



Stoic Week Handbook for Students

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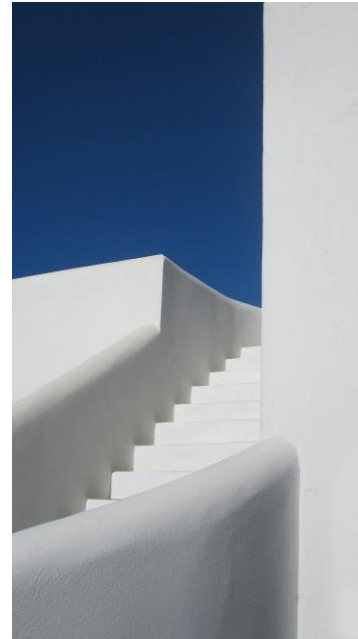
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Part 1

What Is Stoicism?

Asking Questions

Have you ever wondered what's important in life, or what kind of person you should be? Have you thought about how to be happy, or how to make a difference in the world? Everyone wonders these things at some point in their lives. Actually, people have been asking themselves these questions since the beginning of civilization. Philosophers in many ancient cultures (like Greek, Chinese, and Indian) debated how to live a good life and how to be a good person. And we're still talking about it today!

These questions are so complex and interesting that there are as many potential answers as there are people in the world. We each have to answer them for ourselves. And the way we answer those questions can influence the choices we make about life.



Let's say your mobile phone is a year old. It's getting slower but it still works fine. Now your best friend gets a new phone and you really want one. What decision would you make if you believe the following things?

- You believe it's really important to always have the best new device.
- You believe it's important to save money for the future.
- You believe it's really important to impress your friends with your stuff.
- You believe your stuff isn't as important as your inner qualities, like kindness and courage.

As you can see, your decision will be at least partly based on what you think is meaningful in life. That's why it's so important to think about these questions and try to answer them for yourself. We're not asking you to make a final decision right now.

Sometimes it takes many years for people to decide what their philosophy of life is!

Right now we're just asking you to start thinking about it.



During Stoic Week, we're going to be talking about one specific philosophy called Stoicism. We're sharing it with you because thousands of people around the world have found it very helpful. Stoicism teaches people how to be happy and resilient – in other words, how to bounce back after difficulties. It's a philosophy of life, meaning that it can help you deal with whatever happens. For example, you can use Stoicism to recover from challenges, to choose a career, or to find meaning.

Where Does Stoicism Come From?

In ancient Greece 2,500 years ago, an eccentric but brilliant guy named **Socrates** went around Athens asking everyone questions. Endless questions. About everything. He wanted his fellow citizens to explain what they thought about love, or courage, or religion, or how to be a good friend. He was intensely curious and searched for some answers, so he kept asking people wherever he went: in the marketplace, in the gym, at parties.



Even though Socrates never figured out the answers to most of his questions, he started a new philosophical tradition that inspired Greeks for many generations. Many later philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, were inspired by Socrates. The Greeks, and later the Romans, continued to debate topics like how to be a good person or what makes a good life.

One particularly successful ancient school of philosophy was Stoicism, founded by **Zeno** of Citium about a hundred years after Socrates. Zeno himself was a very inspiring man. Before he became a philosopher, he was a merchant from the island of Cyprus, across the Mediterranean Sea from Athens. On one voyage across the sea, his entire cargo of expensive merchandise was lost in a shipwreck. At one stroke, Zeno had lost all his worldly goods.

As Zeno explored Athens, wondering what to do, he stopped in a bookshop and happened to pick up a book about Socrates. He was so inspired by Socrates that he asked the bookseller, “Where can I find a man like this?!” At that moment another philosopher, named Crates, was passing by, so the bookseller pointed and said, “Follow that man.” Zeno followed Crates and spent the next few years studying philosophy.

Zeno later went on to found his own school of philosophy, called Stoicism after the Stoa Poikile, which means “painted porch” in Greek. Zeno wanted philosophy to be open to everyone, so he taught in an open public area and people stopped by to chat with him as he taught.

Today, Stoicism is still a very open and public philosophy. Stoics don’t think philosophy is something you just read about in a book or learn about at a university. We think it’s something you put into practice in daily life. Sure, you have to learn the basic principles first by reading and talking with teachers. But the most important part is applying it to your real life. The reason we’re asking all those questions is so we can live a good life and be happy.

Our Cast of Characters: The Emperor, the Slave, and the Statesmen

During Stoic Week, we'll be sharing ancient writings from some of the most famous Stoics. Why are we using such old-fashioned texts? Because they are absolutely brilliant, and we are confident you're capable of understanding them. Your instructor will help explain the concepts, and you'll have a chance to discuss the writings with other students. We want you to see for yourself how ancient philosophers thought through these questions for themselves—just like we are still doing today.

Let's quickly go through the main characters you will meet this week. They all happen to be from the Roman period of Stoic philosophy. That's because ancient Greece was eventually taken over by Rome, and the Romans adopted Greek philosophy, including Stoicism. The Romans were very pragmatic, and they emphasized the practical aspects of philosophy, just like we're going to do in this course!





