

Ethics and Insights

Stoicism: The Best Philosophy

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You recently gave a talk at NPS entitled “What is the Best Philosophy?” I wonder whether asking that question isn’t contrary to the spirit of philosophy. Isn’t the goal of philosophy not to profess, but to investigate, analyze, and consider?

I think there’s definitely something to be said for that line of thinking. After all, as Plato teaches us in *The Symposium*, philosophy is literally a longing, a seeking, a yearning for a wisdom that we lack.¹ Any philosophy worth reading, any philosophy worth considering, will have something to tell us about a life well lived. Yet there’s another line of thinking worth considering as well. I’ve found that when people discover that I am a professor of philosophy,

they either want to avoid the subject altogether or they want to know my personal opinion about what’s worth studying. A lot of people maintain that spark of curiosity that propelled so many of us, as undergraduates, to stay up late and wonder together about the significance of it all, and to continue to wonder even well into our professional lives. When those inquisitive souls ask me, “So, what’s the best philosophy?”, I don’t take it as an invitation to engage in the Socratic method, but rather as genuine curiosity about one person’s opinion, to help guide them on their own journey toward wisdom. So, I just say what I think, which is that the answer is clearly Roman Stoicism. This is a philosophy for people who believe that virtue is good, vice is evil, and all else is indifferent; it’s a philosophy best

exemplified by thinkers like Seneca, Epictetus, and my namesake and beard guru, Marcus Aurelius.

That's a rather surprising answer for a professional philosopher, given how Stoicism seems to be going through something of a renaissance among people we might consider to be philosophical popularizers.

I think it's important to put that modern popularity into historical context. Stoicism was one of more than a dozen schools in ancient Athens. It was the predominant philosophy during the height of the Roman Empire, in the first four centuries of the Common Era. The Stoics were the primary influence on Emmanuel Kant, who was probably the greatest moral philosopher of the last 500 years, and they had a huge influence throughout the Renaissance. They also had an outsized influence on the founders of the United States. Thomas Jefferson's collection at the Library of Congress is filled with all the outstanding Stoic texts. George Washington famously said that his greatest dream was to be the American Cato.²

But then something happened. Because of the influence of Romanticism, Utilitarianism, Marxism, and Fabianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interest in Stoicism simply vanished for over 150 years.

And now, if you look, Stoicism once again is almost everywhere. Ryan Holiday, author of *The Daily Stoic*, has literally tens of millions of followers on social media; he's quoted by NFL and college football coaches.³ I think many people are familiar with the story of Admiral James B. Stockdale, the most senior American POW in the Vietnam prison camps, who famously quoted Stoicism as the influence that helped him to get through his ordeal.⁴ The popular book, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, is about as Stoic as it gets.⁵ General James Mattis, echoing Frederick the Great, famously said he didn't go anywhere without a copy of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*.⁶ There's even "Live Like a Stoic Week," held every year by Wesleyan University.⁷ So yes, Stoicism is incredibly popular right now, but I tend to view that more as a return from the wilderness than a mere fad.

Why do you think Stoicism is so popular right now?

Well, that's the part that ought to worry us a bit: Stoicism generally flourishes when the world is in rather dramatic turmoil. In Athens, it flourished when the Macedonian emperor came to power and Athenian democracy was on the wane. In Rome, it began to flourish during the fall of the Republic, in the first century BCE. And the Renaissance was, for all its glory, one of the greatest social

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changes in human history. So when we see the way the world is now, it shouldn't surprise us that Stoicism is being embraced. It is, after all, a philosophy that forces us to look internally, to ask what we can do when the world around us is in turmoil.

Another important point is that, because Stoicism wasn't embraced by either philosophers or the population writ large for that hiatus of 150 years, people generally mischaracterize what Stoicism is. When most people think about "stoicism," they often have in mind something like the guard who stands all day at Buckingham Palace without moving, or they think about the bearing tests in army basic training. They don't think about one of the greatest Stoic heroes of the twentieth century, Nelson Mandela, a man who unjustly spent over 30 years in prison, a man who was literally urinated on by his captors, and yet, a man whom we often recall as a smiling and compassionate person.⁸ For these reasons, I encourage people to think about how we can be more Stoic with a capital S: how we can align ourselves more with this ancient school of philosophy than with the kind of caricature that people often think of when they think of Stoicism.

