

The Early Stoics

Introduction Part 1 – Why Should We Care about the Early Stoics & Stoicism?

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"No kind of philosophy is more profitable . . . than the philosophy of the Stoics." — Thomas James

"Stoicism is the greatest system of organized thought which the mind of man had built up for itself in the Greco-Roman world. . . . It represents a way of looking at the world and the practical problems of life which possesses still a permanent interest for humankind, and a permanent power of inspiration." — Gilbert Murray

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This introduction comes from the Cave's

The Best of the Early Stoics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Early Stoics.

Introduction Part 1

Why Should We Care about the Early Stoics & Stoicism?

ASK A GROUP of your friends to describe what a "stoic" is, and you are likely to get answers like this: "A stoic is someone who isn't very emotional." Or, "A stoic likes to appear strong and tough." Or, "A stoic is someone who doesn't express his feelings." And tacking on to the last, another may say, "That's right, a stoic doesn't smile very often, and he certainly doesn't cry."

For others in your group, this shortage of emotions or lack of expression of feelings may indicate something far more severe. "A stoic is someone who represses his feelings."

Depending on your assembly of friends, the latter description may trigger memories of Psychology 101,

Sigmund Freud, and his notion of "repression," where "threatening or painful thoughts or feelings are excluded from awareness." Freud held that repression "is the basis of many other ego defenses and neurotic disorders."¹

Meaning? *Not good!*

Even worse than repression, for one or two among your friends, the term stoic and such characterizations may sound the alarm of "toxic masculinity," a concept that has been around for decades but has only recently figured into some heated exchanges after the American Psychological Association released its *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men* a few years ago. Many have equated toxic masculinity with

what the APA calls “traditional masculinity,” a phenomenon—or “ideology,” as they put it—that, among other elements, includes “emotional stoicism,” “some men shy[ing] away from directly expressing their vulnerable feelings,” the “eschewal of the appearance of weakness,” as well as strong notions of self-reliance and a “reluctance to seek psychological help.”²

Armed with the APA’s assertions, one of your group offers, “A stoic is one who has bought into the whole ideology of traditional masculinity.”

“Toxic masculinity,” quips another.

The first pivots, “A stoic is any one of Dwayne ‘the Rock’ Johnson’s movie characters—or Arnold Schwarzenegger’s.”

“Don’t forget John Wayne,” another says, going

old school, “or Clint Eastwood. They play the ultimate stoic characters.” And quoting dirty Harry with a raspy voice, he mouths, “Go ahead, make my day.”³

Of course, after hearing these different portrayals of what a stoic is, descriptions that are not far off from dictionary definitions, you may want to know how much *this* stoicism aligns with ancient Stoicism—that is, the philosophy developed in the third century BC.⁴ The short answer is a great deal *and* very little. While the ancient Stoics wished to curb their emotional lives according to what they judged to be the skillful guidance of reason, they were interested in far more. They wanted to think well, to explore the nature of reality, and to align their lives with that reality—all, most importantly, to be happy.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT THE EARLY STOICS & STOICISM?

In the year 155 BC, Diogenes of Babylon, the head of the Stoic school, was in Rome with the skeptic Carneades, the head of the Academy, and Critolaus of Phaselis, the leader of the Peripatetics.⁵ The three men had travelled there in order to negotiate with the Romans—really to beg remission of a fine of nearly five hundred talents imposed on Athens for sacking Oropos, a Greek town some twenty miles distant. When the philosopher-ambassadors were brought before the senate to make their case, they spoke through an interpreter, one of the senators, Gaius Acilius. The second-century AD writer Aulus Gellius reports that Diogenes of Babylon spoke *modesta et sobria*, which is to say, “with due measure and sobriety.”⁶

Both characteristics of speaking were pleasing to the Romans. Not only that but many were attracted to Diogenes’ teaching when he later lectured on the Stoic philosophy and way of life. Professor David Sedley explains that these “packed lectures” given by Diogenes and the other philosophers produced “shock waves among the Roman establishment.”⁷ From that moment on, Romans were interested in philosophy as they had not been before—an interest that included Stoic philosophy.

Founded by Zeno of Citium (c. 335-263 BC), Stoicism was a force in Greek and Roman history from its

launch in Athens sometime around 300 BC to well into the third century AD and beyond. And though Stoicism’s organization and influence was uneven during this long stretch of time, what is clear is that many—both men and women—deeply cared about and benefited from it.

This is the first reason why we should care about Stoicism. For half a millennium—from the time when Zeno of Citium’s student Cleanthes of Assos “wrote down Zeno’s sayings on oyster shells and the shoulder blades of oxen”⁸ because they meant so much to him, to when the second-century AD Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote his Stoic-inspired journal of meditations, *To Himself*—Stoicism mapped out an understanding and way of life that strengthened and directed many amid the vicissitudes of human existence.