One of the most famous Roman Stoics was the emperor **Marcus Aurelius**, who used Stoicism in his day job running the empire. Marcus Aurelius also kept a private notebook, where he wrote down his thoughts and ran through the Stoic exercises he had learned as a young man. That notebook later became known as the *Meditations* and is still a bestseller today. In the *Meditations*, Marcus reminds himself not to let his position go to his head, to be kind and patient with people, and to face challenges with wisdom and courage.

Marcus Aurelius learned about Stoicism from his tutors, who shared with him the writings of a famous Stoic teacher named **Epictetus**. Epictetus was born a slave, and he was lame all his life, possibly because his master broke his leg when he was growing up. (As a teacher, Epictetus would later crack jokes to his students about his background and his disability.)

However, he did have the chance to study Stoicism with Musonius Rufus, one of the best teachers around. Epictetus went on to establish his own philosophical school and became one of the most brilliant and respected Stoics in the Roman Empire. One of his students turned his lecture notes into works we now call the *Discourses* and the *Handbook*.

Two other men were especially important in the history of Stoicism. Both were statesmen, which means they were career politicians who devoted their lives to serving Rome. And both were key players who shaped Roman history. **Seneca** was a wealthy senator who became tutor to the future emperor Nero. He helped Nero run the empire for a while, until eventually Nero rejected him and ordered him to commit suicide. Seneca was also a famous writer. He wrote philosophical essays and tragic plays, but we mainly remember him for the *Moral Letters* he wrote to a friend, providing instructions on how to live as a good Stoic.

Cicero was also a famous Roman statesman who lived around the time of Julius Caesar. (He was, in fact, heavily involved in politics when Caesar was assassinated.) Cicero was one of the first people to translate Greek philosophy into Latin. He was not actually a Stoic, but he highly respected the Stoics and did share some of their views. In *On Duties*, a book Cicero wrote to advise his teenage son how to live a good life, Cicero adapted Stoic advice to the necessities of Roman life.

What Is Stoic Week About?

Stoicism is a philosophy of life, which means it covers everything you might want to know about living a good life. That's a lot! We can't tell you everything about Stoicism in one week. So for Stoic Week we're just going to give you a small taste of how it can help you become happy and resilient. We'll ask you to think through some questions, either on your own or with other students. We'll provide some strategies you can use to start feeling better and stronger right now. And at the end of the course, if you'd like to know more, we'll give you resources for studying on your own.

Each day, we'll look at a different topic related to a happy and resilient life. Here are the five topics:

Monday: Emotions

Tuesday: Resilience

Wednesday: The Value of Friendships

Thursday: Nature & Community

Friday: Identity & Character

We've set up the daily courses with similar structures, including:

- Explore (introduction)
- Read (short reading from ancient text)
- Discuss (small or large group discussion)
- Activate (additional activities)

You'll also have homework, because happiness takes a lot of hard work! These are techniques the ancient Stoics themselves used, which means they are over 2,000 years old.

We're still using them because they really work. We hope you will find them helpful in thinking about your life.

Stoic Week Journal. You'll keep a record of your thoughts and emotions throughout the day. Depending on your learning setup, this could be either a written or video log. The point is to continually remind yourself to notice your emotions, so that you can start to change them. You'll learn more details about using the Journal on Day 1.

Evening review. For the evening review, you'll think back over your day and ask yourself three questions related to noticing your thoughts and emotions:

- What did I do well today?
- What did I not do so well today?
- What can I do better tomorrow?

This way you'll have a focused goal to work on when you wake up the next morning. You'll already be on track to improve your thoughts!

Part 2

Stoic Week

Monday: Emotions

Exploring Emotions

It has been scientifically *proven* that if you look at the last few emojis you used on your phone, these are your most common emotions.

Let's think about what the most commonly used emojis are and how these relate to emotions we find we are feeling a lot. For example, if you tend to use a kind of “scared” face, it might mean the emotion you find most challenging is anxiety.

Do any of these emotions tend to really “take you over”? What does that feel like for you?

The Stoics tell us that our emotions follow our judgments, based on things that we are thinking, that are either *true* or *false*.

So, the reason we are going to talk about “unhealthy” emotions is not that we are trying to *get rid of* our emotions and be like some sort of robot, it's because we are trying to think about things in the right way! If a certain emotion *always* follows a thought that just is not *true*, then it's really good to get rid of it.

Stoics would say that some emotions are not helpful *because* they are always based on us thinking things which don't make sense or are not true, like:



- **Desire** can include getting really angry, being “hung up” on someone so you can’t stop thinking about them, being obsessed about something you want to buy, or caring so much about getting enough “likes” on social media.
- **Fear** can involve things like feeling upset because someone said something about you online, panicking about something that is happening, or going over and over in your mind about something that you think could happen.
- **Pleasure** could mean being pleased at someone hurting themselves or saying something stupid, or thinking that getting money is the whole point of life and would always make the person happy, no matter what.
- **Pain** can contain emotions like being jealous that someone else has more followers on social media, not forgiving someone when they have apologized about some tiny thing and you are still hurt about it, or going back over something bad that happened so much that it upsets you all over again!

Think about the positive emotions, those which are based on correct (true) thoughts. So you might find on your phone that you use a happy/smiling face a lot, or one that is surrounded by hearts or has hearts for eyes. You might use these when you are being appreciative of the people you love or happy about how things are going for them. Let’s think about how to encourage these positive emotions!