So what brought you to Stoicism? What do you find so compelling about it as a philosophy?

There's a story, likely apocryphal, that at the entrance to Plato's Academy were inscribed the words, Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here, a legend that makes more sense if we pause to consider the nature of geometry and what Plato thought about the world. When learning geometry, we don't study actual triangles or actual circles encountered in this dusty world of things; we study the ideal. That's what Plato thought we should always be doing: studying the ideal and the perfect, rather than the world we encounter.

The Stoics, in contrast, were much more engaged with the world in which they lived. The name of their school, the Stoa, comes from the porch of the great market of Athens. And, according to legend, the Stoics had a much more basic requirement than mere knowledge: to study at the

Stoa, you had to be sentenced to death. Now, when my students hear this, they get very excited, thinking that they can go back to their rooms, spared from learning about another ancient philosophy. But then I call on one of them and ask them how old their mother is and how old their grandmother is, how old their great-grandmother is, and how old their great-great-grandmother is, and so on. Pretty quickly, they get the point. They realize the fundamental truth of the human condition. As Epictetus said, “You should let death, exile, and everything horrible be in front of your mind all the time, but chiefly death.”⁹ Seneca goes even further and says, “Let us thank God that no man can be kept in life. We may spurn the very constraints that hold us.”¹⁰

I can see why that kind of focus on a readiness for death would be appealing to those in the military, but don't many of those outside of the military find it dispiriting?

This notion that we ought, first and foremost, to recognize that we're beings that have been sentenced to death is one of the primary things that I think people misunderstand about Stoicism. People who hear this assume that the Stoics must believe that life is a burden, that it's something you have to escape. I think the cause of that misunderstanding is an assumption that's far too common in American society: if something is good, then more of it must be better. McDonald's french fries are good, surely, but we all know that more of them is not always better.

The thing that comes to my mind when I think about the Stoic view of death, both the capital D Death that occurs at the end of our lives and the thousands of more minor deaths we suffer whenever a stage of our lives comes to its natural conclusion, is ski boots. When I was a young officer stationed in Colorado, I did a lot of skiing. When I put on my ski boots at the beginning of the day, that was an awesome feeling. I was excited. I was ready for the beginning of an amazing day on the slopes. But here's the thing: when I took *off* the ski boots at the end of the day, that was also an awesome feeling. I was done. I was ready for skiing to be finished. It was time for some food, a beer, and a few minutes in the hot tub, and then off to bed, so I could get up early in the morning and do it again.

When I used to wear the uniform, most days I was excited to put it on in the morning. I thought the work we were doing was important, meaningful, and useful. But Lord knows, at the end of the day, I loved taking *off* the uniform. Now, when company comes to visit—especially after the COVID years—dear God, I look forward to that! I am joyous when these friends and family members are at my house. But here's the thing: I also love when it's time for

When it comes time to die, we need to be ready for that, too, and to realize that our time on earth was so valuable in part **because it had always been limited.**

them to *go*. That's what the Stoics are saying when they say we ought to focus on death. We need more days on which we are excited to get up in the morning and get going, and more days on which we feel, as the sun goes down, that we're ready for it to be over, that it's time for that day to be done. We need more things in our lives like house guests, ski boots, and wearing the uniform. Then, when it comes time to die, we need to be ready for that, too, and to realize that our time on earth was so valuable in part because it had always been limited. As Seneca puts the point, too many of us have lived “as if you were destined to live forever. No thought of your own human frailty ever enters your head, no consideration of how much time has already gone by. You squander time as if you had a full and abundant supply.”¹¹

The Stoics clearly focus on the present, but what about the future? What about the past? How do they view our relationship with time?

