



STOIC WEEK

Live Like a Stoic for a Week

The Stoic Week 2019 Handbook

Care for Ourselves, Others, and Our World

Every animal, as soon as it is born, is concerned with itself and takes care to preserve itself. It favours its constitution and whatever preserves its constitution, whereas it recoils from its destruction and whatever appears to promote its destruction ... also parents' love for their children arises naturally. From this starting-point we trace the development of all human society ... This is also the source of the mutual and natural sympathy between humans, so that the very fact of being human requires that no human be considered a stranger to any other. – Cicero, *On Ends*, 3.16, 62-3

One should always keep in mind these things: what the nature of the whole is, and what my nature is, and how my nature is related to the whole, and what kind of part it is of what kind of whole, and that no one can prevent me from always doing and saying what is in accordance with nature of which I am a part. – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.9

[Learn Modern Stoicism](#)

Latest Revision: 16th September 2019

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The contents of this handbook are not intended as a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Any person with a condition requiring medical attention should consult a qualified medical practitioner or suitable therapist. This experiment is not suitable for anyone who is suffering from psychosis, personality disorder, clinical depression, PTSD, or other severe mental health problems. By undertaking this trial the participant acknowledges that they are aware of and accept responsibility in relation to the foregoing.

Introduction to Stoic Week

Welcome to this year's Stoic Week! Stoic Week is an annual online event in which people from all over the world attempt to live like a Stoic for seven days. This is your opportunity to take part in a unique experiment. You will be using this *Handbook* as your guide and following ancient Stoic Philosophy as an aid to living in the modern world.

The *Handbook* was developed by Modern Stoicism, a multi-disciplinary team of academic philosophers, classicists, professional psychologists and cognitive therapists. The group was formed in 2012 to help others apply Stoic concepts and practices to the challenges of modern living. It includes several authors known for their writing and research on Stoicism. (You can find out more about us on the [Modern Stoicism](#) website.) For those of you interested, there is also a longer and more intensive version of Stoic Week called [Stoic Mindfulness and Resilience Training \(SMRT\)](#), designed by Donald Robertson, which lasts four weeks and runs once or twice each year.

In 2018, Stoic Week proved extremely popular, with over 8,000 people participating. Each year we receive a huge amount of online feedback from participants, which we use to revise and improve the *Handbook*.

In this *Handbook*, you will find advice on how to adapt and follow Stoic principles. It combines general theory with more specific, step-by-step guidance on certain Stoic exercises. These materials have been prepared by experts in the field and give you an unusual and completely free-of-charge opportunity for personal development.

Download Audio Files and Self-Monitoring Record

To participate, you'll also need to download the audio recordings available via this link: [MP3 Audio Recordings for Stoic Week](#)

You'll also need a copy of the self-monitoring record sheet available via this link: [Self-Monitoring Record Sheet for Stoic Week](#)

This Year's Theme: Care for Ourselves, Others and our World

Probably, we all feel we should care properly for ourselves and for others; and increasingly today we feel we should also take more care of the wider natural environment in which we live. But how can we do these things in a coherent way that does not lead to conflict between these aims? And, how, in general, can we work towards giving our actions, relationships and lives more coherence and depth and a better focus? This Handbook is designed to help you to do this by outlining the Stoic framework for living. In the Introduction (What Is Stoicism?), we set out certain core Stoic ideas, including the idea that if we develop properly as human beings we learn to care thoughtfully for ourselves and others and to recognize that all human beings make up a wider community or family. Stoics also think that human beings form an integral part of nature, that nature as a whole has a providential care for all elements within it, and that we should play a constructive role within this natural whole. We also discuss the Stoic view of happiness, their belief that happiness depends on virtue, and that, as we get closer to virtue the quality of our emotional life changes, helping us to avoid negative emotions and to experience positive ones.

Stoic week offers a step-by-step, day by day, opportunity for exploring these ideas and trying to put them into practice in your daily lives. We provide suggestive passages from the ancient Stoic writers as the basis for morning and evening meditations. The meditations and midday exercises give you a chance to think about key distinctive Stoic ideas and how they can be used to give more shape to your life, and to lead towards a life of happiness, whatever the difficulties and challenges that you confront day by day. Of course, this week can only be a start, both in learning about Stoic ideas and in putting them into practice. However, people have found it very helpful in previous years and we hope you do too. The *Handbook* also offers at the end suggestions about how to take this process forward after Stoic Week.

Frequently-Asked Questions

Q: How do I know that living like a Stoic will benefit me?

A: You *can't* know for certain until you try. Indeed, one of the reasons we're conducting the experiment is to find out whether, and how, Stoic practices can help us to live better lives.

Having said that, in previous years, our participants have consistently reported benefits. For example, in 2017 our research findings showed that, on average, life satisfaction increased by 16%, flourishing by 10%, positive emotions by 11%, and negative emotions decreased by 14%. These figures are virtually identical to those reported by participants for the three preceding years, suggesting a consistent pattern of results. Data collected from the 2017 SMRT course showed that when we extended the exercises to four weeks, life satisfaction increased by 16.3%, positive emotions by 18.9%, flourishing by 15%, and negative emotions decreased by 20.1%. For the first time, in 2017, a follow-up was conducted three months after the course, which showed that improvement across these measures had been maintained to a considerable extent.

Learning about Stoicism might help you in different ways. The benefit for you could be educational or philosophical, if it helps you to understand what Stoicism means. It may be psychological, helping you to become more emotionally resilient and possibly even happier. It may be moral, and you may find that the week helps you develop certain ethical qualities. Some people may, of course, find that Stoicism just isn't for them, which might in itself be a valuable discovery. However, from the questionnaire data we've collected and previous participants' testimonies we can see that most people who participated in Stoic Week and related events found their experiences very enjoyable and beneficial.

Q: What's the basic idea?

A: You need to do the following:

1. Follow the daily schedule, which consists of a passage for reflection and

Stoic meditations for the morning and evening. At lunchtime, or another time more suitable for you, consider the Stoic exercise for that day.

2. We would also appreciate it if you would complete the online questionnaires. This will help us with our research and help you to assess your degree of Stoicism and how much the course has helped you.

You should read each chapter in advance of the corresponding day. You might choose to read Monday's chapter, for example, first thing on Monday morning, or beforehand on Sunday evening. However, some people may find it easier just to read the whole handbook through before beginning Stoic Week and use the summary in each chapter as a daily reminder.

You'll find a convenient summary of your daily routine at the end of this introductory section of the handbook, and additional summaries in each daily section to help you remember what you're supposed to be doing. The morning and evening meditation practices will also provide you with a simple daily routine or structure to help you to reflect on what you've done and what happened to you each day. Instructions for the Stoic meditations are offered in this booklet, but there are also guided audio exercises if you wish to use them. You can download these via the link at the start of this chapter.

You'll begin by learning to record your thoughts, actions, and feelings, and to start observing them in a more detached and "philosophical" way. One of the main strategies that runs through both Stoicism and this handbook is that of distinguishing between things that are under your control and things that are not. The Stoics believed that this takes training to do well but that it's the key to self-discipline and overcoming emotional disturbances. Maintaining this distinction between what is and isn't under your control requires continual attention to your own thoughts and judgements. We can describe this as a kind of 'mindfulness' practice. You'll build upon this foundation by exploring different Stoic concepts and techniques each day throughout the course of the week.

Q: What if I'm worried I won't have time to do everything?

A: It will probably be helpful for you to think of this as a definite, short-term commitment – similar perhaps to the effort you would put into preparing for an exam or training for a sporting event. Typically participants take just over 10 minutes to do the required reading and exercises in the morning and evening, and 15 minutes at midday. However, you might want to spend more

or less time than this on the exercises. Some people have told us they can only spare five or ten minutes, which is absolutely fine. Data from previous participants in Stoic Week showed the average amount of time they actually spent on the course was precisely 36 minutes per day. (This is very similar to the commitment required for most research studies on psychological self-help or skills training.)

Q. How can I make use of modern technology for Stoic Week?

Here are some ideas:

- **Video.** Record a video diary of your experiences of living like a Stoic and publish it on [YouTube](#) or another video-sharing site
- **Blogging.** Blog about your experiences on your own site, or send them to our WordPress blog: [Stoicism Today](#)
- **Twitter.** Tweet about your experiences, or post Stoic adages on Twitter as you go along, using [#Stoicweek](#)
- **Facebook.** Discuss ideas or raise questions on our [Facebook Stoicism group](#) to share your ideas and experiences
- **Mobile.** Use your phone to set reminders to start your Stoic practices
- **Other Social Media.** Although we don't currently use other social networks like Instagram and Snapchat, there's nothing to stop you from doing so as part of Stoic Week.

