study rhetoric and philosophy.
2. For Cicero, virtue is the only thing that counts in life. In this regard, Cicero is a complete Stoic.

D. Among the most influential of Cicero’s works are *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia*.

Essential Reading:
Cicero, *De Officiis*.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Cicero’s response to exile and fall from political power demonstrate the power of philosophy in the Hellenistic era?
2. Consider how Cicero thought of his philosophical writing as a cultural legacy with political implications for the future.
Lecture Nine

Seneca—Philosopher as Court Advisor

Scope: Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) shows even more dramatically than Cicero how perilous life close to the throne was for a philosopher. Like Cicero, he came from obscurity in Spain, was fundamentally a scholar, and by dint of his abilities, attained the consulship (57 C.E.). Yet he was forced to commit suicide by the whim of an emperor. Seneca was a playwright whose tragedies (eight are extant) had considerable impact on Renaissance drama. His greatest role was as tutor to the young man who would become the Emperor Nero, to whom Seneca directed his best thoughts on the virtuous government and king (for example, On Anger). Seneca composed many letters and essays that take up a wide range of philosophical topics approached from the perspective of a thoroughly Roman Stoicism. He demonstrated his character as a philosopher by his calm resolution when ordered to take his own life by his former student and patron.

Outline

I. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) was actively engaged in the political life of Rome, in keeping with his commitment to Stoicism, which preached engagement in public affairs.
   A. Seneca was born in Corduba, Spain, of a family that was extraordinarily wealthy, talented, and well connected.
   B. After studying philosophy, he began a legal career, which like Cicero’s, had high points and lows.
      1. He angered Caligula and was saved from execution in 31 only because of his ill health; he was exiled from 41 to 49 by Claudius for adultery with Julia Livilla. He was ordered to commit suicide by Nero in 65.
      2. But when he was appointed by Agrippina as Nero’s tutor in 49, he became part of a powerful coalition (with Burrus) that effectively governed in the early years of Nero’s principate (54–62).
      3. A large portion of his literary work was produced during his years of exile (41–49) and reluctant retirement (63–65).
   C. Seneca taught a rigorous and demanding form of Stoic morality. About his influence on the young king and about his own character, there have always been questions.
      1. As tutor, he did no worse with Nero than Plato did with Dionysius of Syracuse.
      2. His great wealth (and its connection with usury) was a matter of embarrassment.
      3. He never claimed to be a sage himself, but only someone striving, and he faced suicide in the noble Stoic fashion.

II. Seneca’s literary productions are varied in form and uneven in quality.
   A. He spent considerable time on his Questiones Naturales but made no great contribution. His ten tragedies had a great impact on Renaissance drama but are difficult to read today. His satire, The Pumpkinification of the Divine Claudius (an attack on Caligula), is not of Lucian’s caliber.
   B. He wrote twelve Moral Essays. Some of these were directed to the young king (On Clemency). Others were compositions prompted by occasion (such as his three essays On Consolation).
   C. His 124 Moral Epistles, all written to his friend Lucilius, are perhaps most revealing of the range and energy of his thought and his unparalleled crispness of expression.

III. Although Seneca is aware of the wide range of philosophical views and is willing to learn from any teacher, his own outlook is thoroughly Stoic. Dimensions of his thought can be learned from three of his Moral Essays.
   A. On the Happy Life is written to his brother Gallio. Seneca argues that happiness consists in following nature, and the best way to do that is by being a philosopher.
      1. For Seneca, “the highest good is harmony of the soul.” Pleasure in itself is not a problem because the virtuous life brings pleasure.
      2. The essay is noteworthy for its defense of ideals even when they can’t be met and, in particular, a defense of his own great wealth.
3. It is also noteworthy for its memorable lines, including: “All ferocity is born of weakness”—you need
to be able to control your reason.

B. On Tranquility of Mind is written to a young friend, Serenus, who complains of mental torment because of
conflicting desires and drives. Seneca responds by showing the way to a god-like stability of mind. It’s a
matter of application, perceptions, expectations.

C. On Consolation to Marcia seeks to shake a matron from her extended grief at the loss of her young son.
1. The essay shows some of the techniques of moral instruction and assembles an array of arguments for
an acceptance of what fortune brings.
2. Stoics did not deny the role of the emotions—controlling emotions does not mean suppressing them.
3. Seneca consoles Marcia by giving her advice for overcoming her grief and getting on with her life.
4. Seneca believed women to be the equals of men when it came to intelligence and moral capacity.
5. The essay’s conclusion is pure Stoic physics: Stoics believed that the world would come to an end in
conflagration, then begin all over again. At that time, all the blessed would share in a happy future.

IV. Seneca’s 124 Moral Epistles seem, on the surface, to have great variety, but they reveal certain constant
themes.
A. The letters (which are more like small essays than real correspondence) take up such subjects as saving
time, fasting and festivals, discursiveness in reading, the blush of modesty, drunkenness, liberal and
vocational studies, and much more. Each subject leads to a philosophical treatment.
B. Certain themes recur frequently: friendship, how to live well and virtuously (for Seneca, the same thing) in
the face of uncertainty and death, the means of moral instruction.

Essential Reading:
Seneca, On Consolation, to Marcia.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What is involved in the concept of philosophy as “a way of life” when it is embraced by someone as powerful
and wealthy as Seneca?
2. How does the Stoic approach of “reducing expectations” and “facing reality” clash with the premises of
contemporary culture?
Lecture Ten

Good Roman Advice—Cicero and Seneca

Scope: No aspect of life was so highly valued in Greco-Roman culture as friendship. And few subjects received comparable sustained attention by serious thinkers. The level of reflection devoted to an experience that enriches life and whose absence impoverishes it reveals how far this moral philosophy was from an arid scholasticism. The first part of this presentation traces some of the central themes in the Greek understanding of friendship and their distinctive appropriation in Cicero’s great treatise *On Friendship*. The degree to which philosophy was about living well is revealed also by the attention paid to every stage in the human experience, including the last. Cicero and Seneca each wrote a treatise entitled *On Old Age*. The second part of this presentation will draw lessons from a comparison of their treatment of a subject that in our day is considered a medical rather than a moral challenge.

Outline

I. The character of Greco-Roman philosophy is shown in the topics that it considered worth considering.
   A. The standard theoretical issues of physics and logic continued to be considered, but the moral life was the main focus.
   B. The moral life was not only a matter of following rules or filling social responsibilities, but it was also the art of living well in every circumstance of life.
   C. Cicero and Seneca turn repeatedly to the consideration of topics that today would not often fall in the philosopher’s purview but in antiquity were considered among the most serious subjects to be understood: friendship and aging.

II. The subject of friendship (*philia, amicitia*) is among the oldest and most lasting in the philosophical repertoire, reaching from antiquity through the Middle Ages.
   A. Beginning with Pythagoras, many great philosophers took up the subject: Plato in the *Lysis*, Aristotle in the eighth and ninth books of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Plutarch in his *Moralia*, and in the *Life of Pythagoras* by Jamblichus and Porphyry.
   B. Throughout this literature, certain perceptions concerning friendship were reduced to proverbs that gave rise to reflection. Among them are: Friendship is equality; friendship is fellowship; friends hold all things in common; friendship is life together; the friend is another self; friends are one soul.

III. The respective treatments of friendship by Cicero and Seneca reveal something of their distinctive outlooks (Platonic/Stoic) and situations:
   A. Cicero’s *De Amicitia* is one of his most attractive minor works, showing both his dependence on the Greek tradition and his own distinctive Roman twist.
      1. He works with many of the commonplaces concerning friendship but elaborates them and provides examples from Roman history.
      2. He offers a definition of friendship that emphasizes both agreement and benevolence.
      3. He maintains that only the virtuous can truly be friends and insists on separating from acquaintances who are non-virtuous.
      4. Potential friends should be tested, but then loyalty is the rule. Mutual correction rather than flattery is the standard among the virtuous.
   B. Seneca discusses friendship in several of his *Moral Epistles* (see 3, 9, 63, 103, 109) but, as a good Stoic, emphasizes the individual’s freedom from attachment. Nevertheless, true friendship is possible only among the good.
      1. Seneca believes in testing a friendship, but once the decision has been made, loyalty is in order. A good friend should be loyal but also outspoken; worries should be shared with friends.
      2. In *Epistle* 9, Seneca points out that although sages do not need friends, they would be wise to cultivate them as a way of sharing the noble qualities of their lives.
      3. With regard to grief for lost friends, Seneca advises us to always be aware of the transitory nature of life and to replace a lost friend, because friendship develops virtue.
IV. In the modern world, aging is primarily a medical preoccupation, an issue of social management. Among Greco-Roman philosophers, it was a matter of wisdom.

A. Cicero’s *De Senectute* was written in the same period after the death of his daughter Tullia (45 B.C.E.) when he produced a spate of creative works.
   1. Philosophy helps us “live according to nature” at every stage of life. The miseries of old age are due to lack of character, not to age.
   2. Cicero poses the common complaints about aging and rebuts each of them in turn.
   3. He believed that it is still possible to engage the world in old age. It is important to maintain memory and strength (by taking long walks) and to find pleasure in new interests, such as learning, conversation, and gardening.
   4. He also believed that it is pointless to worry about death, because it is with all of us throughout our lives, and there is nothing we can do about it.

B. Seneca discusses old age in a number of his *Moral Epistles* (see 4, 12, 24, 26, 49, 68, 70, 76, 77, 82, 93).
   1. In Stoic fashion, he emphasizes the manner in which the contemplation of death sharpens the desire to live well and wisely.
   2. In contrast to Cicero, he frequently advocates “slipping the anchor,” or committing suicide, as a final gesture of freedom and, therefore, of philosophy. The moral issue is not whether, but the discernment of how and why.

**Essential Reading:**
Cicero, *On Friendship, On Old Age*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What is suggested about ancient culture by the fact that “friendship” is a topic worthy of the most serious intellectual inquiry rather than an accidental appendage of social existence?
2. How does the perception of old age change when it is seen as an opportunity to grow in wisdom?
Lecture Eleven
Musonius Rufus—The Roman Socrates

**Scope:** In contrast to Cicero and Seneca, who are known to us because of their public lives and numerous writings, Musonius Rufus (who flourished at the same time) is virtually unknown to contemporaries, even though he enjoyed a huge reputation among his fellow philosophers in antiquity. The Emperor Julian links him to Socrates (*Oration 6.72*), and his student Epictetus revered him. Even Christian writers consider him among the noblest of pagan philosophers (see Origen, *Against Celsus* III, 66). His fame, then, had something to do with his impressive virtue. There was a clear correspondence between his words and his deeds. He also suffered exile under Nero in 65 because of his convictions. His present obscurity is connected to his oral mode of teaching. Students transcribed his discourses, and only fragments of them remain. From them, we see that he was at once rigorous and humane; remarkably open to the capacity of women to learn, yet traditional in his perception of their social roles.

**Outline**

I. In contrast to Cicero and Seneca, whose lives are well known and whose works are extant, Seneca’s contemporary Musonius Rufus (c. 30–100 C.E.) remains obscure, even though his reputation among other philosophers in antiquity was excellent.
   A. Only the bare outlines of his life are available, and many of the details are in dispute. We know that he opposed Nero and was exiled by him in 65. He may have been exiled a second time under Vespasian.
   B. Like Socrates and Epictetus, he left no writings of his own. He taught students in the dialogical manner of the diatribe. Only fragments of his writings remain, especially the twenty-one longer treatises recorded by his student Lucius and some thirty-two sayings recorded by others.
   C. He was admired by ancient philosophers. Julian mentions him with Socrates (*Oration 6.72*), and the Christian theologian Origen ranks him with Herakles, Odysseus, and Socrates as “models of excellence of life” (*Against Celsus* III, 56).
   D. Perhaps his greatest contribution to posterity was to be the teacher of Epictetus, whose memories of his master give a vivid impression of his character and teaching (see Epictetus, *Discourse* I, 1, 2; I, 7, 31; I, 9, 29; III, 6, 10; III, 15, 14; III, 23, 28).

II. In his discourses dedicated to the philosophical calling, Musonius Rufus reveals his Stoic-Cynic tendencies.
   A. In Fragment 8 (*That Kings Should Also Study Philosophy*), he emphasizes the need for self-control in one who demands self-control of subjects. (For the Stoic, the philosopher is a king, and a king should be a philosopher.)
   B. In Fragment 11 (*What Means of Livelihood Is Appropriate for a Philosopher*), he views agriculture not only as a noble exercise of virtue, but also one that can serve as a means of instruction through imitation. (He also points out that the philosopher’s life means hard work and a willingness to suffer.)
   C. In Fragment 16 (*What Is the Best Provision for Old Age*), Musonius argues that philosophy is not only a matter of knowledge but also of practice, done in obedience to the call of God.

III. Philosophers had different views concerning the innate goodness or badness of humans. Musonius tends toward a more optimistic view and is correspondingly demanding in his ethics.
   A. He argues in Fragment 15 (*That Man Is Born with an Inclination to Virtue*) that virtue is not a specialized art but is one that is available to all and desired by all.
   B. Musonius’s sexual ethics are noteworthy for their stringency, as we find in Fragment 12 (*On Sexual Indulgence*). Sexual intercourse is legitimate only in marriage and only for the sake of procreation.

IV. Musonius’s attitude toward women was unusually egalitarian, as shown by Fragment 3 (*That Women Too Should Study Philosophy*).
   A. His teaching should be placed in the context of a general male hostility toward women’s emancipation and participation in the early empire.
B. Musonius is outspoken in his view that women are as capable as men of learning and acquiring virtue.