This was true not only in terms of time but also in terms of place. Practicing Stoics lived in a wide area of the ancient world from Babylon in Mesopotamia, the ruins of which are in Iraq today; to Tarsus in Cilicia, in modern Turkey, the home of St. Paul, who was likely familiar with if not influenced by Stoic teaching;⁹ to Rhodes, an island just off Turkey and at one point a major outpost of the Stoic school; to Athens, Rome, and beyond, following the northwestern expansion of the Roman Empire to Spain, France, and the British Isles.

We see the significance Stoicism had for Athens in the decree that was set up in honor of Zeno of Citium to recognize the good he had done for the city and the education of its youth.

Zeno of Citium, the son of Mnaseas, has for many years been devoted to philosophy in the city and has continued to be a good man in all other respects, exhorting to virtue and moderation those of the youth who come to him to be taught, directing them to what is most excellent, offering to all in his own manner of living a pattern for imitation in perfect conformity with his teaching.¹⁰

Diogenes Laertius further reports that the Athenians paid homage to Zeno by entrusting him with the keys of the city, giving him “a golden crown,” and setting up “a bronze statue” of him.¹¹

We can also assume that at least some of the people of Macedonia were trained in Stoicism—if, that is, we accept the word of Antigonus, the king of Macedonia, who, we are told, “favored Zeno” and “listened to him lecture whenever he came to Athens,” attending as well the lectures of the Stoic Cleanthes.¹² At one point, Antigonus requested that Zeno visit him in order to instruct him in Stoicism. In the letter of invitation, the king makes the following argument for why the philosopher should meet with him: Understand, he writes, “that you will not only be instructing me but all the Macedonians together.” Though Zeno declined to go due to his old age, he did send two men in his place. One of them, Persaeus of Citium, travelled to Macedonia, teaching Antigonus’ son Halcyoneus and doubtlessly other Macedonians before eventually dying in the king’s service at Corinth.¹³

Much later, it was common for wealthier Romans to send their sons to study philosophy with the Stoic Epictetus (mid-first to second century AD) in Nicopolis. We get some idea of what the experience was like from Epictetus himself. “The school of a philosopher is like an operating room in a hospital,” he declares in one of his discourses. “You should not leave it feeling pleasure or delight but suffering pain. For you do not come there in health,” he reflects, but with

various disorders. “Am I, then, to sit there uttering pretty, trifling thoughts, and little exclamations” so that you may go away with your disorders? “Is it for this that young men travel away from home?” Is it for this that “they leave their parents, their friends, their relations, and their estates?” His emphatic answer: “No!”¹⁴ Young men travelled to him, then, to undergo surgery and gain health. And when better, these in turn went home and spread the benefits of Stoicism to the family and friends they had left behind.

As for other individuals, we may observe with the examples of both men and women how significant and helpful Stoicism was in the ancient world. Diogenes Laertius tells us, for instance, that Cleanthes, a one-time boxer, “intensely studied philosophy” with Zeno, “sticking with [Zeno’s] teachings.”¹⁵ Cleanthes eventually became the second head of the school. The Roman Stoic Seneca reports that Cleanthes morphed into the Stoic that he became thanks to the fact that he had lived and studied with Zeno. “Cleanthes could not have been the image of Zeno if he had merely heard him teach; rather, he lived with him, observing him in private, watching to see if he lived in accord with his own principles.”¹⁶

Much later there was Hierocles “the Stoic,” who wrote the *Elements of Ethics* sometime prior to 150 AD, a work that deals with, among other matters, our natural relationship to ourselves, and our relationship and duty to others.¹⁷ Hierocles was, according to the second-century AD Roman author Aulus Gellius, “a righteous and venerable” man—though that is about all we know of his character and life.¹⁸

Turning to Rome, we may note with Anthony Gottlieb that “for a time, Stoic ethics was more or less the official philosophy of the upper classes in the Roman Empire.”¹⁹ We’ve already witnessed this phenomenon with the young Roman men who travelled to study with Epictetus.

One of the earliest Roman Stoics, and perhaps the most archetypal *Roman* Stoic, was Marcus Cato (the Younger) (95-46 BC). Scholar of Hellenistic philosophy A. A. Long judges that “the life and death of Cato the Younger showed what it might mean to be a Roman and a Stoic.” Cato, he goes on, “undoubtedly

helped to popularize Stoicism among Roman aristocrats during the first century AD.”²⁰ The statesman, orator, and writer Cicero, who was himself strongly influenced by Stoicism even though he counted himself an Academic skeptic, judged that “Cato, in my view, is a perfect specimen of a Stoic.”²¹ A century later, Seneca described Cato in Stoic terms as “a brave man” who lived “in defiance of Fortune.” He was “a living image of the virtues.” As Seneca notes in his treatise *On Anger*, Cato was also a man who knew how to check his anger with various strategies, including humor.²²

