



# **Stoic Therapy: Self-Care and Care for Others**

PHIL 210, class 20



# Living a Good Life and Being a Good Person

THE GOOD LIFE = A MORAL LIFE?

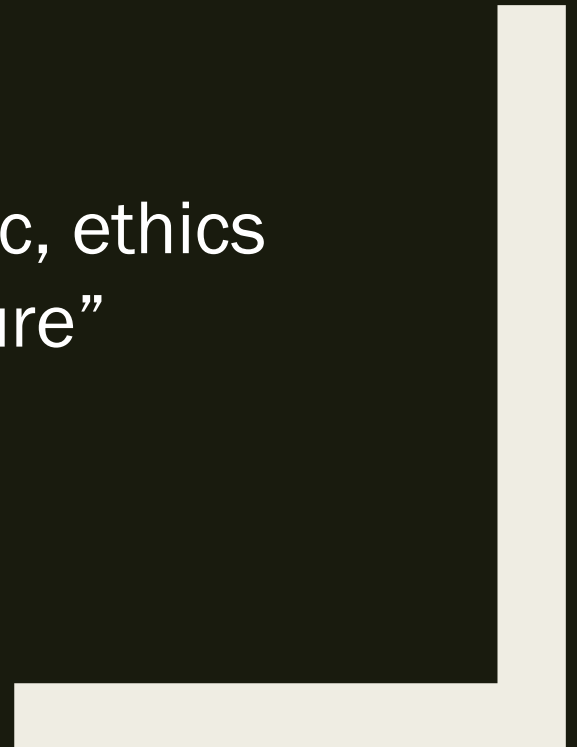
Key question: to live a good life, do you need to be a good person?

} virtue ethicists' answer:  
YES!

	virtue ethicists?	how to live well
CONFUCIANS	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ benevolence</li><li>→ righteousness</li><li>→ propriety</li><li>→ wisdom</li></ul>	cultivate feelings ritual reflection
ARISTOTLE	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ moderation</li><li>→ courage</li><li>→ justice, etc.</li><li>→ (practical) wisdom</li></ul>	cultivate reason (and desires) habituation/action external goods (esp. friendship)
DAOISTS	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ flexibility</li><li>→ open-mindedness</li><li>→ freedom</li></ul>	occupy meta-perspective loosen commitments wander/play
STOICS	YES → virtue is the <u>only</u> good virtue = wisdom	live in harmony with nature focus on "what's up to us"

## RECAP FROM LAST CLASS

- The Stoic system: physics, logic, ethics
- “Living in agreement with nature”
- The Stoic Sage





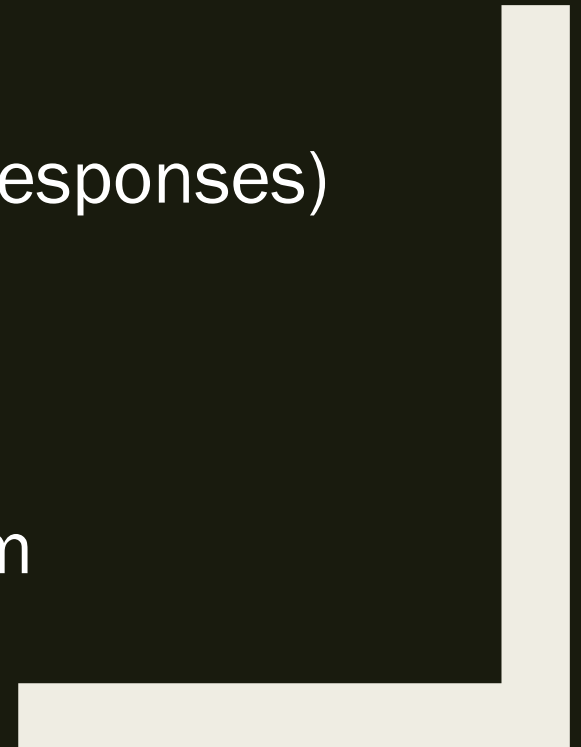
# Stoicism on the Human Good

## “Living in Agreement with Nature”

- From the standpoint of physics (study of nature)
  - sometimes conventional goods can be bad
  - the only thing that benefits us unconditionally is virtue
  - so living in agreement with nature = living virtuously
- From the standpoint of logic (study of reason)
  - to follow nature, we must attend to our impressions
  - the human power that deals with impressions is reason
  - this is the only thing under our direct control
  - so nature requires attending to what's under our control
- Connect physics with logic
  - the Sage lives in full agreement with nature
  - uses reason correctly in evaluating impressions
  - acts with knowledge
  - so virtue = wisdom = responding well to impressions

# OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S CLASS

- Stoicism vs. Epicureanism
- Challenges for Stoicism (and responses)
- The Sage vs. the Progressor
- Stoics on fate and free will
- Positive vs. negative emotions
- Further challenges for Stoicism
- Modern Stoicism



## Epicureanism

- materialist metaphysics
  - all being is material (atoms and void)
  - no intrinsic order, just chance
- hedonistic ethics
  - pleasure is the only good
  - true pleasure = absence of pain
    - so not a Calliclean hedonism
  - look to the human infant



- political minimalists

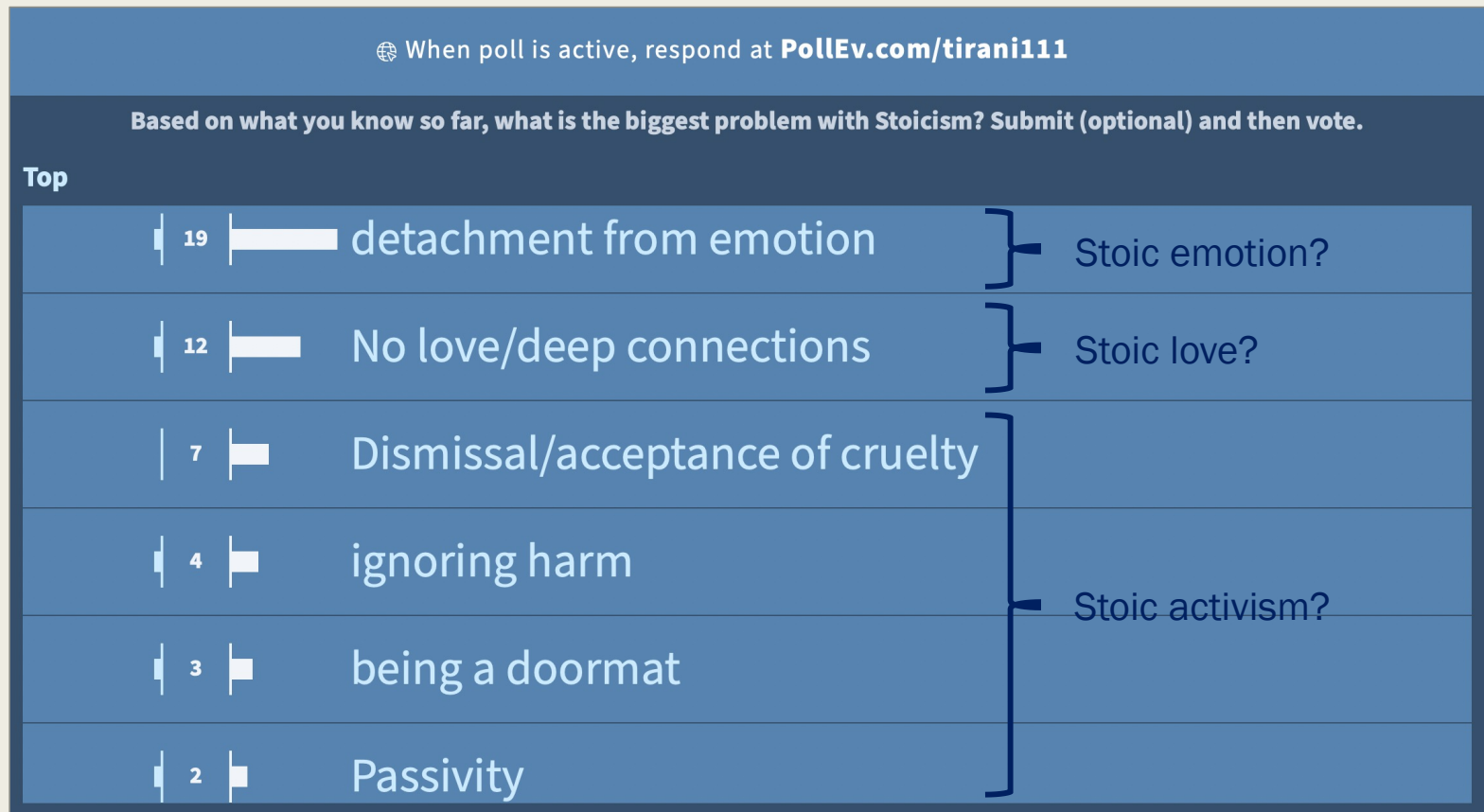
## Stoicism

- materialist metaphysics
  - all being is material (active and passive)
  - intrinsic order, pervaded by reason (*logos*)
- virtue ethics
  - virtue is the only good
  - virtue = wisdom = power of choice
    - capacity to respond well to impressions
  - look again at the human infant
    - in terms of natural affinity (*oikeiōsis*)
    - seeks self-preservation, not pleasure
    - in maturing, pain is naturally endured