C. Nevertheless, he remains deeply conservative socially: Philosophy serves to help women better serve in the household.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. In the ancient assessment of occupations, trade was considered base and agriculture was considered noble. Why? And how can we account for the change in perception today?
2. Consider the paradox that Musonius considered women equal in every respect intellectually and morally with men, yet subordinate by nature in the social order.
Lecture Twelve

Dio Chrysostom—The Wandering Rhetorician

Scope: Dio of Prusa (40–120 C.E.) is unusual among the Greco-Roman moralists, because he spent part of his life as one of their rivals. His early career was spent as a professional rhetorician or sophist, who delivered a variety of orations for pay throughout the cities of the empire. His great eloquence earned him the name Chrysostom (“golden-tongue”). In mid-life, he experienced a dramatic conversion to the philosophical life. From that point on, he devoted himself to teaching virtue as a wandering philosopher. We possess a large number of the orations that were undoubtedly written in preparation for oral delivery, from both the earlier and later portions of his career. These orations provide a lively portrait of the many public speakers competing for attention in Hellenistic cities, as well as the qualities distinguishing the real philosopher from the charlatan.

Outline

I. Dio is an important source for knowledge of second-century C.E. rhetoric and philosophy—not to mention ordinary civic life—but is himself a figure of some ambiguity.
   A. Born in Prusa of Bythinia (in Asia Minor) about 40 C.E., he was educated in oratory and is representative of the rebirth of Attic style called the Second Sophistic.
   B. His orations show that he traveled throughout the empire, apparently with no fixed abode, though he had a wife and child (see Oration 1.9). His relationship to rhetoric and philosophy is disputed:
      1. The two main biographical sources (Synesius and Philostratus) disagree in their depiction.
      2. The educational culture of the day tended to mix the two endeavors.
      3. The vocabulary used by Dio is itself difficult to sort out (does sophist = charlatan?).
   C. He may have begun as an opponent of philosophy (and of Musonius Rufus in particular) but later admired Rufus (see Oration 31.122) and considered himself to be a philosopher, wearing the clothes and observing the poverty of the wandering Cynic.
   D. Although he experienced exile (under Domition in 82), he became a friend of Trajan and dedicated four discourses on kingship to him (Orations 1–4). He died in Prusa about 120.
   E. His extant eighty discourses reveal an unparalleled portrait of public civic life in the empire during the early second century.

II. Dio provides an unusual autobiographical account of his “conversion” to the philosopher’s life in Oration 13 (“On His Banishment”).
   A. Dio was exiled under Domition because he was an associate of someone who had been accused of plotting against the emperor.
      1. His exile at first seemed onerous but began to appear as an opportunity.
      2. He decides to consult the god (Apollo) at Delphi (1–8).
   B. The god advises him to keep doing what he was already doing. Bit by bit, he comes to be taken for, and realizes that he is, a philosopher (9–10).
   C. He preaches in the manner of Socrates, calling his fellow citizens from lives of vice and ignorance and turning them to self-awareness and virtue (14–29).
   D. He even preaches to great crowds in the city of Rome (31–37).

III. Oration 32 (“To the People of Alexandria”) offers a sketch of the popular philosophers as viewed by one among them.
   A. The Alexandrians’ notorious addiction to entertainment is not helped by those who call themselves philosophers (1–8).
   B. Dio enumerates the kinds of people calling themselves philosophers: private advisors, schoolteachers, wandering Cynics, rhetoricians (9–10).
C. They are like bad physicians who do nothing to heal the sick because they lack the courage that is reflected in free speech (parrhesia, 11).
D. In contrast, Dio stands before them as one with a divine calling (12) to speak to them “what is profitable to the listener.”

IV. Dio’s sense of the ideal philosopher is found in the discourse entitled “On Envy” (Oration 77/78).
   A. The discourse begins in dialogical style with a typical treatment of envy as the vice that leads to social upheaval and dissension (1–32).
   B. The description of the man of prudence (beginning in 33) contrasts the pretender-philosopher (charlatan) to the true philosopher, who is characterized by his desire to come to the aid of all—like a physician (see 37–45).

Essential Reading:
Dio Chrysostom, Orations 12, 13, 32, 77/78.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the career of Dio illustrate the complexity of the debates between sophists and philosophers?
2. Why is it appropriate that Dio’s discourse on the ideal philosopher should serve as a response to the theme of envy?
Timeline

B.C.E.

624–546.............................. Thales
581–497.............................. Pythagoras
470–399.............................. Socrates
430–355.............................. Xenophon
427–347.............................. Plato
400–325.............................. Diogenes
384–322.............................. Aristotle
356–323.............................. Alexander the Great
340–271.............................. Epicurus
335–263.............................. Zeno
255.................................. Septuagint
200–168.............................. Macedonian Wars (Roman supremacy)
167–165.............................. Maccabean Revolt
147.................................. Greece comes under Roman control
112................................. Rise of Jewish Sects
110–40.............................. Philodemus
106–43.............................. Cicero
94–55................................. Lucretius
49–47................................. Roman Civil War
45................................. Julius Caesar dictator—end of Republic
30–14.............................. Augustus
15–50 C.E.............................. Philo of Alexandria
4–65 C.E.............................. Seneca

C.E.

14–37.............................. Tiberius
30–100.............................. Musonius Rufus
37–41.............................. Caligula
40–120.............................. Dio Chrysostom
41–54.............................. Claudius
45–120.............................. Plutarch
50–130.............................. Epictetus
54–68.............................. Nero
69–79.............................. Vespasian
79–81.............................. Titus
81–96.............................................. Domition
98–116............................................ Trajan
117–138.......................................... Hadrian
120–180.......................................... Lucian
121–180.......................................... Marcus Aurelius
332–363.......................................... Julian
Glossary

Academy: The school in Athens founded by Plato. The Platonic tradition is designated as “the academics.”

adoleschia: Greek noun meaning “garrulousness” or “compulsive talkativeness.”

akrasia: Greek noun meaning “lack of self-control.”

allegory: A narrative with both figurative and literal meaning. In our literature, a method of interpreting myths to yield moral meaning.

amicitia: Latin noun meaning “friendship”; equivalent to the Greek philia.

angelos: A messenger or scout, as in Epictetus, “Messenger of Zeus.”

anomie: A sociological term for a state of normlessness and lack of clear boundaries.

anthropomorphism: The use of human images in describing the divine, as in “the hands of God” or “the anger of God.”

apatheia: Greek noun meaning “without passion”; the Stoic ideal of self-control.

Aristotelianism: The philosophical school founded by Aristotle, also called the Lycaeum.

asceticism: The practice of severe self-control in all physical matters, especially involving speech, sex, and diet.

ataraxia: Greek noun meaning “without turmoil”; the Epicurean ideal of tranquility.

auspices: The form of technical prophecy carried out by Roman priests using the entrails of birds.

bios: Greek noun meaning “life” in the biological sense; a narrative account, biography.

brachylogia: Greek noun meaning “brevity in speech,” the opposite of garrulousness, and associated with strength and wisdom.

charlatan: A fake or counterfeit philosopher who mimes the manner but falsifies the reality.

cosmology: An understanding of the world, particularly in its physical dimensions.

Cursus Honorum: Latin phrase meaning “round of honors,” referring to the stages of progression in official Roman leadership, culminating in consul.

Cynicism: The philosophical movement deriving from Antisthenes and Diogenes of Sinope, characterized by boldness in life and speech, that strongly influenced Stoicism in the Roman period.

deontology: A form of ethics that focuses on acts under the aspect of duty and seeks to supply universal rules for behavior.

diaspora: Greek term meaning “scattering” or “dispersal,” used with reference to the Jewish population outside Palestine.

diatribe: A dialogical form of exhortation used in classroom instruction, making use of a variety of lively stylistic elements.

dogmatism: In philosophy, the opposite of skepticism: holding definite positions concerning reality and the capacity to know it. The Epicureans and Stoics are dogmatists in this sense.

eclecticism: The practice of drawing from several philosophical traditions rather than staying in the framework of one; in this respect, Cicero is eclectic.

ekpyrosis: Greek noun meaning “conflagration”; used with reference to the Stoic expectation of a consummation of all things by fire, giving rise to another world.

eleutheria: Greek noun meaning “freedom”; with “free speech,” one of the two ideals of the Cynic movement in particular.
enkrateia: Greek noun meaning “self-control,” the opposite of akrasia, and universally admired among philosophers.

epideictic: One of the three forms of rhetoric (with deliberative and forensic) that simply “displayed” something for hearers for their praise or blame. Practiced often as a showpiece by sophists.

epitome: A summary or abbreviation. One of the forms of moral instruction, packing much in a small frame.

eros: Greek noun meaning “love” in the sense of the drive to unite with the loved one; distinct from the love that is friendship (philia) or donative (agape).

Essenes: One of the Jewish sects, characterized by communitarian ideals and asceticism; compared to the Pythagoreans.

ethics: In philosophy, the study of morality: its basis, goal, and means.

ethos: Greek noun (with a short e) that means habit or custom, a characteristic acquired by repeated practice.

ethos: Greek noun (with a long e) that means character in the moral sense, developed through habit.

goes: A Greek noun meaning “charlatan”; used in ancient polemic for those considered as corrupting the ideals of philosophy or religion, especially for reputation or profit.

gymnasium: Originally identified as a place for athletics (there was one in Athens both at the Academy and Lyceum), it increasingly became the place for intellectual training, as well.

hegemonikon: In Stoicism, the “governing principle,” or reason.

Hellenism: Greek culture, especially as it was disseminated after the time of Alexander the Great.

hesychia: Greek noun meaning “quiet” or “silence”; an ideal especially of the Epicureans, who sought “the quiet life,” but also of philosophers generally as the prerequisite to learning.

homonoia: Greek noun meaning “harmony” or “peace,” an ideal in the public realm that resembles friendship in the private; an elusive ideal for war-like and frequently warring peoples.

hyle: Greek noun meaning “matter” in the sense of “stuff.” In Stoicism, the passive principle on which the active pneuma or logos operates.

kathekonta: Greek for “duties” or “responsibilities,” with specific reference to the social obligations incumbent on holding a certain place in the world.

koine: Greek for “common,” used specifically for the form of the Greek language that developed in the Hellenistic period. Used by the majority of the popular moralists (except Cicero and Seneca).

loci: Latin noun locus (“place”) used in the plural with reference to collections of standard statements on a certain subject; see topoi.

logic: In philosophy, one of the three divisions of study, having to do with right thinking and the possibilities of knowing truth.

logos: Greek noun meaning “word,” or “reason,” or “speech.” In Stoicism above all, the rational principle at work in the world.

Lycaeum: The location in Athens where Aristotle established his school independent of Plato; used to identify Aristotelianism.

lype: Greek noun meaning “sorrow”; used negatively, especially in the definition of envy.

misis: Greek noun meaning “hate.” The fixed disposition to harm an enemy, regarded by some moralists as having some elements of nobility.

Neoplatonism: The last period of the Platonic tradition as such, identified above all with Plotinus.

Neopythagoreanism: The renewal of the Pythagorean tradition in the first century B.C.E., associated with Apollonius of Tyana and, later, with such Neoplatonists as Porphyry and Jamblichus.
**oikonomia**: Greek term derived from “house,” and meaning “the ordering of a household” in every respect.

**oikos**: Greek noun meaning “house” and “household”; the basic societal unit of the Hellenistic world, including kin relations and slaves, along with clients and friends.

**oikoumene**: Greek noun meaning “inhabited world,” often used synonymously with “empire.”

**omens**: Signs, usually regarded as of supernatural origin, that alert humans to the significance of events (storms, portents, dreams).

**orge**: Greek noun meaning “anger/wrath.” Not simply the emotion, but the verbal and physical expression of the emotion, considered as a vice.

**paideia**: Greek noun meaning both “education” and “culture,” indicating the close connection between the two in ancient perspective.

**paraenesis**: Greek noun meaning “advice.” Used with reference to the moral advising appropriate in father-son relationships.

**parrhesia**: Greek noun meaning “freedom of speech” or “boldness”; one of the main ideals of the Cynic tradition but admired widely as a sign of courage.

**Patriarch**: Term used in Judaism for the ancestors of the people, specifically Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

**Pharisees**: Jewish sect renowned for its close attention to the interpretation of the law, associated by Josephus with the Stoic philosophy.

**philargyria**: Greek noun meaning “love of money,” one of the fundamental disordered passions.

**philedonia**: Greek noun meaning “love of pleasure,” the lowest and basest form of vice, often polemically asserted of the Epicureans.

**philia**: Greek noun meaning “friendship,” a topic considered worthy of close philosophical attention.

**philodoxia**: Greek noun meaning “love of glory” or the disordered desire for notoriety and fame, the excessive form of *philotimia*, “love of honor,” which is good.

**phthonos**: Greek noun meaning “envy”; in contrast to *zelos*, which can be positive, envy is always a vice and a despicable one.

**physics**: In ancient philosophy, the study of the natural world, including cosmology and what now would be called theology, the relation of the gods to material reality.

**Platonism**: The philosophical tradition deriving from Plato and moving through several stages. In the Roman period, Middle Platonism is dominant.

**pneuma**: Greek noun meaning “breath” or “spirit.” In Stoicism, the divine reason that is immanent in the visible world in the form of air and fire.

**polis**: Greek noun meaning “city-state”; the root for “politics,” as well as “cosmopolitan” (citizen of the world).

**prokope**: Greek noun meaning “progress,” a key concept in a character ethics that includes the possibility of incremental growth and improvement.

**pronoia**: Greek noun meaning “providence.” The key debate between Epicureans and others is whether the gods were involved in the governance of the world and whether that governance had meaning.

**protreptic**: A form of deliberative rhetoric in which someone is urged to follow a certain mode of life.

**religio**: Latin noun meaning “religion,” which includes the public acts of the state as much as private feeling and behavior.

**Saducees**: One of the Jewish sects, associated with the high-priestly families and connected by Josephus to the Epicureans.