Seneca himself, the tutor of and advisor to the emperor Nero, also exemplified how a Roman could benefit from Stoicism. In one letter he testifies how “my Stoic studies were my health and deliverance.” It was his conviction that “Zeno and Chrysippus”—the first and third heads of the Stoic school—“have done greater things than they would have if they had led armies, held high office, and passed laws.” In fact, he concludes, “they did pass laws—though not for one single community of citizens but for the whole of humankind.” Finally, though words not claimed directly for himself, he certainly would echo the speech he puts in the mouth of his friend Serenus. “Readily,” he says, “I follow Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus.”²³

In his *Consolation to Marcia*, Seneca offers the addressee the example of Marcia’s friend Livia (a.k.a., Julia Augusta), the wife of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. When Livia was experiencing a particularly intense grief after the loss of her son, she gave herself “to the consolation of Arius,” the Stoic philosopher Arius Didymus, who was “her husband’s teacher in philosophy.” As for Marcia, the point is clear: Livia is a woman, Seneca announces, “who calls on you to follow her example,” witnessing to the fact that adhering to the way of Arius’ Stoicism “did her much good.”²⁴

Though we have little sure or direct evidence, the same was surely true for other women in antiquity—that is, they learned and benefitted from Stoicism just as Livia and Marcia did by means of Arius Didymus’ “classic of emotional therapy,” as David Sedley labels it. What we know with certainty is that the Stoics

believed that women *should* benefit from their philosophy. This is not surprising given the fact that the early Cynic Antisthenes, an important influence on early Stoicism, held that “virtue is the same for a woman as it is for a man.”²⁵ Later, the Stoic Cleanthes wrote a work titled, *On the Notion that Virtue Is the Same for Men and Women*. Similarly, the first-century AD Stoic philosopher and teacher Musonius Rufus taught in his lectures that “women have received from the gods the same reasoning power as men” and so “women should study philosophy.” For him it followed that “a desire for virtue and an affinity for it belong by nature not only to men but also to women.” He went on: “Since this is so, why would it be appropriate for men but not women to seek to live honorably and consider how to do so, which is what studying philosophy is?” There must, he concluded, be “female philosophers.” In one lecture answering the question “whether daughters should get the same education as sons” (the answer is yes), he observed that “it is obvious that there is not one type of virtue for a man and another for a woman.” He averred that both men and women need good sense, justice, self-control, moderation, and sobriety. As he saw it, the point is clear: “The same virtues [require] the same lessons.”²⁶ Given this evidence, we may accept the conclusion that the Stoics presented their philosophy and way of life both to men and women, urging everyone universally to pursue a life in accord with nature, reason, and virtue.

As for specific examples of women benefiting from Stoicism, there are unfortunately only a few. And our evidence is indirect, gleaned solely from each woman’s family relations to Stoic men and the ancient reports of each woman’s Stoic-like virtue. With that understood, there are three women worth mentioning. One is Porcia Catonis, the daughter of the above-mentioned Stoic Marcus Cato, and the second wife of Brutus, who led the conspiracy that resulted in Julius Caesar’s assassination.²⁷ Another is Fannia, the daughter of Clodius Thrasea Paetus, who was a Stoic and “renowned for his uprightness.” She was the second wife of Helvidius Priscus, who, according to the ancient Roman historian Tacitus,

“followed those teachers of wisdom”—the Stoics—“who hold that the honorable alone is good, the base alone is evil, and things such as power and high birth and the rest, anything external to the mind, they count as neither good nor evil.”²⁸ A final is Annia Cornificia Faustina Minor, the daughter of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor known for his Stoic meditations.

With the mention of Marcus Aurelius, who ruled from 161-180 AD, we come to the end of Stoicism’s prevalence as a philosophy and way of life. Still, we may note the impact of Stoicism from the late second century to our own time. *This is the second reason why we should care about Stoicism*—for its long-term influence.

We’ve already observed the profound guidance that Greek Stoicism gave to various Romans from the time of the Roman Republic on. As we’ve seen with the examples of Julia Augusta, Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Marcus Aurelius, and others, the impact continued into the imperial period. A. A. Long remarks, “In the Roman world during the first two Christian centuries Stoicism was the dominant philosophy among educated pagans.”²⁹ Professor Christopher Gill notes that “as well as being the dominant philosophical movement in the period, Stoicism was also strongly embedded in Greco-Roman culture and, to some extent, in political life, and the idea of living a properly Stoic life remained powerful.”³⁰

The ongoing power of Stoicism persisted for two major reasons, one having to do with pagan or non-Christian philosophy, the other with Christian philosophy or theology. As for the former, both Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism “absorb[ed] Stoic themes and language” into their own philosophical teachings.³¹ A. A. Long explains, for example, that the Neoplatonist Plotinus “incorporated Stoic and Aristotelian concepts in his new interpretation of the Platonic tradition.”³² Christopher Gill writes that Plotinus “shared with Stoicism the idea that a rational force unifies and organizes matter.” He further comments that “the tendency of Platonism to absorb Stoic themes and language leads to the appearance of these in works of popular philosophizing with (broadly) Platonic roots, such as the *Dialexeis* (lectures) of

Maximus of Tyre (second century AD) and the *Tablet of Cebes* (first century BC or AD).”³³

There is nothing surprising in this use of Stoicism or even, as one scholar describes it, the “pill[aging] by eclectics,” since it was common during this period for the different schools of philosophy to learn from one another and adapt ideas and terminology for their own uses. In fact, Stoicism was sometimes judged to be merely an amalgamation of earlier philosophies. It was a common criticism of Zeno of Citium to suggest that his philosophy was nothing new, that it was only novel in its use of language. Cicero, for example, judges that “Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, was actually an inventor of new terms rather than a discoverer of new ideas.”³⁴ However that may be, the charge (though why should it be something negative to use the wisdom of another?) may be made against most philosophers and schools after the initial creative phase of Greek philosophy.

