



The Stoics on Living According to Nature

PHIL 210, class 18



Taking Stock

THE GOOD LIFE = A MORAL LIFE?

Key question: to live a good life, do you need to be a good person?

} virtue ethicists' answer:
YES!

	virtue ethicists?	how to live well
CONFUCIANS	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → benevolence → righteousness → propriety → wisdom 	cultivate feelings ritual reflection
ARISTOTLE	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → moderation → courage → justice, etc. → (practical) wisdom 	cultivate reason (and desires) habituation/action external goods (esp. friendship)
DAOISTS	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → flexibility → open-mindedness → freedom 	occupy meta-perspective loosen commitments wander/play
STOICS	?	?

🌐 When poll is active, respond at pollev.com/tirani111

📱 Text **TIRANI111** to **37607** once to join



Based on your reading so far, what does living a Stoic life require according to Epictetus?

wisdom

virtue

living in harmony with nature

focusing on things under our control

both C & D

all of the above

Living a Good Life and Being a Good Person

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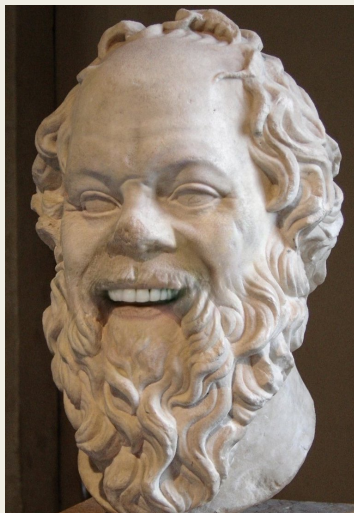
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STOICS	YES → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → virtue is the <u>only</u> good → virtue = wisdom 	?

Living a Good Life and Being a Good Person

THE GOOD LIFE = A MORAL LIFE?

Key question: to live a good life, do you need to be a good person?

} virtue ethicists' answer:
YES!



STOICS

virtue ethicists?

- YES → benevolence
- YES → righteousness
- YES → propriety
- YES → wisdom
- YES → moderation
- YES → courage
- YES → justice, etc.
- YES → (practical) wisdom
- NO → flexibility
- NO → open-mindedness
- NO → freedom
- YES → virtue is the only good
- YES → virtue = wisdom

how to live well

- cultivate feelings
- ritual
- reflection
- cultivate reason (and desires)
- habituation/action
- external goods (esp. friendship)
- occupy meta-perspective
- loosen commitments
- wander/play
- live in harmony with nature
- live in harmony with others
- focus on what's under your control

OVERVIEW OF THE REST OF TODAY'S CLASS

- Some historical background
- The Stoic system: physics, logic, ethics
- The Stoics on the human good
- The Stoic Sage
- Epictetus on what is under our control

(Ancient) Stoicism in its Time and Place



Key Stoic Philosophers



early { Zeno (c. 334 – 262 BCE)
Cleanthes (330 – c. 230 BCE)
Chrysippus (c. 279 – c. 206 BCE)

Diogenes of Babylon (c. 230 – c. 145 BCE)

middle { Panaetius (c. 185 – c. 110/109 BCE)
Posidonius (c. 135 – c. 51 BCE)

late { Seneca (c. 4 BCE – 65 CE)
Musonius Rufus (c. 20/30 – ? CE)
Epictetus (c. 55 – 135 CE)
Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180 CE)

Influences and Interlocutors

C = Cynics A = Academics

- ✗ 399 BCE: Death of Socrates
- Antisthenes (c. 445 – 365 BCE) C
- Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412 – 323 BCE) C
- Speusippus (c. 408 – 339/8 BCE) A
- Xenocrates (c. 396/5 – 314/3 BCE) A
- Crates of Thebes (c. 365 – c. 285 BCE) C
- Polemon (? – 270/269 BCE) A
- Arcesilaus (316/5 – 241/0 BCE) A
- Carneades (214/3 – 129/8 BCE) A
- ✗ 155 BCE: Embassy to Rome
- Philo of Larissa (154/3 – 84/3 BCE) A
- Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 125 – c. 68 BCE) A
- ✗ 529 CE: Emperor Justinian closes all philosophical schools