**Septuagint**: Translation of the Jewish Scripture (Torah) into Greek in Alexandria, circa 250 B.C.E.
sige: Greek noun meaning “absolute silence.” Associated with the refusal to speak about the Mysteries or the Pythagorean teachings.

skepticism: The opposite tendency to dogmatism in philosophy, taking one of two forms. Skeptics either deny altogether the possibility of knowing truth or think that only probable judgments can be made.

sophistic: Associated with the sophists. Negatively, meaning an unprincipled cleverness in argument. Neutrally, meaning rhetorical, as in “Second Sophistic.”

sophist: A public speaker, usually for pay; a rhetorician. Polemically, someone with little regard for truth.

Stoicism: The philosophical school deriving from Zeno and Cleanthes, with a strong emphasis on personal morality, which dominated in the Roman period.

syncretism: In religion, the merging and identification of deities, as is possible in a polytheistic framework.

teleology: In ethics, an approach that emphasizes the ends or the goals of human actions.

theos: Greek noun meaning “a god” or “God.”

Therapeutae: A group of Jewish contemplatives in Egypt described by Philo of Alexandria.

threskeia: Greek noun meaning “religion” in the broadest sense, including activities both public and private.

topoi: Greek noun for “place” in the plural, referring to the collections of standard treatments of rhetorical subjects (see loci).

Torah: The Jewish Scripture, with specific reference to the five books ascribed to Moses.

tyche: Greek noun meaning “chance.” In the Hellenistic period, opposed to providence.

zelos: Greek noun meaning either “jealousy,” in which case it is equivalent to envy and bad, or “zeal,” in which case it equals “emulation” and is good.
Bibliography

Essential Reading:
With few exceptions, the ancient primary texts that form the substance of this course are most easily found in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–). This series of more than 500 volumes contains original language and translated versions of ancient Greek and Latin writers. Look here under author for the writings of Cicero, Seneca, Lucian, Julian, Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom, Marcus Aurelius, and Plutarch, as well as Josephus and Philo.


Supplementary Reading:


Arnold, E. V. Roman Stoicism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911. An older survey, but one that still has considerable merit as an introduction to the Roman moralists.

Balsdon, J. P. V. D. Roman Women: Their History and Habits. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962. Although more work has been done subsequently, this serves to inform the reader on a subject the moralists (patriarchal as they are) neglect, namely half of humanity.


Bonner, S. F. Education in Ancient Rome from the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. More recent than Marrou (see below) and more tightly focused on our period, this book covers all the important dimensions of the educational process.


Copelston, F. *A History of Philosophy*. Volume 1: *Greece and Rome*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1962. Although I use it to make a point in my final presentation, this multivolume history of philosophy from its beginnings to the present is remarkable for its competence and consistency.

Dill, S. *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1956. This is a reprint of the 1904 publication by one of those marvelous classical scholars whose like we shall not see again. A rich and vivid portrayal of the culture in the period defined by the title.


Galinsky, K. *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. With a sharp focus on the early empire, this treatment provides a rich cultural matrix for studying the philosophers of the period.


Hersbell, J. P. “The Stoicism of Epictetus: Twentieth Century Perspectives.” *ANRW* II, 36.3:2, 148–163. As the title suggests, this essay considers specifically the mix of Stoic and Cynic elements in Epictetus.

Hijmans, B. L. *Askesis: Notes on Epictetus’ Educational System*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959. Attention is paid to the elements of practice and “training” undergone by the students who were taught by “that marvellous old man.”


Shackleton Bailey, D. R. *Cicero*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971. A biography that is distinguished by its heavy use of the letters, providing a remarkably intimate and circumstantial picture of the statesman.

Strem, G. G. *The Life and Teaching of Lucius Annaeus Seneca*. New York: Vantage Press, 1981. A popularly written introduction that focuses mainly on his life but also summarizes his teaching according to topics.


Practical Philosophy:
The Greco-Roman Moralists
Part II
Professor Luke Timothy Johnson
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Luke Timothy Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Born in 1943 and from the ages of nineteen to twenty-eight a Benedictine monk, Dr. Johnson received a B.A. in philosophy from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, an M.Div. in theology from Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana, and an M.A. in religious studies from Indiana University, before earning his Ph.D. in New Testament from Yale University in 1976.

Professor Johnson taught at Yale Divinity School from 1976 to 1982 and at Indiana University from 1982 to 1992 before accepting his current position at Emory. He is the author of twenty books, including *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (2nd edition, 1998), which is used widely as a textbook in seminaries and colleges. He has also published several hundred articles and reviews. He is currently at work on several books, including one on the Christian creed, one on the future of Catholic biblical scholarship, and one on the influence of Greco-Roman religion on Christianity.

Professor Johnson has taught undergraduates, as well as master’s level and doctoral students. At Indiana University, he received the President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching, was elected a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, and won the Brown Derby and Student Choice Awards for teaching. At Emory, he has twice received the “On Eagle’s Wings Excellence in Teaching” Award. In 1997–1998, he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, speaking at college campuses across the country.

Professor Johnson is married to Joy Randazzo. They share seven children, eleven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a Yorkshire terrier named Bailey. Johnson also teaches the courses called *The Apostle Paul* and *Early Christianity: The Experience of the Divine* for The Teaching Company.
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Practical Philosophy: The Greco-Roman Moralists

Scope:
How can a person be good when the world all around seems bad? How can someone be wise when the surrounding culture is foolish? How can anyone be healthy when the social atmosphere is sick? Such questions are appropriate for Americans in the early twenty-first century. They are also the questions that preoccupied the moral philosophers of the early Roman Empire. The answers provided by the philosophers of the classical period no longer worked for them. Plato and Aristotle and Epicurus, after all, lived and taught in the small and comprehensible context of Athens. The world of empire was vaster, more complex, and morally much more ambiguous. Philosophy had to shift from theory to therapy. The philosophers of the early empire were concerned with proper thinking, to be sure, but thought was always aimed at proper living. Philosophy became a way of life.

This course introduces the ancient masters of practical philosophy who arose during the period of the late republic and early empire. They need introducing because they tend to be neglected by most students of antiquity. Classicists ignore them because they wrote in the ordinary Greek and Latin of the people rather than in the more elevated style of the poets and dramatists. Historians of philosophy equally neglect them because they do not notably contribute to the great metaphysical and epistemological theories that dominate the story of ancient philosophy. They deserve introducing because they are preeminently worth getting to know. They can still teach us.

Readers looking neither for sublime language nor complex theories but for wisdom have long known that that Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus are worth reading. Those fortunate enough to encounter them either in their schooling or on library shelves have heard these ancient moralists speak with remarkable freshness and force to the basic issues of human character with which we all must struggle. For such readers, the popular philosophers of the Greco-Roman world deserve their self-designation as “doctors of the soul.” Precisely because they focus so precisely on everyday life—the character of the individual and the health of the family—they remain pertinent even today. They analyze the passions of fear and desire, of envy and rage with brilliant insight. They precisely delineate the virtues and vices. They understand the process of moral development and the necessity of moral education. And the great satirist among them, Lucian of Samosata, remains remarkably funny.

Followers of the philosophical ideal appeared in different social locations and roles. Some belonged to formal schools where life and study were part of a common existence. Others were emperors, senators, court advisors, wandering rhetoricians, and schoolteachers. They nevertheless shared a vision concerning the good life that transcended the pleasure, possessions, and power that dominated the desires of most people. They were convinced that a dedication to virtuous living was the way not only to health but also to true happiness. Still, they were themselves completely human, and their ideals struggled for expression in the very structures of society that they found inadequate. Learning how Cicero lived as a senator is as instructive as hearing his thoughts on the good life. Knowing that Marcus Aurelius was supreme ruler of the empire gives his meditations a special significance. Epictetus’s stirring exhortations are all the more moving when we know that he was physically disabled, a slave, and an exile. Plutarch’s encyclopedic learning and cosmopolitan outlook owe something to his social position and priestly status.

The first part of this course establishes the social and cultural context for these teachers. We examine first the changes in society caused by the fact of empire and the reasons that philosophy needed to adopt a more therapeutic approach. We then sketch some of the major philosophical schools from the classical period whose influence was still discernible in the time of empire. A consideration of the major themes and metaphors used by the popular philosophers prepares for a composite portrait of the ideal sage, and its opposite, the charlatan who betrays philosophy’s ideals while mimicking its manner.

The remainder of the course focuses on the specific figures whose lives and thought still affect the way we act and think: Lucian of Samosata, the satirist; Cicero and Seneca, the Roman statesmen; Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, the schoolmasters; Dio Chrysostom, the public speaker; and Marcus Aurelius, the emperor. To show how pervasive were the ideals of character ethics, we then examine the same themes in some contemporary Jewish writers, before concluding with an extended appreciation of Plutarch of Chaeronea and a final reflection on the significance of this missing page in the history of philosophy.
**Lecture Thirteen**

**Dio Chrysostom—Preaching Peace and Piety**

**Scope:** Dio of Prusa is distinctive among the popular philosophers of the early empire in another way: As a public speaker who traveled from city to city, he had the opportunity—and often the requirement—of addressing issues of civic, not simply individual, virtue and vice. In this lecture, we see how his pleas for concord between cities evoke some of the other major themes of ancient philosophy. We ask whether Dio provides a way of connecting character ethics and political morality. A second public issue in antiquity was civic religion. Dio’s “Olympic Discourse” (Oration 12) contains a rightly famous discussion on the popular religious piety that focused on the many gods represented by statues in public places and the philosophical piety that discerned, beneath these many separate expressions of the gods, a single divine force. Dio is an example of a philosophical monotheism that developed independently in Greco-Roman culture.

**Outline**

I. As a trained rhetorician, Dio was able to provide public discourses on a wide range of subjects.
   A. Some of his pure “show pieces” that he delivered early in his career (“On the Parrot” and “On the Fly”) are not extant, but a secondhand report of his Encomium on Hair gives a sense of the epideictic rhetoric that pleased crowds.
   B. His extant orations show his concern for matters pertaining to education and the rhetorical art (see Oration 18, “Training for Public Speaking”; Oration 19, “On Listening”; Oration 26, “On Deliberation”).
   D. Among our Greco-Roman philosophers, Dio is distinctive for the role he played as a public preacher of civic morality; he was concerned for the empire as a whole and for the cities within it.
      1. He has a number of discourses devoted to the theme of kingship. Four are addressed to the Emperor Trajan (Oscriptions 1–4) and two others may have been (Oscriptions 56 and 62). Dio depicts the ideal of the philosopher-king.
      2. Many of his speeches were given to civic assemblies (see Oscriptions 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 48, 49). He takes up local issues and addresses them with boldness.
   E. Oration 44 (“A Friendly Address for His Native Land on Its Proposing Honors for Him”) shows how the subject of virtue remains constant throughout.
      1. A city is not made great through its natural advantages or its material accomplishments, Dio argues.
      2. Instead, its greatness is a matter of moral character, which can be discerned as much in a city as in an individual.
      3. For Dio and the Greco-Roman moralists, personal and public virtue go hand-in-hand.

II. The connection between personal character ethics and political morality is made explicit in Dio’s discourses on concord (homonoia) among cities in his native Asia Minor.
   A. Dio’s addresses to the cities of Nicea and Nicomedia (Oscriptions 38–39) and those to his home city of Prusa and Apameia (Oscriptions 40–41) reveal the sort of rivalries that existed even within (or, perhaps, because of) imperial rule. In each dispute, Dio speaks publicly to each city involved.
   B. In his exhortations to harmony, Dio considers peace always superior to war and extends the ideals of friendship and the evils of envy to the political realm.

III. Dio is among the more profoundly religious of the Greco-Roman moral philosophers.
   A. He refers to his divine calling as a philosopher in Oration 13 and Oration 32.
   B. In his “Olympic Discourse: Or on Man’s First Conception of the Divine” (Oration 12), Dio offers a noble philosophical statement that links popular piety and reason.
1. His discourse is stimulated by the statue of Zeus by Pheidias at the Olympic Games.
2. He shows how the notion of the divine is found in humanity, first of all, in an innate knowledge that arises from the universal experience of the world by humans (Orations 26–34, 39).
3. The Epicureans are scorned because they place pleasure as the center of their existence over the gods (Orations 36–37).
4. Dio discusses the role of poetry, law, and art in impressing ideas of the divine on humans (Orations 44–48) but concentrates on the last, the production of statues.
5. Dio has Pheidias defend the use of the human form to depict Zeus (Oration 59), despite its inadequacy (Oration 63)—speech can do more than sculpture (Orations 65–69).
6. Art can capture some aspect of God but not all of God’s features (Orations 74–78).
7. The God who creates the world is the best artist of all (Orations 82–84)!

Essential Reading:
Dio Chrysostom, Orations 12 and 44.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does a “character ethics” concerned for virtue translate into a “social ethics” in Dio’s orations on concord?
2. What does Dio’s “Olympic Discourse” tell us about public speech and religion in the empire?
Lecture Fourteen
Epictetus—Philosopher as Schoolteacher

Scope: Epictetus (c. 50–130 C.E.) is universally and properly recognized as one of the great moral teachers of Roman antiquity or, for that matter, of any age. Born a slave and suffering from lameness (possibly the result of abuse while a slave), he was freed sometime after the death of Nero (c. 68) but was banished from Rome by the Emperor Domition in 89 or 93. He founded a school for young would-be philosophers in Epirus, following the teachings of the Stoic tradition that he had learned from his own teacher, Musonius Rufus, and like him, mingling Stoicism with strong doses of Cynicism. This first lecture on Epictetus focuses on his life, his setting, and his manner of teaching through the lively discourses known as diatribes. Again, like his teacher (and like Socrates), Epictetus taught only orally, and we are dependent for knowledge of his thought on his student Arrian’s transcriptions of these marvelously powerful and convincing classroom lectures (in four books) and the small compendium of his sayings called the Enchiridion (or “Handbook”).