There are also Stoic groups on [LinkedIn](#) and [Reddit](#), which you may find useful

Which of these appeal to you? How many other ways can you use technology to help you live like a Stoic? If you are doing the experiment with other people, it might help to discuss your experiences regularly. Perhaps you could have a ten-minute Stoic coffee break each day where you touch base with others to discuss how you are doing.

Q: Can I take part offline or by using my mobile device?

A: Absolutely. Most people with internet access work through the handbook on our main website. Stoic Week is currently hosted on a platform called *Teachable*. You can download the [Teachable app for iOS](#) and use this to

access our course on iPhones or iPad. (Android support will be coming eventually.) **NB:** Some features for the app are still pending, such as the ability to access Comments for discussion areas.

We also provide ebook versions of the Stoic Week handbook, which can be used *offline* on mobile phones, tablets, and e-readers. This can be very useful if you're travelling and won't always have internet access. There are three ebook file formats provided: MOBI for Amazon Kindle devices, EPUB for use on all other e-readers and Android and Apple iOS devices, and PDF files, which can be printed or read on virtually any device. We recommend using the MOBI or EPUB formats for reading on electronic devices and the PDF format for printing. (You can also open all three formats on your computer, if you have the appropriate software installed.) We also recommend that at the start of Stoic Week you begin by downloading all of the available offline formats, just in case you need them.

Q: What if I have problems?

A: We're here to provide help and support. Just email the course administrator via admin@modernstoicism.com or use the contact form on the main website. Many hundreds of people have successfully used all of these resources, readings, and exercises since Stoic Week began in 2012. Nevertheless, individuals do sometimes experience technical problems or have other issues with which they may need some assistance. Your first lesson in Stoicism may be that, rather than give up when you run into an obstacle, there's usually a way forward if you're willing to persevere and seek help from the right people.

Q: How will I know whether it has helped or not?

A: At the beginning and end of the week you will fill in questionnaires, which will help you to see objective measures of change and also allow you to reflect on the experience. Your doing so will also help us to evaluate the benefits and limitations of Stoic practices. In Stoic terms, you could even say that participation in the experiment can be seen as contributing toward living a good life.

What is Stoicism?

Stoicism is a school of ancient Greek philosophy in the Socratic tradition. It was founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium around 301 BC. The name comes from the painted porch (*stoa poikile*) where Zeno lectured his students. Stoicism later became very popular in ancient Rome, where it continued to flourish long after the disappearance of the original Greek school. Less than one percent of the Stoics' original writings now survive, however. The most important ancient sources that we have today are:

1. The many *Letters, Essays* and *Dialogues* of the Roman statesman Seneca, who was advisor to the emperor Nero.
2. The *Handbook* and four surviving books of Epictetus' *Discourses* compiled from his lectures by a student called Arrian. Epictetus, a Greek ex-slave, is the only Stoic *teacher* whose thoughts survive in book form.
3. *The Meditations*, a private Stoic notebook or diary of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was strongly influenced by Epictetus.

In the *Stoic Week Handbook* we include passages from all three thinkers, and sometimes also from other ancient authors who wrote about Stoic ethics. These texts are used for the morning and evening reflections. A number of the passages are from Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, which present Stoic ideas in an especially powerful and personal form. Some people think that Marcus wrote *The Meditations* as morning and evening reflections so they may be particularly helpful for encouraging your reflections.

Stoic Week gives *you* a chance to follow a similar routine to Marcus each day. You might like to write down your own morning and evening meditations and keep them in a notebook, or share them with other people through social networks. You can base your personal meditations on the topics suggested or use other Stoic ideas that you have learned about and find helpful.

You may find it helpful to read some of these Stoic writings as a whole during the week, or at least dip into them. For instance, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, Epictetus' *Handbook* and *Discourses*, and Seneca's *Letters* provide sources of helpful additional reading. All of these are available in up-to-date translations with introductions and notes, published by Oxford University Press, The World's Classics, or Penguin, for instance. We offer more suggestions for further reading at the end of the *Handbook*.

Central Stoic Ideas

What is Stoicism? How might it help us to live better, happier lives today? Some of you will be drawn to this experiment because you already know a little bit about Stoicism and want to put it into practice for yourselves. Others may know very little about Stoicism and are curious to learn more. The ancient Stoic philosophical system was well known for being vast and complex, addressing a wide range of topics under the headings of Ethics, Logic, and Physics. It will be impossible to introduce it all. However, here are several central ideas at the heart of Stoic ethics: happiness, virtue, ethical development, emotions, nature. These are also the main themes for reflection on different days of Stoic Week. Don't worry if some of these ideas seem a bit hard to grasp on first reading. They will become clearer as you go through each day of Stoic Week".

1. Happiness

We all want to live happily – but what *is* happiness? In modern terms, ‘happiness’ tends to mean being in a cheerful mood or having enjoyable experiences. People often think that being happy depends on factors largely outside our control, such as being healthy or well-off, or finding the right life-partner or a stable family life. Ancient philosophers often thought of happiness as a matter of leading a certain kind of life, a life that we can determine for ourselves. In forming an idea of happiness, we are adopting a ‘goal’ (in Greek, *telos*) to provide shape for our lives. The Stoics offered an idea of happiness that gives a central role to our own agency, our ability to determine our own actions. They also insisted that we can all work towards achieving happiness whatever our situation in life. They maintained that adopting a correct view of happiness will affect our emotions and moods as well as our actions and relationships to others, and will do so in a very positive way.

What is happiness, then, according to Stoicism? The standard definition was ‘the life according to nature’ or ‘the natural life’. ‘Nature’ in what sense, though? The Stoics seem to have in mind a combination of human nature and nature as a whole (the universe or cosmos). They defined human nature as rational and sociable. They saw animals in general as naturally sociable, and humans as sociable in a way that expresses rationality. They thought the universe or nature as a whole was characterised by two main sets of qualities. One is order, structure, and wholeness (overall, a kind of consistency). The other is providential care for all the forms of life that make up the natural

world, including human beings. The Stoics thought that human beings are capable of expressing these same qualities, though in a human way.

... therefore, living in agreement with nature comes to be the goal, which is in accordance with the nature of oneself [human nature] and that of the whole [...] the virtue of the happy person and his good flow of life [happiness] are just this: always doing everything on the basis of the harmony of each person's guardian spirit with the will of the administrator of the whole. (Chrysippus, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, 7.88)

So, the happy life for Stoicism is a life that expresses human nature at its best and also reflects, at a human level, the best qualities of nature as a whole. The happy life combines the proper use of rationality with sociability (wanting to benefit other people). It is a coherent life, marked by inner order, structure and wholeness or integrity, rather than being chaotic or unstable. It is also a life which combines caring for ourselves (wanting to express the best qualities of our nature) with caring for other people. This idea of happiness is closely linked with Stoic thinking about virtue and ethical development, and their views on those subjects help to spell out what is involved in Stoic happiness.

Compared with some modern ideas of happiness, the Stoic view stresses inner rather than outer features, qualities of understanding and character rather than success or good health or being rich. Although Stoic happiness is not defined in terms of feeling or mood, Stoics think that someone who is happy in the Stoic sense is also someone who experiences positive emotions such as joy and does so in a consistent way, which does not depend on external circumstances. Even if we do not entirely share the Stoic picture of human or universal nature, we may still find their idea of happiness a powerful and inspiring one and one that we want to explore further.

2. Virtue

Virtue is a consistent character, choiceworthy for its own sake and not from fear or hope or anything external. Happiness consists in virtue since virtue is a soul which has been fashioned to achieve consistency in the whole of life. (Diogenes Laertius, 7.89)

For the Stoics, the ideas of happiness and virtue are closely connected; indeed, happiness was sometimes defined as 'the life according to virtue', as well as 'the life according to nature'. The virtues, taken generally, are the qualities that enable us to lead a happy life, that is, a fully human and

‘natural’ life, in the Stoic sense.