In modern society, many of us have this notion—one that the Stoics also find problematic—that the future is meant to be kept pristine and pure. In the present, we might be stuck in the muck and the mire; the past might haunt us. But the future . . . well, the future is supposed to be pristine and clear, free of disappointment and suffering. The Stoics believe we have become greyhounds, chasing a future happiness that is forever somewhere up ahead of us, forever out in the distance, forever just out of reach. The Stoics were some of the first philosophers to point out the difficulty with that line of thought. We are constantly yearning for the next break, the next vacation, the next tour, perhaps even retirement. As Seneca says, “How tragic it is to seek to live only at the margins. What foolishness to intend to begin life only near its end.”¹²

Lieutenant Brad Snyder used to have the office next to mine at the Naval Academy. He was an EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) officer in the Navy and lost his eyesight to an IED in Afghanistan. A year to the day later, he won his first of seven gold medals at the Paralympics in London. Brad has a very Stoic notion about his injury, which he calls the “delta.” He says it's not events in themselves that upset us, but the change we see when we make a comparison between the new circumstance and something else. That something else might be the way we wanted things to be, the way we expected them to be, the way we

thought we deserved them to be, or even, in Brad's case, the way things used to be. That's something that I think has resonated a lot more for many of us since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic: frustration comes not from the world itself, but from the comparison between the world as it is and some expectation about how the world ought to be. It's that delta that causes us perturbation and pain. If people know anything about Stoicism, it's probably this: Stoicism gives us an analgesic. It gives us a way to deal with the times when we're on the rack, when someone we love dies, when, as we say in the military, the fecal matter hits the proverbial oscillating device, as it always will. That's when Stoicism can help us out.

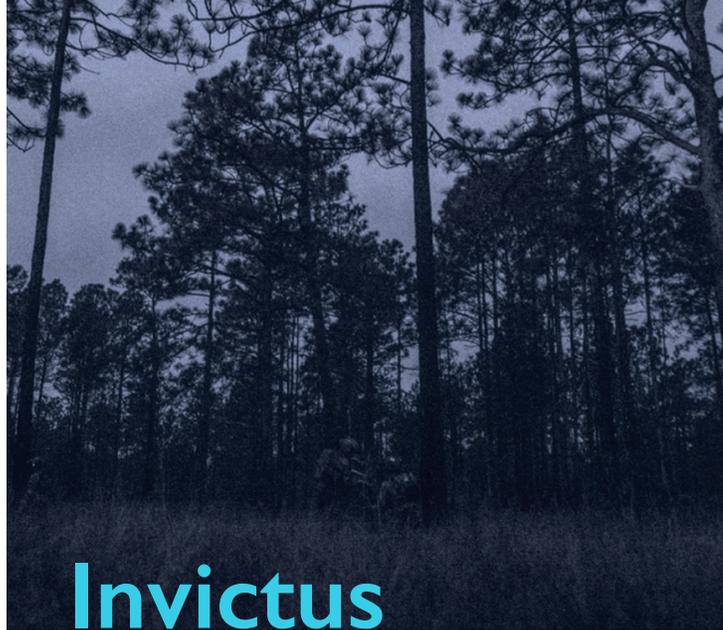
We talked earlier about how Stoicism is becoming increasingly popular today. What's something that the modern popularization of Stoicism misses about the philosophy?

The most important distinction in Stoicism that people just don't talk about enough, either in philosophy or in popular culture, is the difference between a Sage and a Progressor. A Sage is a person who is perfect, who would do the right thing in all situations, while those of us who are trying to get better, trying every day to live more joyously, trying to care less about things outside of our control, are Progressors. There's a difference between Socrates and Cato, both of whom the Stoics hold up as examples of Sages, and Admiral Stockdale, a Progressor who recognized his own failures

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and faults while still trying to do his best. When the Stoics tell us that we should not get angry about things outside of our control, we should recognize that their advice is about the ideal. Most of us are going to be frustrated when we don't get that better job, when our reputation is maligned, or when someone gets an award that we think we deserve. The question is, what then? In the much more popular Aristotelian theory of virtue, we are meant to emulate what the virtuous person does; we have to get in our reps, we have to build good habits, we have to do the same virtuous thing again and again and again to develop our moral virtue.

But the Stoic Sage is someone who *always* does the right thing. By definition, that person would never have a moral failing or fall short, and would always live up to the ideal. Even for virtue theorists whose moral exemplars aren't perfect, those exemplars often don't struggle with the kind



Invictus

by William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

of shortcomings the rest of us face—that’s *why* they’re exemplars. If the goal is to move closer to—to progress toward—being more truly virtuous, we need to recognize that, at least at times, the way to do that is to act in a way that the virtuous don’t act.

