

Thursday, 10 September 2026 // filosofia 16 at Rozz-Tox // *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004 Gondry, dir.) & “The Enchiridion” (135CE Epictetus)<sup>1</sup>

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion (about 6:30pm, informal)
- film starts 7:00pm // 10 - 15 minute break // post-screening discussion of Epictetus reading selection and film from 9:00pm to 10:00pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)

- general remarks about our filosofia series:
  - we screen a film and we pair it with a famous philosophical text that examines themes related to that film; this year the schedule is quarterly:
    - 5 March 2026: *Memento & Meditations on First Philosophy* (Descartes)
    - 4 June 2026: *Waking Life & “Allegory of the Cave”* (Plato)
    - 10 September 2026: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind & Discourses* (Epictetus)
    - 10 December 2026: *Silent Running & “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?”* (Routley)
  - more filosofia plans on instagram (@rozztox\_qc & @casuallyinefficacious), on the Rozz-Tox website: [www.rozztox.com](http://www.rozztox.com), and my website: [dekecainasgould.com](http://dekecainasgould.com)
- More details on the four main branches of philosophy:
  - metaphysics: the theory of reality
    - notable sub-fields: ontology (the study of what exists), philosophy of mind (theory of the nature of consciousness), free will, God, personal identity
  - epistemology: the theory of knowledge
    - notable sub-fields: analysis of ‘knowledge’ (challenges to the “Justified True Belief” model), debates over the a priori vs. a posteriori justification (whether there is justification independent of experience)
  - axiology: the theory of value
    - notable sub-fields: normative ethics (theory of right/wrong), aesthetics (theory of good/bad art), social and political philosophy
  - logic: the theory of right reasoning
    - notable sub-fields: classical logic (modern formal theory of entailment), non-classical logics (formal theories that reject assumptions in classical logic, such as the principle of explosion (*ex falso quodlibet*) in paraconsistent logics)

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<sup>1</sup> Epictetus. (135CE/2008) “The Enchiridion.” excerpt from *Epictetus: Discourses and Selected Writings*. Dobbin, trans. Penguin Classics.

- tonight's topic: axiology and the history of philosophy
  - What matters, and how should we live?
  - first, a brief lecture on the origins of the Academic tradition and some of its early rivals (Cynicism, Stoicism, and Hedonism)

#### Post-Screening Discussion (9:00pm)

- Quick note about the title of the film:
  - The name comes from a line by Alexander Pope, which is about Abelard & Heloise—star-crossed lovers that resulted in the castration of Abelard
    - Abelard was the most famous European logician and philosopher in his day, and Heloise was his student
    - Heloise's family found out about their affair and castrated Abelard, but even after that event, the two kept up a famous correspondence
- Historical Background: Socrates, the Academics, Cynics, Stoics, and Hedonists
  - The execution of Socrates caused tremendous ripples throughout the philosophically-interested world:
    - Plato retreated to buy land in the sacred olive grove Ἀκαδημία (Academia), and created the academic tradition in its early form
    - Antisthenes lectured in the Κυνόσαργες (Kynosarges), the “White Dog” temple, by the gymnasium
    - Diogenes of Sinope followed Antisthenes and called himself κυνικός (kynikos), “doglike”, the origin of our term “cynic”
    - Zeno of Citium followed one such Cynic philosopher (Crates) but didn't have the stomach for their extreme way of life, lecturing at the στοά, “stoa”, which was the public porch near the marketplace in Athens
      - All of these figures highly admired many features of Socrates's character, and one of those was certainly his ability to exercise self-control, and his views about what that is and how best to achieve it.

- Cynicism, very cursorily described (see Dobbin 2012 for more): Diogenes was known as a “stuntman” of philosophy, insisting that luxury and wealth made us weak and distracted us from fulfilling our nature/potential.
  - He preached the value of exercise, but he also preached the need to reject customs, defecating and masturbating in public, citing dogs as his model.
  - Diogenes, like his mentor Antisthenes before him, rejected the Academic approach to philosophy that Plato and his followers pursued.
    - They objected that the Academics were too concerned with theoretical speculation about what we would call “metaphysics” or “epistemology”.
    - The Cynics insisted that philosophy’s primary job was to guide the student in how to live (seems to be closer to what Socrates likely actually concerned himself with).
- Stoicism, very cursorily described (see Inwood & Gerson 1998 for more): Zeno of Citium also urged his followers to exercise self control, and think about what they can control vs. what they could not control.
  - The Stoics also returned to metaphysics and notably logic.
    - Some of the most important followers of Zeno anticipated some of the most central features of modern formal logic, especially regarding what we call nowadays “modal logic”: the logic of possibility and necessity (see Kneale & Kneale 1962 for more).
- Hedonism, very cursorily described (see Inwood & Gerson 1998): Epicurus and his followers maintained that the only intrinsically valuable things are positively valenced affective states.
  - Often, this concept is understood as “pleasure”, but that is misleading.
    - Epicurus insisted that the goal should be tranquility, and that this is best achieved through simple living and avoiding extremes.
    - Note the tragic way that all three of these terms–Hedonism, Cynicism, and Stoicism–have strayed from their philosophical origins!