Here are the positive emotions:

- **Wishing** can include feeling good for other people, being kind to others and appreciating and taking care of others.
- **Caution** can include things like respecting yourself, for example not letting someone bully you into doing something you don’t feel comfortable with, having dignity and caring enough about not making mistakes so that you make an effort and prepare well for things like exams.
- **Joy** can also include enjoying things about your personality, like when you make good decisions or are brave or kind, feeling cheerful about your life, appreciating others when they are kind and make good choices, loving being in nature and connecting with others.

One of the Stoics, Seneca, wrote some really useful things about understanding our emotions. He wrote a little book all about anger. In it he talks about what he called three “movements” in terms of our emotions being unhelpful. Although he happened to be going on about anger, it could be “fear of missing out,” anxiety, feeling ashamed about things, or feeling really sad.

The **first movement** is the “animal like” first response, like jumping when someone comes up behind you. It is our instinct and so not something we can or should try to control.

The **second movement** is where our thoughts come in, “*Something really good or bad is going on here.*” So this means the person has really “jumped on board” with the “animal” reaction.

In the case of anger for example, the thought would be “*something actually bad is happening where I am being harmed AND it is right for me to try to get revenge for this thing.*” In the case of depression and anxiety it might be something like “*something bad is either here or might happen, where I am either being harmed or likely to be and it is right for me to **avoid** situations due to this.*”

The **third movement** is where we have been *taken over* by the emotion. This means that we are likely to not be acting like our true selves, because we might do or say something silly, we might forget to be fair or kind and may experience that we have “lost it” (we have lost our self-control), and finally we may try to avoid things which we should have faced (we lack *courage*).

How can this help? Well we can be aware that we are experiencing an emotional reaction and choose not to “get on board” with it, just because it is here! There is a little recorded meditation in the resources called “Mind the Gap” that could be helpful for doing that.

Reading about Emotions

Remember that what insults you isn't the person who abuses you or hits you, but your judgement that such people are insulting you. So, whenever someone irritates you, recognize that it is your opinion that has irritated you. Try above all, then, not to allow yourself to be carried away by the impression...You'll find it easier to gain control of yourself.
Epictetus, Handbook, 20

What do you think about this quote? It's quite tricky to get your head around the idea that the thing that “hurts” us is the thoughts in our heads, rather than the person who has said something horrible to us. Try to remember this every time you experience someone behaving in a potentially upsetting way, it is what you are thinking about their behavior that is causing you to feel sad or angry, not their actual behavior. For example, if a small child said something insulting to us, we would be likely to say to ourselves, “They don't know any better.” So can we try saying that to ourselves with adults too? It isn't about being passive and letting people bully us, it's about how we feel.

Discuss Emotional Role Models

Can you think of a celebrity or family member you would like to be like in terms of how they handle life and their emotions? What is it about them that you think is really great? Are there any celebrities who have loads of money and fame, but don't seem to handle their emotions very well? Do you think they are still living their best life?

As we were saying before, there was an amazing and brilliantly short book called *Meditations*, which was written by Marcus Aurelius. He was the Roman Emperor, so he must have had a lot of things to get really stressed out about! In this book, Marcus says that when we need encouragement, we can think of the people we know and what they are like, how they would handle things. Where one person might be full of enthusiasm, another is kind and calm in the face of things going wrong. We can look to these examples as what we can aim at ourselves, even when we are having a tough time of it!

Here is what he said:

Whenever you want to cheer yourself up, think of the good qualities of those who live with you: such as the energy of one, the decency of another, the generosity of another, and some other quality in someone else. There is nothing so cheering as the images of the virtues displayed in the characters of those who live with you and grouped together as far as possible. So you should keep them ready at hand.

Meditations, 6.48

In the beginning of *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius spends a great deal of time and effort going over all the amazing people he can think of, and what is cool about them or how he would like to be like them. He goes through all the people who have been important to him in his life and considers every lesson he learned from them about how to live his best life. Marcus finds *seventeen* examples, however, some of them are very short. For example, from his grandfather he learned “*character and self-control*,” and then that’s pretty much it! He wasn’t writing this whole long essay about each person! Let’s try this out:

Think of one person who has taught you something specifically about emotions. These people might be friends and family, or they could be characters from movies, singers, or famous people from history who showed great characteristics.

For example, you might have learned in school about how Nelson Mandela behaved when he was released from prison. He showed so much forgiveness, showed acceptance of what had happened to him and treated people who might have been expected to be his “enemies” with respect and kindness. Then he got on with organizing a big rugby sport event so that people could learn to make friends with each other. He was amazing!

Write in your Journal

Consider which emotional role model has been most important to you. Can you picture them and think about what they would say to you when you are really stressed out? How would they deal with some things you are facing?

Is there anything different about how they have or would deal with a pandemic for example, in terms of their emotional responses?

Make a note in your Stoic Week journal.

Activity: Noticing Our Emotions

It would be great to spend some time today and over this week noticing which emotions come up for you a lot. Here is an example, taken from real-life experiences!