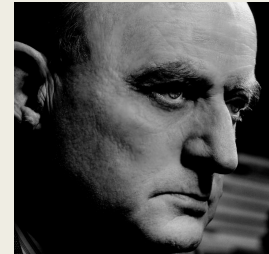
- political maximalists

# Last Week's Poll Results

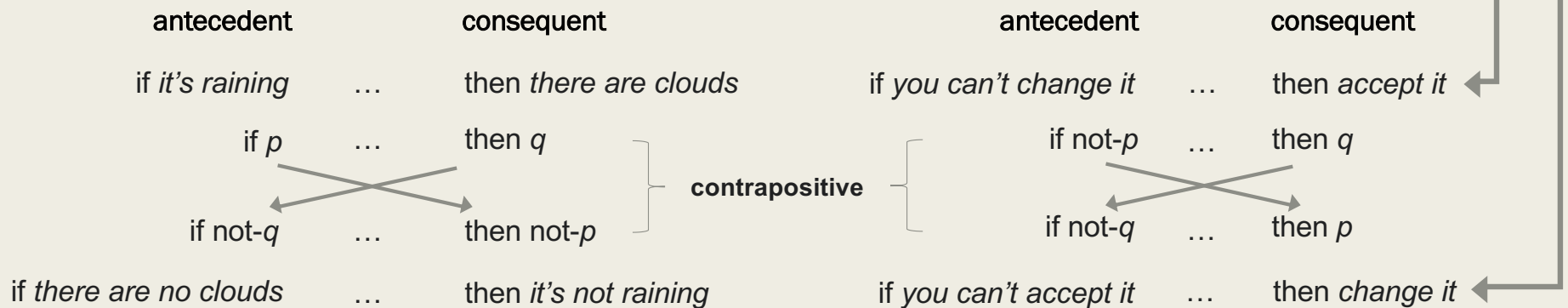


# Who's the Stoic?

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ..."  
– Reinhold Niebuhr



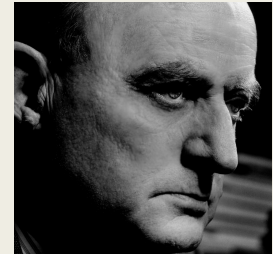
"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."  
– Angela Davis



# Who's the Stoic?

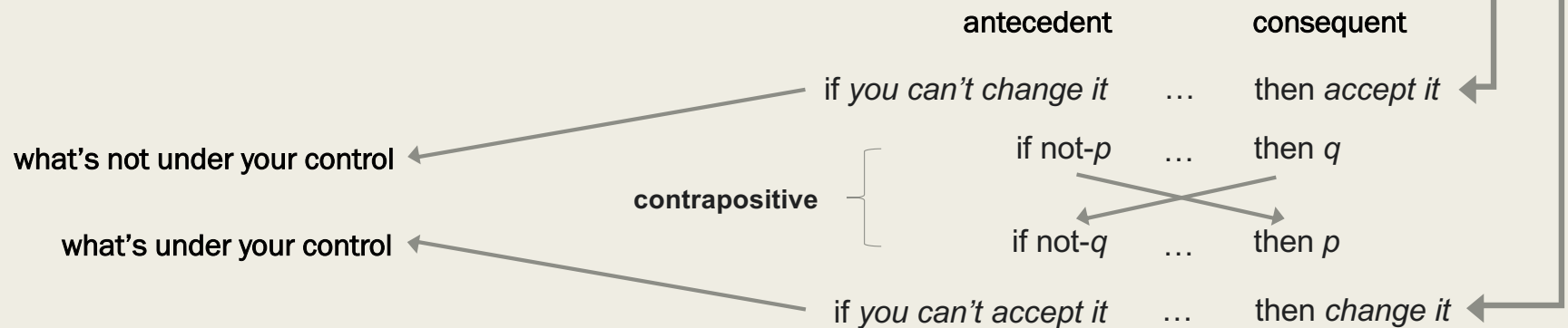
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# Stoic Activism