Some Morning Advice from Marcus Aurelius

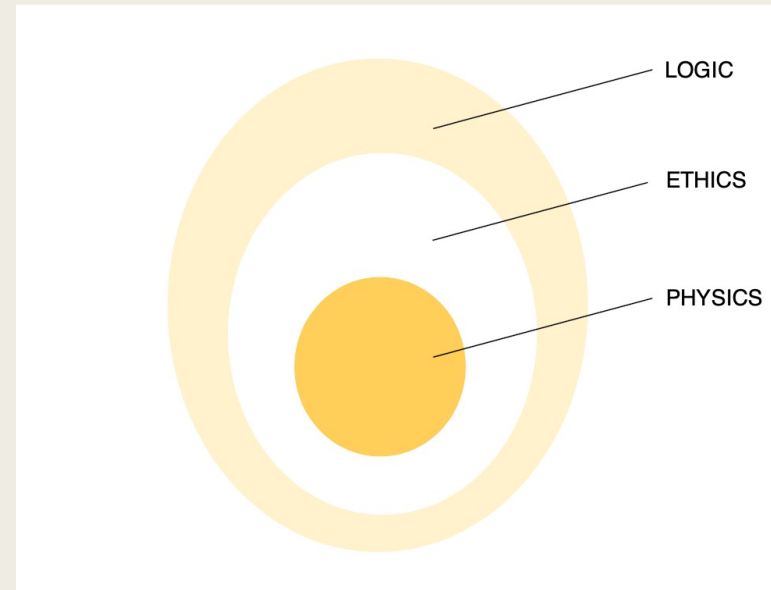


“Say to yourself first thing in the morning: I shall meet with people who are meddling, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, and unsociable. They are subject to these faults because of their ignorance of what is good and bad. But I have recognized the nature of the good and seen that it is the right, and the nature of the bad and seen that it is the wrong, and the nature of the wrongdoer himself, and seen that he is related to me, not because he has the same blood or seed, but because he shares in the same mind and portion of divinity. So I cannot be harmed by any of them, as no one will involve me in what is wrong. Nor can I be angry with my relative or hate him. We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. So to work against each other is contrary to nature; and resentment and rejection count as working against someone.” (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.1)

1. wrongdoing results from misperception of what's good and bad
2. M. knows what's good is “the right” and what's bad is “the wrong”
3. M. cannot be harmed by any wrongdoer
4. anger/resentment/rejection of the wrongdoer is “contrary to nature”