Date	
How did I react emotionally?	I was holding my breath, this is a common sign for me I had a lot of tension in my shoulders I chewed at my nails, which is annoying as I just painted them...
What event did I react to?	My computer had gone weird
What was I thinking?	That this was an actually bad thing and was hurting me, and that it was correct to be anxious about it That I would let people down and that they would be hurt by this situation I won't be able to work as I am too "dependent" on technology
Why might this be wrong?	Something like this is an external circumstance and not in fact <i>hurting</i> , this is just <i>a thought in my head</i>
What emotion did I feel and how strongly did I feel it?	I felt anxiety I notice that this is my most common overwhelming emotion
How could I think about the event differently?	I can remind myself that the only thing that really matters is being a good person. Therefore, if I am behaving with self-control, being brave, making good choices and being kind and fair, I am living my best life whatever happens This big emotional response is not very clever or self-controlled!
How will I remind myself about this next time a similar event happens?	I can catch the first signs that I am experiencing anxiety and do something to change it straight away, e.g.: Drink a glass of water or go outside for a minute to "catch" and challenge my thinking Watch a video of puppies on YouTube, this always works!

Now it's your turn to try! Starting today, and for each day this week, write down at least three episodes of emotional response that you noticed. (Try to write it down as soon as possible after it happens!)

Tuesday: Resilience

Reading about Resilience

If an evil is pondered beforehand, it is gentle when it comes...the wise person accustoms oneself to coming trouble, ...whatever happens he says 'I knew it.'

Seneca, Moral Letters, 76

Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and ...whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and...whatever are not our own actions.

If you suppose that only to be your own which is your own, and what belongs to others such as it really is, then no one will ever compel you or restrain you.

Further, you will find fault with no one or accuse no one. You will do nothing against your will. No one will hurt you, you will have no enemies, and you (will) not be harmed.

Epictetus, Enchiridion, 1

Think about these quotes. They are saying that you can be more prepared for challenging events when they happen, and that we should carefully think through what is under our control and what isn't. These two things together will really help us to be *stronger* in the face of our challenges!



Discuss

Take a recent event or situation, it could even be the pandemic itself or some exams or tests you needed to take. In a group, see if you can divide up which things were under your control, and which things were not.

If you have time, use a big sheet of paper or a whiteboard to divide everything to do with the event or situation into two columns, under your control, and not under your control.

For example, with an exam, the bus turning up late and making you late for school when you have a test, is not under your control. However, choosing to leave early on an exam day might be something that you could do, and so is under your control. What is on the exam paper is not under your control, but how you choose to study is under your control.

How does it feel to really focus on the things which *are* under your control?

What is bad about imagining or trying to be in control of things that are *outside* of our control?

Activities for Resilience

What might go wrong today and can we do anything about it?

Each morning when you are getting ready for school or your weekend activities, think ahead to something you have planned for the day. Try to imagine what could “*go wrong*,” then think about what parts of things going wrong are *not in your control*.

Is there anything you can actively *do* that might make things go well today? For example, if you ever find you miss the bus to school, and then you get told off and it’s a horrible start to the day, could you set your alarm earlier, with another alarm to tell you when to leave the house?

Finally, is there a phrase you could say to yourself that would be helpful if things do start to go wrong?

Make a note in your Stoic Week journal.

You might find this activity a bit of a challenge for two reasons: First of all you have to make the time to do it, and then some people find they get stressed out by thinking about what can go wrong with their day. Try reading over the reasons why we are doing this, and if you do find it stressful, start with something really *tiny* that could go wrong. For example, you might think, “What if my phone loses a charge and I can’t get to a charger?”



Here's an example:

Date	
What events are planned for today?	I have to meet up with someone in a different town.
What <i>could</i> go wrong?	I get the train and a bus, but sometimes they are late. It can be scary for me to travel to new places , I might get lost.
What is <i>not completely</i> in your control about things maybe going wrong?	My initial stress reaction to getting lost or being late. Whether the train or bus are late.
What is in your control about things maybe going wrong?	I can plan ahead by doing some research about where I am going so it is less scary. I can plan to arrive early by getting an early train, so it doesn't matter if it is late.
What could you say to yourself about today that you are likely to remember in the "heat of the moment"?	I can remind myself that it is ok that I sometimes have a stress reaction to traveling on my own initially, this is my "animal brain" trying to make sure I am safe. I can remind myself that it is ok to ask for help. I can remind myself that if I was late, it would not be my fault as I am doing everything in my power to be on time. The people I am meeting would understand.

Now it's your turn!

Date		
What events are planned for today?		
What <i>could</i> go wrong?		
What is <i>not completely</i> in your control about things maybe going wrong?		
What is in your control about things maybe going wrong?		
What could you say to yourself about today that you are likely to remember in the “heat of the moment”?		

Wednesday: The Value of Friendships

Exploring Friendships

The four Stoic virtues, more valuable than all other valued things in life, are courage, practical wisdom, moderation and justice. These qualities are made of many other things, for instance, justice includes kindness and compassion, courage includes persistence and generosity, practical wisdom includes curiosity and love of learning, and moderation includes patience and restraint.

These are the four things we have complete control over in our lives and putting them at the top of our preferences – above the other things we feel we want or need to make us happy – leads to living a virtuous life.

For the Stoics, only virtue is **good**, while everything else is either **worthy or not worthy of choice**. This is why Stoics made a distinction between virtue on the one hand, and everything else, on the other hand.