In other virtue theories, the central model is emulation. We need to act as the virtuous person would in our situation. We seek to do the things the virtuous person does. That’s how we develop habits, we get in our moral reps. We do virtuous things in order to become more virtuous, and in becoming more virtuous, we become more likely to do virtuous things, and eventually our dispositions and desires change such that we now *want* to do what virtue requires.

The Stoics believe, in contrast, that what’s much more important than habits, what’s much more important than our moral reps, is *first* getting our desires right, first getting our big picture “why” right, and always working toward that asymptotic ideal of someone who doesn’t get upset when things don’t go the way he or she assumes they should. While acting as the virtuous person may help us recognize our duties to one another, it will be of little help in changing our emotional reactions to the world around us. This is because the truly virtuous person often simply lacks the inappropriate reaction to the world—that’s precisely what makes her or him virtuous. Such a person is of little help as an exemplar for those of us who are trying to remove our own problematic reactions to the world around us.

When I was a second lieutenant, for example, I had a list of things I wanted to remind myself of at the beginning and the end of every day. The first and last was always “Don’t take it personally.” I wanted to become someone who didn’t take things so personally, but to become that person I had to do something that I hoped one day to be able to leave behind: to constantly remind myself not to assume that others were attacking me. That’s why the Progressor is so important in Stoic philosophy.

Failing to recognize this distinction between the Progressor and the Sage leads to radical misunderstandings of Stoicism. Consider, for example, the Stoic prescription not to grieve when those we love die. When someone I care about dies, I want to be able to regard the fact that this person was in my life as a gift, rather than seeing the fact that they’re no longer in my life as a harm. But, of course, the chances that any of us can have that kind of perspective immediately after the death of a loved one are near zero, and we have to recognize that fact. But we also have to recognize that such a change of perspective is the goal of our mourning rituals. The question then becomes,

how do we get there? For any trauma, we need to get to the point where we can talk about the event without reliving it. That’s something the role of the Progressor helps us to realize: the significance not only of recognizing the goal we are striving to achieve, but also of undertaking an honest assessment of where we are now. That’s the only way we can move closer to that ideal.

Consider as well the role of anger. Some may think that they *need* to be angry when there’s injustice in the world, that they *ought* to be angry whenever people don’t live up to a certain standard of behavior. But once again, the distinction between the Progressor and the Sage can help us here. If one can see injustice *only* if one gets angry, if one can only be motivated to fight injustice by being angry, then becoming angry is preferable to doing nothing. But the goal remains to be able to fight injustice *without* anger. In fact, the Stoics would say that justice itself requires us to do so. If you look at places like the military, or nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits, and schools,



Nelson Mandela

they’re frequently filled with young people who come in full of piss and vinegar, trying to blaze a new path, trying to instantly make the world a better place. And that’s great. But all these organizations have a huge issue with burnout, in no small part because the fight for justice will often run up against a world that will frustrate those ideals,

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That's the radical freedom the Stoics offer us.

and that demands we nonetheless keep fighting for them time and time again. This is the biggest aspect that people get wrong about Stoicism: they think it involves pushing your emotions down. If you're upset, if you're frustrated, if you're angry, you're just supposed to act like that's not the case. But that's not the point at all. What the Stoics are saying is that there is an ideal out there: a person who doesn't require an emotional fire to do what is right. So the question the Progressor leads us to always ask is, how do we move closer to that ideal?

Is there anything else that you think doesn't get enough emphasis in the popular conception of Stoicism?

There are two points, actually. The first is the very distinctive Stoic conception of freedom. It is helpful to remember that Epictetus—one of the most prominent Roman Stoics—was a *literal* slave. The nineteenth-century poem “Invictus” is popular with a lot of modern people who are drawn to Stoic philosophy. It was written by William Earnest Henley, who suffered from tuberculosis and had to have his leg amputated. The word “invictus” literally means “unconquerable,” not “unconquered.” It was a favorite poem of Stockdale's, who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam for eight years, kept in solitary confinement for four years, and confined in leg irons for two. The Stoics were people who believed that through it all—through loss of limb, through imprisonment, through actual slavery—we can maintain genuine freedom. One of my favorite stories about Stockdale was when his men came to him in the prison camp and said that they couldn't disobey each and every order of their captors. But they felt that they could not, in good conscience, follow them all, either. They couldn't, for instance, give information on their fellow prisoners, or make public statements against their country. So they asked Stockdale to help them develop a distinct demarcation, from which they could say to the guards, “Past this line, torture would be required.” That's the only way they felt they could truly be free, by determining themselves what they were unwilling to do—even if doing so threatened their very lives. The Stoics would say that

that's the freedom we all have, always. We can always affirm that losing our possessions—even losing those we care about—are things that cannot taint us, that cannot harm us. The things that ought to keep us up at night are our own mistakes, our own moral mistakes, not those things outside our control. That's the radical freedom the Stoics offer us.