Outline

I. Epictetus (c. 50–130 C.E.) exemplifies the character of the Greco-Roman moralists in both his life and his teaching.
   A. Born of a slave woman in Hierapolis of Phrygia and himself a slave (his name means “acquired”) of Epaphroditus, a freedman of Nero, Epictetus was manumitted at the death of Nero in 68 but was banished under Domition in 89 or 93.
   B. Physically disabled and poor, he studied under Musonius Rufus and founded his own school for would-be philosophers of the Stoic school while in exile in Nicopolis (in Epirus). There, he taught students until his death.
   C. He lived in great simplicity and had a sweetness of disposition. Even the skeptic Lucian calls him “that marvellous old man” (The Ignorant Book Collector 14). The Christian Origen compares him to Plato but considers him more accessible: He is “admired by persons of ordinary capacity, who have a desire to be benefitted, and who perceive the improvement which may be derived from his writings” (Against Celsus 6.2).
   D. He left no compositions. He taught orally in the form of the diatribe. Ninety-six of these diatribes were transcribed by Flavius Arrianus (also author of the Anabasis) in four books. Arrian also published an epitome of Epictetus’s teaching in the Enchiridion.
   E. The continuing impact of Epictetus’s vivid voice and strong spirit is wonderfully depicted in Thomas Wolfe’s novel A Man in Full.

II. In his discourses, Epictetus teaches his students in the dialogical style called the diatribe.
   A. The ordinary course of instruction undoubtedly included reading and analyzing standard Stoic authorities, above all Chrysippus, to learn the theory of logic, physics, and ethics. The discourses resemble seminar sessions rather than lectures.
   B. They have a lively dialogical style that includes certain standard features: a fictional interlocutor, rhetorical questions, abrupt answers and expletives, citation of authorities (especially poets), and the use of personal examples.
   C. A sense of this pedagogical style—and of Epictetus’s typical concerns—can be gained from Discourse II, 17, 29–40.

III. Discourse III, 22 (“On the Calling of a Cynic”), is a splendid example of a protreptic discourse on philosophy, which urges students to the highest possible ideals of this life.
   A. Because he was addressing students seeking to become philosophers, Epictetus does not focus on the attractive features of the life, but on its demands and hardships.
   B. He seeks to counter students’ sense that philosophy is a matter of dress or lifestyle, insisting that it requires a lifelong commitment to virtue.
1. The true Cynic must be called by God (2–8) and must rely on his self-respect (9–16), keeping his governing principle *(hegemonikon)* pure (19–22).
2. The Cynic does not serve the self but is sent by Zeus as a scout to humans, following in the path of Diogenes (24) and Socrates (26). A sample of a Socratic sermon is given (26–44).
3. Because the true Cynic must offer his own life as an example from which people can learn (45–49), his life must resemble a moral Olympics, in which struggle is constant (50–52).
4. Such a vocation is dangerous to undertake unless one knows oneself and is in accord with the deity (53–61).
5. The Cynic calling is a lonely one. The Cynic does not have friends (62–66) or family (68–77). He serves all of society (77–82), which is the best of all political involvements (83–85).
6. The Cynic requires a fit body (86–89) and natural wit and charm (90–92), but above all, a purity of intention (94–96); the Cynic is a general who directs the lives of others without meddling (97–99), he is because constantly preoccupied with moral purpose (100–109).

**Essential Reading:**
Epictetus, *Discourses* II, 17; III, 22.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Why are the discourses of Epictetus so immediately gripping and so vividly memorable?
2. How is personal transformation the main element in Epictetus’s curriculum for young philosophers?
Lecture Fifteen
Epictetus—The Stoic Path to Virtue

**Scope:** Epictetus’s discourses show how the theories of the Stoic philosophy were constantly put in service of moral transformation. His frequent references to Chryssipus, the great systematizer of Stoic doctrine, indicate that he taught his students the rudiments of theory in the three branches of that philosophy: logic, physics, and ethics. But his constant reminders that theory was useless without the practice of virtue shows that his real interest was in the way students progressed in moral practice. In this lecture, we learn the basics of Stoic doctrine as communicated to students by Epictetus, especially the personal twist he puts on each branch of the doctrine: The real point of logic is understanding how the world works and making proper inferences; the importance of physics is perceiving how the universe is providentially ordered by nature; the goal of ethics is living in accordance with nature as rational beings.

**Outline**

I. Epictetus combines an exceptionally narrow focus with a brilliant variety of exhortations.
   A. Epictetus clearly had the capacity to discourse learnedly on the technical aspects of Stoic philosophy, but he is mainly interested in the moral transformation of his students, who find it all too easy to be distracted by theory because it is so much simpler.
   B. To keep his students’ attention on the essential task of practicing virtue and growing in moral character, Epictetus exhorts them from a variety of angles.

II. He is intensely loyal to the Stoic tradition that he learned from Musonius Rufus and is outspoken in his criticism of rival philosophical schools (see Discourse II, 20).
   A. The Academician’s are condemned for their skeptical suspension of judgment (I, 5, 9), and for the sophistical arguments used by Pyrrho (I, 27, 2).
   B. The Epicureans’ withdrawal from society and political involvement betrays the social character of humans (I, 23, 149–151), the consequence of corrupt judgment and behavior (III, 7, 19–28).

III. Epictetus’s own focus is completely on the ethical dimension of Stoicism.
   A. Rather than distinguish among logic, physics, and ethics, he organizes his training around three areas of practice (III, 2):
      1. The management of desires and aversions: Never desire the unattainable and never seek to flee the unavoidable (control of passions).
      2. The management of impulses and choices: Learn what is appropriate to do in different circumstances (relations with others).
      3. The control of one’s own assent so that error and impulse are avoided. Here is the practical dimension of epistemology and logic, to determine what is real and what is not. Logic helps us understand the world and our role in it.
   B. A good example of Epictetus’s understanding of philosophical theory and practice is found in his first Discourse, “On Things that are under our Control and not under our Control” (I, 1).
      1. Epictetus argued that it was fitting that the gods had placed under mankind’s control only the power to make correct use of external impressions—the power of reason.
      2. Our freedom lies in the power to control our minds—our reason.
      3. But we choose to be concerned about many things—things that burden us and drag us down.
      4. How should we train ourselves? By learning what is not ours to control and what is ours to control. Even under duress, we still have the power to control our own thoughts—the way we perceive reality.

IV. A fundamental distortion of philosophy is to make it only a matter of learning theory and not a matter of personal transformation.
   A. He argues in II, 19, “To Those who Take Up the Teachings of the Philosophers Only to Talk about Them,” that having opinions, even learned ones, is not what being a Stoic is about.
   B. The gap between book-learning and virtue among his students is a constant theme in his diatribes:
1. Students say that they recognize that progress should be in virtue, but they measure their own advance in philosophy by the amount of Chrysippus they have read (I, 4, 19).
2. The exclusive study of argumentation can distract from the pursuit of virtue and lead to vanity and enslavement (I, 8, 4–10).
3. Knowing Chrysippus is important only insofar as it helps one understand the law of nature and live according to it (I, 17, 13).
4. Reading philosophy to impress others at banquets is a form of vanity (I, 26, 9).
5. Learning that does not lead to action is useless; “A Stoic is a Stoic in deed.” (I, 29, 35 and 55–57).
6. A false philosopher is one whose words are falsified by his actions (II, 9, 13–21).

**Essential Reading:**
Epictetus, *Discourses* I, 1, and II, 19.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Why is the distinction between what is in our control and what is not in our control so critical to the Stoic understanding of wisdom?
2. Consider how Epictetus’s exhortations reveal the perennial tendency among students to prefer learning facts to changing practices.
Lecture Sixteen

Epictetus—The Messenger of Zeus

Scope: The Greco-Roman philosophers remind us that high moral standards and religious convictions do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. The religious affections of Lucian are hard to discern, and those of Dio, Cicero, Musonius, and Seneca seem mostly formal. Their sense of moral obligation is not intrinsically linked to a personal sense of the divine. Epictetus stands out as much for his personal religious fervor as for the rigor of his moral teaching. Although he uses the language of Stoicism about nature, it is clear that when he speaks of Zeus, it is as something more than the rational dimension of the physical world. He is fond of quoting Cleanthes’s “Hymn to Zeus.” He views his own life as one in service to divine providence. And his understanding of the true Cynic is as a messenger of God to humans for their benefit, to turn them from vice and toward virtue.

Outline

I. In considering the philosopher as a “messenger [angelos] of Zeus” (III, 22, 23), Epictetus occupies a distinctive position among Greco-Roman moralists with respect to religion.
   A. We have observed a wide range of opinions concerning the relationship of philosophy to religious belief and practice.
      1. Lucian of Samosata applauds the religious skepticism and effective atheism of the Epicureans (Alexander the False Prophet) and lauds the religious critique of Demonax.
      2. Cicero (On the Nature of the Gods II–III) finds the dogmatism of the Stoics as implausible as the atheism of the Epicureans and prefers the suspension of belief of the Academics.
      3. Dio is considerably more pious (see Orations 12 and 13) but evinces little personal fervor.
   B. In contrast to all these (and in a degree greater even than Marcus Aurelius), Epictetus is a genuinely religious figure, who interprets reality and his own role as a teacher in terms of a philosophy suffused with religious sensibility.

II. The physics of classical Stoicism supports a positive view of nature and of God. In fact, the two realities merge.
   A. The world is material but is also entirely a manifestation of divine rationality. There are two elements: passive matter (hyle) and active god (theos), which totally interpenetrate each other.
   B. At the level of observation, these components appear as the traditional four elements: earth, water, air, fire. Of these, earth and water are passive, while air and fire are active. They form spirit (pneuma) that pervades and shapes all things. Spirit, in turn, is the vehicle of reason (logos) that governs—and is immanent within—the entire world.
   C. The Stoic universe is, then, a living being and the best possible world, because it is the embodiment of reason. It will end in a great conflagration (ekpyrosis) that will give birth, in turn, to another equally perfect world identical to the present.
   D. “God” (dios, zeus) is the immanent principle governing the world. Because the world itself is in some sense divine, it is providentially guided, and all that is and happens bears the signs of rational design.
   E. Distinctive to humans is the gift of rationality, which is a share in the divine nature, enabling humans to discern the patterns of the world and follow them appropriately. To “follow nature” in Stoicism means implicitly to “follow God.”

III. Epictetus infuses this Stoic understanding, which he received from Musonius Rufus, with an intense personal piety that is distinctive.
   A. He speaks frequently in defense of God’s providence (pronoia): see I, 6; I, 14; I, 16; II, 14, 11–13; III, 15, 14; III, 17; Fragment 13.
      1. We can prove God from the very structure of nature.
      2. God creates humans to be spectators of his creation and to interpret his world.
      3. Humans should act in imitation of God.
      4. Epictetus believes that most people complain because they do not perceive the world properly—as reflective of God’s mind.
5. All things happen in accordance with reason.
6. So why do the wicked prosper and the good suffer bad things?
7. Because we do not know how to interpret life with true insight; we do not understand the “other side” of what we interpret negatively—God has his reasons for the bad things that happen in the world.
8. The downside of this view is that it can lead to social conservatism and even impassivity in the face of negative experiences. But the Stoic response is that one should get along as best one can under the (negative) circumstances.

B. His language about God is both passionate and personal: see, for example, I, 1, 17; I, 3, 1–3; I, 4, 32; I, 6, 3–7 and 18–19; I, 9, 4–8; I, 14, 6–8; I, 16, 7–8; I, 17, 27–28; I, 24, 1; I, 29, 4–6 and 46–50; I, 30, 1; II, 5, 12; II, 7, 11; II, 8, 10–14.

C. Epictetus frequently invokes the “Hymn of Cleanthes” (“Lead Thou me on, o Zeus and Destiny! …I’ll follow you”) and clearly understands life in its terms (see II, 23, 42; III, 22, 95; IV, 1, 131; IV, 4, 34; Enchiridion 53).

D. He powerfully interprets his own life in the framework of God’s providence (see I, 16, 15–21; III, 5, 8–11; III, 26, 29; IV, 1, 89; IV, 1, 108).

Essential Reading:
Epictetus, Discourse I, 6; I, 14.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Is it a paradox or not that the philosopher who most represents the “margins” of ancient society is also the most passionately devoted to God’s providential care?
2. How does Stoicism give a distinctive twist to the ancient maxim “follow God”?
Lecture Seventeen
Marcus Aurelius—Meditations of the King

Scope: Among the most attractive representatives of ancient moral philosophy is the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 C.E.). He was an adopted son of the Emperor Antoninus Pius and became emperor in 161. He died while on military campaign in 180, and his sole literary work, the Meditations, was composed while engaged in his military campaigns. This series of thoughts begins by expressing thanks to all those who had influenced him. Of particular importance was the impact of Epictetus, whose preoccupation with the inner life of the virtuous person is echoed by the emperor. Marcus Aurelius also pays tribute to the nephew of Plutarch, a professional philosopher from Chaeronea called Sextus, who was a Platonist but, nevertheless, taught the king the meaning of “living according to nature.” The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius shows how democratic the ideals of philosophy were within the empire, embracing both the slave Epictetus and the Emperor Marcus himself, whose personal circle also included philosophers of various schools, all dedicated to the life of virtue.