Things like wealth, health, education, friendship, love, and other things do not make us **morally** better or worse people. For example, if you lost all your possessions in a fire overnight, you could still be a good person the next day. Losing your possessions doesn't take away your good character.

The fact that a person is wealthy, healthy, educated, has friends, is in love, etc. makes absolutely no difference to someone's moral character and worth. Indeed, one may lack all of those things and yet still be a **morally good person**. It all depends on how one makes use of those things in their life.

That, in fact, is what virtue is: the ability to make good use of the things we have. (from Massimo Pigliucci)



One exercise to determine what values we have is to prioritize the things (people, objects and emotions) that we attach to goodness. Ranking them allows a person to see their value and compare their worth according to our own personal system.

Friendship, of course, is an important and valuable thing to have, and for that reason it is usually highly ranked. But the Stoics understood that friendship, while greatly cherished and rewarding, is still not necessary to having a good character and living a good life.



Seneca explains the Stoic value of friendship:

The wise man is self-sufficient. Nevertheless, he desires friends, neighbors, and associates, no matter how much he is sufficient unto himself.

Seneca, Letters, 9.3

He continues:

In this sense the wise man is self-sufficient, that he can do without friends, not that he desires to do without them. When I say 'can,' I mean this: he endures the loss of a friend with equanimity.

Seneca, Letters, 9.5

Learning to prepare oneself slowly for the loss of certain relationships is not focusing on the negative. In fact, “The Stoics ... were not mad. They didn’t seek physical pain, nor did they think that their attitude could magically make it go away. The same goes for emotional pain. The issue is one of rational acceptance of the reality of things and of (virtuous) endurance of that reality when we are exposed to the hardship and tragedies of life.” (from Massimo Pigliucci)

Reading

Ponder for a long time whether you shall admit a given person to your friendship; but when you have decided to admit them, welcome them with all your heart and soul. Speak as boldly with them as with yourself.

Seneca, Letters, 3.2

Look closely at the quote. What do you think about Seneca’s thoughts? Now let’s answer some questions.

1. What are the qualities of a friend?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a good friend? Why or why not?
3. Do you think it’s better to have a good friend or to be a good friend to someone? Why?
4. How important is having a “best” friend? How can you tell if someone is your “best” friend? Have you ever lost a “best” friend?
5. Would you rather have one best friend or a good group of friends? Why?
6. In what ways could you still be a good person if you lost your best friend?
7. Do you need to have friends to be a good person? In what ways do friends help you to be a better person?



Activity: Virtue and Everything Else

1. Make 3 lists, called A, B and C
2. In the A list, write 3 or 4 qualities that you think are important for someone to be a “good” person. For example, these could be honesty, strength or patience. The question to ask yourself is “What is a character quality that I think makes someone a good person?” Sometimes we want to put people into the A list, but another person does not **make** you a good person, you do. And the reason you are a good person is because you value the things in the A list.
3. Next, in the B list, write some things (3 or 4) that you consider to be important for having a **good** life. Some examples might be family, friends, comfort, health, wealth, fame, a good education, a good job, a nice house, etc. The question to ask yourself is “Can I still be a good person if I don’t have this?”
4. Finally, in the C list, write some neutral things that are important to you – for instance, your favorite movie or song, or what particular sport you enjoy. The things in the C list are great to enjoy but certainly not necessary to having a good life. The question to ask yourself is “Are these things I like, but don’t need, in order to be a good person?” Here’s an example of some things in their groups.

A group Essential for being a good person	B group Preferred but not necessary for being a good person	C group Neutral and not important for being a good person
Honesty	Wealth	A nice house
Strength	Fame	My favorite music
Patience	Family	My favorite sport

5. Now, compare your lists. Sort the lists into an order to rank the things that are most important to the least important.
6. Which things from the A list would you trade for anything from B or C? Would you trade a nice house for your brother, for instance? Or would you trade honesty for money? Which things from the C list would you trade for A or B? Would you trade your favorite sport for being a patient person, for example?
7. Discuss your choices with the students in class. Do you agree or disagree with their choices? Would you change anything after thinking about it?

Discuss

The Stoics tried to put their preferences into order of importance. They felt that the things in the A list were much more important than the things in the B list and called them “Virtues.” The Stoics felt that having lots of friends was in the B list, and not as important as the qualities of a good person, but that being a good friend was always in the A list. As another example, trading your brother for a lot of money would be an unwise choice (even if you aren’t getting on well right now) because a person is always more valuable than money.

Do you agree?

Make a note in your Stoic Week journal.

Further Reading

- Philosophy at Texas A&M. <https://philosophy.tamucc.edu/notes/aristotelian-virtues>
- Pigliucci, Massimo. *Stoicism, friendship, and grief*. <https://medium.com/the-philosophers-stone/stoicism-friendship-and-grief-cd7a5329f772?sk=a13d5678992072c98cbb12cee24cd5a8>
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Thursday: Nature & Community

Exploring the Environment

The environmental crisis represents a true emergency for all life on our planet – one that humanity has never encountered in its history.