As for Christians thinkers, since they were educated in the same schools and manner as the pagan philosophers, it is no surprise that they responded to and made use of Stoicism in a similar way, whether favorably or critically or both.³⁵ “It was the [Christian] Church,” writes A. A. Long, “which helped above all to keep Stoic ideas in circulation, and Stoicism in its turn had an important influence on the Christian Fathers.”³⁶ It is an influence that is, however challenging to detect, evident among both eastern and western Christians, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Lactantius, Augustine, and Boethius.

More specifically, we encounter the favorable reception and use of Stoicism within the realm of ethics.³⁷ Mark Morford explains that “Many of [Stoicism’s] ethical doctrines were attractive to early Christians, who appropriated them.”³⁸ A. A. Long adds that they oftentimes did so “without acknowledgement.”³⁹ Meaning? There was among Christian writers no self-identification as a Stoic. Regardless, the significant point for us is that early Christians *were* influenced by Stoicism in terms of ethics. Mark Morford states, “Three doctrines of the Stoic system have significantly affected the [Christian] tradition:

that happiness is the goal of rational action; that virtue is attained by living in accordance with nature; and that virtue, achieved through reason, is the only good.”⁴⁰

To give one example, in the *City of God*, Augustine of Hippo (fourth and fifth centuries) approvingly cites the beliefs of “the Stoics and other philosophers on the passions and disturbances of the soul.” The Stoics, he notes, “stand on the side of the mind and reason against the tyranny of the passions.” A few paragraphs later he clarifies that “scripture subjects the mind to God for his direction and assistance, and the passions to the mind for their moderation and bridling.”⁴¹ In stating such, Augustine subtly baptizes Stoic teaching in the waters of the Christian tradition, namely, sacred scripture and the notion that God is the sole or ultimate source of human well-being.

More broadly speaking, A. A. Long sums up early Christianity’s positive relationship with Stoicism in the form of Clement of Alexandria (second to third centuries) in the following manner. Clement, he expounds,

assimilates the Stoic *logos* to ‘the word of God,’ approves of the suppression of emotional impulses, and while teaching salvation as the basis of ethics sees the life of the Christian as ‘a collection of rational actions, that is, the invarying practice of the teachings of the Word, which we call faith.’ . . . The sinner, like the Stoic ‘fool,’ is ignorant. And we find Clement using a Stoic style of argument to prove that man is loved by God. Clement was steeped in Greek literature, and the Stoic doctrines which he refers to or incorporates are part of the orthodox tradition. Of all of the Christian Fathers he is the most valuable as a source for Stoic theory.⁴²

A negative or critical response to Stoicism is also readily discoverable in early Christian writing. Justin Martyr, for instance, disparaged the Stoic teaching—or lack thereof—regarding God. “I surrendered myself to a certain Stoic,” he relates of his education in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, “and having spent a considerable time with him, when I had not acquired any further knowledge of God (for he did not know

himself, and said such instruction was unnecessary), I left him.”⁴³ Christians were also critical of the thoroughgoing materialism of the Stoics, as well as their permissible views toward suicide. Further, as A. A. Long explains, “Some Stoic doctrines, such as the identification of God with fire and the denial of the soul’s immortality, were anathema to the early Fathers of the Church, which helps to explain why no complete texts by any early Stoic philosophers have survived.”⁴⁴

Despite the criticism, Stoicism and its ideas endured through the centuries well beyond the period of the early Church, continuing past the time when the Christian Byzantine emperor Justinian closed the ancient schools of philosophy, including that of the Stoics, in Athens in 529.⁴⁵ Seneca was an important source for Stoicism in the west, as well as Cicero’s writings, whereas in the east, “Epictetus’ *Manual* [*Enchiridion* or *Handbook*] took the space of Seneca.”⁴⁶ Mark Morford reports, “Manuscripts of Seneca and Cicero were diffused from the 11th century onward, especially in France and Germany.”⁴⁷

Regarding Cicero, as A. A. Long urges, we should not “overlook the importance of his earlier political writings, *De republica* and *De legibus*, in which the Stoic concepts of natural law and justice are expounded. It was largely due to Cicero,” he contends, “that such ideas gained the support of Roman lawyers and the Roman Church Fathers who gave them a new foundation in western culture.”⁴⁸ And from them, these ideas passed to medieval theorists and jurists, including Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Marsilius of Padua.