Outline

I. The pervasive popularity of the philosophical ideal in the imperial period is demonstrated dramatically by the example of Marcus Aurelius (121–180 C.E.).
   A. The ideal of the philosopher-king was classically expressed by Plato in his Republic V, 18 (483 C–E), and VII, 17 (540 D), and Laws IV (711 B–D), and remained alive in the “Kingship Discourses” of Dio Chrysostom (Orations 1–4).
   B. Despite the philosophical tutoring of early emperors, such as Nero, however, Roman rulers were mainly suspicious of philosophers, as demonstrated by the frequent exiling of the figures we are studying.
   C. Marcus Aurelius comes as close to realizing Plato’s ideal as any actual historical figure.
      1. Born of a noble family and adopted by the Emperor Antoninus Pius in 138, Marcus Aurelius became co-ruler in 161 and sole emperor in 169. He died while on military campaign in the Danube region in 180.
      2. As an emperor, he was moderately successful in mitigating some of the anomalies in Roman law and in bettering the lot of disadvantaged classes, such as widows and slaves. Despite a number of apologies addressed to him, he continued the policies of repression directed at Christians.
      3. He was educated in law and philosophy, constantly schooled himself in the practices of philosophical discipline, and endowed the four chairs of philosophy (Epicureanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism) in Athens in 176.
      4. His Meditations in twelve books, written in a vigorous Greek, sets down his thoughts “to himself” in what amounts to a philosophical diary while he was engaged in the business of ruling the oikoumene (the known world, or Roman Empire) during a time of constant war and plague. These meditations are better known today than they were in antiquity.

II. The first book of the Meditations is justly renowned for its humble and delicate recollection of the intellectual and spiritual influences in Marcus Aurelius’s life.
   A. He singles out the personal and moral qualities of his relatives (both natural and adoptive), teachers, and friends. His selection of qualities reveals the values he most appreciates. From what we know of some figures, he was also generous in his appraisal.
      1. His grandparents and natural parents are thanked for their simplicity (the simple life was an important theme in Roman life) and piety, qualities he constantly sought in himself.
      2. His teachers are praised for communicating good moral values and a variety of intellectual influences.
      3. The moral values included, for example, exhortations not to bet, to have few wants, to turn a deaf ear to slander, not to be taken up with trifles, to crave simple furnishings, to keep fingernails clean!
      4. His friends are specially singled out for their robust moral challenge and intellectual contributions. Rusticus is thanked for leading Marcus to Epictetus (1.7), whose influence pervades the Meditations (see 4.41; 7.19; 11.34–36, 37–38). Sextus (grandson of Plutarch) showed him how to “live according to nature” (1.9) and to beware the nature of tyrants.
B. His longest tribute is dedicated to his adoptive father, the Emperor Antoninus Pius, who in his son’s depiction, appears as the philosopher-king in action, virtuous in every respect (1.16). (The ancient world had a strong sense of the difference between a king and a demagogue.)

C. The emperor’s piety is shown by the final part of the opening book, in which he thanks the gods for all the gifts that had come to him through others (1.17).

III. Books 2–12 of the Meditations amount to a set of exhortations addressed “to himself” that strike the same themes repeatedly,

A. The world reveals the divine reason in all its aspects (see 2.1; 3.6; 4.40; 5.21; 6.9; 7.9; 8.26; 9.28; 10.6; 11.20; 12.26). There is little distinction between “nature” and “God” or “the Gods,” who are constantly regarded as the source of everything good (2.3; 3.6; 4.23; 5.7; 7.67; 9.1; 12.28). The king tells himself to “keep all thy thoughts on God” (6.7) and “follow God” (7.31). He deplores the skepticism of the Epicureans and defends providence (2.3; 4.3; 6.10; 9.39; 12.5; 12.12; 12.14).

B. “Following God” means, in effect, living according to nature, that is, living according to reason (2.9; 3.4; 4.23; 5.1; 5.10; 6.33; 7.21). Controlling perceptions is the key to a reasonable life (2.15; 4.4; 5.19; 6.13; 7.2; 8.13; 9.32; 11.16; 12.18). This demands looking inward (7.59) and concentrating on the essentials, rather than on the accidental (3.4; 4.2; 6.3; 7.20; 8.22; 9.25; 12.20).

C. Marcus Aurelius detests vice, especially those connected to the pursuit of pleasure (2.10), and seeks virtue in every matter (6.48). Philosophy he regards as the way to a life of virtue even in the setting of a court (2.17; 5.9; 6.12; 6.30; 8.10; 11.7), imitating the wise (4.38).

D. Essential to living virtuously is understanding the transitory character of all mortal existence (2.12; 3.10; 4.32; 4.46; 5.13; 6.4; 7.1; 8.6; 9.19; 10.18; 12.21) and, above all, of one’s own mortality—less difficult in a time of plague and warfare, perhaps—(2.2; 3.1; 4.17; 5.33; 6.28; 7.69; 8.2; 9.3; 10.29; 12.31–32). For Marcus Aurelius, the mark of a good character is to pass through each day as if it were the last.

E. When life follows nature, and the body and soul are directed by the mind (nous; see 3.16; 12.3), then follows tranquility of mind (5.2; 6.11; 7.75; 9.31), simplicity (3.5; 6.30; 7.31; 10.9), and contentment (4.25; 5.5; 7.54; 8.9).

F. Distinctive to Marcus Aurelius is his understanding of world-citizenship (12.36), which as emperor of the oikoumene, gave him a strong sense of commonality with all rational beings and a profound sense of service to the common good (4.4; 5.16; 5.31; 6.23; 7.5; 8.23; 10.4; 11.18; 12.20).

IV. Precisely because his philosophy and manner of life appeared in one of the most privileged and powerful positions imaginable, Marcus Aurelius presents a particularly poignant contrast to the conventional notions of “the good life” in contemporary America.

Essential Reading:
Marcus Aurelius, Meditations.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How is the character of Marcus Aurelius itself revealed in the first book of his Meditations? Consider the construction of a similar essay for yourself.
2. Comment on the proposition that the constant reminder of mortality in Marcus Aurelius’s Meditations is an enhancement rather than a diminishment of life.
Lecture Eighteen
Jews Thinking Like Greeks

Scope: The power and persuasiveness of Hellenistic moral philosophy is nowhere more evident than in its impact on Jewish thinkers of the imperial period. Although Greek-speaking Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora regarded their ancestral traditions as older and better than those of the Greeks and Romans—and certainly considered belief in one God superior to polytheism—they nevertheless adopted the perspectives of Greek philosophy, as both a way of communicating themselves to the larger world and of understanding themselves in the framework of the dominant culture. In Josephus’s *Life and Antiquities of the Jews*, we see the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, not least in his description of Jewish sects in terms of philosophical schools. Likewise in the scriptural interpretation of Aristobolos, we find the same allegorical techniques for saving Torah that were used by Stoic philosophers on Homer.

Outline

I. The success of Greco-Roman moral philosophy is attested by its wide acceptance even within the Judaism of the imperial period.
   A. The process of Hellenization within Judaism began as early as Alexander the Great, and although it was opposed by some, it was accepted by many others, in both Palestine and the Diaspora, where Jews had lived in great numbers for centuries.
   B. Apart from its distinctive adherence to monotheism (but remember Dio and others among the philosophers), Judaism was able to accommodate other aspects of Greco-Roman culture in the framework of its ancestral traditions.
   C. The Jewish scripture was translated into Greek in Alexandria around 250 B.C.E. and became the basis of an extensive Hellenistic-Jewish literature that was religiously distinct but culturally assimilated (the Septuagint).

II. Greco-Roman moral philosophy showed its influence on Judaism through a variety of literary expressions.
   A. *The Fourth Book of Maccabees* (first century C.E.) celebrates the martyrdom of those who resisted syncretistic worship, but does so in the form of an encomium on reason and self-control. The Jewish martyrs are shown to exhibit the virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, courage) in an extraordinary fashion.
   B. *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (first century B.C.E.–first century C.E.) is a pseudonymous appropriation of a Greek teacher of maxims from the sixth century B.C.E. and clothes Jewish values in the language and perceptions of Greek philosophy.
   C. *The Letter of Aristeas* (between third century B.C.E. and first century C.E.) uses the form of the symposium derived from Plato and Xenophon to express the superiority of Jewish wisdom to Greek. One of the main topics is how the king should be a lover of wisdom.
   D. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (the twelve sons of Jacob) (second century B.C.E.) combines a thoroughly Jewish concern for the law and cult (and eschatology) with Greco-Roman moral teaching. Thus, each patriarch is associated with a specific virtue (Joseph has self-control) or vice (Simeon has envy).

III. In apologetic writings, Judaism is frequently portrayed as a form of Greek philosophy.
   A. In his *Life 2*, Josephus describes his early life in terms of a philosophical search in which he tries one Jewish “school” after another (compare Lucian, *Hermotimus*).
   B. When he describes the several competing Jewish parties in Palestine, Josephus uses the language of Greek philosophy and its “schools” (*The Jewish War* 2.118–166; *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.11–25).
      1. The Essenes resemble the Pythagoreans in their teachings and in their community mode of life.
      2. The Sadducees resemble the Epicureans because of their denial of fate and God’s role in history, their emphasis on freedom, and their denial of the soul’s continued existence.

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3. The Pharisees resemble the Stoics because they combine a belief in fate (and God) with a commitment to free will, and they maintain a future for the virtuous soul.

4. The “Fourth Sect” (associated with Juda the Galilean) is dismissed in The Jewish War 2.118 as the work of a “sophist,” but in Antiquities, Josephus makes it appear close to the Cynic tradition in its love of freedom and its contempt for pain.

IV. Greek philosophical influence is also at work in the allegorical interpretation of Jewish scripture.

A. Among Stoic philosophers, the scandalous passages in Homer and Hesiod were interpreted allegorically in order to save the text and provide moral examples.
   1. In The Odyssey 8.266–366, we find “the loves of Ares and Aphrodite and how they first began their affair in the house of Hephaestus,” that is, an adulterous affair.
   2. In Heraclitus’s Homeric Questions 69, the erotic union is interpreted as the combination of strife and love in harmony.

B. Similarly, Hellenistic Jewish interpreters, such as Aristobolos (second century B.C.E.), who was associated with the Aristotelian tradition, used allegory to remove inappropriate implications from Torah, such as anthropomorphic qualities ascribed to God (see Fragments 2 and 4).

Essential Reading:
Fourth Maccabees.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What is said about Judaism and Hellenistic culture that philosophy could embrace both cultural systems?
2. How does allegorical interpretation serve to save both sacred texts and sound moral standards?
Lecture Nineteen
Philo—Judaism as Greek Philosophy

Scope:
The synthesis of Judaism and Greek philosophy found its most prolific expression in the writings of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (15 B.C.E.–50 C.E.). A member of a wealthy and influential Jewish family and himself fiercely devoted to his ancestral traditions—he was part of a delegation that petitioned Caligula when the emperor threatened to profane the Jerusalem temple—Philo was also thoroughly steeped in Hellenistic culture, and he unhesitatingly interpreted Jewish traditions from the perspective of Greco-Roman philosophy. His allegorical interpretation of scripture imitated the practice of philosophers with the troublesome parts of the Greek myths. Philo agreed with them that sacred texts should teach proper morality. He portrayed the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in terms of moral virtues and Moses, as the best of philosophers. And his portrayal of a Jewish contemplative community argues that the ideals of philosophy found their best realization among these ascetic Jews.

Outline

I. Philo of Alexandria, or Philo Judaeus (c. 15 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), is the supreme example of the fusion of Judaism and Greco-Roman philosophy.
   A. Because so much of his work was preserved (by Christians) and so little of his contemporaries’, the proper historical placement of Philo is difficult: Is he idiosyncratic or representative?
   B. Part of a wealthy and influential Alexandrian Jewish family, Philo was educated in the Gymnasium. He draws on a wide variety of Greek authors, especially epic and tragic poets, and probably was trained in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmonies, philosophy, grammar, logic, and rhetoric.
   C. He was deeply faithful to Judaism, scorning those who abandoned the practice of circumcision to assimilate Greek culture (Migration of Abraham 89–93). He defended his local community against oppression (Against Flaccus) and, in 39–40, headed a delegation to the Emperor Caligula to defend Jewish rights (Embassy to Gaius).
   D. He probably knew no Hebrew and interpreted the Jewish scripture according to the Septuagint, which he regarded as divinely inspired. To some degree, all his writings have an apologetic character, seeking to interpret to outsiders the beauty of his own tradition in terms they would understand and, at the same time, interpreting his tradition to insiders in the common terms of the culture.

II. Philo’s Greek intellectual and philosophical heritage was eclectic. He admires and draws from virtually everyone except the Epicureans.
   A. He draws from many sources simultaneously and indiscriminately, quoting from Plato, Homer, and Euripides side-by-side with the Bible (see On Dreams 139–163). He is familiar with the allegorical interpretation of the philosophers applied to Homer (Embassy 93–113; On the Decalogue 54).
   B. He also uses philosophical traditions eclectically. The Pythagoreans feed his fascination with numbers (Decalogue 20–31) and strict asceticism (On the Contemplative Life). Aristotle offers him a cosmological and ethical framework. Stoicism supplies moral vocabulary and the tendency to allegorize myths.
   C. Above all, however, Philo is a Platonist and himself a key figure in the development of Middle Platonism, in which the Academy becomes influenced by Stoicism, Aristotelianism, and Semitic cosmology.
      1. See his understanding of the two different accounts of the creation of humans in Genesis 1–2 (Allegorical Interpretation I, 31; Questions on Genesis 1.4).
      2. See his interpretation of the “heavenly tabernacle” shown to Moses in Exodus 25.40 (Questions and Answers on Exodus 82; Allegorical Interpretation III, 102).
      3. His Platonism comes through also in his tinge of mysticism—the flight of the soul to the realm of the divine (see On the Creation 71).
   D. He does not develop a philosophical system but uses whatever lies to hand as a means of “philosophically” interpreting difficult passages of scripture (see On the Posterity and Exile of Cain).
III. For Philo, as for other Hellenistic philosophers, the real point of philosophy is not a theory about the world, but an understanding of how to live in the world. For Philo, however, the best source for this understanding was the Jewish Law.

A. Like other philosophers, Philo writes tractates on set philosophical themes, such as *That Every Good Man Is Free* (on the Stoic paradox) and *On Providence*.