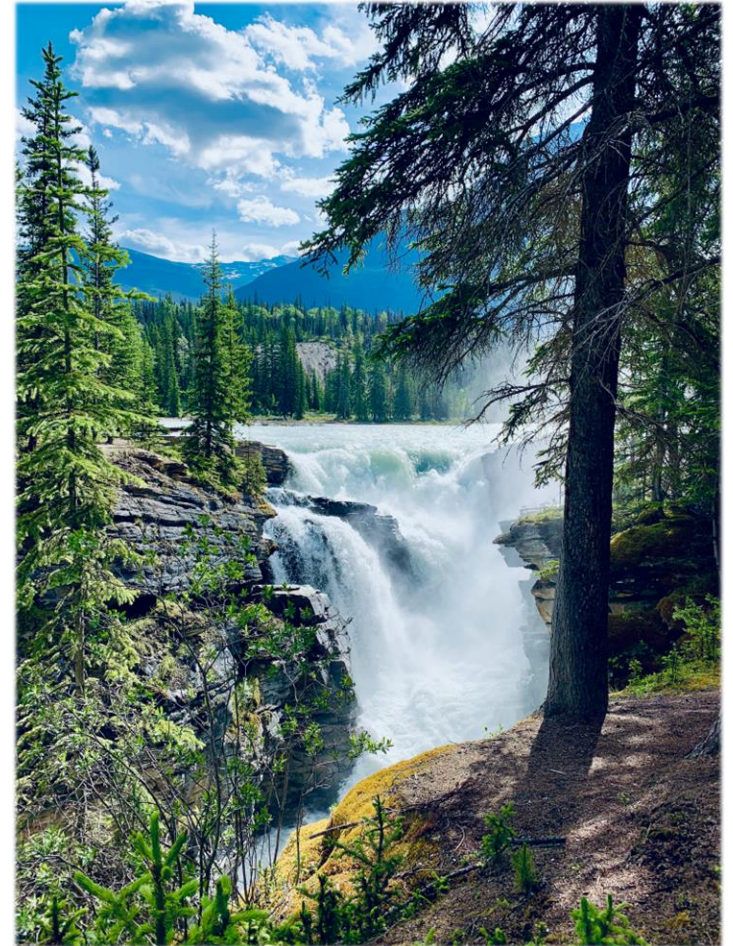
The Stoics link human happiness with nature as a whole. In this respect, the Stoic standpoint is not, in fact, centered on humanity—for them, the whole universe contains more fully qualities that humans possess to a lesser extent. In modern life, we tend to see human beings as separate from nature, which is different from how ancient cultures saw things.

The Stoics see nature not as ethically neutral, not as just a material object or a process; they see it as embodying **good qualities** which human beings can also share, although less completely.

There are two forms of good qualities: the first is rationality, which the Stoics interpret as order and wholeness. Secondly, according to the Stoics, nature is good because it provides for all living things, not just for human beings and other animals, but also plants, and sea and air, all of which contribute to the universe and are good.

One problem with seeing a connection between the environment and humans is the fact that we have trouble relating to the community of all life on the planet – not just our own little group (however that might be interpreted).

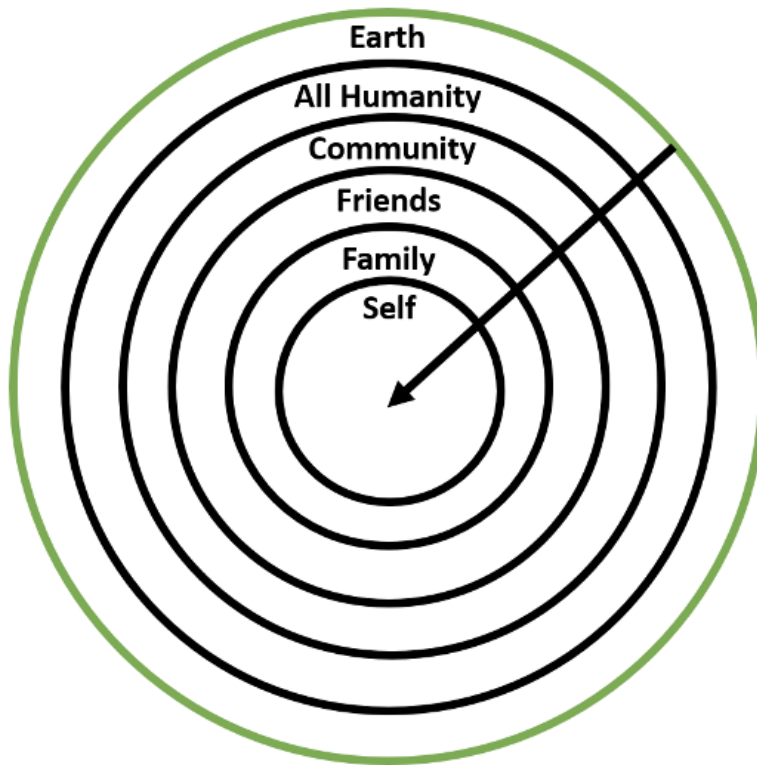
The Stoic framework can be helpful in leading us to make the kind of response in action that is called for by the environmental crisis, and to conceive this response in a positive way. The Stoics think human beings (like other animals) have an instinct to take care of themselves and others of our kind. (from Christopher Gill and Gabriele Galluzzo)



Because of our rationality we can see good as virtues, in a way that benefits ourselves and others.

1. What does community mean to you?
2. Who do you consider to be a part of your community?
3. Do you think you owe anything to your community? Does your community owe anything to you?
4. What is a good way for people to get involved with their community?

