

Stoicism, Scepticism, & Epicureanism: Philosophies of Life

Final Exam

Duration: 2 Hours

Note: All questions are of equal value.

Scoring

Each of the following six questions is worth a total of 5 points. Answers will be graded according to the following rubric:

- 5** Clear, careful, accurate, nuanced & insightful answer, supported by multiple pieces of evidence that are thoughtfully woven together and balanced against each other
- 4** Clear, careful, & accurate answer, supported by multiple pieces of evidence
- 3** Clear, accurate, but simplistic answer, supported by a minimal amount of evidence
- 2** Clear but inaccurate answer, which misrepresents or misunderstands the view in question
- 1** Unclear or extremely inaccurate answer
- 0** No answer

PART I: Creative applications

For each of the following three questions, write a short essay answering one of the available prompts. Remember that there is no single “right” answer to any of these prompts; the key is how you develop and support your answer. Wherever possible, explain your answers with reference to the specific ideas and principles of the relevant philosophical school.

Question 1: Epicureanism

Answer one of the following three prompts.

(1A) Dating advice You’ve been single for a while now and are wondering whether you should start dating. What would an Epicurean tell you to do? (How should you date? Whom should you date? Why should you date? Or should you not bother dating at all?)

(1B) Why recycle? Let’s face it: recycling is a nuisance. It’d much easier and more convenient just to throw everything in the garbage. What would an Epicurean think about recycling? Would an Epicurean go through the hassle of recycling, or would they not bother? Why?

(1C) Free massages It’s your lucky day! You’ve just won a lifetime of free massages at your local spa. For the rest of your life, you can now get massages whenever you want, at no cost. How would an Epicurean think you should feel about winning this prize? (Is it a good thing, a bad thing, or indifferent? Will it make your life better, worse, or the same?)

Question 2: Stoicism

Answer one of the following three prompts.

(2A) Social media You're thinking about changing up how you use social media. What would a Stoic tell you to do? (What platforms should you use? What kind of posts should you make? How should you engage others? Or should you not use social media at all?)

(2B) Dementia You've just been informed that you have a rare and irreversible kind of dementia. Your body will remain in good health, but your mind will slowly deteriorate over the next three years, after which point you will not be able to think or mentally function in the way you can now. How would a Stoic think you should respond to receiving this diagnosis? (Is it a good thing, a bad thing, or indifferent? Will it make your life better, worse, or the same?)

(2C) Cat You're thinking about getting a cat. How would a Stoic advise you in this decision? (Take this in whatever direction you like!)

Question 3: Scepticism

Answer one of the following three prompts.

(3A) Spare change While walking down the street you notice someone sitting on the sidewalk asking everyone who passes for spare change. You happen to have a couple of loonies in your pocket. If you were a Sceptic, would you give this person your change? Why or why not?

(3B) Vegetarianism Your friend is a dedicated vegetarian and has been encouraging you to become a vegetarian too. She has presented a number of compelling reasons in support of vegetarianism: moral, environmental, political, and nutritional reasons. If you were a Sceptic, how would you approach this choice? Would you or wouldn't you become a vegetarian?

(3C) College dropout You're an aspiring Sceptic, and you've taken to heart the Sceptical idea that for every argument an equal argument is opposed. Because of this, it seems pointless to bother "learning" anything – what, after all, is there to learn? So you're now thinking of dropping out of university. What would a true Sceptic advise you to do? (Would they agree that getting an education is a waste of time? Or would they encourage you to stay in school? Why?)

PART II: Application critiques

For each of the following three questions, choose one of the following scenarios. **Each scenario may be chosen once and only once; you may not choose the same scenario for multiple questions.** Remember that there is no single “right” answer to any of these questions; the key is how you develop and support your answer. **The main focus of your answers should be on the “critique” and “reply” sections** (the second and third bullet points). Wherever possible, explain your answers with reference to the specific ideas and principles of the relevant philosophical school.

Part II Scenarios

(A) Traffic jam Helen is stuck in traffic. She took what is normally the fastest route to her destination, but today there’s been a major accident on the road and traffic is backed up for kilometres. She could’ve avoided all this traffic if she had simply checked her navigation app beforehand and known to take the alternate route, but she didn’t think to do this. Nonetheless, Helen, as a Hellenistic philosopher, remains calm and undisturbed.

(B) House fire Helen left her house in a rush this morning. She can’t remember if she turned off her stove before she left, but she decides to put the worry out of her mind. It’s just a silly worry, right? Wrong. When she finally returns home, she discovers that she *had* left the stove on, that this had ignited a fire, and that her entire house and all her possessions are now burned to the ground. Nonetheless, Helen, as a Hellenistic philosopher, remains calm and undisturbed.

(C) Plane crash Helen is on a plane flying across the Atlantic when she starts to notice some heavy turbulence. At first she thinks it’s nothing, but then the pilot gets on the loudspeaker and announces that the aircraft’s computer systems have stopped functioning and they’ve lost all control of the plane. There is nothing they can do: in a matter of minutes, the plane will crash into the middle of the ocean. Nonetheless, Helen, as a Hellenistic philosopher, remains calm and undisturbed.

Question 4: Epicureanism

Choose one of the above scenarios (A, B, or C). Now imagine that Helen is an Epicurean and write a short essay that addresses the following three points:

- First, briefly explain how Helen, as an Epicurean, is assessing her situation, such that she remains calm and undisturbed
- Then, present a critique of the Epicurean's assessment of this situation
- Lastly, explain how the Epicurean would reply to this critique

Question 5: Stoicism

Choose another of the above scenarios (i.e., a scenario other than the one you chose for Question 4). Now imagine that Helen is a Stoic and write a short essay that addresses the following three points:

- First, briefly explain how Helen, as an Stoic, is assessing her situation, such that she remains calm and undisturbed
- Then, present a critique of the Stoic's assessment of this situation
- Lastly, explain how the Stoic would reply to this critique

Question 6: Scepticism

Choose the remaining scenario (i.e., whichever scenario you did not choose for Question 4 or Question 5). Now imagine that Helen is a Sceptic and write a short essay that addresses the following three points:

- First, briefly explain how Helen, as an Sceptic, is assessing her situation, such that she remains calm and undisturbed
- Then, present a critique of the Sceptic's assessment of this situation
- Lastly, explain how the Sceptic would reply to this critique