The Stoic System



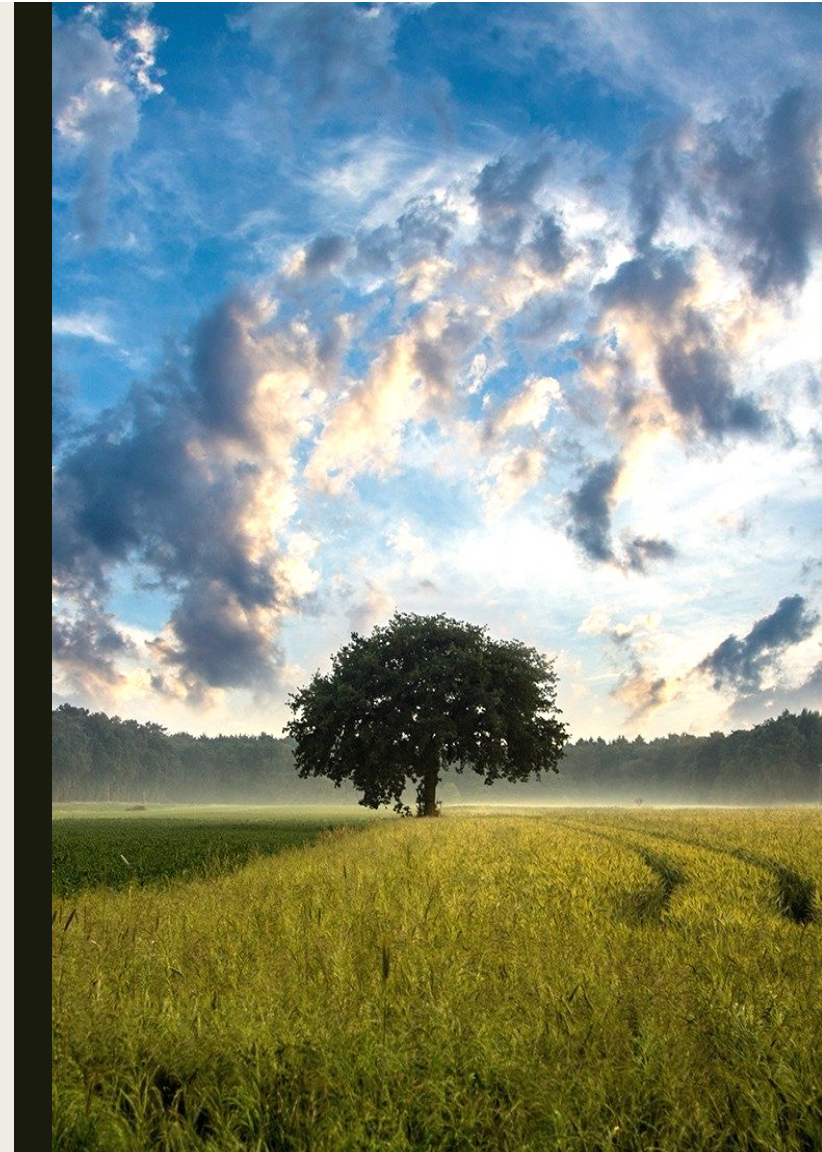
“physics” = study of nature — incl. metaphysics
(what underlies nature?)

“logic” = study of reason — incl. epistemology
(what is knowledge?)