B. For the most part, however, he finds his moral instruction in the interpretation of Torah.
   1. His treatment of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob shows how they are virtuous as “ensouled law,” according to the triad of “teaching, natural endowment, and practice.” *On Abraham*, for example, describes how he was pious, showed hospitality, was kind, and showed courage and self-control.
   2. *On Joseph* shows the young Jewish exile who became Pharaoh’s vizier to be the paragon of statesmanship.

C. Above all, it is Moses who, by his life and writings (the Law!), demonstrates that Judaism is the best of all philosophies.
   1. In the *Life of Moses*, Philo shows Moses to be lawgiver (2.8–65), high priest (2.66–186), and prophet (2.187–291). These biblical categories are introduced by the depiction of Moses as the philosopher-king (1.148).
   2. Moses’s life was the model of the virtues that he taught through his legislation (*Life of Moses* 1.158–159).
   3. In *On the Decalogue* and *Special Laws*, Philo interprets Mosaic legislation consistently in terms of its ability to shape both individual and communal virtue (see also *On the Virtues* and *On Rewards and Punishments*).

D. In his description of the Jewish groups the Essenes and the Therapeutae, Philo presents a picture of Jews living in a philosophical community (*Hypothetica* 11.1–18 and *On the Contemplative Life* 14–18).

Essential Reading:
Philo, *Life of Moses*.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How is the elasticity of Platonism demonstrated by the inclusion of Philo in that school?
2. In what respects would Philo agree and disagree with other Greco-Roman moralists on the character of the good life?
Lecture Twenty

Plutarch—Biography as Moral Instruction

Scope: Plutarch of Chaeronea (45–120 C.E.) lived under the Emperors Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian at a time when the Roman Empire enjoyed some of its best and most stable government and when Greek and Latin literature saw its last great flourishing. His life was correspondingly placid and productive. He studied in Athens and occasionally visited Rome but spent most of his time in his native town, serving for many years as a priest of the god Apollo at Delphi. Plutarch has, perhaps, the most cosmopolitan and subtle mind among the Greco-Roman moralists, as well as the calmest and most dispassionate judgment. His learning is encyclopedic and his literary production, extensive. In this lecture, we review his major ethical writings (The Moralia and The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans). We note how his biographies serve as moral instruction, with particular attention to the lives of Alexander and Caesar, Demosthenes and Cicero.

Outline

I. Plutarch of Chaeronea (45–120 C.E.) is a fitting figure with which to conclude a survey of Greco-Roman moralists.
   A. His life combined, in equal measure, elements of the active and the contemplative.
      1. Born of a wealthy and well-connected family in Boeotia, he studied philosophy under Ammonius of Lamprae (a Platonist with a strong Aristotelian bent) in Athens.
      2. He traveled extensively in Greece, Italy, Egypt, and Asia Minor, picking up a vast amount of learning wherever he went.
      3. He lectured publicly in Rome on Platonic philosophy and performed some civic roles (consul under Trajan and proconsul in Greece under Hadrian), before retiring to his hometown, serving as a priest of the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, and teaching students.
   B. Many of his writings are lost, but what remains is still substantial and impressive.
      1. His *Moralia* (fifteen volumes in the Loeb Classical Library) comprises sixty-five lectures, dialogues, essays, and collections of anecdotes, revealing a remarkable intellectual curiosity and erudition. His “Table-Talk” alone is worth admission.
      2. The *Parallel Lives of Greeks and Romans* (eleven volumes in Loeb) contains fifty biographies, forty-six in the form of comparative matches and four individually.
   C. Plutarch deserves extended attention for several reasons:
      1. His writings are literarily diverse and distinguished. They have had a great impact in the West (see Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra, Julius Caesar*).
      2. He amasses an astonishing amount of lore about antiquity that remains of first importance to students of the Greek and Roman period.
      3. He is a significant figure in Middle Platonism, with his devotion to Plato’s vision of reality, together with his use of Aristotelian logic and ethics.
      4. He remains an insightful and persuasive moral teacher, one of the most attractive and humane figures of the ancient world.
   D. We begin with a consideration of his *Lives*, remembering that there is both a literary and philosophical connection between this work and the *Moralia*.

II. It was natural that biography should become an instrument of moral instruction in the imperial period.
   A. It was universally agreed that morality was learned through the imitation of examples even more than through maxims or exhortation.
   B. The writing of a “life” (*bios*) was uniquely capable of providing instruction in character ethics (*ethos*).
      1. The Greco-Roman novel was underdeveloped in terms of character, focusing as it did on plot. At best, it showed how love (*eros*) could overcome chance (*tyche*).
      2. The history was mostly devoted to the great deeds of nations and generals, particularly in war. It could make the argument for or against the role of providence (*pronoia*) in human affairs.
      3. The biography not only focuses on a single person, but specifically on the character of that person as revealed in dispositions and deeds.
C. A number of biographies show the interest in moral instruction through exemplary narrative.
   1. Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* presents an idealized picture of the Persian King Cyrus.
   2. Philo’s *Life of Moses* shows that the life and teaching of the Jewish leader formed the best philosophy.
   3. Jamblichus and Porphyry each wrote a *Life of Pythagoras* as a means of popularizing Neopythagorean moral teaching.

III. Plutarch’s is the most ambitious and impressive effort to marry serious biography (as opposed to sheer legend) and moral inquiry. His overall thesis is that character is destiny.
   A. His biographies are filled with factual information grounded in his research (some of it contained in the *apophthegmata* of the *Moralia*). He turns a critical eye toward legendary accounts and exaggeration but is open to the phenomena of omens and dreams. His “comparisons” in eighteen of the *Parallels* especially elucidate moral issues.
   B. When dealing with figures of great and public accomplishment, the narrative of deeds sometimes swallows moral analysis (see *Alexander* [criticized for becoming overly superstitious] and *Caesar* [criticized for becoming arrogant]), despite Plutarch’s intentions. But even legislators can be compared at the level of morality (see *Lycurgus* and *Numa*).
   C. In some of the biographies, focus on character is paramount. Thus, in *Demosthenes* and *Cicero*, he ignores their technical feats in rhetoric to concentrate on their moral dispositions.

**Essential Reading:**

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How does the *bios* uniquely offer itself as an instrument of moral instruction?
2. What do we learn about the nature of Greco-Roman philosophy by Plutarch’s constant focus on character rather than on accomplishments?
Lecture Twenty-One
Plutarch and Philosophical Religion

Scope: As an official functionary in a cult, as well as a man generally dedicated to traditional practices, Plutarch provides insight into the way a sympathetic philosopher viewed religion during the empire’s most stable period. This lecture considers some of his general views—how religion is an essential part of the stability of the state, for example, and how superstition is more dangerous than atheism—before considering some of his treatises dealing specifically with religious issues. Two of these arise from his own cultic setting. His philosophical reflection on “The E at Delphi” offers alternative explanations for the presence of the cryptic inscription in the temple precincts. And “The Obsolescence of Oracles” takes up the serious problem of the failure of prophecy: Why does the Delphic oracle not speak as of old? Plutarch’s “Isis and Osiris,” finally, provides insight into the problems created for the philosophical mind by religious myth, particularly when the myth seems to be a form of superstition.

Outline

I. Because Plutarch was a Platonist, his understanding of Greco-Roman religion was both subtle and complex.
   A. Like many ancients, Plutarch saw religion (threskeia/religio) as part of the social fabric, part of the “givenness” of the world (see Libanius, Oration 30.34; Cicero, Pro Flacco; Plutarch, “Reply to Colotes” 31–34 [Mor 1125C–1127E]).
      1. Religion is not simply a matter of private opinion or individual behavior or personal feeling.
      2. It was intrinsically connected to the public life of the polis/civis and was, therefore, public, visible. The attitude of eusebeia applied to the state, as well as to the gods.
   B. For this reason, Plutarch, with most of the popular philosophers—Lucian notably the exception—detested Epicureanism (see “Reply to Colotes,” “That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible,” and “Is ‘Live Unknown’ a Wise Precept?”).
      1. The Epicurean elevation of pleasure led to the destruction of individual and communal virtue.
      2. Its denial of the gods’ involvement in the world eroded the stability of society.
      3. By making Epicurus the “divine” center of a cult, it placed a single figure in competition with gods and, therefore, a sect against the state (see also Christianity).
   C. As a philosopher, however, Plutarch was also troubled by uncritical religious beliefs and practices.
      1. Although he respected omens, such as the auspices (they were, after all, part of the state ritual), and prophecy (he was a priest at Delphi), he rejected superstition as worse than atheism.
      2. Similarly, he deprecated the dogmatism of the Stoics concerning the divinity of the world—reason (see “On Stoic Self-Contradictions”).
   D. In his many essays devoted to religious subjects, we see a philosopher who seeks to combine loyalty to tradition with a critical spirit of inquiry. The real point of religious belief and practice is the way it leads to a moral life.

II. Plutarch’s tractate “Isis and Osiris” reveals his basic approach to religious questions.
   A. The cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis and her consort Osiris reached Greece before 330 B.C.E., and there is inscriptive evidence for its presence in Corinth and in Chaeronea. Plutarch dedicates this essay to Clea, a woman priestess of the cult of Apollo at Delphi who (not untypically) was devoted to Isis, as well.
   B. Plutarch asserts from the beginning that the search for God and the search for truth go together. Therefore, inquiring into the truth of religion is itself a religious quest (1–2) [Mor 351D–F].
   C. The odd practices of the cult are not to be considered as superstitious, but rather, as signals to deeper interpretation, having “moral and practical value” (8) [Mor 353F].
   D. The myth, if taken literally, is unseemly, but if understood “philosophically,” enables one to avoid “superstition which is no less an evil than atheism” (11) [Mor 355B–D].
   E. There are many gods and many religious rituals, but only one god beneath them all who rules the world (67–68) [Mor 377F–378B].
III. As priest of Apollo at Delphi, Plutarch had the occasion (and necessity) of addressing urgent religious issues philosophically.

A. “The E at Delphi” (Mor 384D–394C) shows the philosopher struggling to make sense of “divine revelation” in the form of a particularly obscure inscription at Delphi.

B. “The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse” (Mor 394D–409D) takes up the issue of change in religious practice and the form of revelation from God.

C. “On the Obsolescence of Oracles” (Mor 409E–438E) addresses the most serious issue of the apparent failure or decline of prophecy in his own shrine.

1. The problem is posed by the decline of a once-flourishing prophetic shrine (5 [412A] and 8 [414B]).
2. The change must be due to god’s will—to think otherwise would be to deny the divine source of the cult in the first place (8 [413B]).
3. The god’s benefits change over the course of time as circumstances (such as changes in population) shift (8 [414B–D]).
4. Aristotle offers natural explanations (44 [434B–C]), but these must be combined with religious causes, as well (48 [436 D–E]).

IV. The subtlety and richness of Plutarch’s religious reasoning in the Platonic mode is shown in his dialogue “On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance.”

A. The dialogue is a defense of divine providence (pronoia) after an attack on it by Epicurus.

B. Plutarch eschews any dogmatism, adopting the cautious tone of the Academy when speaking about God (4 [Mor 549E–550C]).

C. He offers four reasons why God seems to delay the punishment of wrongdoers:

1. God is our model. God’s delay in punishing teaches us to be slow in retaliation so that we do not commit error (Mor 530C).
2. God allows time for repentance from error among wrongdoers (Mor 551C).
3. Some offenders are capable of offering benefits to others—delay in punishment enables them to provide such benefits (Mor 552D).
4. God defers punishment in order to provide it in the appropriate time, place, and manner (Mor 553D).

D. Punishment is also sometimes not delayed, but is inherent in the life of the wicked person (Mor 553F).

E. A discussion of punishment directed at the descendents of the wicked (Mor 556–560) leads to the exposition of a myth concerning the immorality of the soul, punishment of souls after death, and transmigration of souls (Mor 563B–567E).

Essential Reading:
Plutarch, “Isis and Osiris” and “On the Delays of Divine Vengeance.”

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. In what way does Plutarch’s “philosophical religion” differ from the view of religion developed in the Enlightenment?
2. What religious and political implications of Epicureanism made it so distasteful to moralists of other traditions?
Scope: The ancient moralists disputed how virtue was acquired, but most agreed that it involved some form of prokope, or progress, that resulted from the cultivation of habits. Virtue, indeed, is nothing more than a certain “power” consistently to act in accord with the perception of the good. Habits are developed by repetition. This conditioning process involves all of a person’s physical, emotional, and mental capacities. No one had a better grasp on the difficulties of this process and its stages than Plutarch, whose writings on the subject have influenced educators through the ages. In this lecture, we consider his tractate “On Progress in Virtue,” which lays down the basic theory, and his treatise “On the Education of Children,” which sounds on many points that are surprisingly familiar, along with those that seem alien—and surprisingly challenging.

Outline

I. Plutarch has remained an important source for people dedicated to the formation of character.
   A. He does not, like some other moralists, present an ideal that is so rigorous that it appears unattainable, and he combines a commitment to virtue with an appreciation of beauty and culture.
   B. Most of all, he understands philosophy not as a matter of sudden conversion, from total vice to total virtue, but rather as a lifelong process that can be understood in terms of progress (prokope) and education (paideia).
   C. His perceptions were attractive to ancient Christian thinkers (see Jerome and Johannes Mauropus) interested in spiritual transformation and to modern thinkers committed to moral education (see Montaigne, Rousseau, Bacon, Dryden, Emerson).
      1. The essays are profoundly affected by Plutarch’s own social setting: He writes as a male for males and as a wealthy aristocrat for members of the same class.
      2. The essays nevertheless contain insights of enduring value that can be translated—and have been—into other social contexts.