The Stoics thought there were four core (or ‘cardinal’) virtues, with many subdivisions, which cover the four main areas of human experience and motivation. They defined them as forms of knowledge or expertise (skill in living a happy life). But they are not purely intellectual skills and cover qualities of character as well as understanding. The core virtues are:

- **Wisdom**, excellence in reasoning and judgement in theory and practice
- **Courage** (or resilience), ability to deal with dangers properly
- **Justice** (including kindness and generosity), excellence in our relationships with others
- **Moderation** or self-control, ability to deal properly with emotions and desires

The four virtues were seen as very closely linked. Sometimes, wisdom was regarded as the core virtue, and the other three virtues as aspects of wisdom, that is, as wisdom applied in the various sectors of human experience. The virtues were also seen as depending on each other, so you could not be brave or moderate, in a real sense, unless you were also wise (using good judgement) or just (treating people properly).

In modern thought, virtues are often described as ‘moral’ qualities and these are seen as qualities that benefit other people rather than ourselves (or that express altruism rather than egoism). In ancient ethics, including Stoicism, virtues are generally seen as qualities that benefit us ourselves as well as other people. In Stoicism, the virtues enable us to lead a happy life, that is, the best possible life for a human being (seen as part of nature as a whole). By exercising wisdom or good judgment in the four main areas of human experience, we express the distinctively human combination of rationality and sociability. In this way, we also take the best possible care of ourselves and of other people who form part of our lives, by achieving the best possible qualities of human excellence and expressing this in the way we treat others, for instance, by acting justly, bravely and with self-control. We also give our lives an overall shape and coherence or wholeness, as the virtues are applied consistently in all aspects of our actions and experiences. Thus, we achieve happiness, but a form of happiness that benefits other people as much as us, and does so to the fullest possible extent.

The Stoics sometimes draw a sharp distinction between the virtues (genuinely good) and other things often *assumed* to be good by the majority of people, such as health, prosperity, reputation and the welfare of our families and

friends. The second kind of things are described by Stoics as ‘matters of indifference’ or, more precisely, as indifferents that are ‘preferred’ or ‘preferable’, rather than the opposite. This distinction is a potentially confusing one, especially as the Stoics also recognise that the preferred indifferents such as health and the welfare of our families have a real, positive value and are things that human beings naturally want to have rather than not have. Why, then, are they described as ‘indifferents’? They are indifferents because they do not make the difference between leading a happy life or not, whereas the virtues do make this difference. If you have and exercise the virtues, you will achieve happiness, as Stoics understand this (leading a life that is properly rational and sociable, for instance), and you will do so whether or not you also have health, prosperity and so on. But if you have the preferred indifferents but not the virtues, you will not lead a happy life (you will not care for yourself and others in a proper way or give your life coherence and unity). So the distinction reflects the central role given by the Stoics to virtue in producing happiness.

There are two recent dialogues on the Stoic idea of ‘indifferents’ between Tim LeBon and Chris Gill on the ‘Stoicism Today’ blog that you might find helpful: 1. [Stoic Values Clarification Part 1](#) 2. [Stoic Values Clarification Part 2](#)

3. Ethical Development ('Appropriation')

From the beginning nature has assigned to every type of creature the tendency to preserve itself, its life and body, and to reject anything that seems likely to harm them [...] Common to all animals is the instinct to unite for the purposes of procreation, and to care for those that are born ... The great difference between humans and other animals is this [...] Human beings have a share in reason. (Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.11)

Stoics believed that all human beings have a natural, in-built, capacity to develop towards virtue and happiness. In this respect, they differed from some other ancient thinkers who believed that ethical development depended on having a special kind of inborn nature, and a special kind of upbringing and social context or education. For the Stoics, ethical development is a matter of fulfilling your own nature as a human being and an integral part of the natural universe; and everyone, even someone who seems to be evil or conflicted, has this ability at a deep level. They described this process as ‘appropriation’ (in Greek, *oikeiōsis*), which suggests making your human nature ‘your own’ or making other people who share your nature ‘your own’ (*oikeion*).

This process of development was sometimes subdivided by Stoic thinkers into two strands (though they are also seen as interlinked). These can be seen as *rational* and *sociable* strands, corresponding to the two main distinctive features of human nature. In the first strand, we express our rationality by learning how to select properly between ‘indifferents’ (things such as health and prosperity) and in this way learning how to select virtuously (wisely, bravely, justly, moderately). As we come to learn what the virtues involve, we also recognise that it is virtue, rather than other things, that enables us to lead a happy life, and we begin to form a proper understanding of what happiness is.

In the second strand, we develop the sociability that is also an integral part of human nature. The Stoics thought that all animals have a social instinct, expressed most obviously in the love of parents for their offspring. In human beings this social instinct can be developed in a rational way, and can lead us to care for (or to ‘make our own’) family members, friends, neighbours and fellow-citizens. These different kinds of relationships were sometimes described as ‘circles’ around ourselves. Also, the Stoics, exceptionally in the ancient world, maintained that all human beings, including foreigners, are our brothers or sisters or fellow-citizens, in that we all share the same core human characteristics of rationality and sociability and are equally capable of virtue and happiness.

These two strands of development are interconnected. Learning how to select things virtuously depends partly on forming attitudes of care towards other people, in different forms of relationship. Caring for other people properly depends on treating them virtuously and also on recognising that happiness depends on virtue rather than indifferents. Although the Stoics thought this process was natural for us as human beings, they did not see it as easy or automatic. Indeed, for virtually all of us, it will be a life-long process and one that we do not complete in full. However, we can make progress in doing so, and in learning how to carry through these two strands and to relate them to each other. Aiming to make progress towards virtue and happiness can provide a coherent and powerful framework for our lives, even if we fall short of the perfection of the ideal wise person.

4. Emotions

Modern ideas of happiness often give a central place to emotions (feeling happy), and this topic also plays a part in Stoic thinking on happiness and ethical development. In the popular imagination the Stoic is someone who has no emotions (like a robot) or who represses her feelings in an unhealthy way.

The Stoics' real views on this are more credible and also more complex. Stoics think that a further strand in our ethical development is the emotional one. As we make progress towards virtue and happiness, our emotional life changes. We stop having ethically misguided and intense or conflicted emotions (sometimes called 'passions') and we move towards having 'good emotions'.

As Epictetus puts it: 'if virtue promises to enable us to achieve happiness, freedom from passion, and serenity, then progress towards virtue is surely also progress towards each of these states' (*Discourses*, 1.4.3).

The passions are misguided because the passionate person supposes that happiness depends on acquiring or retaining 'preferred indifferents', such as wealth or fame (rather than on exercising the virtues). This mistake generates emotions such as anger, fear, or overwhelming lust; as well as being mistaken, these emotions are often marked by intensity of feeling, instability and inner conflict. Ethical development leads someone towards acting virtuously and recognising that happiness depends on virtue. It also leads towards expressing affection and care for the other people who share our lives, including children and other family members, fellow-citizens and strangers or foreigners. Someone who develops in this way experiences 'good emotions', rather than misguided ones, based on sound ethical judgements and marked by a calmer and more stable and consistent pattern of feeling.

The Stoics recognise three main good emotions (with many subdivisions), corresponding to three of the main passions; these good emotions are focused on developing the virtues, rather than on preferred indifferents, as the passions are:

1. **Wishing**, directed at gaining what is genuinely good (virtue), rather than intense desire or craving for (for instance) wealth
2. **Caution**, directed at avoiding what is bad (vice or defective character), rather than fear about losing wealth or another preferred indifferent
3. **Joy** or delight directed at what is good (virtue or happiness in oneself or someone else), rather than (misguided) pleasure in something trivial or malicious

The good emotions can be focused on other people's virtues and happiness as well as one's own. The Stoics recognized good (wise) forms of erotic love and of affection for children and other family members as well as the three main good emotions and their subdivisions.

So for the Stoics, as well as other thinkers, happiness has an emotional dimension. But good emotions, like happiness generally, come as a result of developing the virtues and should not be taken as a separate objective or goal in their own right.

5. Nature

As brought out already, ‘nature’ is a very important idea in Stoic ethics, with several key senses:

1. Human nature, regarded as distinctively rational and sociable
2. Universal or cosmic nature, marked by order, structure, wholeness and providential care for all parts of the universe, including human beings
3. Our own nature, which at its best (when it achieves virtue and happiness) shares in these qualities of human and universal nature
4. The community or brotherhood of human beings, which is the bond existing between all human beings as co-sharers in nature in these senses.