“ethics” = study of the good life

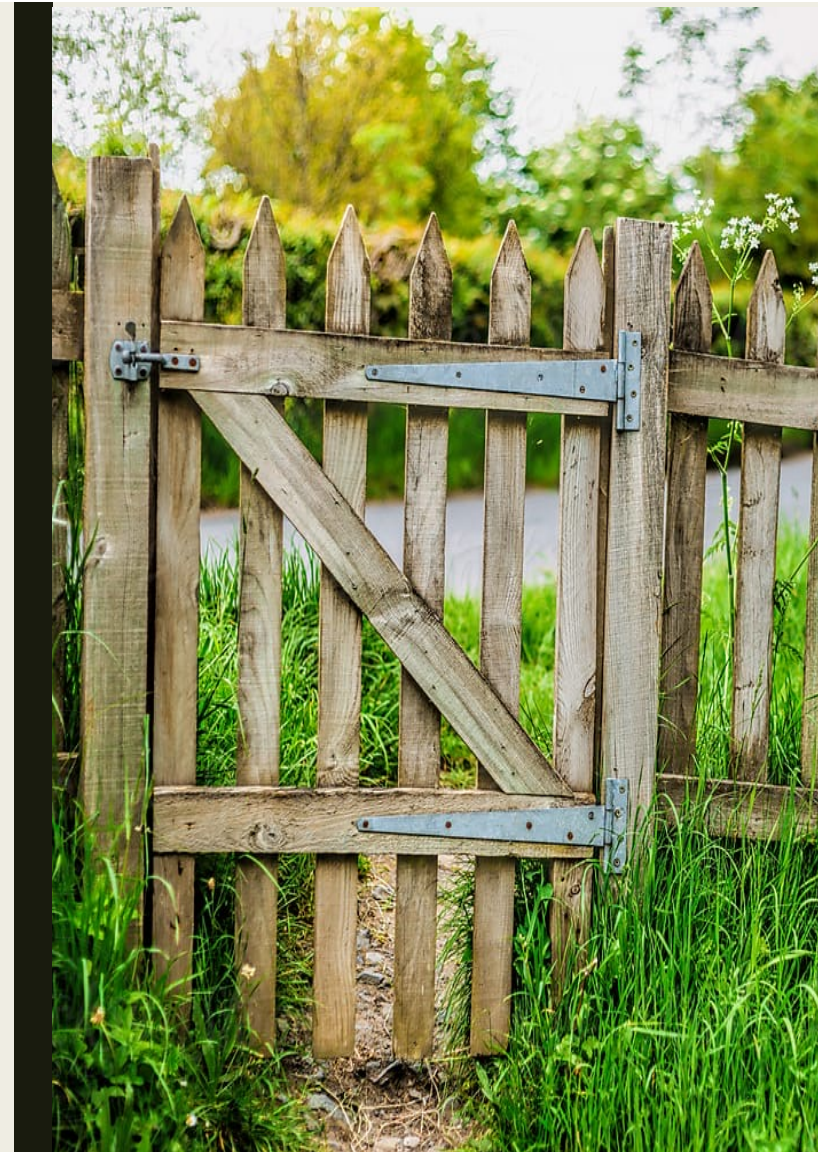
The Stoic System: Physics

- Consider what it means to be something
 - every being has the power to act or to be acted upon
 - true of all animate and inanimate beings
 - but only bodies/matter have this power
 - so all being is bodily/material
- But: two principles at work in the physical world
 - passive principle and active principle
 - active principle: reason (*logos*); “god”
 - reason makes matter intelligible
 - permeates physical world and makes it ordered
 - ordered cosmos organized in a providential way
- Stoic physics in a nutshell
 - nature reveals how things are
 - everything that exists is material
 - reason has an ordering role to play in nature



The Stoic System: Logic

- How do we come to understand nature?
 - through sense perception
 - but sensory impressions can be assented to or not
 - impressions aren't always true
 - belief = assenting to an impression
 - true belief = assenting to an impression that's true
 - "knowledge" = doing this consistently and reliably
 - knowledge is really hard!
- The Stoic Sage
 - assents only to impressions that are true
 - "true" = corresponds to how things are in nature
 - possesses knowledge
 - not omniscient; simply responds well to impressions
 - most in agreement with nature and its rationality
 - none of us are Sages; maybe Socrates was
 - best we can be are "Progressors"

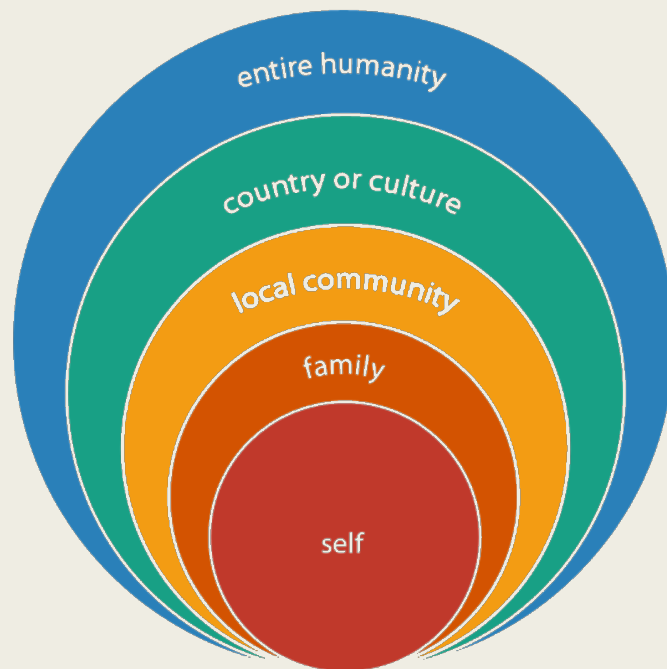


The Stoic System: Ethics

- So what is the good life?
 - “living in agreement with nature”
- From the standpoint of physics
 - sometimes conventional goods can be bad
 - the only thing unconditionally good for us is virtue
 - so good life = living virtuously
- From the standpoint of logic
 - to follow nature, we must attend to our impressions
 - the human power to deal with impressions is reason
 - this is the only thing under our direct control
 - so good life = attending to what’s under our control
- Connect physics with logic
 - the Sage lives in full agreement with nature
 - acts with knowledge (responds well to impressions)
 - so virtue = wisdom = responding well to impressions