## “Wishing With Reservation”



- Is the Stoic excessively passive?
  - no: do what you can
  - but with a “reserve clause”
- “I’ll achieve this, if nothing prevents it”
  - if you’re prevented, adjust efforts
  - adapt to new situation
  - convert obstacles into opportunities

“Confine yourself to motivation and disinclination, and apply these attitudes lightly, with reservation and without straining.” (Epictetus, *Handbook* 2)

# Stoic Activism

## “Wishing With Reservation”



“The ruling power within us, when it is in line with nature, takes up a stance towards events that enables it always to adapt easily to what is presented to it. It is not attached to any specific material, but aims at achieving its objectives with reservation. When it comes up against an obstacle, it converts this into material for itself, like fire, when this masters the things that fall into it. A small lamp would have been extinguished by them but a blazing fire quickly appropriates the things thrown into it and consumes them and uses those very things to grow still higher.”  
(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.1)

# Stoic Emotions

- Emotions are products of our beliefs and judgements
  - dwelling on outcomes leads to anger, fear, etc.
  - focus instead on what's "up to us," i.e., virtue
  - faulty judgements → unhealthy emotions
  - wise judgements → healthy emotions
- Healthy emotions and desires (*eupatheia*)
  - **joy** in what's truly good
    - delight
    - mirth / good cheer
    - contentment / tranquility
  - **caution/discretion** directed at what's truly bad
    - reverence / awe
    - respect
  - **wishing/willing** directed at what's truly good
    - good will
    - affection



- Stoics also acknowledge reflex-like emotions
  - involuntary and outside our control
  - still: we can choose how to respond
  - can choose whether to dwell on them
  - decide not to have them define us

# Summary of the Stoic Sage

- Wise
  - responds well to impressions
- Politically engaged
  - cares for all humankind
- Wishes with reservation
  - focuses on efforts rather than outcomes
- Handles adversity well
  - keeps calm; carries on
- Emotionally healthy
  - affected by what's truly good/bad
- “Unflappable”



**KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
GET  
STOIC**

# The Sage vs. the Progressor

- Only the Sage is virtuous
  - the rest of us are all equally vicious
  - but note: “vice” = cognitive weakness/deficiency
  - we can still be Progressors!
- How to be a Stoic Progressor
  - don’t focus on outcomes and impressions
  - focus on how you judge and respond internally
  - “the inner self” = “will” = capacity for rational choice
    - this is under your control
  - money, job, fame, victory, etc. are “indifferents”
    - these things are outside your control
  - perform duties in line with the roles you have
    - e.g., promote patients’ health, protect country, etc.
    - accords with our nature as human/social beings
  - but be prepared to give all of this up and carry on



 **Poll locked.** Responses not accepted.



# Who best illustrates the qualities of the Stoic Sage in the Potterverse?

Harry Potter

Hermione Granger

Ron Weasley

Severus Snape

Albus Dumbledore

Minerva McGonagall

Remus Lupin

Sirius Black

Start the presentation to see live content. For screen share software, share the entire screen. Get help at [pollev.com/app](https://pollev.com/app)

# The Stoic Sage Reconsidered

Albus Dumbledore,  
*Harry Potter and the  
Sorcerer's Stone* (2001)



Marcus Aurelius,  
*Gladiator* (2000)



RIP Richard Harris

# The Stoic Sage Reconsidered

It Is Our Choices  
That Show What  
We Truly Are  
♦ Far More Than ♦  
Our Abilities

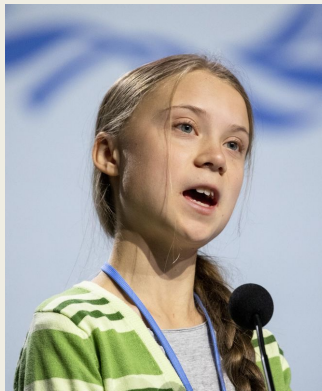
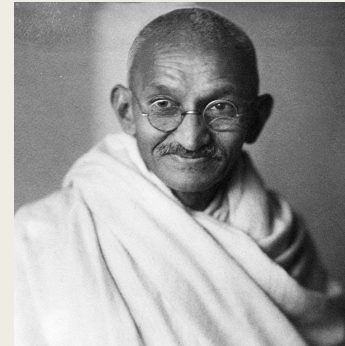