Modern people would find it difficult to accept the kind of picture of the physical world offered by Stoic physics, rather than by modern science. But we can still see the role allocated to nature in Stoic ethics as a powerful and suggestive one today, for several reasons. For instance, the Stoic idea of nature helps to give substantial content to their thinking on virtue and happiness. The idea that virtue and happiness consist in a combination of rationality and sociability, and involve order, structure, and wholeness, as well as care for ourselves and others of our kind, is one that modern thinkers can find convincing and inspiring.

Thinking about ourselves as an integral part of universal or cosmic nature may have ethical significance in other ways too. It can help us to see our life-cycle from birth to death as an infinitesimal part of life in nature, and thus to accept inevitable events such as our own death and that of others in a more realistic and calmer way. Also, today – much more than in the time of the ancient Stoics – we need, as human beings, to take care of the natural environment and to try to repair the damage we have done to many aspects of the natural order. Thinking of ourselves as integral parts of universal nature can help us to develop a proper sense of responsibility in this respect.

You should regard the realization and fulfilment of what seems good to nature as a whole in the same way as you view your own health, and so welcome everything that happens, even if it seems rather harsh, because

it leads in that direction, towards the health of the universe. – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.8.9

Conclusion

If you are going to follow Stoic week then you need to be open-minded at least towards these core Stoic ethical ideas. Our aim here is not to convince you of the truth of these claims but to invite you to consider them and reflect on them and see if they can help you to formulate and shape your own thoughts about how to give more shape and purpose to your life. If the ideas we are presenting seem completely absurd to you it may simply be that Stoicism is not for you. But you will only find this out by giving yourself time to think about these ideas for yourself.

Stoic Week: Your Daily Routine

Each day in Stoic Week has its own central theme, and these themes build upon one another as the week progresses. This has the potential to make the whole exercise the beginning of a deeper journey into Stoicism. Take some time out at midday each day, or any time that suits you, to reflect on the day's theme and how it might shape the various activities in which you are engaged.

Daily Discussions

There are discussion areas for each day of the week in the online version of the course. If you're reading the e-book version of the *Handbook* you can either access these by going to the main course page and clicking on the corresponding day of the week, or you can share your thoughts on social media for discussion. We recommend using the Facebook group below and marking your posts #stoicweek.

[Stoicism \(Stoic Philosophy\) Facebook Group](#)

Just post your reflections or any questions about the content of the chapter for the day or the corresponding exercises. If you get stuck, you can ask other participants for help here as well.

There are also morning and evening meditations, which you should try to practise at the beginning and end of every day. Let's now explore these two exercises in more detail.

Morning Meditation

When you wake up each morning take a few moments to compose yourself and then patiently rehearse the day ahead, planning how you can make yourself a better person, while also accepting that some things lie beyond your control.

1. Marcus Aurelius talks about walking on your own to a quiet place at daybreak and meditating upon the stars and the rising sun to prepare for the day ahead. You can also do this at home, sitting on the end of your bed, or standing in front of the mirror in your bathroom, and still think of the sun rising against a backdrop of stars.

2. Pick a specific philosophical principle that you want to rehearse and repeat it to yourself a few times before imagining how you to put it into practice during the rest of the day. This might be the morning text for reflection for that day (we have chosen a text that matches the overall theme for the day), or an idea based on that text. Or you might prefer to choose the key Stoic theme: ‘Some things are under our control whereas others are not’ and think about giving more importance to being a good person, acting well, and treating things you cannot control as ultimately much less important.
3. Alternatively, you might pick a specific virtue that you want to cultivate in order to prepare yourself mentally for your day ahead. For example, imagine in broad outline how you would act if you showed more wisdom, justice, courage, or moderation.
4. Practise this meditation for about 5-10 minutes, picking out key events or specific challenges that might arise.

Once you've gotten into the habit of doing this, try imagining greater challenges in the day ahead such as some of your plans not going as you hope or dealing with difficult people. As you consider a possible difficulty, think about how you could tackle it with a Stoic principle or virtue. For example, in one of the most famous passages in *The Meditations*, Marcus writes:

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. (*Meditations*, 2.1)

During the Day

You should practise observing your own thoughts, actions, and feelings carefully throughout the day and, if possible, record them in the format described in the *Stoic Self-Monitoring Record Sheet*. You'll find a copy later in this *Handbook*.

Evening Meditation

For each day of the week, we have chosen a Stoic text for reflection which matches the overall theme for the day. You should read and reflect on that text each evening. If you find it helpful you can bear it in mind when carrying

out the evening meditation.

Epictetus and Seneca both allude to a form of philosophical self-analysis that was practised each evening by Stoics. The contemplative exercise they describe was actually borrowed from Pythagoreanism. For example, Epictetus quoted the following passage from the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras* to his students:

Allow not sleep to close your wearied eyes, Until you have reckoned up each daytime deed: "Where did I go wrong? What did I do? And what duty's left undone?" From first to last review your acts and then Reprove yourself for wretched [or cowardly] acts, but rejoice in those done well. (*Discourses*, 3.10.2–3)

For our purposes, before going to sleep at night, take 5-10 minutes to review the events of your day, picturing them in your mind if possible. It's best if you can do this before actually getting into bed, where you might begin to feel drowsy rather than thinking clearly. You may find it helpful to write notes on your reflections and self-analysis in a journal, documenting your 'journey' as you learn to apply Stoic practices in daily life. Try to remember the order in which you encountered different people throughout the day, the tasks you engaged in, what you said and did, and so on. Ask yourself the following (or similar) questions:

1. **What did you do badly?** Did you allow yourself to be ruled by fears or desires of an excessive or irrational kind? Did you act badly or allow yourself to indulge in irrational thoughts?
2. **What did you do well?** Did you make progress by strengthening your grasp of the virtues? Praise yourself and reinforce what you want to repeat.
3. **What could you do differently?** Did you omit any opportunities to exercise virtue or strength of character? How could you have handled things better?

As Seneca puts it, by asking yourself these questions, you are adopting the role of a friend and wise advisor toward yourself, rather than a harsh or punitive critic. Criticise your specific actions rather than yourself as a person in general and focus on ways in which you can improve.

We can probably assume that a Stoic whose self-analysis and review of the preceding day leads him to conclude he has erred in his judgement, acted badly, or failed to follow his principles, would seek to learn from this and act

differently the following day. When you wake up the next day you'll find it natural to base your morning meditation on your reflections from the previous night. These meditations combine to form a 'learning cycle' as you plan how to live and act more wisely, put this into practice during the day, and then reflect on the outcome afterwards, leading to the same cycle the following day.

Modern research-based psychotherapy advises that you'll need to be cautious to avoid reflection turning into morbid 'rumination' or worry. Don't dwell too long on things or go around in circles. Rather, try to keep a practical focus and arrive at clear decisions; if you are not able, then set your thoughts aside and return to them in the morning. There are many hidden aspects to this exercise, which will become clearer as you progress in your studies of Stoicism. For example, bearing in mind that the past is beyond your ability to change, you might want to use this review to adopt an attitude of provisional acceptance of your own shortcomings, forgiving yourself while resolving to behave differently in the future. As Seneca emphasises when describing his use of the same evening routine, we should not be afraid of contemplating our mistakes because as Stoics we can say: "Beware of doing that again – and this time I pardon you."

Audio Download: Morning and Evening Meditations Audio exercises for Stoic Week, including the morning and evening meditations, can be found via the links at the start of this *Handbook*.

The Stoic Self-Monitoring Record

You may find it helpful to make use of a self-monitoring record. This will help you keep a record of behaviours you'd like to stop, such as dwelling on negative thoughts or actions you may later regret. If you feel you don't have time to do this, don't worry, it's *optional*. However, keeping a record is one of the things that previous participants in Stoic Week told us they found particularly helpful.

The self-monitoring record is based on methods used in cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). However, although the ancient Stoics didn't actually fill out a form like this, we can find similar self-monitoring practices in their writings. For example, Epictetus advised his students to keep a tally of days which elapsed without them succumbing to anger. The record we suggest you keep is just a simple sheet of paper with several columns marked on it as below. You can make your own version or download the one we have created from the website.

This process is not just about record-keeping. It's about pausing, taking a step back from things, and gaining what therapists call 'psychological distance' from your initial upsetting thoughts and feelings. Write down your observations as soon as possible. Doing so will help you to view your thoughts in this detached way, observing events and describing them in an objective manner. Keeping these written notes can actually be therapeutic in itself because self-awareness of this kind often leads to subtle improvements in negative feelings.