- Socrates on the Invincibility of the Good-Souled Person (see Plato 399BCE/2002)
  - during his famous trial for corrupting the youth (which he lost and later led to his execution), Socrates gives a famous argument that a good-souled person is invincible:
    1. The good-souled person is one for whom reason is in complete control.
    2. The only thing that can harm a person is the choice to not act with reason in control.
    3. If that's right, then outside sources injuring a person only harms their body, not the soul.
    4. If outside sources only harm the body but not the soul, and the good-souled person has reason in complete control, then the good-souled person is invincible.
    5. Therefore, the good-souled person is invincible.
  - this argument is not exactly convincing to all of Socrates's followers—Aristotle (the most famous student of Plato) argues against it, for example.
- Zeno of Citium, the Hellenic Stoics, and the later Roman Stoics
  - The Stoics returned some of their philosophizing to metaphysics and logic, but much of their legacy in axiology was on recognizing what is within your control and accepting what is not within your control.
  - Epictetus insists throughout the Enchiridion (a distillation of his thought from the Discourses) that this acceptance includes a reminder that your loved ones might not continue to exist by the end of the day.
    - a key component of Stoic thought is the acknowledgement that you aren't entirely in control of your existence—an important source of that is God
    - recognition that your existence isn't entirely up to you should lead you to gratitude for the goods you have received, and to treat hardships as opportunities for self-improvement

- connection to “amor fati”: love thy fate
  - Nietzsche was a fan of this, and defended it in numerous places, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*
    - he also endorsed a much more radical metaphysical hypothesis of “eternal recurrence”...
    - see Huemer 2021 for a modern, statistical update
- there’s a humility in this outlook that challenges the idea that you should avoid all hardships or seek to erase all painful memories
- A Stoic Argument Against Seeking Lacuna’s Services After a Hard Breakup (or anything difficult for that matter)
  1. In all of your experience, there are opportunities to learn and for self-improvement, and there is a good chance that something positive can be found.
  2. If that’s right, then even in hard breakups, there are valuable chances for growth and there were likely positive experiences involved (pleasures, knowledge, goals satisfied, etc.).
  3. If one should seek to erase all memories that are difficult, then in those experiences there were no chances for growth or it was unlikely that there were positive experiences involved.
  4. Therefore, one should not seek to erase all memories that are difficult.
- compare this argument to the cliché “it is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all”
  - that cliché doesn’t really capture what is wrong with Joel & Clementine’s seeking the Lacuna service
  - the problem is not merely that it is better to have loved...etc.; rather, the problem is that in seeking that service, the characters are not taking a proper stance of humility described above
    - there’s an arrogance in trying to take control in that way, and proper lack of gratitude for what they had

## Recommended Further Reading/References:

1. Aristotle. (340BCE/1995) *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Selections*. Irwin and Fine, trans. Hackett.
2. Diogenes. (340BCE/2013) *The Cynic Philosophers: From Diogenes to Julian*. Dobbin, trans. Penguin Classics.
3. Durand, Shogry, & Baltzly. (2023) "Stoicism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Zalta & Nodelman, eds. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/stoicism/>
4. Epictetus. (2008/108CE) *Discourses and Selected Writings*. Dobbin, trans. Penguin Classics.
5. Graver. (2025) "Epictetus." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Zalta & Nodelman eds. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2025/entries/epictetus/>
6. Huemer. (2021) "Existence is Evidence of Immortality." *Nous*. 55.1: 281-151.
7. Inwood & Gerson. (1998) *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. Hackett.
8. Kneale & Kneale. (1962) *The Development of Logic*. Oxford University Press.
9. Plato. (399BCE/2002) *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo* (Second Edition). Grube & Cooper, trans. Hackett.