ALL WE HAVE TO DECIDE  
IS WHAT TO DO WITH THE  
TIME THAT IS GIVEN US

# The Stoic Sage Reconsidered

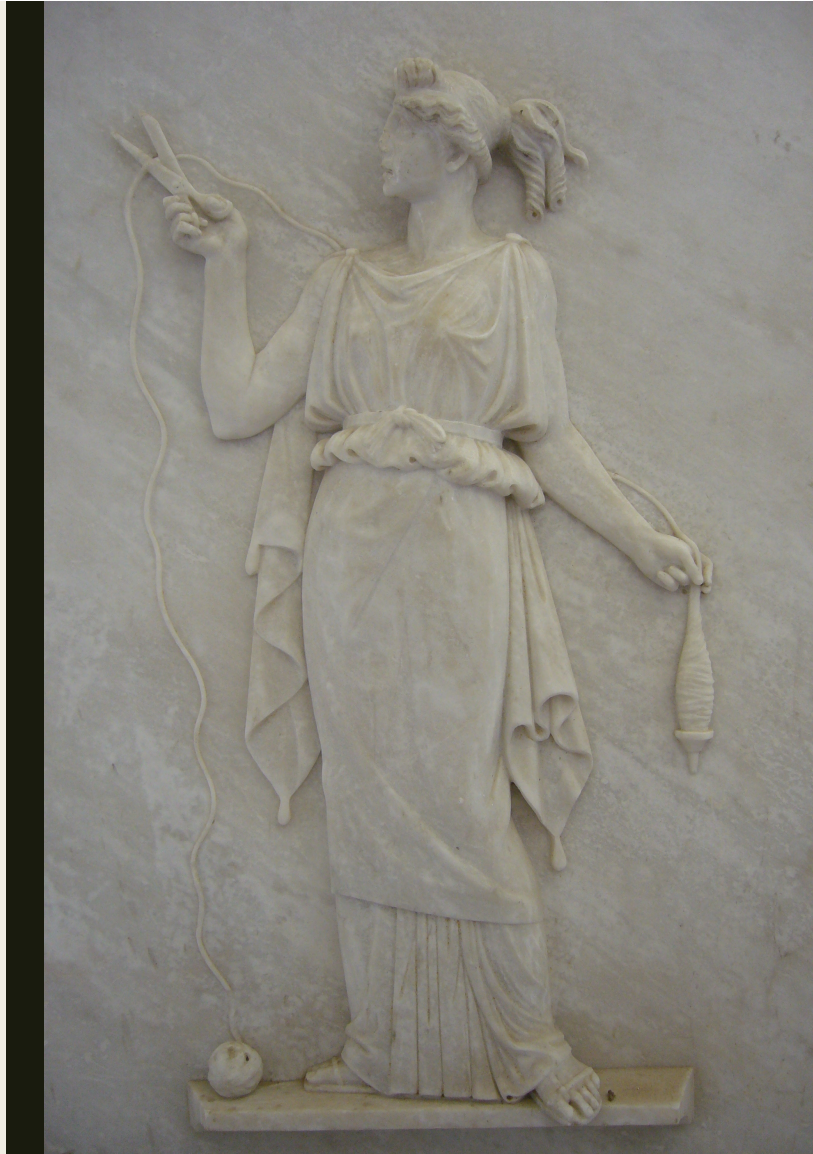
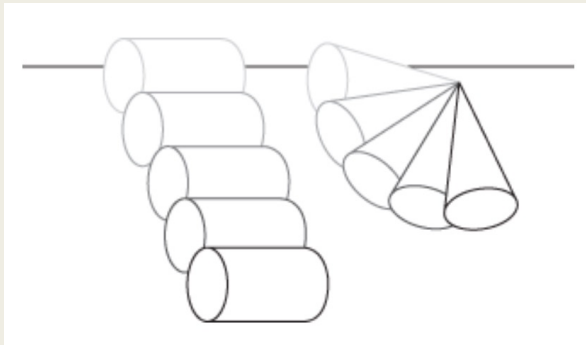


