

The Early Stoics

Reading 5 – Hymn to Zeus, Ruler of the Cosmos

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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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Reading 5

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The primary source for the following text is the *Anthology* of Johannes Stobaeus.

This reading comes from the Cave's *The Best of the Early Stoics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Early Stoics*.

Hymn to Zeus Ruler of the Cosmos

The early Stoic Cleanthes of Assos hymns Zeus, saying:

MOST GLORIOUS OF immortals, you of many names, all-powerful and everlasting Zeus, the origin and leader of nature, guiding all things with law—greetings!

For it is right that all mortals should speak to you.

For we are your offspring, having received your voice-image, we alone of all mortals who live and move on earth.

And so I will hymn you and always sing of your strength.

The whole cosmos, wheeling around the earth, obeys you, wherever you take it, readily ruled by you.

Such is the servant you carry in your unconquered hands, the two-edged, fiery, ever-living thunderbolt.

For under its blows the whole of nature shudders.

READING 5 ▪ HYMN TO ZEUS, RULER OF THE COSMOS

By it you direct the universal rational principle that moves through all things, mixing with the greater and lesser lights.

By it you have become so great, highest king over all and forever.

Nor does any work upon earth take place apart from you, god, nor in the divine aethereal vault of heaven, nor in the sea—none but what is done by bad men in their own folly.

But you put a stop to what is excessive and set up what is suitable, ordering what is disordered; for you what is unpleasant is pleasant.

In this manner you have joined together all noble things with things ignoble, so that there is one everlasting rational principle in all things.

This is what wicked mortals flee from and leave alone—ill-fated ones, those always yearning for the property of good men.

They neither see the universal law of God, nor do they hear it.

If they wisely obeyed it, they would have a noble life.

But unrefined, these same ones rush off, going one way or another—some bearing miserable, strife-ridden zeal for a glorious reputation, some turning toward immoderate gain, and others toward relaxation and the pleasures of the body.

Pressing on, the very opposite of these things happens.

But Zeus, giver of all, shrouded in dark clouds, ruler of the thunderbolt, deliver human beings from mournful ignorance, scatter it from their souls.

And grant that they may encounter the purpose you rely on to guide all things with justice, so that being so honored, we may in turn favor you with honor, hymning your works from beginning to end as is fitting for mortals, considering there is no greater honor-prize, neither for mortals nor for gods, than to hymn rightly and always the universal law.

So ends Reading 5. See you in Reading 6, “Ethics in Cicero’s *On Ends*.”

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