Reading about Cosmopolitanism



The Stoics pioneered the theory of cosmopolitanism – the idea that we have ethical obligations not just to our friends and family, but to our wider community, and even to the community of humanity. Sometimes our obligations might clash – between our friends and our country, or between our government and our conscience (for example, would we resist the Nazis if we grew up in 1930s Germany?).

Read this article: Being Better: The Spartans and Stoics Offer So Much More than Self-Help.

<https://modernstoicism.com/being-better-the-spartans-and-stoics-offer-so-much-more-than-self-help-by-kai-whiting/>

A useful activity here is the Stoic exercise of the “widening circles”, imagining all the different wider communities that we’re a part of.

The circles visually portray the Stoic belief that a reasonable person’s relationship with others starts with the circle of the “self” and expands into “family,” “community,” “nation,” and “all humanity”, and finally, the whole planet “Earth”. These circles allow us to recognize ourselves in all of humanity and all of humanity in ourselves. It leads to an understanding that Stoicism is more about collective obligations, responsibilities and civic duty, a sentiment which is nicely captured by Marcus Aurelius when he says:

*What brings no benefit to the hive brings no benefit to the bee.
Meditations 6.54*



Activity & Discussion

1. Draw a group of circles and write the names of closest family and friends in the inner circles. Then each outer circle will have groups getting farther away from you. Who are all the types of people in your family? Would you include family members that you have never met?
2. What different types of people in your community can you think of? How are you connected with them? For instance, the people who live in your neighborhood who you see every day, or people who work in your town but live in a different town.
3. The people in the “All Humanity” circle will be people who are from foreign countries, who speak different languages and have different cultures from your own. Do you know anyone who lives in a foreign country? Have you seen films or read books about people from far away?
4. How do you think your life is similar to and different from the people in each circle?
5. Do we have obligations to people on the other side of the world?
6. Do you think we owe anything to other species of life on Earth? What about future generations?
7. Write a short letter to someone on the outer circle, farthest from you. What could you say to them? How would you ask them for help, if you needed it? What would you do to try and help them, if they needed it?

Make a note in your Stoic Week journal.

Further Reading

- Evans, Jules. *3 thoughts on Getting Practical Philosophy into the Classroom*.
<https://modernstoicism.com/getting-practical-philosophy-into-the-classroom-by-jules-evans/>
- Gill, Christopher and Gabriele Galluzzo. *Stoicism, Aristotle, and Environmental Responsibility*. <https://modernstoicism.com/stoicism-aristotle-and-environmental-responsibility-by-chris-gill-and-gabriele-galluzzo/>
- Whiting, Kai. *Being Better: The Spartans and Stoics Offer So Much More than Self-Help*.
<https://modernstoicism.com/being-better-the-spartans-and-stoics-offer-so-much-more-than-self-help-by-kai-whiting/>

Friday: Identity & Character

Exploring Identity

You're probably tired of that dreaded question: what do you want to be when you grow up? It seems that adults in our society never tire of asking kids. But Stoicism has a different question for you: *who* do you want to be when you grow up? In other words, *what kind of person* do you want to be? Courageous? Strong? Helpful? Resilient?

Stoics think that the career or job you end up doing isn't nearly as important as the kind of person you are. In fact, Emperor Marcus Aurelius said, "What is your profession? To be a good person" (*Meditations*, 11.5). Let's think about that for a minute. The Roman Emperor was the most powerful person in the world at the time. He had, to put it mildly, a great career. He was fabulously wealthy and could have almost anything he wanted. And yet, in his private journal, in his innermost thoughts, he reminded himself that none of that mattered as much as being a good person. All the wealth and power in the world can't make you happy but being the right kind of person can.

Before we start our reading for today, think about how people decide what kind of person to be.

1. Do you get to decide what kind of person to be, or does someone else decide for you?
2. If you get to decide, how do you make such an important decision?
3. What influences you, or what could you use as a guide?
4. What are some character traits you would like to have, both now and as an adult?



Reading about Character

Today's reading comes from Marcus Tullius Cicero, who was also one of the most famous and influential people of his time. In the passage below, he is writing to his teenage son, who was off studying with philosophers in Athens – the ancient equivalent of studying at university.

Cicero was very ambitious and had high expectations for his son. (He keeps annoyingly reminding his son that he expects him to follow in his father's footsteps and have an illustrious career. And in fact, Cicero junior did go on to become influential and respected in his own right.) So the advice given here doesn't conflict with having a good career – in fact, it might help you choose one. But the point is that your career choice is only one part of who you are, and certainly not the most important part.

Let's look at how Cicero describes these four aspects of our character, or four components of our identity.

Nature has endowed us with what we may call a dual role in life. The first is that which all of us share by virtue of our participation in reason...The other is that which is assigned uniquely to each individual, for just as there are great variations in physical attributes (for we see that some can run faster and others wrestle more strongly, or again, one has an imposing appearance, while another's features are graceful), so our mental makeup displays variations greater still...

To the twin roles I mentioned earlier, a third is added when some chance or circumstance demands it; and there is also a fourth which we attach to ourselves by our own studied choice. Regal powers, kingships, military commands, noble birth, riches, resources—and the opposite of these – are a matter of chance, depending on circumstances. On the other hand, the role which we should like to play is prompted by our own choice. So some devote themselves to philosophy, others to civil law, and others again to eloquence; and even in the practice of the virtues different people prefer different ones at which to excel...