1. Date/Time/Event

Note the date and time of the event when you started to feel angry or afraid, for example. Briefly describe the actual situation you were facing, e.g., perhaps someone criticised your work, or maybe someone offered you some junk food while you were trying to lead a healthy life.

2. Feelings

What emotions or desires did you actually experience? (The Stoics use the technical term 'passions' for both.) Remember, we're only interested in feelings that might be considered irrational in the sense of being misguided

and negative. Following on from our examples above, you might write down that you felt excessively anxious or angry about being criticised, or that you felt a strong craving to eat junk food, which you found hard to resist. Remember that you're also trying to catch these feelings early, so try to note 'early-warning signs', which are often sensations such as trembling when afraid, or thoughts such as telling yourself 'just one won't hurt' when you're tempted to eat something unhealthy.

3. Thoughts

What related thoughts went through your mind? Stoic psychology holds that our emotions and desires fundamentally depend upon our thoughts, particularly our value-judgements. Be forewarned that most people find it difficult at first to identify the specific thoughts that are responsible for their feelings. You'll probably need to work on this but with practice and study it should become easier. Were you telling yourself that something external is very good (desirable) or bad (upsetting)? For example, someone who feels anxious and angry about being criticised might come to realise that they're thinking, 'I must be respected at work' and placing great importance or intrinsic value on other people's opinions of them, instead of wanting to do their job well for its own sake.

4. Control

As we'll see, this is the central question that Stoics use to evaluate their impressions: "Is it up to me?" They meant: "Is this – the thing that my feelings are about – under my direct control?" Again, don't worry too much about this for your first day or so, because as you learn more about Stoicism you'll get better at posing this question. For example, you might observe that other people's opinions of you are ultimately beyond your direct control. All you can control in this situation is your response to their words and perhaps your plans for how to act in the future. Even your previous failings are no longer within your power to change. You can't rewrite the past.

As you'll see, this distinction between what is up to us and what is not is crucial for Stoics. They urge us to serenely accept those things in life we cannot change while taking full responsibility for bringing our own voluntary actions into line with our moral principles. Just write a few words here summing up your analysis of the situation in terms of which aspects you do or do not control. Alternatively, rate how much control you have over the aspects of the situation that upset you on a rough subjective scale from 0-

100%. However, we'll need to explore this question more carefully in the following parts of the course.

5. Actions

In this situation, how far did your actions actually match your ethical principles? Did you act in a way which matches your understanding of virtue? Were your actions wise, just, courageous, and temperate or were they marked by foolishness, unfairness, cowardice and self-indulgence? Think about how you treated other people and not just how your actions affected you, since that is an essential part of virtue. You might want to rate how consistent your actions were with your core values, or definition of "virtue", on a rough percentage scale from 0-100%.

Download Self-Monitoring Record You can download a PDF of an example self-monitoring record via the link at the start of this chapter.

Monday: Progress

Learning to Care For Ourselves, Others and Our World

Morning Text for Reflection

If virtue promises to enable us to achieve happiness, freedom from passion, and serenity, then progress towards virtue is surely also progress towards each of these states ... if, when someone gets up in the morning ... he bathes as a trustworthy person, and eats as a self-respecting person, putting his guiding principles into action in relation to anything he has to deal with, just as a runner does in practising running ... this then is the person who is truly making progress; this is the one who hasn't travelled in vain. – Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.4. 4, 20-1

Today's Midday Exercise: How Can we Make Progress?

The special theme for this year's *Handbook* is taking care of ourselves, others, and our world. Two sections in the Introduction (What is Stoicism? Core Stoic Ideas) are particularly useful for this theme: 'Ethical Development' and 'Nature'. Stoics think all human beings are capable of achieving virtue and happiness, and thus also capable of taking the best possible care of ourselves as rational and sociable animals. We do this by developing the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, justice and moderation), and trying to express these in our daily actions. We also do it by expressing our concern for our loved ones, families, friends, work-mates, neighbours, community, and country, as well as those falling outside these groups, and viewing them all as part of a larger human fellowship. Stoics think we should see ourselves as an integral part of the natural universe and play a positive role within this; and for 21st century would-be Stoics this includes trying to take better care of the natural environment that human beings have done so much to damage.

Take a few minutes this lunch-time to think of a few ways in which you could make progress towards caring better for yourself, others, or your world. Note

down some first steps, things that you could do during this week or the next. Think of one or two larger moves in this direction – broader aims in life that you may have lost sight of in the daily demands on your time and attention. It may be helpful, like Epictetus in the morning text for reflection, to think of your life as a journey that you can shape and make significant, and to remember that small actions can become useful steps towards realizing your in-built capacity to live a rich human life.

Evening Text for Reflection

Marcus Aurelius thinks about the qualities of his friend, Sextus, which helped Marcus to make progress in learning how to care for himself and others.

From Sextus [I learnt] kindness ... the idea of living according to nature; seriousness without affectation; perceptiveness in gauging his friends' needs ... the ability to fit in with everyone, so that his company was more pleasant than any kind of flattery, while at the same time he aroused the greatest respect from those who were with him; a secure and methodical discovery and organization of the principles necessary for life; never to give the impression of anger or any other passion but to be at once completely free of passion and yet full of affection for other people; to speak well of others without making a fuss about it, and deep learning without ostentation. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.9

Today's Summary

Here's a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today's theme.

1. *Morning*. Read today's morning text, and during your morning meditation think about using this text as a starting-point in making ethical progress during the day to come.
2. *Midday*. Sit quietly and take 5-10 minutes noting down some ways in which you could become better in taking care of yourself, others, or the world around you. Note some first steps you can take this week and also some more long-term aims.
3. *Evening*. Read today's evening text, and think about whether, like Marcus Aurelius, you can find examples in your friends' behaviour of taking good care of yourself, others, or the world.

Remember you can use the Stoic Self-Monitoring Report. Focus today on ways that you think you are falling short in take proper care of yourself, others, or the world, as well as your thoughts about how to improve this.

Tuesday: Happiness

The Goal of Life

Morning Text for Reflection

The wise person does nothing that he could regret, nothing against his will, but does everything honourably, consistently, seriously, and rightly; he anticipates nothing as if it is bound to happen, but is shocked by nothing when it does happen and refers everything to his own judgement, and stands by his own decisions. I can conceive of nothing which is happier than this. – Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.81

Today's Midday Exercise: What is Happiness?

Happiness, in modern terms, tends to mean having certain emotions ('feeling happy') or pleasurable experiences. Ancient thinkers saw happiness (Greek, *eudaimonia*) as the overall goal or purpose of your life, the aim that gives meaning and shape to your life as a whole. They sometimes defined happiness as living in a certain way, a way that you can yourself determine by your own efforts. During this lunchtime, spend a few minutes thinking about happiness in this way and also reflecting on the Stoic idea of happiness (explained in the section on 'Central Stoic Ideas'). Do you think the Stoic idea of happiness could help you give more focus and coherence to your life?

For example, Brad, a stay-at-home father of two pre-school children, sees parenting his children as one of the most valuable aspects of his life. Janice, a manager in IT, includes spending quality time with her friends and making a success out of her career. Both Brad and Janice see that they want to achieve excellence in these areas. Brad wants to be an excellent parent, drawing on the love he has for his children and his patience and sense of humour. Janice wants to be a good friend and an excellent manager, using her abilities to be friendly, well-organised and empathic.

Bring to mind the aspects of your own life that you already see as most important and valuable. These might be your work or career, or some projects within your work; they might be your relationship with your partner, children,

parents or other family member, or friendships and bonds within a work group. They might be leisure activities, cultural or literary pastimes, doing philosophy or other intellectual activities, or sports that you take part in or support, or a religion you practise or believe in.

Is there anything that you see as holding these various valuable things together – any ‘core’ value or set of qualities that you aim to express through these activities and relationships? This could be achieving excellence in areas you regard as important, or expressing your distinctive personal gifts or way of viewing the world. It could be helping other people and caring for them, either those who are closest to you or those who most need help, wherever they are in the world.

Think about the Stoic idea of happiness as a possible way of identifying core values or qualities. The Stoic idea (‘the life according to nature’) aims to bring out the qualities that are central to being human, or to being an integral part of nature as a whole. These qualities combine exercising our distinctively human rationality and bonding with other people in a way that expresses this rationality. They also combine achieving order, structure and wholeness in our lives, and expressing care for ourselves and for others of our kind (other human beings), in the deepest possible way.

