

In Getty Lustila's philosophy class, the motto is 'how to live the good life'. But in the 2,300 years between now and the required readings, it is unclear if the good life has stayed the same.

*Ancient Philosophy and Political Thought* covers the poster-boys of Western philosophy (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the like). In the text, they talk to each other about how to be happier people, and why it's easier said than done. "When you think about philosophy, you don't think about it as like something that is so directly practical," Lustila observed. "When I came across like ancient philosophy, and that was the aim that was kind of exciting for me."

He is not alone. The classes are often full (he teaches two a semester). "Many of them come in seeing it as just an academic thing," Lustila said when asked about his students. "I think then people like get surprised about the power and the ideas."

Perhaps that appealing practicality is the power keeping these ideas alive longer than most. For instance, the philosophy of Epicureanism says that sensory pleasure is what happiness is. Not to be confused with drugs or hedonism, the most accurate modern equivalent might be a sort of peaceful minimalism, or as Lustila likes to put it, "eating lentils with your boys over a fire." Under this philosophy, maybe the good life has stayed the same.

Another explanation for this longevity is that these ideas adapt to changing times. The philosophy of Stoicism is a good example of this. Stoics think happiness is about channeling your emotions to fulfill your purpose.

Stoicism has seen a recent resurgence, [particularly among online, masculine cultures](#). In 2012, [Penguin Publishers](#) sold 16,000 copies of *Meditations*, a seminal Stoic work. In 2019, they sold an excess of 100,000 copies. Stoic Week, an annual meeting for all things Stoicism, started in 2013 as a huddled group of academics and students. Last year's [gathering](#) had over 3,300 participants.

Lustila noted that such a resurgence also occurred in the 18th century, but noted a crucial difference: "For those folks it's very much tied up with Christianity, and they really pull on threads in Stoicism that are present, but I think are not really talked about in contemporary contexts."

But Lustila sees those threads built into the fabric of the philosophy. "With the Stoics, there's a whole sort of providentialist backstory about how there's a God, and God has given you a place in the system of the universe, and it's your job to find it."

Roman and Greek Gods held these thoughts with greater meaning, then Christianity, and it is not clear what, or who, has filled that gap. Lustila wasn't sure if modern interpretations render Stoicism adapted or no longer itself. However, he did call on us to think if we are now using Stoicism to control, rather than channel our emotions. "I don't think those are the same," he said.

Maybe practicality is another word for knowing the reality we find ourselves in. In that sense, our realities seem far from a jobless Socrates sauntering to *symposia* (drinking parties) or Marcus Aurelius (Roman Emperor and Stoic) choosing to sleep on the bare ground.

Lustila talked much about his students. He talked about their stresses of youth and uncertainty, anxiety of a country always crazed, robbed futures, emotional blackout, and constant comparison. Noted coping mechanisms are locking in, or letting life happen, with little wiggle room in between.

"It will be okay," he reminds his students. "You can carve a path for yourself. It's not all, it's not all like too far gone." All the while he watches his students debate, laugh, and chat. "This sort of drama gets played out in the classroom, between the different [schools of thought]," Lustila said, nicely.

He also reminds them that the ancient West, for all its remnants of grandeur and reason, had its fair share of terribleness (accepted pedophilia, corruption, and constant wars, to name a few).

In the classroom, Lustila is flexible with his understandings. "I could see some people being like, 'Oh, you're using Aristotle wrong.' I don't get too worried about some of the stuff like that," he said, while also thinking that the ideas were more conversation starters than scripture.

In the end, he hopes such philosophies, as ridiculous or relatable as they vary, keep people curious about everything, and easily happy.

Maybe what has kept these philosophies around is not frozen genius or adaptability, but a knowing that the good life is about your people, and the never-ending chat of trying to figure it all out.