

Workout 1 • DOING PHILOSOPHY

KNOWING & PRACTICING THE THREE PARTS OF PHILOSOPHY

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for the Early Stoics and Early 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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The following workout is related to content from the early Stoics and Stoicism, which may be found in the Cave's

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

To read some of the content, go to the "Early Stoics" in the Cave Library.

"If, then, it is true that all the good and none but the good are happy, what possession is greater than philosophy, or what is more divine than virtue?" — the Stoic Cato, in Cicero

"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."

— Athenian Decree in Honor of Zeno, recorded by Diogenes Laertius

O PHILOSOPHY! YOU, the guide of life, the explorer of virtue and expeller of vice! What would have happened to my life without you? And not only mine but the lives of all men?"

So wrote the Roman statesman Cicero toward the very end of his life. And even though Cicero was not a Stoic, he admired Stoicism. Regardless, his sentiment was one the Stoics shared. Zeno of Citium—who, we are told, was "devoted" and "very energetic in his approach to philosophy"—or any other early Stoic would have praised philosophy in the same manner for the same reasons.

Greek & English • The root of the Greek word for "philosophy" (*philosophia*) is *sophia* or "wisdom." So, "philosophy" means the love "*philos*" of wisdom.

As noted in the Introduction to *The Best of the Early Stoics*, the whole point of Stoicism was to do philosophy in order to live according to virtue and thus be happy.

But if we're going to do philosophy, we have to know what it is. So, *what* is it? And what are we supposed to *do* with it?



Athena, goddess of wisdom

WORKOUT 1 • DOING PHILOSOPHY

PROMPT • DEFINING TERMS • Take some time to **consider** what **philosophy** is. A few questions to ponder: What is philosophy? When you see or hear the word “philosophy,” what comes to mind? Any synonyms? What is the point or purpose of *doing* philosophy? Is *learning* about philosophy different from doing philosophy? Jot down a provisional definition or description. Where can you learn about philosophy? From what sources? What else?

What comes to mind when you see or hear the word “philosophy”? Any synonyms? _____

What is the point or purpose of *doing* philosophy? _____

Is *learning* about philosophy different from doing philosophy? _____

What is philosophy (write a provisional definition) _____

Where can you learn about philosophy? From what sources? _____

“The Stoics liken philosophy to a well-walled
city managed in accord with reason.”

—Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*

THE PARTS OF STOIC PHILOSOPHY

“The Stoics say that there are three divisions of philosophy, namely, logic, natural philosophy or physics, and ethics.” Such was the common division among ancient Greek philosophers.

Diogenes Laertes reports that the Stoics used various analogies to discuss the three parts of philosophy. For instance, “The Stoics,” Diogenes says, “liken philosophy to a fertile, all-productive field,” where logic “is the fence that goes around the field, ethics is the crop or fruit, and physics (natural philosophy) is the soil or the fruit tree.”

In the analogy, logic is the science of knowing. As such, it investigates the nature of knowledge and how we may come to know one thing or another. Most significantly, it is the barrier that keeps falsehood out and the truth within the field.



The field itself, with its soil and fruit trees, is natural philosophy, the part of philosophy that discovers “what is” in terms of the whole of reality and human life. It investigates not only what we might term the “hard sciences” such as physics, chemistry, biology, and astronomy, but also the “soft sciences” such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology, as well as metaphysics, including theology, the study of the gods or God, along with the reality of things like Fate or divination.

Finally, ethics—the “crop or fruit”—is everything having to do with human flourishing, including the goal of life and the means by which we can attain the goal. It deals with things like living according to nature and by the light of reason, as well as the passions, virtue and vice, and happiness.

EXERCISE • ANALYSIS • Evaluate the way early Stoicism looked at philosophy. What do you think about the three parts of Stoic philosophy (logic, physics, ethics)? Would you keep them as they are? Would you add or subtract a part? Finally, which part do you believe is the most significant to you? Why? If it is, how is the most significant part reflected in your own life—say, in what you feel, think, speak, and do?

What do I think of the three parts of Stoic philosophy? _____

Would I keep the three parts as they are? Or add or subtract a part? _____

Which part of philosophy is the most significant to me? Why? _____

How is the most significant part (to me) reflected in my own life? _____

THE NEED TO DO PHILOSOPHY, TO PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY

Reading the early Stoics, we notice that philosophy not only demands *thinking* but also *doing* or *practicing*.

This point tallies with the major contention of Pierre Hadot, who was a French philosopher and historian of philosophy.

More than a dry, logical system, ancient philosophy was, Hadot argued, “a way of life” aimed at wisdom. Wisdom itself was a state of being or a condition rather than a method or vast collection of information or knowledge. Ancient philosophy, including Stoicism, Hadot said, “was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, . . . the goal of which was to transform the whole life of an individual.” More than *thinking*—though ancient philosophy was that, too—it was *doing*.

In one of his discourses, the later Stoic Epictetus makes the same point, that philosophy is only significant if we exercise ourselves relative to its directives.

“Suppose, for example,” Epictetus says, “that in talking to an athlete, I said, ‘Show me the muscles of your arms and shoulders,’ and in reply, he said, ‘Look at my weights.’ ‘No,’ I would say, ‘I want to see the effects of the weights.’ So when you say, ‘I’ve read this work of philosophy and mastered it,’ my response is, ‘Slavish fellow! I’m not asking about this work, but how it is that you exercise the powers of choice and refusal, desire and aversion. Do you do so in accord with nature or not? If so, then give me evidence of it and I will declare that you are making progress.’”

So let’s get into the gym and practice!

PRACTICE ▪ You were asked above to determine which part of philosophy is most significant to you, and how it is reflected in your own life. Now, turn to **one of the other parts** (logic, physics or natural philosophy, ethics) and find a specific, concrete way to practice it. Then **practice**. For ideas, see the “Plan of Life Following the Early Stoics” and the “Points of Wisdom from the Early Stoics” in the “Early Stoics Gym” in the Cave Gymnasium. As always, **evaluate** your practice after some time has passed.

The Part of Early Stoic Philosophy: _____

What I will practice: _____

Evaluation _____

3 ACTION POINTS

- **Consider** the nature of philosophy. Learn about its different parts (logic, physics, ethics).
- **Study** ancient philosophy. What it has to say. How it has developed over time. Ancient and later philosophy. Greek and other ancient philosophies (e.g., Indian and Chinese philosophy).
- **Practice** philosophy. Don't stop at learning—reading and thinking. **Do** philosophy. Apply what you've learned to your own life (not in grand, abstract ways, but in small, concrete ways).

Extra Space for Answers and Journaling

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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