II. In “Progress in Virtue” (Mor 75B–86A), Plutarch provides a checklist for the person dedicated to growth in virtue.
   A. The essay opens with a theoretical discussion. Plutarch opposes the Stoics, who believe that the wise man acquires virtue as a whole and all at once, thinking that this leads to contradictions (2). Plutarch thinks that there is progress in virtue as in other arts (1) and seeks to provide the signs by which that progress can be measured (3).
      1. There is no “standing still” in human life, no point of absolute accomplishment.
      2. Rather, one is either moving forward or moving backward, according to the patterns of disposition and behavior (habits/virtues).
   B. There are definite signs of progress that can be marked if one engages in self-examination.
      1. Is there a greater desire for philosophy (5), a willingness to pursue it despite opinions of others (6), a lack of measurement on others’ scales (envy and jealousy) (7)?
      2. Is there a shift from style to substance: Is one’s own discourse simpler rather than more elaborate (7); does one listen to the speech of others for substance rather than adornment (8); when speaking, does no one seek to improve rather than to win applause (9–10)?
      3. Is the concern for growth internalized? Does one practice virtue for its own sake (10); is one self-critical (10); does one value the criticism of friends more than flattery (10–11)?
      4. Can one measure the effects? Are dreams progressively free of vice (12); are the emotions and passions in better control (13); are judgments translated consistently into action (14)?
      5. Do we seek to imitate good people (15), approach them confidently despite our lingering faults (16), stay serious about all our faults (17)?
III. Plutarch’s ideas on moral progress are well expressed in “The Education of Children” (Mor 1A–14C).

A. Some doubt the essay’s authenticity, but if not by Plutarch, it is entirely consistent with his views. He provides a theoretical framework, then applies it through the several stages of a child’s life.

B. Moral excellence depends on nature (physis), reason (logos), and habit (ethos) (4). The combination of all three is necessary, but reason and habit can compensate even when natural endowment is deficient.

C. Character (ethos) is habit (ethos) long continued. The virtues of character (ethikas aretas) are the virtues of habit (ethikas aretas).

D. Plutarch repeats how important education and training are: What is distinctive to humans is the mind and reason. In comparison to education, all other goods are trivial (8).

E. He acknowledges that he writes for the rich but hopes that his ideals can be universalized even by the poor (11).

F. Every stage of life and every aspect of training is taken into consideration:
   1. The circumstances of birth (3) and the consequences of feeding by the mother or hired persons (5) are critical. Note the impressionability of infants.
   2. Children’s companions (6), pedagogues, and teachers (7) must be chosen carefully and with an eye to character.
   3. General education is important, but it is education in philosophy that is most critical for formation in character (10)
   4. Even the training of the body is aimed at the development of discipline and self-restraint (11).

G. The attitudes of parents make a big difference through every stage.
   1. Children gain more by encouragement and reasoning than by physical blows and ill treatment; praise and rebuke must be measured appropriately (12).
   2. Parents should not overtax children with too high expectations, yet should remain involved (13).
   3. They should train children’s memories, keep them away from foul language and bad associations. The issue of male admirers of young men is a difficult one (13–15).
   4. At adolescence, when young men run wild, parents must exercise strict control yet also be understanding—they were also young once (16–19)!
   5. Fathers should always present themselves to their sons as a model to be imitated (20).

Essential Reading:
Plutarch, “Progress in Virtue” and “The Education of Children.”

Supplementary Reading:
S. F. Bonner, Education in Ancient Rome from the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the notion of progress (prokope) govern Plutarch’s understanding both of philosophy and of education?
2. In what ways would contemporary pedagogy agree and disagree with Plutarch’s ideas on educating children?
Lecture Twenty-Three
Plutarch—Envy, Anger, and Talking Too Much

Scope: If the Greco-Roman moralists were adept at describing the virtues, they excelled in their depictions of vice. Here is where their real psychological penetration is evident. They clearly were close observers of themselves and others. They had a well-developed sense of the absurdities of human frailty. In this regard, Plutarch is again a superb source. His *Moralia* is filled with precise and subtle examinations of human failing. In this lecture, we gain some acquaintance with his discussions of three vices that were discussed broadly by ancient philosophers: anger, envy, and garrulousness. Of particular interest is the way in which these vices are seen to intertwine and influence one another, in the same way that the virtues are mutually reinforcing. The clarity—and, it might be argued, superiority—of the ancient understanding of human character in all its complexity can once more be perceived by those who today are slowly emerging from the dark fascinations of depth psychology.

Outline

I. Essential to ancient cognitive psychology and character ethics is the analysis of vices and virtues.
   A. In contrast to teleological and deontological forms of ethics, which focus on acts and their consequences, character ethics focuses on the agent’s emotions, passions, rational control, dispositions, and habits. Philosophy of this sort inevitably involves the psychology of the individual.
   B. Everywhere we find this sort of analysis, we can detect the influence (acknowledged or not) of Aristotle, who catalogued, defined, and described the virtues and vices (see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*).
   C. Over the course of time, standard treatments of the virtues and vices (*topoi/loci*) were developed and collected as the accumulation of philosophical insight (see Stobaeus, *Anthologium Graecum*).
   D. Plutarch’s *Moralia* includes a number of essays that illustrate such *topoi*, yet contain characteristic distinctive touches: “Tranquillity of Mind,” “Brotherly Love,” “On Curiosity,” “On Love of Wealth.”

II. The interconnection and distinction among vices is the subject of the short essay “On Envy and Hate” (*Mor* 536E–538E).
   A. This essay reveals Plutarch’s love of comparison (see his *Lives*), as well as his dependence on Aristotle, who defined envy (*phthonos*) as a sorrow (*lype*) at someone possessing something simply because they have it (*Rhetoric* 1387B). In contrast to *zelos*, which can be positive, envy is always a vice, and one that is ignoble (*Rhetoric* 1388A), the “ulcer of the soul” (Stobaeus, III, 38, 48).
   B. Plutarch begins with the similarities between envy and hate (*misos*). He notes that passions and vices are interconnected in the way that diseases are and that both envy and hate oppose the “goodwill” and friendship (*philia*) that seek the good of the other (1).
   C. They are also different in important ways: Hate has boundaries and envy has none; hate is specific and directed, while envy is diffuse (2).
      1. Hate is found in both animals and humans, whereas envy is only found in humans (4); hate is directed against both animals and humans, but envy, only against other humans (3).
      2. Hate is compatible with justice and has a certain nobility; envy is not compatible with justice and is base (5). Thus, hate decreases as the enemy is less wicked, whereas envy increases with the virtue of the one envied (6).
      3. Envy is more responsive to external circumstances and tends to keep growing, whereas hate tends to diminish (7).
      4. Hate seeks to injure the enemy. Envy seeks to reduce the other to one’s own level (8).

III. In “On Control of Anger” (*Mor* 452F–464D), Plutarch both diagnoses the illness that is this vice and prescribes the cure.
   A. He enumerates the elements in anger (*orge*) that make it so difficult to heal.
1. It often starts small (2), with a sense of being hurt and despised (11) that is grounded in sensuality and selfishness (13), and grows into a great tyranny that takes us over and makes us find fault with everything (3 and 5).

2. When full blown, anger shuts down reason (2), distorts one’s physical appearance (6), alters one’s voice (6), and causes one to act ineffectively because of haste and impulsiveness (10).

3. Although it identifies itself as manly and courageous, calling itself “righteous anger” (8), it is actually a sign of weakness, littleness, and fear (8–9).

B. Anger is not incurable (2), but requires long-range treatment before it takes hold, like a slow-acting medicine (1–2), because when it appears, it listens to nothing (2).

1. We need to observe others, not only ourselves, to see what anger is and does (1 and 6). It is easy to detect in this fashion (4).

2. We need to ignore it when it begins and keep silent (5 and 13). Do not feed the anger by “acting out” in words or deeds (4).

3. It is important to slow down (10), keep speech soft (8), cultivate cheerfulness in all circumstances (14). Bear in mind the truths about human limitations, including the reminder that we all need indulgence (16). Real courage is found in gentleness (9).

IV. Plutarch’s tractate “On Talkativeness” (Mor 502B–515A) combines all the standard features of the topos in a typically charming fashion and is marred mainly by its own length and loquaciousness.

A. Garrulosity (adoleschia) is a vice that is difficult to heal with reasonable words precisely because the compulsive talker never listens to anyone else (1). Unlike other vices (love of pleasure, money, fame), it can never achieve what it most desires, namely attentive hearers, because it drives them off (2).

1. Like drunkenness (4), it is a manifestation of lack of self-control (akrasia, 11–12). To always want to speak at once is a sign of haste and arrogance (19).

2. There is no controlling a loose tongue (14). It does untold damage and is a danger to others, as well as making the speaker the object of detestation (7, 16).

B. Silence (sige) is best (2) as shown by the attitude at the Mysteries (8, 17). Quiet (hesychia) is necessary for learning. If not silence, then brevity in speech (brachylogia) is best (17):

1. The Spartans were renowned for their strength and self-control, and they were notoriously “laconic” in their speech.

2. The wisdom of the past is shown by the brief adages of the sages.

3. Even the oracles of the god are brief and direct.

C. It is necessary, therefore, to “rein in the tongue” (3) by forming habits of deliberation (19), such as pausing for reflection before speaking and, above all, cultivating silence (23).

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Plutarch’s discussion about hate and envy differ from what we would expect from a Christian discussion, based on the Sermon on the Mount?

2. Do Plutarch’s discourses on anger and talkativeness show him to be a good or inadequate doctor of the soul?
Lecture Twenty-Four
The Missing Page in Philosophy’s Story

Scope:  The story of philosophy is often told as though thoughts about the world and thoughts about thinking were at the heart of the enterprise. The Greco-Roman moralists remind us of the deeper issue that has always, at least up until very recently, been at the heart of philosophy, the question of how to live well as a human being. And because of their unswerving attention to moral character, they remind us, as well, that if philosophy is understood as the love of wisdom, then it is impoverished if it becomes only another way of analyzing language. This presentation shows how the Greco-Roman moralists tend to be neglected by scholars, yet have always been important to those who seek wisdom, and asks how the story of philosophy might look if the page dealing with them were read more carefully.

Outline

I.  The Greco-Roman moralists—including Jewish philosophers—who have occupied the past twenty-three lectures are usually regarded as a footnote to the main story of Western philosophy.
   A.  In the influential fourth-century C.E. Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Diogenes Laertius mentions only Plutarch (4.1, 9.60) and then only his Lives.
      1.  He mentions other philosophers (such as Philodemus of Gadara) of our period and others still later (such as Sextus Empiricus). Names now utterly obscure receive strong attention (see Apollodorus of Seleucia and Antisthenes of Rhodes).
      2.  More important, he sets the plot for philosophy’s story: founders, schools, and doctrines (doxai) having to do with physics, logic, and ethics. It is all about ideas. Moral exhortation does not fit.
   B.  A similar outlook is found in the modern, compendious History of Philosophy by Frederick Copelston. In Greece and Rome (1962), he devotes ninety-three pages to post-Epicurean philosophy, following the same plot line of schools and individuals.
      1.  He hits all nine of the figures we have discussed, devoting about twenty pages to them, but he misses the point. He devotes only four pages to their ethics, one line to Plutarch’s moral teaching!
      2.  More telling, in his twenty-one–page conclusion to the entire period, he devotes eight full pages of discussion to ethics, but with reference only to Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus.
   C.  The Greco-Roman moralists have consistently escaped the scan of the scholars.
      1.  Classicists have been drawn to language and literature. In both, the moralists seem unworthy of notice. Their language is common; their literature, unimaginative.
      2.  Philosophers have been concerned with questions of being and of knowing (physics and logic). Plato and Aristotle and Epicurus are originative and interesting; the moralists, at best derivative, a low point before the rebirth of metaphysics in Neoplatonism.
      3.  Scholars of religion have missed the diverse responses to popular religion in the moralists and the way in which, in some cases, their thinking is a religious movement. Only lately have students of the New Testament given close attention—for more than linguistic parallels—to these contemporary writers.

II.  Yet during the period of the early empire, philosophy was perhaps as central to the life of the larger culture as at any time in the history of the West.
   A.  Philosophy provided a common language for people from widely different cultural backgrounds (Plutarch and Philo are both Platonists!) and set the basic terms for the discussion of the meaning and goals of life (far more than religion).
   B.  Philosophy was widespread through every rank in society, including emperors (Marcus Aurelius, Julian), senators (Seneca), equestrians (Cicero), regional gentry (Plutarch), wandering rhetoricians (Dio), and slaves (Epictetus). It drew attention from ordinary people (Lucian) and drew the suspicion and wrath of emperors (see the frequency of exile).
   C.  Despite their differences, the philosophers of the imperial period united in an anti-Epicurean stance that is at once optimistic and public minded:
      1.  Religious devotion to the gods is good when it is reasonable and supports moral behavior.
      2.  Pleasure is a completely inadequate basis for the good life.
3. Humans are essentially social and owe their best efforts to the common good rather than their private peace.
4. Human impulses (both positive and negative) are capable of being controlled and being made more productive through reason, and reason is capable of being educated.

III. Greco-Roman moral teaching is a page of philosophy’s story that deserves careful re-reading, especially for those in contemporary Western culture.

A. It understands philosophy in terms of wisdom rather than knowledge. The key question is not the origin of life (or how to produce it!) but how to live worthily as a human person.

B. It focuses on the ethics of character, both for the individual and the community. The virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and courage are translatable to the public realm. The contrast between envy and friendship is applicable to relations between states as it is to relations between persons.

C. It uses psychology in the service of shaping good character rather than as an excuse for bad character.
   1. It understands the corrupting effect of disordered desires and passions.
   2. It appreciates the dangers inherent in the lack of self-control.
   3. It shows how progress can be made in moral transformation, not only through knowledge but through the formation of habits through practice.

D. It proposes that humans are called to responsibility in their conduct of life that is more than private.
   1. It appreciates how virtue is learned through personal example and demands living in a manner that others can imitate.
   2. It understands the effect of mutual correction and encouragement and demands that friends not be flatterers.