# The Stoic Sage Reconsidered



# The Problem of Free Will

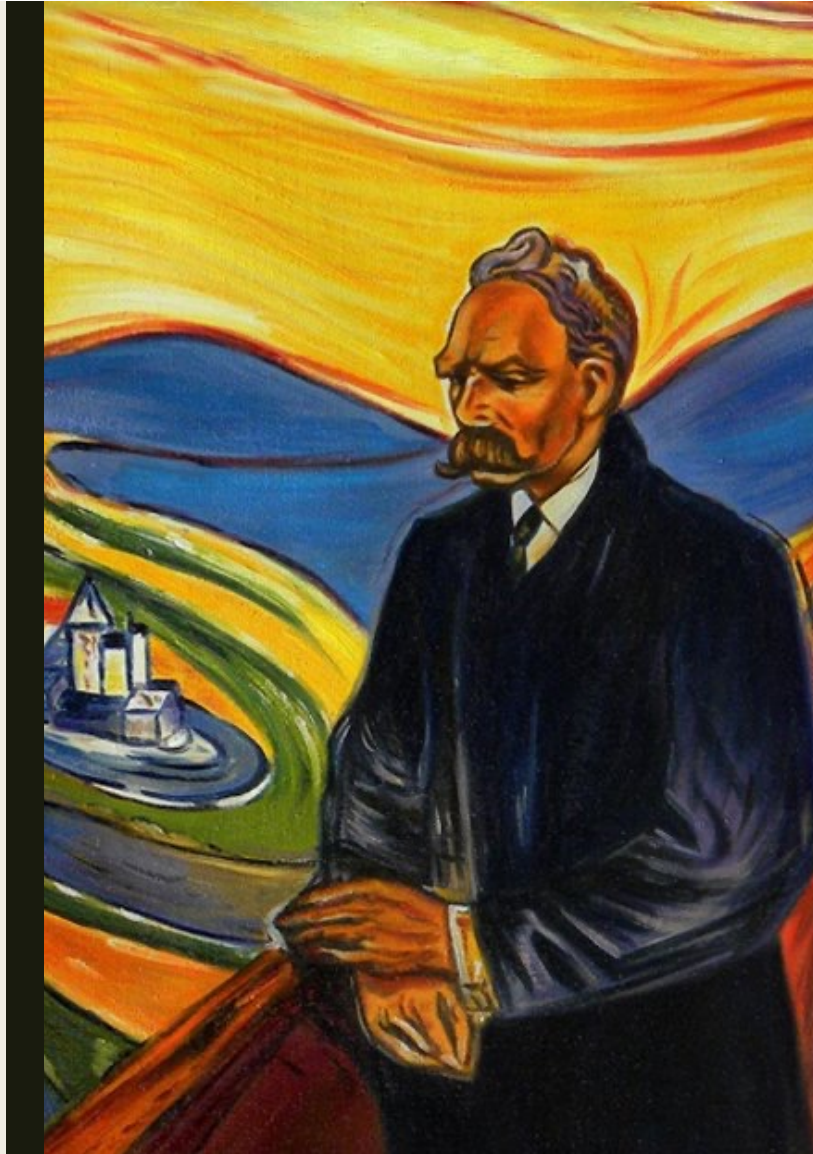
- Recall the Stoics on nature
  - nature is providentially ordered
  - so all things are fated
  - how is free will possible?
- Stoics promote a “compatibilist” view
  - believing in both fate and free will isn't inconsistent



# “Amor Fati”

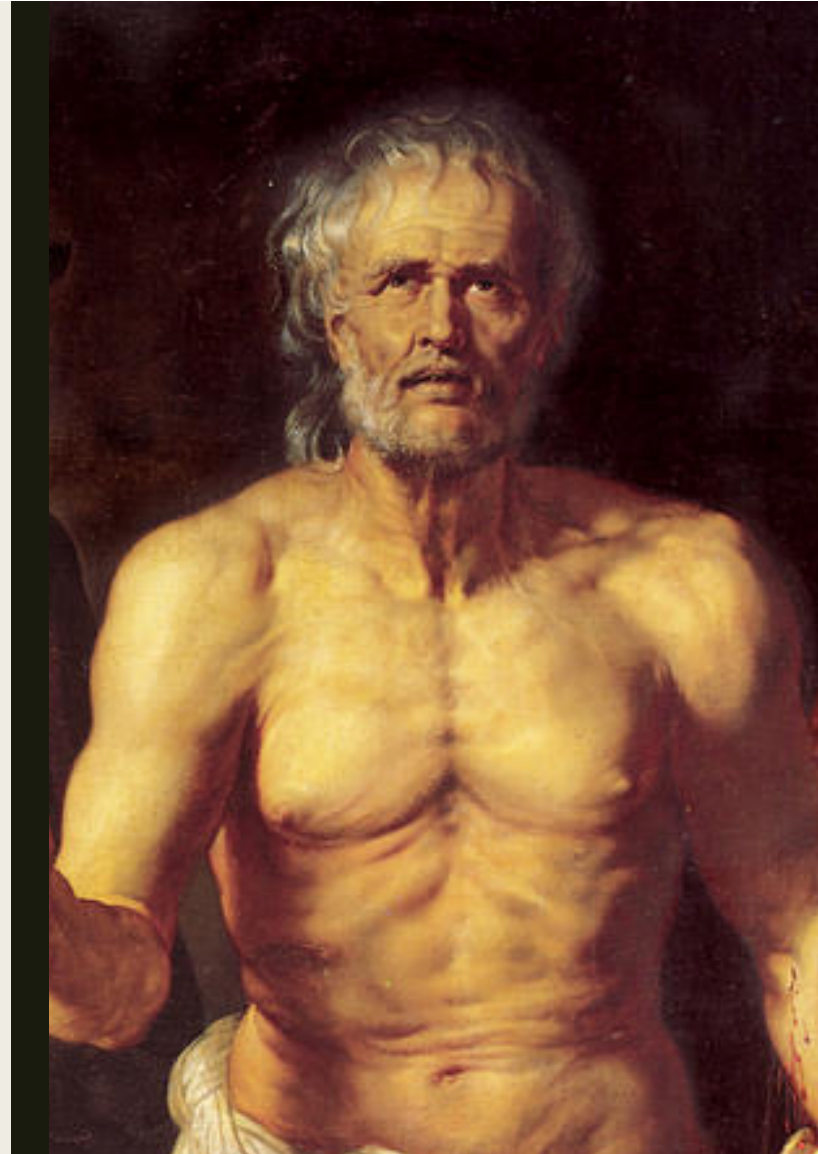
“Don’t ask for things to happen as you would like them to, but wish them to happen as they actually do, and you will be all right.” (Epictetus, *Handbook* 8)