At the beginning of the Renaissance, Petrarch (fourteenth century), who declared himself “Ciceronian” and labeled Cicero and Seneca “our philosophers,” penned *On the Remedies of Good and Bad Fortune* from a largely Stoic point of view—that of Seneca and the presentation of Stoicism found in Cicero. In the work, reason responds to the misdirected expectations of various passions. Nevertheless, Petrarch “disagreed with the Stoics on the self-sufficiency of human beings to attain virtue through reason.” Erasmus, who produced a critical edition of

Seneca's works in 1529, brought up the same point, that "human beings were not the source of their own virtue."⁴⁹

The point raises the fact of a number of ongoing criticisms of Stoicism that began in the early Christian period, continued through the Middle Ages, and lasted into the Renaissance. Although much was admired about Stoicism, and utilized, much was also censured—including the idea that everything is body or matter; the notion of an all-ruling fate; the rejection of the emotions or passions; the assertion of immanent divinity; and the view that suicide is sometimes acceptable, even right.

Still, there were many who judged Stoicism fundamentally compatible with Christianity. The Flemish humanist scholar Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) was one who had a tremendous long-term influence in Europe—so much so that "after the 17th century all philosophers had to take Stoicism into account, and some were strongly influenced by it, including David Hume . . . and Bishop Joseph Butler." Late in the sixteenth century, Justus Lipsius "developed the first systematic exposition of Stoicism since antiquity." His Stoicism, known as Neostoicism "was a practical philosophy for troubled times."⁵⁰ Of four works, Justus Lipsius' most significant was *On Constancy* (1584). Professor John Sellars explains that the book "outlines the way in which a Christian may, in times of trouble, draw upon a Stoic-inspired ethic of constancy (*constantia*) to help him to endure the evils of the world."⁵¹

There were many who engaged with Stoicism over the next few hundred years as the following examples demonstrate. The French essayist Michel de Montaigne was particularly inspired by Seneca, even though, in the end, he looked to "our Christian faith" rather than "Stoic virtue" for any true and "miraculous metamorphosis."⁵² The German philologist and anti-Protestant controversialist Kaspar Schoppe wrote *Elements of Stoic Moral Philosophy*, a work that was, says Mark Morford, "didactically Christian." The Frenchman Guillaume du Vair published a translation of Epictetus, which included an essay that "sought to reconcile Neostoicism with Christianity."⁵³ In the dedicatory epistle that

accompanied his English translation of Du Vair's *The Moral Philosophy of the Stoics*, Oxford librarian Thomas James declared, "Philosophy in general is profitable unto a Christian man, if it be well and rightly used. But no kind of philosophy is more profitable and nearer approaching unto Christianity than the philosophy of the Stoics."⁵⁴ In Spain, Francisco de Quevedo also hoped to square Stoicism with Christianity in like manner to Du Vair, Lipsius, and others. Though not explicit, Stoicism may be detected in Baruch Spinoza's theology and ethics.⁵⁵ Moving forward in time, the American transcendentalist and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson and the German philologist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche were both influenced by Stoicism—Emerson relative to his notion of the Spirit present behind and throughout nature and "present to the soul of man," and Nietzsche in terms of the "eternal recurrence" or "eternal return" of all things.⁵⁶

Stoicism's impact has been ongoing during the past hundred years in popular culture, philosophy, and psychotherapy or counseling. As for the first, we may briefly note its appearance in Tom Wolfe's 1998 novel, *A Man in Full*. Therein, the imprisoned Conrad Hensley reads from "THE STOICS. The complete extant writings of Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, C. Musonius Rufus, and Zeno" (alas, a fictional volume). For Hensley, the book is the "word of Zeus," which is a means to freedom, confidence, and tranquility in life, and even an exhortation toward a kind of Stoic evangelistic mission.

Relative to philosophy, Stoicism has experienced serious attention in the form of critical study and is undergoing somewhat of a revival with the efforts of a variety of adherents and their works. One example is scientist and professor of philosophy Massimo Pigliucci. In his book *How to Be a Stoic*, he reveals why "I've become a Stoic," offering, among other reasons, that Stoicism is rational, science-friendly, and practical. More, it "speak[s] to us in plain language" and "speaks most directly and convincingly to the inevitability of death and how to prepare for it."⁵⁷ Another is professor of philosophy William B. Irvine. His "interest in Stoicism," he discloses, "is resolutely practical. My goal is to put this philosophy to work in my

life”—a practice that he holds compatible with most religious beliefs.⁵⁸ A last example is professor emeritus of philosophy and ethicist Lawrence C. Becker, who has constructed what may be described as an updated form of the philosophy in *A New Stoicism*, originally published in 1998. In Becker’s own words, the book “outlines a contemporary version of Stoic ethics, not a reconstruction of the ancient one.” “We hold,” he states (the “we” referring to contemporary Stoics, including himself), “that there is a single unifying aim in the life of every rational agent, and that aim, guided by the ultimate goal of a good life (happiness, eudaimonia), is virtue, achieved through the perfection of agency.”⁵⁹