But above all we must establish who and what kind of person we wish to be, and what pattern of life we wish to adopt.

Cicero, On Duties, 1.107-1.117

Activity

Watch this video by Dr. Gregory Sadler on Cicero's Four Characters: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkZfoZfjXoA>)

As you watch, fill in the table below.

	1. Human Nature	2. Individual Nature	3. Chance/ Circumstances	4. Personal Choices
Description				
Examples				
Is this in your control to change?				
How does this apply to your life?				

Now let’s think about the only one of the four characters you can control: your personal choices. As you fill in the table below, remember all the topics we’ve discussed throughout this week (emotions, resilience, friendship, community, and nature).

What are my talents and personality traits? (Character #2)	
What are my personal interests? (Character #2 & 4)	
What opportunities do I have to apply my talents and interests, now and in the future? (Character #4)	
What choices can I make about my life now and my future? (Character #4)	
What challenges might I face as I make those choices?	
What personal characteristics do I have that will help me overcome those challenges?	

Discussion

Now that you're familiar with the four characters, what do you think?

1. Do you agree with Cicero's four characters?
2. Are they helpful?
3. Can you use the four characters to make decisions about who you want to be, both now and in the future?
4. Imagine you're 30 years old and looking back at the decisions you made as a teenager. What advice would you give your younger self?

Make a note in your Stoic Week journal.



Part 3

Wrap-Up

What Did You Think?

Now that we've wrapped up Stoic Week, let's talk about what you learned. Take a look at your Stoic Journal entries for the week. Talk through the following questions with your classmates or friends:

1. Which day was your favorite? What did you like about it?
2. What's something you learned from Stoic Week that you will continue to use in your everyday life?
3. Do you think Stoicism could help you become happier and more resilient?



Values Clarification

One of the biggest decisions each person has to make is choosing what is important in their life. So let's think through what matters to you. Write down what is true for *you* in *your* life. Here are some questions to get you started. (Adapted from *Achieve Your Potential with Positive Psychology* by Tim LeBon and *A Stoic Values Clarification Dialogue* by Christopher Gill and Tim LeBon.)

Think about the best day of your life so far. What made it a great day?	
Think of a time you responded well to a challenging situation. What were you proud of in this situation?	
Think about a person you admire, or someone you consider a role model. Write down the traits you admire.	
Now look back over your answers so far and pick the top six values in your life. Write them here.	
How can you apply your top six values in your life right now?	

Learning More About Stoicism

So Stoic Week is over, but you want to keep going with Stoicism? Here are some resources that will help you learn more.

- **Modern Stoicism.** <https://modernstoicism.com/> Modern Stoicism is a nonprofit organization dedicated to studying and sharing Stoicism with people all over the world. We have a blog, events, a YouTube channel, and lots of links on our website.
- **Meditations.** You can find the meditations mentioned in this Handbook in the Stoic Week for Students resource file on the Modern Stoicism webpage.
- **Stoicism on Facebook.** Search for Stoic groups on Facebook and talk with other people who are learning about Stoicism.
- **Stoicare.** www.stoicare.com If you'd like to put Stoicism into practice by volunteering in your community, Stoicare has some great resources for you.
- ***A Cartoon Introduction to Philosophy.*** This book by Michael F. Patton and Kevin Cannon is a great introduction to general philosophy. You'll learn not just about Stoicism, but about many other Western philosophies.
- ***What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character.*** Keep asking questions and developing your character with this excellent book by Barbara Lewis.



Just remember, there is also a lot of wrong information about Stoicism out there. Stoicism is so misunderstood that some people think it requires not caring about things – which is the opposite of what it really means! So try to stick with content from the people and sources you've met in the Stoic Week guide. This will get you started, and once you learn the basics, you can branch out more.

About the Authors



Brittany Polat is a writer and researcher on Stoicism as a way of life. She is the creator of *Living in Agreement*, a website on Stoic moral psychology, and co-creator of *Stoicare*, an online hub for teachers, parents, medical professionals, and all Stoics who care. Brittany holds a Ph.D. in applied linguistics with a focus on individual differences in second language development. Her latest book is *Tranquility Parenting: A Guide to Staying Calm, Mindful, and Engaged*.



Eve Riches is a Stoicism based mentor and coach. She is an advisor to the Aurelius Foundation, and also runs the online group, London Stoics. Eve is the co-creator of Stoicare with Brittany Polat. Eve also works as an employment consultant, supporting autistic adults and teens. Eve is registered blind / severely sight impaired and credits Stoic teaching with being able to live well with disability.



Amy Valladares, Ph.D., discovered ancient Stoic philosophy as a freshman in college, and then rediscovered it during a midlife crisis. She credits her “natural Stoicism” to the “school of hard knocks,” getting her through some tough times. Amy’s anthropology training has led her to self-study the ancient sources, take part in modern community-building and create a personal Stoic practice. She co-organized the Stoicons in New York (2016), Toronto (2017), London (2018) and Athens (2019). As a teacher of middle and high school students, she has stealthily incorporated ideas of Stoic philosophy into classes about everyday life.