**PART C: SOME *SUGGESTIONS* FOR DISCUSSION AT TABLES TONIGHT**

**Discussion Item 1**: The **serenity prayer** -courage and wisdom are among the four cardinal virtues of classical Greece, along with self-control and justice:

*God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.*

**Do you like this prayer**? It has been much used by Alcoholics Anonymous, and other groups dealing with very tough psycholological problems. Often commented upon as close to Stoicism. But does it need God or a similar Being who or that loves you personally, no matter what state you are in? Can it work without a Cosmic Purpose and Meaning involving each human person?

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**Discussion Item 2:** Even if you think there **is** some cosmic meaning, a logos or world-soul or God and thus some sort of “grand plan”, do you nevertheless agree and know for yourself that we have very little **individual control** over the world.

*“If you accept that the universe is uncontrollable you’re going to be a lot less anxious”* - psychologist Albert Ellis to Oliver Burkeman, 2006.

Seneca frequently comments on this –we tend to act as if our control over the world is much greater than it really is. Our individual health, our finances, our reputation and status: we can try to influence their status, but they are ultimately beyond our control. The behaviour of other people is even further beyond our control

**Do we expect far too much from Government and leaders?** –that they can impose top-down measures to rescue the economy, for example? Barack Obama was being hailed with quasi-messianic powers as the saviour of the US economy and much else.

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**Discussion Item 3**: The Stoic Epictetus**; the method of “Premeditation of Evils**” (the opposite of “Positive Visualisation”):

*-Each time you kiss your child goodnight, specifically consider the possibility she could be dead tomorrow. The practice will both cause you to love her all the more and also reduce the shock should that event ever come to pass.*

And also, consider the empirical (probabilistic) truth that when things do go wrong, as they surely will, they will almost certainly go *less wrong* than you were fearing. You can dispute with yourself; dispute the probabilities, based on empirical actuality. It is *preferable* that X rather than Y is happening. But it is not **awful**, or **horrendous** or **terrible**, nearly always.

**Question:** Is this “Premeditation of Evils” too much? Have you tried it? Have you tried the opposite –Positive Visualisation?

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**Discussion Item 4** Affluence: The Stoics were as concerned with surviving prosperity as with enduring adversity. For them, wealth is not bad in itself. But it encourages character defects- desire for even more wealth, self importance, contempt, resentment, impatience, restlessness. Among the affluent, the vice of “too much is never enough” is all too common

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**Seneca: *“The greatest hindrance to living is expectancy, which depends on tomorrow and wastes today”***

**-Question:** Seneca is referring to the problem of always living in expectancy, not living vividly in the “now”, the real reality of the present moment, that is all there is and ever will be: that the next car, holiday, partner, house, job, etc, is going to be THE ONE; the happy ever after. **Do you think that living in the past and the future is highly irrational?**

**Discussion Item 5**: **Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT)**

***Question: What do you think of the following Albert Ellis statements*? Which one(s) appeal to you; which do you strongly dislike?**

*“Nothing, yes, NOTHING is awful, horrible, or terrible, no matter how bad, inconvenient and unfair it may actually be.”*

*Your basic goals are to remain alive and be reasonably happy. Whatever discomfort, pain or unhappiness you experience, whether it be physical or mental, you observe, think about it, and push yourself to reduce it*”

*No miracles, as many “New Age” treatises cavalierly promise you. But, with hard work and practice, you can make yourself less upsettable. Yes, you can.*

*“As for world conditions being arranged so that they have to give you exactly what you want the moment you want it: alas, no! Not a chance. Frankly, the world doesn’t give a hoot for your desires, and has no personal interest in you”*

*“No matter what conditions exist in my life, yes, even poverty or fatal illness, I can still find some enjoyable pursuits if I think I can and if I try to find them! So I can stand, I can tolerate almost anything that I really don’t like.”*

*Disputing your self-defeating irrational beliefs is one of the main and most helpful methods of Rational Emotional Behavioural Therapy. There is no magic, no free lunch. Self change, while almost always possible, requires persistent work and practice.*

*I will stop whining about the Adversities and stop demanding that they absolutely should not and must not exist.*

*There can be no absolute ethics except for angels and God.*

*Loving often stems from personal strengths, meaning, that loving people do not really care that much whether others love them and are therefore strong enough to truly interest themselves in others....The art of love is largely the art of persistence...*

*Let’s suppose somebody abused you sexually. You still had a choice, though not a good one, about what to tell yourself about that abuse.*

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