As for psychotherapy or counseling, we may note with professor Sarah Marks that “the cognitive-behavior traditions have . . . situated themselves within Greek—and more specifically Stoical—thought.”⁶⁰ The point holds true for the significant founders of the cognitive-behavior tradition, for both Albert Ellis (1913-2007), the developer of Rational Therapy, what came to be called Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), and Aaron Beck (1921-2021), the originator of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). Ellis, for instance, in *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, reveals the following regarding the connection between REBT and Stoicism:

I induced this principle of the ABCs of emotional disturbance [central to REBT] from working with hundreds of clients from 1943 to 1955. But I also took it over from many philosophers I studied from 1929 (when I was 16) onwards. . . . Clearest of all amongst the ancients were the Greek and Roman Stoics, especially Zeno of Citium (the founder of the school), Chrysippus, Panaetius of Rhodes (who introduced Stoicism into Rome), Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. . . . I largely adapted REBT’s ABC theory of emotional disturbance from Epictetus and

other Stoics and . . . made Epictetus one of the patron saints of cognitive therapy.⁶¹

With this ongoing impact over the past hundred years, we come to this present moment, and so to *the third reason why we should care about Stoicism*. Briefly stated, as we have seen with the example of others, we too can benefit from the ancient philosophy that began with Zeno of Citium and persisted through time with adherents such as Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

The point is clear not only from the examples already cited (Pigliucci, Irvine, and Becker) but also from the testimony and activity of others. For instance, the scholar Gilbert Murray states, “I believe that [Stoicism] represents a way of looking at the world and the practical problems of life which possesses still a permanent interest for the human race, and a permanent power of inspiration.”⁶² Then there is Jim Stockdale’s *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*, in which he gives witness to the power of Stoicism, specifically in the form of Epictetus. “The Stoic philosopher Epictetus,” he testifies, “was foremost among my consolations in the pressure cooker of Hanoi,” where, after being shot down, he was in prison for eight years during the Vietnam War. From Epictetus and his writings, he received “comfort and strength.”⁶³ Other examples include Donald Robertson’s *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness*, Jonas Salzgeber’s *The Little Book of Stoicism*, and Elen Buzaré’s *Stoic Spiritual Exercises*, as well as online sites such as Daily Stoic (Ryan Holiday) and Modern Stoicism, which promote the practical effectiveness of Stoicism by means of annual conferences, courses, blogs, videos, and the like.⁶⁴

But who were the Stoics? Although we’ve already caught glimpses, let’s turn now to a few basic facts about this highly beneficial and influential group of ancient philosophers.

So ends this item. See you in **another reading or item** from the Cave.

NOTES

¹ See Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Belmont: Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning, 2013), 67.

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² American Psychological Association, *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men* (Washington, DC: APA, 2018), 11, 3, 17.

³ Such, yes, *masculine* characters—one could well protest and so leave out the tendentious “toxic” designation—are as old as the Spartan Dieneces, who appears in Herodotus’ *Histories* (the fifth century BC account of the wars between the Persian Empire and the Greek city-states). When, just before the battle of Thermopylae (480 BC), Dieneces finds out that countless Persian arrows flying through the sky will hide the sun and thus darken its light, he insouciantly responds, “This is good news—then we shall have our fight in the shade.” See Herodotus, *The Histories* 7.226. See also Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* 1.101, where the author approvingly mentions the same event in the context of having a proper—dare we say stoic?—disdain for death.

⁴ Here are two example entries for STOIC: *Webster’s New College Dictionary* gives, “Apparently indifferent to or unaffected by pleasure or pain: impassive.” And the *Cambridge English Dictionary* gives, “Not showing or not feeling any emotion, especially in a situation in which the expression of emotion is expected.” In his book exploring Stoicism for modern life, William B. Irvine reveals, “Before I began my research on desire, Stoicism had been, for me, a nonstarter as a philosophy of life, but as I read the Stoics, I discovered that almost everything I thought I knew about them was wrong. To begin with, I knew that the dictionary defines a *stoic* as ‘one who is seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by joy, grief, pleasure, or pain.’ I therefore expected that the uppercase-S Stoics would be lowercase-s stoical—that they would be emotionally repressed individuals. I discovered, though, that the goal of the Stoics was not to banish emotion from life but to banish negative emotions. When I read the works of the Stoics, I encountered individuals who were cheerful and optimistic about life.” See William B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

⁵ Though it had changed significantly since his time, the Academy was the philosophical school founded by Plato (c. 427-347 BC). The Peripatetic philosophers followed in the line of Aristotle (384-322 BC), whose school was the Lyceum.

⁶ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 6.14. The story of the sacking of Oropos and fine, which was ultimately reduced to 100 talents, is told in Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.11.4-5.

