

Stoic Therapy: Self-Care and Care for Others

PHIL 210 — Living a Good Life
November 20, 2023

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Recap: Stoics on the Good Life

“Living in Agreement with Nature”

- From the standpoint of physics (study of nature)
 - sometimes conventional goods can be bad
 - the only thing that benefits us unconditionally is virtue
 - so living in agreement with nature = living virtuously
- From the standpoint of logic (study of reason)
 - to follow nature, we must attend to our impressions
 - the human power to deal with impressions is the mind/reason
 - this is the only thing under our direct control
 - so nature requires attending to what’s under our control
- Connect physics with logic
 - the Sage lives in full agreement with nature
 - uses reason correctly in evaluating impressions
 - acts with knowledge
 - so virtue = wisdom = responding well to impressions

2

Rank the following from what's most under your control to what's least under your control

Plans over Thanksgiving break

Opinions of others

Product of your work

Effort you put into your work

A loved one's distress

Material possessions

Your looks

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Epictetus on What's 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.
- "... 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, *Encheiridion* 1)
1. under our control = power of the mind/reason
 2. 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


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Stoic Activism

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ..."
– Reinhold Niebuhr





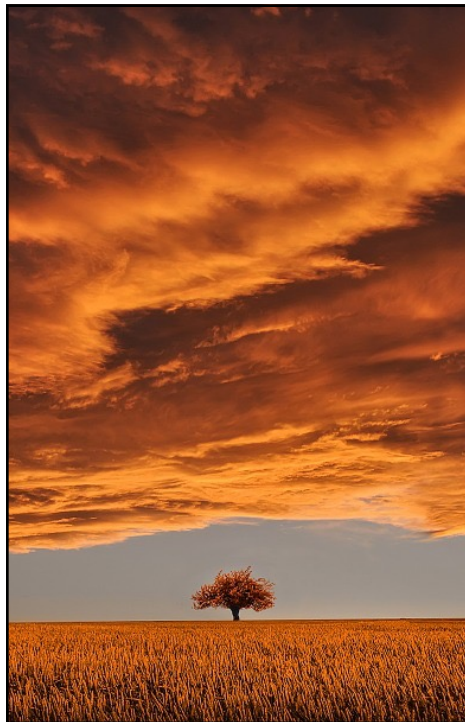


"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."
– Angela Davis

	antecedent			consequent
what you cannot change (what you cannot control)	if you can't change it	...	then	accept it
	if not- <i>p</i>	...	then	<i>q</i>
what you cannot change (what you cannot control)	if not- <i>q</i>	...	then	<i>p</i>
	if you can't accept it	...	then	change it

contrapositive

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The Obstacle is the Way

The mind can adapt and alter every impediment to action to serve its purpose; something that might have hindered a task contributes to it instead, and something that was an obstacle on the road helps you on your way.

– Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.20

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OVERVIEW OF REST OF TODAY'S CLASS

- Stoicism vs. Epicureanism
- The Stoics on emotions
- The Sage vs. the Progressor
- “Preferred and dispreferred indifferents”
- Challenges for Stoicism
- Modern Stoicism

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Epicureanism

- materialist metaphysics
 - all being is material
 - no intrinsic order in nature, just chance
- hedonistic ethics
 - pleasure is the only good
 - true pleasure = absence of pain
 - so not a Calliclean hedonism
 - look to the human infant



- political minimalists

Stoicism

- materialist metaphysics
 - all being is material
 - intrinsic order in nature, pervaded by reason
- virtue ethics
 - virtue is the only good
 - virtue = wisdom = power of choice
 - capacity to respond well to impressions
 - look again at the human infant
 - esp. what it has a natural affinity for
 - seeks self-preservation, not pleasure
 - in maturing, pain is naturally endured



- political maximalists

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Seneca on Epicureanism vs. Stoicism

The difference here between the Epicurean and our own school is this: our wise man feels his troubles but overcomes them, while their wise man does not even feel them.

– Seneca, Letter 9

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Stoic Emotions

- Emotions are products of our beliefs and judgments
 - dwelling on outcomes leads to anger, fear, etc.
 - focus instead on what's "up to us," i.e., virtue
 - faulty judgments → unhealthy emotions
 - wise judgments → healthy emotions
- Healthy emotions and desires (*eupatheia*)
 - **joy** in what's truly good
 - delight
 - mirth / good cheer
 - contentment / tranquility
 - **caution/discretion** directed at what's truly bad
 - reverence / awe
 - respect
 - **wishing/willing** directed at what's truly good
 - good will
 - affection



- Stoics also acknowledge reflex-like emotions
 - these are involuntary and outside our control
 - still: we can choose how to respond
 - can choose whether to dwell on them
 - decide not to have them define us

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Summary of the Stoic Sage

- Wise
 - responds well to impressions
- Politically engaged
 - cares for all humankind
- Wishes with reservation
 - focuses on efforts rather than outcomes
- Handles adversity well
 - keeps calm; carries on
- Emotionally healthy
 - affected by what's truly good/bad
- “Unflappable”



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The Sage vs. the Progressor

- Only the Sage is virtuous
 - the rest of us are all equally vicious
 - but note: “vice” = cognitive weakness/deficiency
 - encourages a more forgiving outlook
 - we can still be Progressors!