What do you think about the Stoic idea of happiness as a framework for holding your core values together and giving them coherence? Can you see how their pattern of thinking links up with yours? Is there anything you see as missing in the Stoic view – or something new but helpful in the Stoic idea? These are quite big questions so it does not matter if you do not have a ready answer. The main thing is to raise the questions and to see how far the week as a whole provides answers.

Evening Text for Reflection

Will there come a day, my soul, when you are good and simple and unified [...] some day will you have a taste of a loving and affectionate disposition? Some day will you be satisfied and want for nothing [...] Or will you be contented instead with your present circumstances and delighted with everything around you and convince yourself that all you have comes from the gods, and that all that is pleasing for them is well for you? Will there come a day when you are so much a member of the community of gods and humans as neither to bring any complaint against them nor to incur their indignation? – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 10.1

Today's Summary

Here's a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today's theme.

1. *Morning.* Read today's morning text, and during your morning meditation think about how you can work towards this pattern of wisdom and happiness during the day.
2. *Midday.* Sit quietly and take 5-10 minutes writing down the things which you think are most valuable in your life and comparing these with the Stoic view of happiness, noting the key Stoic themes (virtue, order, care for self and others).
3. *Evening.* Read today's evening text and think about the ideal of happiness it suggests and build this into your evening meditation – how far have you lived like that today?

Remember you can use the Stoic Self-Monitoring Record. Today focus on recording and evaluating specific situations, and your actions and responses. What do you notice about the relationship between your responses in these situations and your sense of happiness or fulfillment in life? Consider what changes might lead to a happier life.

Wednesday: Virtue

Clarifying Your Values

Morning Text for Reflection

If you can find anything in human life better than justice, truthfulness, self-control, courage [...] turn to it with all your heart and enjoy the supreme good that you have found [...] but if you find all other things to be trivial and valueless in comparison with virtue, give no room to anything else, since, once you turn towards that and divert from your proper path, you will no longer be able without inner conflict to give the highest honour to what is properly good. It is not right to set up as a rival to the rational and social good anything alien to its nature, such as the praise of the many, or positions of power, wealth, or enjoyment of pleasures. – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 3.6

Today's Midday Exercise: Virtues and 'Indifferents'

The main points in Stoic thinking about virtue are set out in 'Central Stoic Ideas'. Here we pose some questions to help you explore this view of virtues and think how you might use it in your life.

Draw up a list of what you think the most important qualities are for living a good human life. How far does your list match the Stoic set of four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice, and moderation or self-control. Remember these are just general types with subdivisions. What do you find missing in the Stoic list – or in your list? Does the Stoic list help you to think of virtues you would like to develop more fully in yourself?

The Stoics draw a sharp distinction between the virtues (which are really good) and the 'preferred indifferents' such as health and prosperity (which have positive value but are not 'good'). The crucial point is that the virtues make the difference between being happy or not whereas the indifferents do not. The virtues enable you to express the distinctive human characteristics of being rational and sociable. They also enable you to exercise care for yourself (to manage your life as a whole) and to care for other people properly. They

also give your life coherence (order, structure and wholeness) as you apply the virtues consistently to all your activities and relationships. ‘Preferred indifferents’, such as health, prosperity, and the welfare of one’s family or friends, have real, positive value and are worth having. But they do not, in themselves – and without the virtues – enable you to live a happy life in the Stoic sense.

Think about this Stoic distinction – do you find it convincing? Can you think of moments in your life or your observation of others where you can see that happiness depends on having the virtues rather than on having things like prosperity, fame, or a flourishing family? It is sometimes easier to see this when you think about how people react to loss of these things or the risk of losing them. Can you think of ways in which being aware of this distinction might make a difference to the way you manage your life? For instance, in making a choice of career or in how you cope with major personal crises such as the sudden loss of someone you care deeply for.

Evening Text for Reflection

From what did we gain an understanding of virtue? From someone’s orderly character, his sense of what is appropriate and consistency, the harmony between all his actions, and his greatness of spirit in coping with everything. In this way, we came to understand the happy life, that flows on smoothly and is completely under its own control. – Seneca, *Letters*, 120.11

Today's Summary

Here’s a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today’s theme.

1. *Morning*. Read today’s morning text and use it as part of your morning meditation, thinking about the virtues you aim to express today.
2. *Midday*. Take 5-10 minutes to sit quietly and list what you think are the most valuable qualities in a human life comparing this with the Stoic list of virtues. Think about occasions when you did aim, or could aim, at acting virtuously rather than trying to get external things (‘preferred indifferents’).
3. *Evening*. Read today’s evening text and think about the picture given

there of the virtuous and happy life, and bear that in mind in your evening meditation. How far did your actions and thoughts today match the virtues and qualities you regard as most important? Could you do things differently tomorrow?

Remember you can use the *Stoic Self-Monitoring Record*. Today focus on recording and evaluating specific situations, and your actions and responses. How well did your actions match your core values? Did you exhibit virtues such as wisdom, justice, generosity of spirit, moderation and respect for others? What virtues would help you to respond better to situations in the future?

Thursday: Community

Relationships with Other People and Society

Morning Text for Reflection

It is important to understand that nature creates in parents affection for their children; and parental affection is the source from which we trace the shared community of the human race ... As it is obvious that it is natural to us to shrink from pain, so it is clear that we derive from nature itself the motive to love those to whom we have given birth. From this motive is developed the mutual concern which unites human beings as such. The fact of their common humanity means that one person should feel another to be his relative. – Cicero, *On Ends*, 3.62-3.

Today's Midday Exercise: The Community of Humankind

Stoics believe that caring for other people is instinctive for human beings, and is just as basic an instinct as self-preservation. If we develop properly, this primary instinct will gradually express itself in two main ways. We will come to form deep and lasting relationships with others in a specific context – close friendships, families, local communities, political associations and roles. We will also come to regard any given human being as our relative (brother or sister) or fellow-citizen, because they share with us the core human capacities for rationality and mutual concern.

The Stoics do not regard these two attitudes as alternatives or as incompatible with each other. On the contrary, forming a close relationship, with a lover or friend for example, involves recognising their shared humanity and autonomy. And we should treat strangers in need with a kindness we have come to know and express in our family life and friendship. Likewise, a Stoic would see no incompatibility between being strongly patriotic (even willing to die for your country) and being ready to welcome asylum seekers and refugees into your community.

The Circles of Hierocles

Here is an exercise that you might use to explore and develop a similarly philanthropic attitude. It is based not on Marcus, but on the advice of another Stoic of the second century AD, Hierocles.

Hierocles suggested we should think of ourselves as living in a series of concentric circles, and that we should try to 'draw the circles somehow toward the centre'. He explained that, 'The right point will be reached if, through our own initiative, we reduce the distance of the relationship with each person.' He also suggests using verbal techniques such as calling one's cousins 'brother' and one's uncles and aunts 'father' or 'mother'.

The following visualisation or meditation technique is loosely based on Hierocles' comments:

1. Close your eyes and take a few moments to relax and focus your attention on the things you're about to visualise.
2. Picture a circle of light surrounding your body and take a few moments to imagine that it symbolises a growing sense of affection toward your own true nature as a rational animal, capable of wisdom (virtue), the chief good in life.
3. Now imagine that circle is expanding to encompass members of your family or others who are very close to you, towards whom you now project an attitude of family affection as if they were somehow parts of your own body.
4. Imagine that circle expanding to encompass people you encounter in daily life, perhaps colleagues you work alongside, and project natural affection toward them as if they were members of your own family.
5. Let the circle expand further to include everyone in the country where you live, imagining that your affection is spreading out toward them also, insofar as they are rational animals akin to you.
6. Imagine the circle now growing to envelop the entire world and the whole human race as one, allowing this philosophical and philanthropic affection to encompass every other member of the human race.

Evening Text for Reflection

Let us embrace in our minds the fact that there are two communities – the one which is great and truly common, including gods and human beings, in which we look neither to this corner or to that, but measure the boundaries of our state by the sun; the other, the one to which we have been assigned by the accident of our birth. – Seneca, *On Leisure*, 4.1

What benefits each of us is what is in line with our constitution and nature; my nature is rational and political. As Antoninus, my city and fatherland is Rome, as a human being it is the universe. It is only what benefits these cities which is good for me. – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 6.44.5-6

Today's Summary

Here's a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today's theme.