⁷ David Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” in Brad Inwood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 7.174 (from here on *Lives*). Diogenes Laertius was a third century AD biographer of Greek philosophers, his work extending from the Presocratics to Epicurus. Assuming “Laertius” indicates where Diogenes was born, he was from Laertes, a seaport town in Caria or Cilicia (both in modern Turkey).

⁹ To what extent and how directly Paul was acquainted with Stoicism has been debated for decades. See, for instance, Frederick Clifton Grant, “St. Paul and Stoicism,” *The Biblical World* 45, no. 5 (1915): 268-281, or N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: Harper One, 2018).

¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.169.

¹³ For the story, including the letter of Antigonus to Zeno and the latter’s response, see *ibid.*, 7.6-9. For Persaeus with Antigonus, see *ibid.*, 7.36. For Persaeus’ death in Corinth, see Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.8.4.

¹⁴ Epictetus, *Discourse* 3.23.30. In the *Handbook* 48.2, Epictetus observes that “The one who is making progress in philosophy moves through life as one who is healing, careful not to disturb what is healing until it is fully healed.” For more from Epictetus, pick up the Cave’s forthcoming *The Handbook of Epictetus: Pocket Edition*.

¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.168.

¹⁶ Seneca, *Epistle* 6.6.

¹⁷ See Hierocles the Stoic: “*Elements of Ethics, Fragments, and Excerpts*,” trans. David Konstan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

¹⁸ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 9.5.

¹⁹ Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Reason: A History of Western Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 300.

²⁰ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 2nd ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1986), 233.

²¹ See Cicero, *Stoic Paradoxes* 2. In Cicero’s *On Ends* (3.10), Cato expresses disappointment in the fact that Cicero has not joined the Stoic school. Therein Cicero finds Cato “seated in the library” at the house of Lucullus. “He was surrounded by many books on Stoicism,” he says. Cicero explains that Cato turned to him and declared, “How I wish that you had been inclined to the Stoics! You of all men might have been expected to count virtue as the only good.”

INTRODUCTION PART 1 ▪ WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT THE EARLY STOICS & STOICISM?

²² See Seneca, *Letter to Lucilius* 104.29; *On the Tranquility of the Mind* 16.1; and *On Anger* 2.32.2 and 3.38.2.

²³ Seneca, *Letter to Lucilius* 78.3; *On Leisure* 6.4; and *On the Tranquility of the Mind* 1.10.

²⁴ Seneca, *Consolation to Marcia* 4.1-2. Regarding Arius, David Sedley reports that two Stoics in particular had Augustus' ear. Of one, he writes, "Athenodorus . . . spent most of his career at Rome where, as the emperor's moral counselor, he is reported to have been held by him in high regard." Of the other, he relates, "Much the same can be said of Arius Didymus. Like Athenodorus a Stoic, and like him a court philosopher who gained Augustus' confidence, he achieved eminence as an exponent of practical moral philosophy." See David Sedley, "The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics*, 31-32.

²⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.12. For the Cynics, see the Cave's *The Best of the Cynics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Ancient Cynics*.

²⁶ Musonius Rufus: *Lectures and Sayings*, trans. Cynthia King, ed. William B. Irvine (CreateSpace, 2011).

²⁷ It is worthwhile to note, since the information has infelicitously made rounds online, that John Dryden (seventeenth century) incorrectly translated Plutarch's descriptive *philostorgos* of Porcia as "addicted to philosophy" rather than what it should be, "affectionate" or "loving tenderly." See "Life of Marcus Brutus" 13 in *Plutarch's Lives: The Translation Called Dryden's* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1865)—an edition that was "corrected from the Greek and revised by A.H. Clough."

²⁸ See Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 337; and Cornelius Tacitus, *The History* 4.5.

²⁹ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 233.

³⁰ Christopher Gill, "The School in the Roman Imperial Period," in Brad Inwood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³² A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 235.

³³ Christopher Gill, "The School in the Roman Imperial Period," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics*, 55.

³⁴ Cicero, *On Ends* 3.5.

³⁵ To give a few examples of such an education, Justin Martyr (second century) studied with Stoic, Peripatetic (Aristotelian), and Pythagorean instructors before landing with a Platonist. L.W. Barnard states that "it was while a Platonist that Justin became a Christian." See Barnard's *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 6-7. See also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 2. Later in the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, both immensely significant Christian theologians, studied philosophy in Athens.

³⁶ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 235.

³⁷ Though Christians were in fact using Stoic ideas, at the time many Christians simply traced these ideas back to Christian (or Jewish) sources. Ambrose of Milan, for instance, has this to say: "We are told that the Stoics taught that all things that are produced on the earth are created for the use of men, but that men are born for the sake of men so that mutually one may be of advantage to another. But from where did they get such ideas if not from sacred scriptures?" He goes on to cite Moses and David. "So," he concludes, "these philosophers have learned from our writings." See Ambrose of Milan, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 132-134. Other Christian thinkers, such as Ambrose's protégé Augustine of Hippo, saw parallels between the Christian and the Stoic approach to life and ethics. Both Christians and Stoics live according to the (Holy) Spirit, he observes. "The Stoics, who place man's highest good in the rational soul, live according to the spirit." See Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 14.2.