“My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it ... but *love* it.”  
(Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 10)



# Challenges for Stoicism

- Does Stoic ethics need Stoic physics?
  - not according to Lawrence Becker, *A New Stoicism*:  
“Following nature means following the facts. It means getting the facts about the physical and social world we inhabit, and the facts about our situation in it [...] before we deliberate about normative matters. It means facing those facts—accepting them for exactly what they are, no more and no less—before we draw normative conclusions from them.” (Becker, *A New Stoicism*)
- The value of external goods
  - compare with Aristotle
  - egalitarianism at the cost of realism?
- The value of friendship / the possibility of love  
“What is my object in making a friend? To have someone to be able to die for, someone I may follow into exile, someone for whose life I may put myself up as security and pay the price as well.” (Seneca, *Letter IX*)

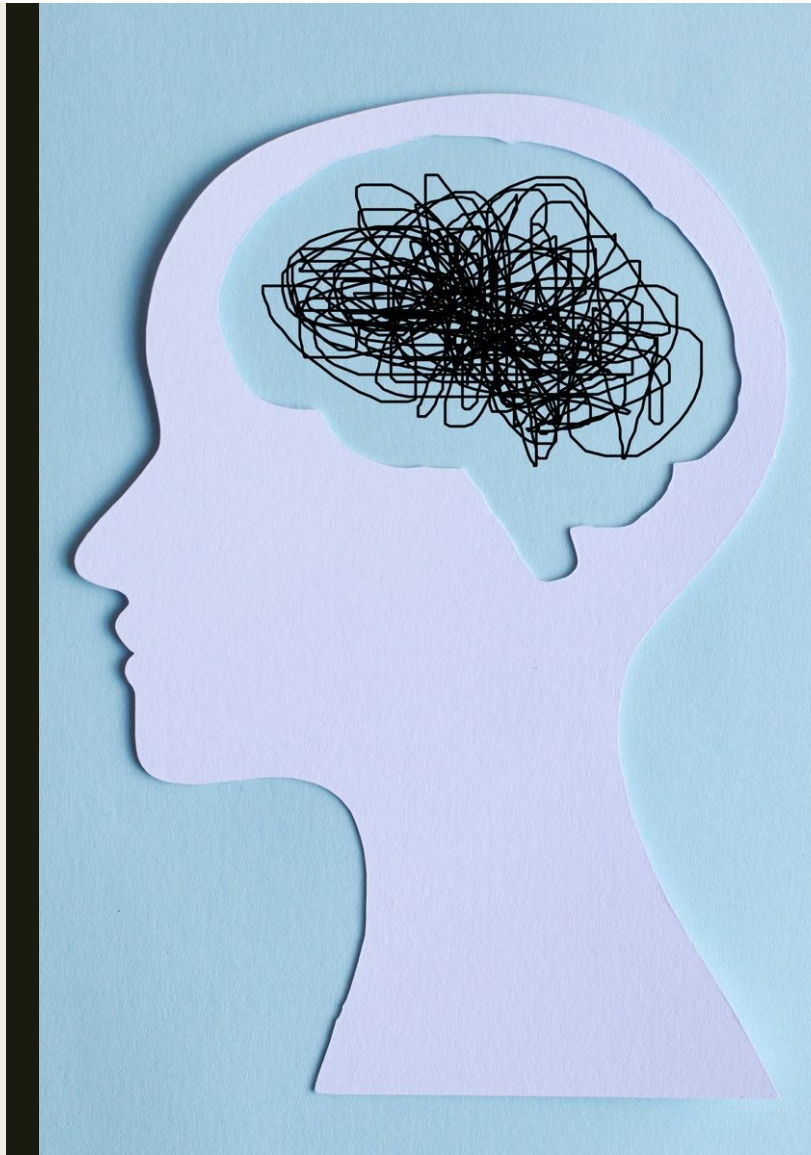


# The Influence of Stoicism

- Serenity prayer  
“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”
- Cognitive behavioral therapy



“The philosophical origins of cognitive therapy can be traced back to the Stoic philosophers.” (Beck et al., *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*)

