

Title: Stoic Social Grit
Speaker: Dr. Nancy Sherman
Date: 28 April 2022
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Where: Virtual LOO via Zoom
POC: Peg Klein, Ph.D.

Zoom link:

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Synopsis

If you call someone a Stoic, you are probably thinking that they have buttoned up emotions, or can keep calm in the face of adversity, or cultivate resilience through tough inner strength and grit. To be Stoic is to be self-reliant. It is to “suck it up and truck on.” I argue in this talk and in my recent book *Stoic Wisdom* that this is a deeply flawed picture of ancient Stoicism. The classic texts of Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Seneca tell a different story.

The Stoic Roman emperor and military leader, Marcus Aurelius, understood that resilience depends on our connections to others. Writing to himself during the campaign against the Germanics (c. 170 CE), Marcus meditates on what happens when we cut ourselves off from community. His image is graphic: Picture a dismembered hand and head lying apart from the rest of the human trunk. That’s what ‘man makes of himself. . . when he cuts himself off’ from ‘the world’ of which he is a part. The battlefield and its detritus is on Marcus’s mind: Body parts can’t function cut off from the whole to which they belong. We can’t function separated from the global whole to which we belong.

What are critical Stoic lessons to help prepare service members as they go to war and come home from war? In answering this question, I pair Stoic texts with a too little read World War I epic of the battle of the Somme written by a Londoner and Welsh fusilier. You can hear in the very cadence of the poem the social grit that makes a cadre

Bio

Nancy Sherman holds the rank of a distinguished University Professor and Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University. A New York Times Notable Author, her most recent book is *Stoic Wisdom: Ancient Lessons for Modern Resilience* (2021). Other books include *Afterwar*, *The Untold War* (a NYT editors' pick), *Stoic Warriors*, *Making a Necessity of Virtue*, and *The Fabric of Character*. She is the editor of *Critical Essays on the Classics: Aristotle's Ethics*. In the mid-nineties, she served as the inaugural Distinguished Chair in Ethics at the U.S. Naval Academy. She has written over 60 articles in the area of ethics, military ethics, the history of moral philosophy, ancient ethics, the emotions, moral psychology, and psychoanalysis. Sherman has written for the NY Times, Washington Post, LA Times and contributes frequently to many other media outlets in the U.S. and abroad. Her NY Times essays were selected for The Stone Reader. She is a frequent guest on podcasts. Sherman has received numerous honors and awards for her work, among them from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Wilson Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council for Learned Societies, the Mellon Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, The Charlotte Newcombe Fellowship (of the Institute for Citizens and Scholars), and NYU's Center for Ballet and the Arts. In 2005, she visited Guantanamo Bay Detention Center as part of an expert independent observer team assessing the medical and mental health care of detainees. Sherman lectures internationally on ancient philosophy, military ethics, moral injury, and the emotions. Sherman holds a Ph.D. from Harvard in ancient philosophy, a B.A. from Bryn Mawr College, and an M.Litt. from the University of Edinburgh. She has research training in psychoanalytic therapy from the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis. She taught at Yale before joining the Georgetown faculty.

For more, see www.nancysherman.com