³⁸ Mark Morford, "Stoicism," in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 908.

³⁹ He states that "much that had been distinctively Stoic in origin was absorbed into the complex amalgam of Judaic [including that of Philo of Alexandria] and Greek teaching that became Christian theology and ethics. So Stoicism is a part, but a largely unacknowledged part, of the Christian tradition." A. A. Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics*, 367.

⁴⁰ Mark Morford, "Stoicism," in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition*, 909.

⁴¹ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 9.4-5.

⁴² A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 235.

⁴³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 2.3.

⁴⁴ A. A. Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics*, 367.

⁴⁵ What the precise nature of this closing was in Athens is uncertain. Regardless, other schools in Alexandria, Antioch, and

Constantinople remained open. See James Hannam, *The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2011).

⁴⁶ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 236. In his introduction to Justus Lipsius' *On Constancy* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), John Sellars relates, "Adaptations of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* made for use in monasteries (references to 'Socrates' being altered to 'St. Paul'), highlight the perceived affinity between Christian and the Stoic way of life" (1-2). To read Epictetus *Handbook* (*Enchiridion*), pick up the Cave's forthcoming *The Handbook of Epictetus: Pocket Edition*.

⁴⁷ Mark Morford, "Stoicism," in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition*, 909.

⁴⁸ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 231.

⁴⁹ For Petrarch's disagreement with the Stoics and Erasmus' similar point, see Mark Morford, "Stoicism," in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition*, 909.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 910. Neostoicism is sometimes written Neo-Stoicism.

⁵¹ John Sellars, introduction to Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy*, trans. Sir John Stradling (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), 2.

⁵² Michel de Montaigne, "Apology to Raymond Sebond" 2.12, cited in Mark Morford, "Stoicism," in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition*, 911.

⁵³ For Schoppe and du Vair, see *ibid.*, 911.

⁵⁴ Cited in John Sellars, introduction to Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy*, trans. Sir John Stradling (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), 1 and 14. Thomas James' English has been modified to reflect a more modern usage.

⁵⁵ For analysis of Stoicism and Spinoza, see A. A. Long in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 208-209, and "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics*, 369-379. In the latter he observes, "The modern assessment of Spinoza's Stoic affinity is a curious record of extremes" —some writers leaving out any mention of Spinoza's debt to Stoicism, and others who "see Spinoza as heavily indebted to Stoicism and concerned to refashion it" (369). As for A. A. Long himself, he simply wishes to note the "conceptual similarity and difference" between Stoicism and Spinoza (370).

⁵⁶ See Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, Chapter 7, "Spirit." The notion of "eternal recurrence" appears in a few of Nietzsche's works, including *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and the posthumous work, *The Eternal Return*. For a discussion relative to Stoicism, see Robert Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, 24.

⁵⁷ Massimo Pigliucci, *How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 2, 5-6. Otherwise, he states, "For all its uniqueness, Stoicism has numerous points of contact with other philosophies, with religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, and Christianity), and with modern movements such as secular humanism and ethical culture" (10).

⁵⁸ William B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5, 12. "The Stoic philosophy of life may be old," he acknowledges, "but it merits the attention of any modern individual who wishes to have a life that is both meaningful and fulfilling—who wishes, that is, to have a good life."

⁵⁹ Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism*, revised ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 6, 22.

⁶⁰ Sarah Marks, "Psychotherapy in historical perspective," *History of the Human Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2017): 3-16. Note that the term "stoical" is simply used here as a synonym for "stoic" (or "Stoical" for "Stoic").

⁶¹ Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, revised ed. (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1994), 64-65. It should be noted that Albert Ellis nevertheless states that, "I am hardly a Stoic. I favor, in addition to Epictetus, Epicurus . . ." Epicurus was the founder of another major ancient Greek school of philosophy, Epicureanism. For more on Epicurus and Epicureanism, see the Cave's *The Best of Epicurus: The Life, Writings & Teachings of Epicurus the Greek Philosopher*. Regarding the "ABC theory of emotional disturbance," Gerald Corey, in *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 293, states, "The A-B-C framework is central to REBT theory and practice. . . . A is the existence of a fact, or activating event, or an inference about an event, an individual. C is the emotional and behavioral consequence or reaction to the individual; the reaction can either be healthy or unhealthy. A (the activating event) does not cause C (the emotional consequence). Instead, B, which is the person's belief about A, largely creates C, the emotional reaction."

⁶² Gilbert Murray, *The Stoic Philosophy* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1915), 2.

⁶³ Jim Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 20.

⁶⁴ In addition to these, see the various forthcoming offerings from the Cave: *The Wisdom & Way of the Early Stoics: Pocket Edition*, and *The Early Stoics Workbook & Journal: Ancient Greek Wisdom & Ways for Living Well & Aiming for Genuine Happiness*.

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