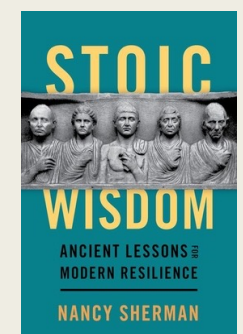
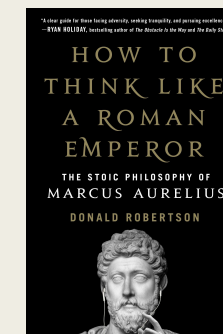
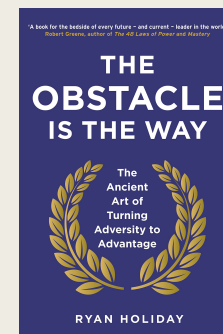
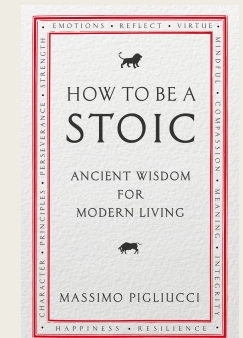
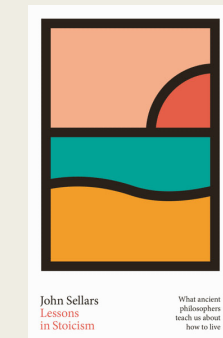
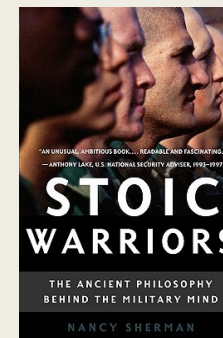
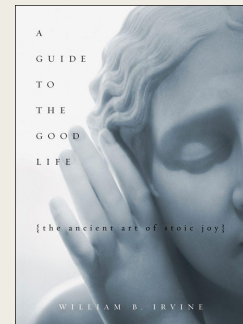
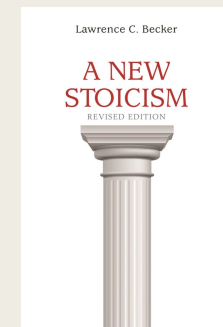
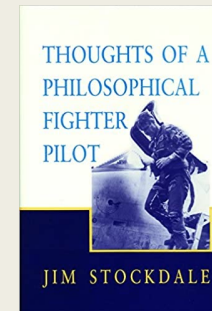


# Modern Stoicism

- Updating Stoicism
  - view nature as less teleologically ordered
  - allow for degrees of virtue
  - allow for degrees of control

- Modern Stoicism movement
  - Stoicon and International Stoic Week

“In 2014, research findings for Stoic Week showed that on average Life Satisfaction increased for participants by 16%, flourishing by 10%, positive emotions by 11%, and there was a 16% reduction in negative emotions. This confirmed previous findings, including data collected from a 2014 Stoic Mindfulness and Resilience Training (SMRT) course, showing that when exercises were extended to 4 weeks, Life Satisfaction increased by 27% and negative emotions decreased by 23%.”



- Coming up
  - Live Like a Stoic week
  - Enjoy Thanksgiving!
  - Guest lecture by Céline Leboeuf on existentialism
  - Stay tuned for details on:
    - Classes after break
    - Final debate on Mon., December 6