

What is Philosophy?

Ancient Greek Philosophy

Main figures: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – known for:

1. Conceptual Precision
2. Logical analysis and logical arguments (vs. appeals to emotion)
3. Comprehensive worldviews, including:

Physics: accounts of the natural world, the gods, soul and body

Ethics: accounts of the best human life and the virtues needed to live it

Hellenistic & Roman Philosophy (early 4th c. BC – 2nd c. AD)

Main movements (“schools”): Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Skepticism

Ultimate goal of life: *happiness*, long-term flourishing (vs. mere feeling)

- Usually understood as tranquility (freedom from “disturbance”)
- Associated with freedom and self-sufficiency (vs. “slavery” and dependence)

Followers of the same philosophical school sometimes lived in their own communities

Over time, increasing focus on practical questions of “ethics”

Philosophy in the Modern Period (17th-19th c.)

Increasingly “academic” (vs. a way of living)

Increasingly distinguished from both theology and the sciences

Still concerned with the basic assumptions of the sciences

- Examples: What is time? What is a biological species? An emotion?

Still concerned with conceptual precision and logical argument

Philosophy from the 20th c. to the Present

Growing specialization within philosophy

Fewer philosophers develop comprehensive worldviews

Most philosophers work mainly in one or more subfields:

- Logic, philosophy of science, ethics, history of philosophy, etc.

Stoicism

- Began in the 3rd c. BC (Epictetus is a representative of later Stoicism)
- Influenced Christian, Islamic, and Jewish theology, though often indirectly
- Influenced early modern philosophy, especially Descartes and Spinoza
- Examples of present-day influence:
 - Philosophy: Lawrence Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton UP, 1998)
 - Cognitive & Cognitive-Behavioral Psychotherapy: Ronald Pies, *Everything Has Two Handles: The Stoic's Guide to the Art of Living* (Hamilton Books, 2008)
 - Military Education:
 - James Stockdale, “The Stoic Warrior’s Triad” (1995)
 - Nancy Sherman, *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind* (Oxford UP, 2005)

Epictetus (d. 135 AD)

- Grew up as a slave during the Roman empire
- After being freed, became a famous teacher of Stoicism
- Apparently never wrote anything
- Teachings compiled by Flavius Arrianus (alias Arrian)
- Main work by Epictetus: the *Discourses*
- The *Handbook*: a highly condensed version of the *Discourses*
- Focused primarily on ethics, secondarily on physics (including theology)
- Addressed his teachings to ordinary people

Key Distinction: What is Up to Us vs. What is Not Up to Us

- Our mental states: our opinions, judgments, desires, aversions, emotions, and virtues or vices
- *By nature* free, unhindered, unimpeded, our own
- Within our control
- Our freedom from harm and disturbance
- Everything else: our possessions, jobs, reputations, and even our own bodies
- Enslaved, hindered, weak, not our own
- Beyond our control
- Our own deaths

Theory of Emotions and Value

The ideal state of mind = *apatheia*, freedom from passion (vs. emotion or feeling)

Whatever is *good* is beneficial under *all* circumstances

Only our own virtue is good, and our own virtue is up to us

Other things might have instrumental value but are still “indifferent” (not good or bad)

Passions

- Always irrational
- Reflect the erroneous judgment that something indifferent is good or bad
- Examples: desire, exuberance, fear, grief, anger, envy

Good Emotional States

- Reflect rational judgments about what is good and bad
- Do not cause disturbance
- Examples: wish, joy, caution
- No rational counterparts of grief, anger, envy

The Central Argument

(from *Handbook*, sect. 8 & sect. 2)

- P1. If you want your life to go well [= If you want to be happy], things must happen as you want.
- P2. How things happen is not up to you.
- C. Therefore, you should either (a) want things to happen as they do happen or (b) want nothing.

Premises stated elsewhere:

- P3. In fact, you do want your life to go well. (Everyone wants to be happy.)
- P4. Wanting or not wanting something *is* up to you.

A problem with (b): Will your life go well if you want nothing at all?

No, only (a)—the ideal state which philosophers alone attain—truly makes your life go well.

But the conclusion still follows—because you must attain (b) in order to “make progress” towards (a), and at least (b) will ensure that you are not “unfortunate.”