1. *Morning*. Read today's morning text and build into your morning meditation the thought that we have a natural bond of affection not only with our families but with all human beings, who have the same core nature as ourselves.
2. *Midday*. Take 5-10 minutes to sit quietly and practise the Circle of Hierocles exercise given here. Think of yourself as gradually expanding the circle of those you are concerned with till you reach the circle of human beings in general.
3. *Evening*. Read today's evening texts and bear them in mind in your evening meditation. How far did you succeed in fulfilling your local roles and responsibilities while also bearing in mind the broader values shared by humanity in general – or the needs of those human beings currently without a home or country of their own?

Remember you can use the *Stoic Self-Monitoring Record*. Focus on recording your actions and attitudes to other people, and on thinking how far you have succeeded in extending the boundaries of your concern.

Friday: Emotions

Values and the Passions

Morning Text for Reflection

It isn't the things themselves that disturb people, but the judgements that they form about them. Death, for instance, is nothing terrible, or else it would have seemed so to Socrates too; no, it is in the judgement that death is terrible that the terror lies. Accordingly, whenever we are impeded, disturbed or distressed, we should never blame anyone else but only ourselves, that is, our judgements. It is an act of a poorly educated person to blame others when things are going badly for him; one who has taken the first step towards being properly educated blames himself, while one who is fully educated blames neither anyone else nor himself.

– Epictetus, *Handbook*, 5

Today's Midday Exercise: Good and Bad Emotions

As explained earlier ('Central Stoic Ideas'), the Stoics draw a distinction between misguided emotions ('passions') and 'good emotions'. Misguided or bad emotions, such as anger and fear, are based on the mistaken belief that our happiness depends on securing 'preferred indifferents' such as fame and wealth. They are also marked by intensity of feeling and sometimes instability or inner conflict. Good emotions, such as wish, caution and joy, are based on understanding that happiness depends on the virtues, and recognising what happiness really is. They are also typically calmer, more stable and consistent in feeling.

Changing our emotional pattern from bad to good emotions is not something that happens overnight. It depends on making progress in understanding virtue and happiness and in our actions and relationships with others – that is, the process discussed in the midday exercises for the last two days. However, there are things we can do to help this process along, by reflecting on the way we react emotionally to events and by aiming at a better way of responding. Here are two suggestions to think about today.

Call to mind a recent occasion when you reacted in a way that you can now see as misguided. Perhaps you got very irritated or angry when someone was insulting you or was treating you in a casual or thoughtless way. At the time or just afterwards, you may have thought, 'I'm justified at getting angry at being treated like this'. Reflect on the value-judgements built into this reaction. In effect, you were thinking that your happiness (what really matters in life) depends on being given status or importance by other people and annoyed when this did not happen. Remind yourself that happiness does not depend on other people's valuation of your status but on what you do for yourself to develop the virtues and put these into practice. When the same person insults you again, bring this belief to mind and see if it helps you to avoid having the same outburst of anger or irritation.

Call to mind this time a recent occasion when you reacted with what you can now recognise as a 'good emotion', in Stoic terms. Perhaps you felt very positively about doing something worthwhile; or you felt strongly disinclined to do something wrong or distasteful; or you felt a real enthusiasm and pleasure at a fine act done by someone you consider to have genuinely good character. These are the kind of reactions Stoics would describe as the good emotions of 'wishing', being 'cautious', or experiencing 'joy'. Reflect here too on the value-judgements built into your reaction, above all, the recognition that happiness depends on what we can do for ourselves to develop and act on the virtues. On the next occasion, you may feel this kind of emotion more readily because of building up the pattern of beliefs on which these emotions depend.

Evening Text for Reflection

So reflect on this: the result of wisdom is stability of joy. The wise person's mind is like the superlunary heaven: always peaceful. So you have this reason to want to be wise, if wisdom is always accompanied by joy. This joy has only one source: an awareness of the virtues. A person is not capable of joy unless he is brave, unless he is just, unless he has self-control. – Seneca, *Letters*, 59.16

Today's Summary

Here's a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today's theme.

1. *Morning*. Read the morning text and bear that in mind in your morning

meditation. Think about how you can respond to events more reflectively and more in line with your most profound judgements about what really matters in life.

2. *Midday*. Take 5-10 minutes and sit quietly, thinking of occasions in the recent past when you reacted in a ‘passionate’ way (attaching value to things like fame and prosperity), and also on occasions when you reacted with a ‘good emotion’, remembering that what matters most is acting virtuously.
3. *Evening*. Read today’s evening text and use that to guide your evening meditation. Did your emotions today express an attempt to respond virtuously and what could you do to make this happen tomorrow and to experience the ‘joy’ that Seneca describes?

Use the *Stoic Self-Monitoring Record*, noting down cases where you reacted in a ‘passionate’ way or one that came closer to being a ‘good emotion’.

Saturday: Resilience

Resilience and Preparation for Adversity

Morning Text for Reflection

Be like the headland, on which the waves break constantly, which still stands firm, while the foaming waters are put to rest around it. 'It is my bad luck that this has happened to me.' On the contrary, say, 'It is my good luck that, although this has happened to me, I can bear it without getting upset, neither crushed by the present nor afraid of the future.' This kind of event could have happened to anyone, but not everyone would have borne it without getting upset. – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 4.49

Today's Midday Exercise: Preparation for Adversity

Yesterday the midday exercise was about moving from bad, misguided emotions towards good ones, focused on the virtues. Today we consider a related type of emotional training. We look at an aspect of Stoicism that many people have found especially helpful – building up resilience by preparing yourself for adversity. In following this exercise, we need to remember that many of the things that cause people fear are not regarded as 'bad' by the Stoics. The only thing that is really bad is loss of virtue, because virtue is the only truly good thing and forms the basis of our happiness. But the Stoics also accept that recognising this truth and making it central to our emotional life is a long and demanding process. Preparing for adversity is part of this process of Stoic training.

The form of adversity that people fear most is death, both their own and that of those they love. In his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius often reflects on his own death. He reminds himself again and again that death is a natural process and not really a bad thing in itself. We can develop the virtue of courage by facing the inevitability of our own death. Death is also part of the cycle of nature. Our death, like our life, forms part of a providential pattern. The prospect of death does not take away our capacity to live life to the full now, in the present, and to express our human capacities for rationality and

affectionate concern for our friends and family, for all humanity and for the world as a whole.

By repeatedly picturing future catastrophes – at least what are generally regarded as catastrophes — Stoics aimed to reduce anxiety about them, just as exposure therapy in CBT today aims to reduce the anxiety attached to specific situations. We know from modern psychological research that the best way to overcome anxiety is to expose yourself to the feared situation in reality, repeatedly and for prolonged periods. However, psychologists have also established that simply picturing the same event in the mind, repeatedly and for long enough, often works almost as well.

To begin with, you should not do this with anything that might lead you to bite off more than you can chew. Don't imagine things that are deeply personal or traumatic until you're definitely ready to do so without feeling overwhelmed. Begin by working on small things that upset you. Don't let yourself worry about them; just try to picture the worst case scenario patiently, and wait for your emotions to abate naturally. Remind yourself of the Stoic principles you've learned, in particular, the maxim that people are upset not by external events but by their own judgements about them, particularly value judgements that place too much importance on things that are not under their direct control.

Try to spend at least 20-30 minutes doing this each day. (If you cannot spare this much time then it's essential that you pick a much milder topic to work on – one which generates a level of emotion low enough to naturally abate within fewer minutes.)

You might find it helpful to keep a record of your experiences as follows: 1. Situation. What is the upsetting situation that you're imagining? 2. Emotions. How does it make you feel when you picture it as if it's happening right now? How strong is the feeling (0-100%)? 3. Duration. How long (in minutes) did you manage to sit with it and patiently expose yourself to the event in your imagination? 4. Consequence. How strong was the upsetting feeling at the end (0-100%)? What else did you feel or experience by the end? 5. Analysis. Has your perspective changed on the upsetting event? Is it really as awful as you imagined? How could you potentially cope if it did happen? What's under your control in this situation and what isn't?

If your anxiety level hasn't reduced to at least half its peak level then you might need to pick an easier subject, or else spend more time on this exercise to get its full benefit. Use the natural "wearing off" of upsetting feelings as an

opportunity to re-evaluate the situation in a more rational and detached manner, i.e., from a more philosophical perspective. What do you think a Stoic like Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius would make of the same situation? How might you view it differently if you had made more progress towards developing the virtues of wisdom, justice, courage and self-control?

Take time to note down what you can learn from this experience.