“You were not invited to someone’s dinner party. That’s because you didn’t pay the host the price of the dinner. He sells it for flattery, for getting attention. Pay the price it’s sold for, then, if you think it’s worth it. But if you want to get it without paying up, you are being greedy and stupid. Do you have nothing instead of the dinner? Of course you do. You don’t have to flatter the man you didn’t want to flatter or to deal with the crowd around his door.”

— Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 25



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The Sage vs. the Progressor

- How to be a Stoic Progressor
 - don't focus on outcomes and impressions
 - focus on how you judge and respond internally
 - "the inner self" = "will" = capacity for rational choice
 - this is under your control
 - all external goods are "indifferents"
 - these things are outside your control
 - "preferred indifferents"
 - money, job, pleasure, health, fame, victory, etc.
 - "dispreferred indifferents"
 - poverty, social isolation, physical pain, defeat, etc.
 - perform duties in line with the roles you may have
 - accords with our nature as human/social beings
 - but be prepared to give all of this up and carry on

"Accept humbly; let go easily."

– Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 8.33



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Seneca on Cultivating Indifference

Let every day pass as I would wish it to, let new congratulations join the old: I will not on this account give way to self-love. Alter this generosity of time to the opposite, let my soul be buffeted from this quarter and that by loss, by grief, by various misfortunes, let no hour lack some ground for complaint: I will not on this account call myself the most miserable of the miserable, I shall not on this account curse any one day; for I have seen to it that no one day shall be a black one for me. And what do I conclude? I would rather moderate my joys than suppress my sorrows.

– Seneca, "On the Happy Life," §25

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The Stoic Sage

It is Our Choices
That Show What
We Truly Are
♦ Far More Than ♦
Our Abilities



ALL WE HAVE TO DECIDE
IS WHAT TO DO WITH THE
TIME THAT IS GIVEN US

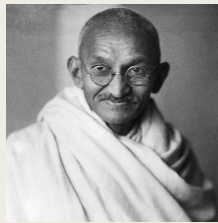
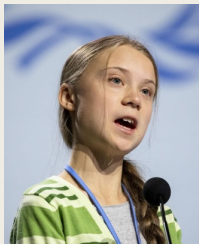
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The Stoic Sage Reconsidered



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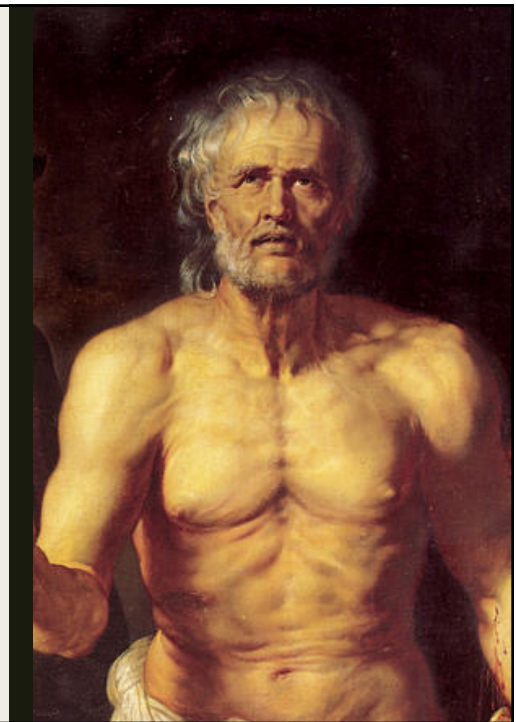
The Stoic Sage Reconsidered



