**Philosophy 320L – Philosophy in Translation: Latin**

**Seneca’s *Letters[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Fall 2020

Syllabus

Jeffrey K. McDonough



**Important Information:**

Meeting: On-line, Fridays 1:45-3:00

Zoom link: [https://harvard.zoom.us/j/95848297698](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://harvard.zoom.us/j/95848297698&sa=D&source=calendar&usd=2&usg=AOvVaw2gAuM_crfjVQT2bGxTjigl)

Professor: Jeffrey McDonough

Email: jkmcdon@fas.harvard.edu

**Course Description:**

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was a Roman Stoic philosopher, essayist, celebrity, and renown playwright. Exorbitantly rich, he defended the virtues of poverty. Advisor to Nero, he insisted that political power is worthless. Maintaining that death is not evil, he was compelled to commit suicide in his sixty-ninth year. This course will meet weekly to read passages in Latin from one of Seneca’s most celebrated philosophical texts, his *Letters to Lucilius*. The course is open to undergraduates, graduates, and faculty of all reading levels. It can be audited with minimal commitment or taken as a course towards the satisfaction of the Philosophy Department’s language requirement. Please contact the instructor if you would like to be placed (with no commitment) on the course e-mail distribution list.

**Optional Texts and Background Reading:**

Peter Adamson, Later Antiquity, *The History of Philosophy without any Gaps*, online at: <https://historyofphilosophy.net/later-antiquity/hellenistic>

Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, et al (eds), The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy (Cambridge: 1999).

Richard M. Gummere, trans. *Seneca, Lucius An*naeus. *Epistulae Morales*(*Letters*). (Harvard University Press, 1917) 3 vols.

Brad Inwood, Seneca: *Selected Philosophical Letters* (Clarendon: 2010). Translations of selected letters with extensive philosophical commentaries.

Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford 2005).

A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, The Hellenistic Philosophers (Cambridge: 1987), vol. 1: translations and commentary, vol.2: texts.

Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, (Princeton University Press, 1994).

John Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1969).

James S. Romm, *Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero* (Random House, 2014).

Katja Vogt, "Seneca", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/seneca/>>.

Robert Wagoner, *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online at:

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/seneca/>

Emily Wilson, *The Greatest Empire: A Life of Seneca* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

**Tentative Schedule**

Latin text links are to: Loeb Classical Library digital editions, Richard M Gummere trans.:

Seneca, [*Epistles* 1-65](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/LCL075/1917/volume.xml),

Seneca, [*Epistles* 66-92](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/LCL076/1920/volume.xml)*,*

Seneca, [*Epistles* 93-124](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/LCL077/1925/volume.xml)

**Reading #1: Letter 58 – On Being**

Broader context: [Letter 58](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL075.387.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 25-34

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 111-136

**Reading #2: Letter 65 – On the First Cause**

Broader context: [Letter 65](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL075.445.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 11-14, 18-24

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 136-155

**Reading #3: Letter 66 – On Various Aspects of Virtue**

Broader context: [Letter 66](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL076.1.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 12-20

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 155-181

**Reading #4: Letter 71 – On the Supreme Good**

Broader context: [Letter 71](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL076.73.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 2-8, 26-28

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 183-200

**Reading #5: L 76 – On Learning Wisdom in Old Age**

Broader context: [Letter 76](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL076.147.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 7-17, 25-26

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 200-219

**Reading #6: L 85 – On Some Vain Syllogisms**

Broader context: [Letter 85](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL076.285.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 6-13, 39 (start a few lines up, at “Ita nulla fortuna …”)-41

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 220-238

**Reading #7: L 87 - Some Arguments in Favor of the Simple Life**

Broader context: [Letter 87](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL076.323.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 31-41

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 239-260

**Reading #8: The Corporeality of Virtue**

Broader context: [Letter 106](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL077.217.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 1-12

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 261-271

**Reading #9: The Vanity of Place Seeking**

Broader context: [Letter 118](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL077.361.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 8-17

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 306-314

**Reading #10: More about Virtue**

Broader context: [Letter 120](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL077.381.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 1-5, 10-14

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 322-331

**Reading #11: The Conflict between Pleasure and Virtue**

Broader context: [Letter 123](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL077.425.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 1-6, 12-14

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 355-360

**Reading #12: The True Good as Attained by Reason**

Broader context: [Letter 124](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/seneca_younger-epistles/1917/pb_LCL077.435.xml)

Latin reading: Paragraphs 2-4, 12-20

Commentary: Inwood, pp. 361-377

1. The image is of *Le muerte de Séneca*, by Manuel Domínguez Sánchez (1871). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)