Evening Text for Reflection

Glad and cheerful, let us say, as we go to our rest: 'I have finished living; I have run the course that fortune set for me'. If God gives us another day, let us receive it with joy. The happiest person, who owns himself more fully, is the one who waits for the next day without anxiety. Anyone who can say, 'I have had my life' rises with a bonus, receiving one more day. – Seneca, *Letters*, 12.9.

Today's Summary

Here's a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today's theme.

1. *Morning*. Read today's morning text. Mentally prepare for your day ahead by contemplating what it means to be more emotionally resilient throughout the day. How would you achieve this? What would the consequences be?
2. *Midday*. Take time to listen to the Premeditation of Adversity recording and rehearse facing some events that feel emotionally challenging or difficult.
3. *Evening*. Read today's evening text. Reflect on what it means to be grateful for each day as if it were your last and to make the most of the opportunities life presents you with.

Remember you can use the Stoic Self-Monitoring Record. In particular, today, focus on how you coped with situations that you rehearsed in advance, during your morning meditation, if possible.

Sunday: Nature

Being Part of Nature and Caring for It

Morning Text for Reflection

The works of the gods are full of providence, and the works of fortune are not separate from nature or the interweaving and intertwining of the things governed by providence. Everything flows from there. Further factors are necessity and the benefit of the whole universe, of which you are a part. What is brought by the nature of the whole and what maintains that nature is good for each part of nature. Just as the changes in the elements maintain the universe so too do the changes in the compounds. — Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.3

Today's Midday Exercise: The View from Above

A striking and important part of Stoic thought is their view that nature as a whole is significant for ethics, and that reflecting properly on nature can help us to become better people. Why do they hold this view and is it one we can share?

Take the Marcus Aurelius passage for the morning meditation, which is one of many references to the idea that we form an integral part of nature as a providential whole. Why does Marcus think it is helpful to think about nature in this way? Partly this is a way to purge us of our over-attachment to trivial things by expanding our minds beyond their habitual, narrow perspective. We're less upset about things when we picture them as occurring in a tiny corner of the cosmos. This helps us realize that we are, in reality, a very small part of the natural universe and that we have a very temporary existence within this larger whole.

But there is also a more positive dimension in Stoic thought about this topic. The Stoics believed that the universe exhibited qualities which could provide exemplary moral norms for human beings trying to lead a good life. The qualities they attributed to the universe as a whole were order, structure and rationality on the one hand and providential care on the other. Order and

structure are shown in the repeated patterns of nature, such as the regular movements of the planetary system, the alternation of day and night, the cycle of the seasons, and the growth and regeneration of living things. Providential care was shown in the fact that all species, including human beings, have the in-built natural capacity and instinctive desire to maintain their own existence and to propagate and care for others of their kind. So thinking about ourselves as part of nature helps us to understand our human nature and capacities.

Can we moderns share this view of nature and derive anything useful from it? Of course, the modern scientific worldview is very different from the Stoic one. On the other hand, at the very general (and by our standards non-scientific) level at which the Stoics thought about nature as a whole, it may still be possible for us also to see nature as ordered and providential. Also, we moderns have reasons the Stoics did not have that make it rather urgent for us to think about ourselves as part of a larger natural whole. Since the 19th century, human beings have done great damage to the environment and the ecology of the planet, which we are now belatedly trying to repair. We have also put at risk the survival of many species of animals and plants, which also share this planet. So we have very powerful reasons to want to recover a view of ourselves as parts of a larger whole, and to try to enable nature to regain its proper character as ordered and providential. Reflecting on the Stoic view of humanity as part of a larger cosmic whole may help us to do this.

The View From Above

The ‘View from Above’ is a guided visualisation that is aimed at instilling a sense of the ‘bigger picture’, and of understanding your role within nature as a whole. You can practise a visualisation of the ‘View from Above’ by downloading the audio recording provided.

Evening Text for Reflection

I travel along nature’s way until I fall down and take my rest, breathing out my last into the air, from which I draw my daily breath, and falling down to that earth from which my father drew his seed, my mother her blood and my nurse her milk, and from which for so many years I have taken my daily food and drink, the earth which carries my footsteps and which I have used to the full in so many ways. — Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.4

Today's Summary

Here's a reminder of your daily routine, with some tips on adapting it to today's theme.

1. *Morning*. Read today's text and base your morning meditation on thinking about nature as a providential and ordered whole.
2. *Midday*. Take longer (20-30 minutes) to sit quietly and contemplate the View from Above, using the audio recording provided.
3. *Evening*. Read today's evening text, and base your evening meditation on thinking about yourself as an integral part of nature. Think about how you could improve that relationship, for instance by thinking more about the effect of your actions on the natural environment.

Remember, you can use the *Stoic Self-Monitoring Record*. Focus today on how much your actions were consistent with a more expansive and more objective perspective on things of the kind described above. Did you place too much importance on trivial things, for example?

After Stoic Week

What next? Have you enjoyed following Stoic Week? Have you found it helpful? If you have, there is no need to stop at the end of this week! One of the reasons for adopting this format is that it gives you a ready-made template that you can continue to follow week after week.

In order to deepen and develop your Stoic practice, the next step is to start exploring some of the ancient Stoic texts for yourself if you don't know them already.

1. Obtain a copy of *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. Every day in a spare moment read at least one new section of the text. As many of these are very short you will probably read many more than just once.
2. Start reading *The Handbook* and then *The Discourses* of Epictetus. Set aside some time every weekend to read two new chapters (most only a couple of pages long). There are 95 chapters in the *Discourses* so this will keep you going for much of the coming year.
3. After that do the same with the *Letters* of Seneca to Lucilius – one or two each weekend. There are 124 letters but most modern translations print only a selection. Two a week will occupy you for just over a year. If for whatever reason you would rather start with Seneca then do!

The follow translations are recommended:

- Marcus Aurelius: Oxford World's Classics or Penguin Classics. Note also the edition in the Penguin Great Ideas series.
- Epictetus: Oxford World's Classics or Penguin Classics (only selections). There is also a selection in the Penguin Great Ideas series.
- Seneca: Penguin Classics (a selection) or Oxford World's Classics (a selection), both of whom also publish his essays.
- Seneca: Letters on Ethics (the complete letters), Chicago University Press (now in paperback).

Appendix: Further Reading

Here are some further reading suggestions if you would like to learn more about ancient Stoicism, putting Stoicism into practice, or the connections between Stoicism and psychotherapy.

First of all, we should mention *Stoicism Today: Selected Writings*, volumes 1 and 2, edited by Patrick Ussher, two collections of writings from different authors taken from the Stoicism Today blog. These are very good introductions to Stoicism because they approach the subject from many different perspectives in short articles written by authors from different backgrounds. Some of the following books should also be on your personal reading list:

Putting Stoicism into Practice

- W. B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- D. Robertson, *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019)
- D. Robertson, *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness* (London: Teach Yourself, 2013)
- D. Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy* (London: Karnac, 2010)
- R. Pies, *Everything Has Two Handles: The Stoic's Guide to the Art of Living* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2008)
- E. Buzare, *Stoic Spiritual Exercises* (Lulu, 2011)
- S. Lebell, *Art of Living* (HarperOne, 2007)
- P. Ussher, Ed., *Stoicism Today: Selected Writings Vol 1* (2014)
- P. Ussher, Ed., *Stoicism Today: Selected Writings Vol 2* (2015)
- R. Holiday and S. Hanselman, *The Daily Stoic* (Penguin, 2016)
- M. Pigliucci, *How to be a Stoic* (Basic Books, 2017)
- J. Evans, *Philosophy for Life* (Rider, 2013)
- W. Farnsworth, *The Practicing Stoic: A Philosophical User's Manual* (Godine, 2018)
- B. Inwood, *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2018)
- J. Sellars, *Lessons in Stoicism* (London: Allen Lane, 2019)

Introductions to Ancient Stoicism

- J. Sellars, *Stoicism* (Chesham: Acumen / Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)
- T. Brennan, *The Stoic Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005)
- B. Inwood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Studies Exploring the Practical Side of Ancient Stoicism

- M. C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)
- R. Sorabji, 'Is Stoic Philosophy Helpful as Psychotherapy?', in R. Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle and After* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1997), 197-209
- R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- J. Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 2009)

Books on Practical Aspects of Roman Stoicism

- P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)
- A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002)
- Reydam-Schils, G., *The Roman Stoics* (University of Chicago, 2005).
- J. Xenakis, *Epictetus: Philosopher-Therapist* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969)

The End

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