E. Despite its manifest limitations and weaknesses, the moral discourse of the early empire deserves at least as much attention as that offered today in the media.

Essential Reading:
Plutarch, “How to Tell a Friend from a Flatterer.”
Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How could philosophy be taught in the modern university if it were again defined as a way of life to be lived rather than a subject to be studied?
2. What are the major weaknesses and strengths of Greco-Roman moral teaching? Do the strengths outweigh the weaknesses and make it still worth engaging?
Timeline

B.C.E.
624–546. Thales
581–497. Pythagoras
470–399. Socrates
430–355. Xenophon
427–347. Plato
400–325. Diogenes
384–322. Aristotle
356–323. Alexander the Great
340–271. Epicurus
335–263. Zeno
255. Septuagint
200–168. Macedonian Wars (Roman supremacy)
167–165. Maccabean Revolt
147. Greece comes under Roman control
112. Rise of Jewish Sects
110–40. Philodemus
106–43. Cicero
94–55. Lucretius
49–47. Roman Civil War
45. Julius Caesar dictator—end of Republic
30–14. Augustus
15–50 C.E. Philo of Alexandria
4–65 C.E. Seneca

C.E.
14–37. Tiberius
30–100. Musonius Rufus
37–41. Caligula
40–120. Dio Chrysostom
41–54. Claudius
45–120. Plutarch
50–130. Epictetus
54–68. Nero
69–79. Vespasian
79–81. Titus
81–96.............................................. Domition
98–116............................................ Trajan
117–138.......................................... Hadrian
120–180.......................................... Lucian
121–180.......................................... Marcus Aurelius
332–363.......................................... Julian
Glossary

Academy: The school in Athens founded by Plato. The Platonic tradition is designated as “the academics.”

adoleschia: Greek noun meaning “garrulousness” or “compulsive talkativeness.”

akrasia: Greek noun meaning “lack of self-control.”

allegory: A narrative with both figurative and literal meaning. In our literature, a method of interpreting myths to yield moral meaning.

amicitia: Latin noun meaning “friendship”; equivalent to the Greek philia.

angelos: A messenger or scout, as in Epictetus, “Messenger of Zeus.”

anomie: A sociological term for a state of normlessness and lack of clear boundaries.

anthropomorphism: The use of human images in describing the divine, as in “the hands of God” or “the anger of God.”

apatheia: Greek noun meaning “without passion”; the Stoic ideal of self-control.

Aristotelianism: The philosophical school founded by Aristotle, also called the Lycaeum.

asceticism: The practice of severe self-control in all physical matters, especially involving speech, sex, and diet.

ataraxia: Greek noun meaning “without turmoil”; the Epicurean ideal of tranquility.

auspices: The form of technical prophecy carried out by Roman priests using the entrails of birds.

bios: Greek noun meaning “life” in the biological sense; a narrative account, biography.

brachylogia: Greek noun meaning “brevity in speech,” the opposite of garrulousness, and associated with strength and wisdom.

charlatan: A fake or counterfeit philosopher who mimes the manner but falsifies the reality.

cosmology: An understanding of the world, particularly in its physical dimensions.

Cursus Honorum: Latin phrase meaning “round of honors,” referring to the stages of progression in official Roman leadership, culminating in consul.

Cynicism: The philosophical movement deriving from Antisthenes and Diogenes of Sinope, characterized by boldness in life and speech, that strongly influenced Stoicism in the Roman period.

deontology: A form of ethics that focuses on acts under the aspect of duty and seeks to supply universal rules for behavior.

diaspora: Greek term meaning “scattering” or “dispersal,” used with reference to the Jewish population outside Palestine.

diatribe: A dialogical form of exhortation used in classroom instruction, making use of a variety of lively stylistic elements.

dogmatism: In philosophy, the opposite of skepticism: holding definite positions concerning reality and the capacity to know it. The Epicureans and Stoics are dogmatists in this sense.

eclecticism: The practice of drawing from several philosophical traditions rather than staying in the framework of one; in this respect, Cicero is eclectic.

ekpyrosis: Greek noun meaning “conflagration”; used with reference to the Stoic expectation of a consummation of all things by fire, giving rise to another world.

eleutheria: Greek noun meaning “freedom”; with “free speech,” one of the two ideals of the Cynic movement in particular.
enkrateia: Greek noun meaning “self-control,” the opposite of akrasia, and universally admired among philosophers.

epideictic: One of the three forms of rhetoric (with deliberative and forensic) that simply “displayed” something for hearers for their praise or blame. Practiced often as a showpiece by sophists.

epitome: A summary or abbreviation. One of the forms of moral instruction, packing much in a small frame.

eros: Greek noun meaning “love” in the sense of the drive to unite with the loved one; distinct from the love that is friendship (philia) or donative (agape).

Essenes: One of the Jewish sects, characterized by communitarian ideals and asceticism; compared to the Pythagoreans.

ethics: In philosophy, the study of morality: its basis, goal, and means.

ethos: Greek noun (with a short e) that means habit or custom, a characteristic acquired by repeated practice.

ethos: Greek noun (with a long e) that means character in the moral sense, developed through habit.

goes: A Greek noun meaning “charlatan”; used in ancient polemic for those considered as corrupting the ideals of philosophy or religion, especially for reputation or profit.

gymnasium: Originally identified as a place for athletics (there was one in Athens both at the Academy and Lyceum), it increasingly became the place for intellectual training, as well.

hegemonikon: In Stoicism, the “governing principle,” or reason.

Hellenism: Greek culture, especially as it was disseminated after the time of Alexander the Great.

hesychia: Greek noun meaning “quiet” or “silence”; an ideal especially of the Epicureans, who sought “the quiet life,” but also of philosophers generally as the requisite to learning.

homonoia: Greek noun meaning “harmony” or “peace,” an ideal in the public realm that resembles friendship in the private; an elusive ideal for war-like and frequently warring peoples.

hyle: Greek noun meaning “matter” in the sense of “stuff.” In Stoicism, the passive principle on which the active pneuma or logos operates.

kathekonta: Greek for “duties” or “responsibilities,” with specific reference to the social obligations incumbent on holding a certain place in the world.

koine: Greek for “common,” used specifically for the form of the Greek language that developed in the Hellenistic period. Used by the majority of the popular moralists (except Cicero and Seneca).

loci: Latin noun locus (“place”) used in the plural with reference to collections of standard statements on a certain subject; see topoi.

logic: In philosophy, one of the three divisions of study, having to do with right thinking and the possibilities of knowing truth.

logos: Greek noun meaning “word,” or “reason,” or “speech.” In Stoicism above all, the rational principle at work in the world.

Lyceum: The location in Athens where Aristotle established his school independent of Plato; used to identify Aristotelianism.

lype: Greek noun meaning “sorrow”; used negatively, especially in the definition of envy.

misos: Greek noun meaning “hate.” The fixed disposition to harm an enemy, regarded by some moralists as having some elements of nobility.

Neoplatonism: The last period of the Platonic tradition as such, identified above all with Plotinus.

Neopythagoreanism: The renewal of the Pythagorean tradition in the first century B.C.E., associated with Apollonius of Tyana and, later, with such Neoplatonists as Porphyry and Jamblichus.
oikonomia: Greek term derived from “house,” and meaning “the ordering of a household” in every respect.

oikos: Greek noun meaning “house” and “household”; the basic societal unit of the Hellenistic world, including kin relations and slaves, along with clients and friends.

oikoumene: Greek noun meaning “inhabited world,” often used synonymously with “empire.”

omens: Signs, usually regarded as of supernatural origin, that alert humans to the significance of events (storms, portents, dreams).

orge: Greek noun meaning “anger/wrath.” Not simply the emotion, but the verbal and physical expression of the emotion, considered as a vice.

paideia: Greek noun meaning both “education” and “culture,” indicating the close connection between the two in ancient perspective.

paraenesis: Greek noun meaning “advice.” Used with reference to the moral advising appropriate in father-son relationships.

parrhesia: Greek noun meaning “freedom of speech” or “boldness”; one of the main ideals of the Cynic tradition but admired widely as a sign of courage.

Patriarch: Term used in Judaism for the ancestors of the people, specifically Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Pharisees: Jewish sect renowned for its close attention to the interpretation of the law, associated by Josephus with the Stoic philosophy.

philargyria: Greek noun meaning “love of money,” one of the fundamental disordered passions.

philedonia: Greek noun meaning “love of pleasure,” the lowest and basest form of vice, often polemically asserted of the Epicureans.

philia: Greek noun meaning “friendship,” a topic considered worthy of close philosophical attention.

philodoxia: Greek noun meaning “love of glory” or the disordered desire for notoriety and fame, the excessive form of philotimia, “love of honor,” which is good.

phthonos: Greek noun meaning “envy”; in contrast to zelos, which can be positive, envy is always a vice and a despicable one.

physics: In ancient philosophy, the study of the natural world, including cosmology and what now would be called theology, the relation of the gods to material reality.

Platonism: The philosophical tradition deriving from Plato and moving through several stages. In the Roman period, Middle Platonism is dominant.

pneuma: Greek noun meaning “breath” or “spirit.” In Stoicism, the divine reason that is immanent in the visible world in the form of air and fire.

polis: Greek noun meaning “city-state”; the root for “politics,” as well as “cosmopolitan” (citizen of the world).

prokope: Greek noun meaning “progress,” a key concept in a character ethics that includes the possibility of incremental growth and improvement.

pronoia: Greek noun meaning “providence.” The key debate between Epicureans and others is whether the gods were involved in the governance of the world and whether that governance had meaning.

protreptic: A form of deliberative rhetoric in which someone is urged to follow a certain mode of life.

religio: Latin noun meaning “religion,” which includes the public acts of the state as much as private feeling and behavior.

Saducees: One of the Jewish sects, associated with the high-priestly families and connected by Josephus to the Epicureans.

Septuagint: Translation of the Jewish Scripture (Torah) into Greek in Alexandria, circa 250 B.C.E.
sige: Greek noun meaning “absolute silence.” Associated with the refusal to speak about the Mysteries or the Pythagorean teachings.

skepticism: The opposite tendency to dogmatism in philosophy, taking one of two forms. Skeptics either deny altogether the possibility of knowing truth or think that only probable judgments can be made.

sophistic: Associated with the sophists. Negatively, meaning an unprincipled cleverness in argument. Neutrally, meaning rhetorical, as in “Second Sophistic.”

sophist: A public speaker, usually for pay; a rhetorician. Polemically, someone with little regard for truth.

Stoicism: The philosophical school deriving from Zeno and Cleanthes, with a strong emphasis on personal morality, which dominated in the Roman period.

syncretism: In religion, the merging and identification of deities, as is possible in a polytheistic framework.

teleology: In ethics, an approach that emphasizes the ends or the goals of human actions.

theos: Greek noun meaning “a god” or “God.”

Therapeutae: A group of Jewish contemplatives in Egypt described by Philo of Alexandria.

threskeia: Greek noun meaning “religion” in the broadest sense, including activities both public and private.

topoi: Greek noun for “place” in the plural, referring to the collections of standard treatments of rhetorical subjects (see loci).

Torah: The Jewish Scripture, with specific reference to the five books ascribed to Moses.

tyche: Greek noun meaning “chance.” In the Hellenistic period, opposed to providence.

zelos: Greek noun meaning either “jealousy,” in which case it is equivalent to envy and bad, or “zeal,” in which case it equals “emulation” and is good.
Bibliography

Essential Reading:
With few exceptions, the ancient primary texts that form the substance of this course are most easily found in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–). This series of more than 500 volumes contains original language and translated versions of ancient Greek and Latin writers. Look here under author for the writings of Cicero, Seneca, Lucian, Julian, Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom, Marcus Aurelius, and Plutarch, as well as Josephus and Philo.


Supplementary Reading:


Anna, J. The Morality of Happiness. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Asserting that ancient ethics makes sense as an argument concerning means rather than ends, Anna posits happiness as the goal and enters into the debate between schools concerning the means.

Arnold, E. V. Roman Stoicism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911. An older survey, but one that still has considerable merit as an introduction to the Roman moralists.

Balsdon, J. P. V. D. Roman Women: Their History and Habits. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962. Although more work has been done subsequently, this serves to inform the reader on a subject the moralists (patriarchal as they are) neglect, namely half of humanity.


Bonner, S. F. Education in Ancient Rome from the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. More recent than Marrou (see below) and more tightly focused on our period, this book covers all the important dimensions of the educational process.


Copelston, F. *A History of Philosophy*. Volume 1: *Greece and Rome*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1962. Although I use it to make a point in my final presentation, this multivolume history of philosophy from its beginnings to the present is remarkable for its competence and consistency.

Dill, S. *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*. New York: World Publishing Company, 1956. This is a reprint of the 1904 publication by one of those marvelous classical scholars whose like we shall not see again. A rich and vivid portrayal of the culture in the period defined by the title.


Galinsky, K. *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. With a sharp focus on the early empire, this treatment provides a rich cultural matrix for studying the philosophers of the period.


Hersbell, J. P. “The Stoicism of Epictetus: Twentieth Century Perspectives.” *ANRW* II, 36.3:2, 148–163. As the title suggests, this essay considers specifically the mix of Stoic and Cynic elements in Epictetus.

Hijmans, B. L. *Askesis: Notes on Epictetus’ Educational System*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959. Attention is paid to the elements of practice and “training” undergone by the students who were taught by “that marvellous old man.”


Shackleton Bailey, D. R. *Cicero*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971. A biography that is distinguished by its heavy use of the letters, providing a remarkably intimate and circumstantial picture of the statesman.

Strem, G. G. *The Life and Teaching of Lucius Annaeus Seneca*. New York: Vantage Press, 1981. A popularly written introduction that focuses mainly on his life but also summarizes his teaching according to topics.


