

## NORMS AND NATURE IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

**Place:** University of Gothenburg.

**Time:** Fall of 2024, weeks 47-48. (The course is a 7.5-ECTS course, equivalent to five weeks of full-time study, or 200 hours, but the teaching is condensed to two weeks.)

Each week we will begin on Monday afternoon (14.15), and then meet at 10.15-12.00 and at 14.15-16.00 on Tuesday and Wednesday. The first week, our last meeting will be between 10.15 and 12.00 on Thursday. Depending on the number of student presentations towards the end of the course (which will depend on the number of course participants), we will end the second week either on Thursday (at 12 or 16) or, at the latest, on Friday at 12. A detailed schedule will be distributed approximately one month before the course starts to those who have signed up for it.

**Teacher:** [Frans Svensson](mailto:frans.svensson@gu.se) (frans.svensson@gu.se)

**Course description:** Following Julia Annas, we might say that “the mainstream of ancient ethical theory” starts out from “[t]he assumption ... that each of us has ... an ultimate or overarching end in terms of which we make sense of our everyday actions and our longer-term priorities” (Introduction to Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. xvii). It is furthermore assumed that as far as the name of this end is concerned, it is *eudaimonia* (usually translated into English as happiness). But the philosophers disagree in important ways about what constitutes happiness, and, therefore, about what is required of us to obtain it. In this course, we will first consider some crucial aspects of Aristotle’s view about these things in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and then how the views of the epicureans and of the stoics differ in those respects both from Aristotle and from each other.

The course will consist of two parts. We begin with 8 or 9 seminars led by the teacher. The second part will consist of seminars where course participants present and frame the discussion of an important paper about some topic in the course (which papers, as well as who will present them, will be decided one or two weeks in advance).

**Course requirements:** In addition to coming well prepared to all seminars, participants must:

- Present and initiate a discussion of a paper relevant to the course.
- Write a course essay (between 3000 and 5000 words in length).

**Contact and application:** While the course is organized within the framework of the *Norms and Normativity* research school (a collaboration between the philosophy departments at the universities of Gothenburg, Stockholm, and Uppsala), it is open to all doctoral students in philosophy in Sweden. Applications, as well as any questions that you may have about the course, should be sent to Frans Svensson ([frans.svensson@gu.se](mailto:frans.svensson@gu.se)). **Please send your application before Monday 4 November.**

### Readings:

(Please note that the list of [Further readings](#) below is incomplete. A full list – which will include papers to be presented and discussed in the second part of the course – will be distributed approximately one month in advance to those who have signed up for the course.)

Primary sources:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Focus especially on Books 1-3, 6-7, and 10.  
There are several good translations available in English, but I would suggest using either Roger Crisp's (published by Cambridge University Press) or Terence Irwin's (Hackett).
- Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*:
  - (i) Book 10.117-154 on Epicurus' ethics (paragraphs 121-135 consists of Epicurus' famous letter on ethics to Menoeceus).
  - (ii) Book 7.84-131 on Stoic ethics.

There are at least a couple of different English translations available, but I would suggest using the one by Pamela Mensch (Oxford University Press).

- Cicero, *De Finibus (On Final / Moral Ends)*:
  - (i) Book 1 contains a (not very charitable, perhaps) presentation of Epicurus' ethics, and book 2 a critique of it.
  - (ii) Book 3 on Stoic ethics.

Here I suggest using Raphael Woolf's translation, which includes an excellent introduction by Julia Annas (Cambridge University Press).

Further readings (below I have listed a few examples of texts that may guide your reading and thinking about the primary texts):

- Annas, J. 1993: *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press). Especially chapters 1-4, 7, 16, 18-20. (A masterful and very influential treatment of ancient moral philosophy after Socrates and Plato.)
- Gill, C. 2022: *Learning to Live Naturally: Stoic Ethics and Its Modern Significance* (Oxford University Press). Especially Part I (chapters 1-3). (A very detailed and interesting scholarly account of the basic ideas in Stoic ethics.)
- Irwin, T. 2007: *The Development of Ethics. Volume One: From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford University Press). Chapters 2 (Socrates), 5 (Plato), 6-9 (Aristotle), 11 (Epicurus), 12-13 (the Stoics).
- O'Keefe, T. 2010: *Epicureanism* (Acumen). (An excellent overview of epicurean philosophy.)
- Sellars, J. 2020: *Lessons in Stoicism* (Penguin). (A very short and extremely accessible introduction to the basic ideas in Stoic thinking.)
- Striker, G. 1996: "Antipater, or the art of living." In *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press). (Interesting discussion of the Stoic notion of the art (or craft or expertise) of living.)
- Striker, G. 1996: "Epicurean Hedonism." In *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press).