Stoic Cosmopolitanism



- From: *cosmos* + *politēs*
 - “citizen of the world”
- Circles of affinity (*oikeiōsis*)
 - first circle: self
 - second circle: family
 - wider circles: tribe, state, nation
 - widest circle: all humankind

“‘They’re slaves,’ people say. No. They’re human beings.”

– Seneca, Letter 47

Recall Marcus' Morning Advice

Say to yourself first thing in the morning: I shall meet with people who are meddling, ungrateful, violent, treacherous, envious, and unsociable. They are subject to

1. these faults because of their ignorance of what is good and bad. But I have recognized the nature of the good
2. and seen that it is the right, and the nature of the bad and seen that it is the wrong, and the nature of the wrongdoer himself, and seen that he is related to me, not because he has the same blood or seed, but because he shares in the same mind and portion of divinity. So I
3. cannot be harmed by any of them, as no one will involve me in what is wrong. Nor can I be angry with my relative or hate him. We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth.
4. So to work against each other is contrary to nature; and resentment and rejection count as working against someone. (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.1)

1. wrongdoing results from ignorance
2. M. knows what's good is "the right" = virtue
 - this is up to us = under our control = power to choose well
3. no one can force his assent to what's wrong
 - "harm" here depends on the belief that we've been harmed
4. working against others is "contrary to nature"
 - since the wrongdoer is another human being

Epictetus on What is Under Our Control

- “Some things in the world are up to us, while others are not. Up to us are our faculties of judgment, motivation, desire, and aversion—in short, everything that is our own doing. Not up to us are our body and property, our reputations, and our official positions—in short, everything that is not our own doing. Moreover, the things up to us are naturally free, unimpeded, and unconstrained, while the things not up to us are powerless, servile, impeded, and not our own. Keep this in mind then: if you think things naturally servile are free and that things not our own are ours, you will be frustrated, pained, and troubled, and you will find fault with gods and men. But if you think you own only what is yours, and that you do not own what is not yours, as you really don't, no one will ever put pressure on you, no one will impede you, you will not reproach anyone, you will not blame anyone, you will not do a single thing reluctantly, no one will harm you, you will have no enemy, because nothing harmful will happen to you.
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- “... Right now, then, make it your habit to tell every jarring thought or impression: 'You are just an appearance and in no way the real thing.' Next, examine it and test it by these rules that you have. First and foremost: does it involve the things up to us, or the things not up to us? And if it involves one of the things not up to us, have the following response to hand: 'Not my business.'” (Epictetus, *Handbook 1*)
1. what's under our control = power of choice
 2. what's not under our control = outcomes in general and all external goods (incl. other people)
 3. “freedom” = attending to what's under our control
 4. if we attend to this, nothing will ever harm us
 5. beware of impressions
 6. be prepared to say: this is nothing to me

Based on what you know so far, what is the biggest problem with Stoicism? Submit (optional) and then vote.

Top

Dealing with Loss

“In the case of everything that attracts you or has its uses or that you are fond of, keep in mind to tell yourself what it is like, starting with the most trivial things. If you are fond of a jug, say: ‘I am fond of a jug.’ Then, if it is broken, you will not be troubled. When you kiss your little child or your wife, say that you are kissing a human being. Then, if one of them dies, you will not be troubled.” (Epictetus, *Handbook 3*)



- This Wednesday
 - Send to your professor a passage from Epictetus you want to discuss in section
 - “Boat” metaphor in chapter 7 of *Encheiridion*
 - What does Epictetus mean by “freedom”?
 - What does Epictetus mean by “education”?
 - Next week
 - Readings from Seneca
 - Live Like a Stoic Week
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