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Challenges for Stoicism

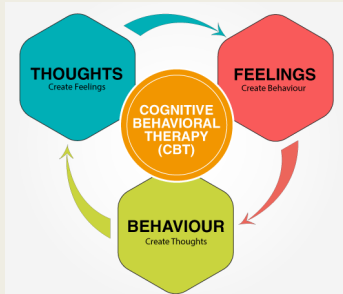
- Does Stoic ethics need Stoic physics?
 - not according to Lawrence Becker, *A New Stoicism*:
 “Following nature means following the facts. It means getting the facts about the physical and social world we inhabit, and the facts about our situation in it [...] before we deliberate about normative matters. It means facing those facts—accepting them for exactly what they are, no more and no less—before we draw normative conclusions from them.” (Becker, *A New Stoicism*)
- The value of external goods (or “preferred indifferents”)
 - compare with Aristotle
 - egalitarianism at the cost of realism?
- The value of friendship / the possibility of love
 “What is my object in making a friend? To have someone to be able to die for, someone I may follow into exile, someone for whose life I may put myself up as security and pay the price as well.” (Seneca, Letter 9)



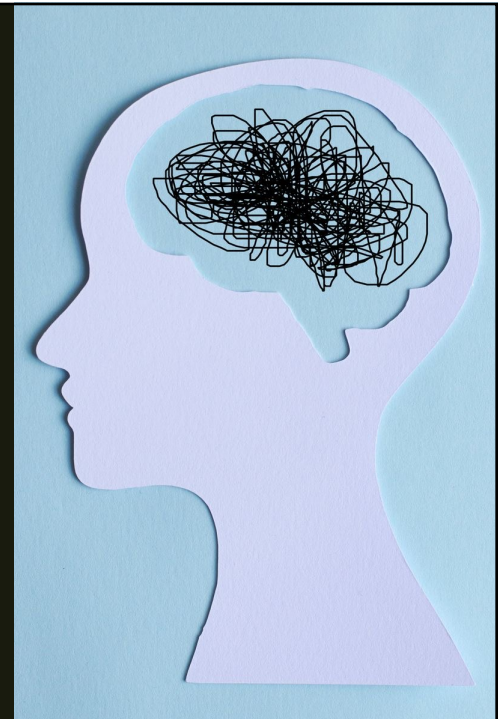
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The Influence of Stoicism

- Twelve-step programs
 "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."
- Cognitive behavioral therapy



"The philosophical origins of cognitive therapy can be traced back to the Stoic philosophers." (Beck et al., *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*)

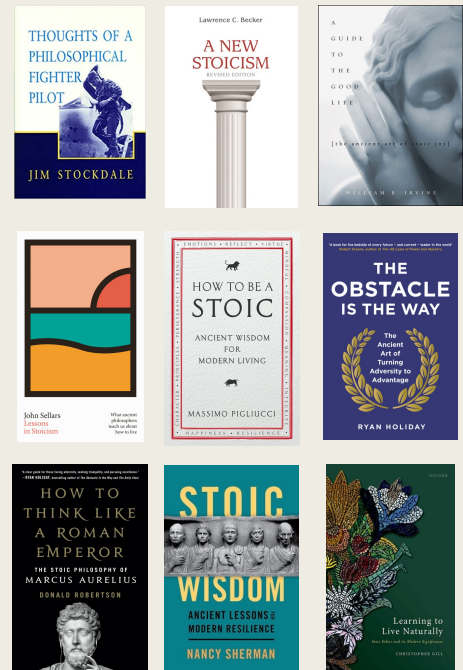


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Modern Stoicism

- Updating Stoicism
 - view nature as less teleologically ordered
 - allow for degrees of virtue
 - allow for degrees of control
- Modern Stoicism movement
 - Stoicon and International Stoic Week

"In 2014, research findings for Stoic Week showed that on average Life Satisfaction increased for participants by 16%, flourishing by 10%, positive emotions by 11%, and there was a 16% reduction in negative emotions. This confirmed previous findings, including data collected from a 2014 Stoic Mindfulness and Resilience Training (SMRT) course, showing that when exercises were extended to 4 weeks, Life Satisfaction increased by 27% and negative emotions decreased by 23%."



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Taking Stock

THE GOOD LIFE = A MORAL LIFE?

To live a good life, do you need to be a good person?

} virtue ethicists' answer:
YES

	virtue ethicists?	how to live well
ARISTOTLE	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → moderation → courage → justice, etc. → (practical) wisdom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultivate reason (and desires) habituation/action external goods (esp. friendship)
CONFUCIANS	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → benevolence → righteousness → propriety → wisdom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultivate feelings ritual reflection
DAOISTS	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → flexibility → open-mindedness → freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> occupy meta-perspective loosen commitments wander/play
STOICS	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → virtue is the <u>only</u> good → virtue = wisdom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> live in harmony with nature live in harmony with others focus on what's under your control

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- Coming up
 - Live Like a Stoic week
 - Enjoy the break!
 - Next week: reading from *Socrates Tenured*
 - Stay tuned for details on:
 - Classes after break
 - Final debate on Mon. December 4

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