

Philosophy: Stoicism, Old and New | The 2026 Walter and Susan Schenker Seminar in the Humanities

Faculty: Jacob Klein, Professor of Philosophy at Colgate University

Week One: July 5 – 11, 2026

Schedule: Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

Location: Kennedy Hall, room 101

Dear ‘Philosophical Stoicism’ student,

Our course is just three weeks away, and I look forward to meeting you. We will spend a stimulating week discussing an outlook that persisted for some five hundred years in antiquity, profoundly shaping subsequent currents of philosophical thought. Stoicism is moreover undergoing a surprising contemporary revival, inspiring intense interest both within and beyond academia.

Our central focus will be the ancient sources themselves. In keeping with Tad Brennan’s original template, however, we will place these sources in conversation with contemporary popular discussion of Stoicism and with those who regard the ancient view as a source of insights that remain relevant today. At the close of our week together we will ask whether these appropriations adequately capture the ancient view and to what extent the ancient outlook remains useful and viable in the modern world.

It may be helpful to consider the ancient texts to be discussed as falling into three broad categories. There are, first, (1) the literary and philosophical texts that influenced the original Greek Stoics and provide valuable background for understanding the origins of the Stoic thought. These especially include the works of Homer, Heraclitus, Plato, and Xenophon. A second group of texts comprises (2) our evidence for the views of the original Greek Stoics who lectured and taught in ancient Athens. Here our sources are fragmentary and complex but highly compelling. Our aim will be to get a general sense of the evidential record and to consider key examples of the evidence that survives. Finally, we will consider (3) later and better-known authors in both the Greek and Latin traditions, focusing on Seneca and Cicero along with the “imperial Stoics,” Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

I will introduce each of our sessions together with a presentation of guiding themes and questions, as well as, when relevant, an explanation of important terms and philosophical distinctions. We will then consider individual texts in smaller groups before reconvening for class-wide discussion in the final part of each session.

I will be in touch in the coming weeks with additional details about our syllabus and will post some optional readings and resources in advance of our first class. If you have any questions or concerns in the meanwhile, please feel free to contact me at jklein@colgate.edu. I look forward to an enjoyable and illuminating week in July.

Best wishes and see you soon.

Jacob