The second aspect of Stoicism that isn't appreciated enough is one of the most powerful ways of exercising that freedom: to perpetually express gratitude. We should be grateful for the opportunities we're given. We should always be able to frame our current perspective in terms of gratitude. As Epictetus tell us, “One must have within oneself two qualities: the ability to see a particular event in the context of the whole, and a sense of gratitude. Without the first, one cannot understand what has happened; without the second, one cannot appreciate it.”¹³ Marcus Aurelius constantly tells us that adversity is what you make of it. The impediment to one action becomes part of another. The obstacle becomes the way forward.

So the Stoics can help us see why gratitude in response to tragedy can be so powerful. Nelson Mandela, for example, famously said that, although he wouldn't want to be in prison again for 27 years, he couldn't have become the leader he was without that experience; he could not have unified the country if he wasn't able to use his prison experience as an opportunity to learn and to grow. He said that he was *grateful* for his time on Robben Island, because it helped him become the leader his nation needed him to become. Having the ability to change our focus towards gratitude, even in the face of great tragedy, is precisely the kind of freedom we always possess, regardless of the circumstances. If we choose well, if we can react well to tragedy, our people will act differently—not just the people under our command, but the people we work with, the people we interact with on a daily basis, our families—all will be changed for the better.

What do you think the Stoics would say in those cases in which what's at risk is not just property or reputation, but something more meaningful? What do the Stoics say when something we participated in, something that we didn't have complete control over but considered to be a significant part of our own excellence, falls apart despite our best efforts? For example, many military service members feel this way about the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan. How would the Stoics say we can move forward after the thing we valued has failed?

This might be unsatisfactory to some, but what the Stoics are going to say is, what's next? How do you use that experience and become better as a person? And how do you also help *us* become better? How do you help *us* do the right thing in the future? Stoics believe that the kind of lament you feel, similar to the way you might criticize yourself for something you personally did, can be really useful, as long as it helps *you* to be better and helps you help *us* to be better, too. But the lament for the lament's sake isn't useful. If you're just beating yourself up over a personal decision or something that you were a part of that was a larger tragedy, that would be a wasted lament, wasted grief.

What, then, do the Stoics believe we should treat as if it has genuine value?

Excellence and Virtue. Excellence and Virtue. That's it. Everything else is instrumental. Epictetus had an analogy that Stockdale loved. If you tried to explain any ball sport to someone who's never seen anything like it—if, for instance, you wanted to explain soccer or American football to an alien from outer space—what he's going to realize very quickly is that the ball seems to have great value. And the

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alien is going to be shocked when, at the end of the game, one team just puts the ball in a bag and no one cares about it anymore. The alien is going to say, "Wait: I thought the ball was so important! I thought it was *all* important," and you'd say, "Well, no, it's not *actually* important of itself. But acting as if the ball has value provides a way for us to demonstrate a particular kind of excellence: athletic excellence."

The Stoics would tell us that all of these external things, from the obvious ones such as property and reputation to the more meaningful things like our careers and our relationships, provide the means by which we can display a different kind of excellence, a more fundamental human excellence. Because we can't exemplify excellence on our own; we need a community, we need relationships, in which to display that quality. And to do that, we have to

realize that all those things we care about—our projects, our careers, our possessions, our relationships—are going to end. For the Stoics, all these things are like the ball in sports: we act as if they have value, but the real value lies in the kinds of choices we make. Whatever situation we're in, we can act with excellence.

What would you say to those who find something valuable in Stoic philosophy and want to embrace it? What can they do in their lives to better embody the Stoic philosophy?

There are several things, but here I will briefly highlight four. First, we can better know what the target is, what we are aiming at, what kind of person we want to be. As Cicero says, "Above all we must decide what sort of people we want to be, and what kind of life we want to lead. This turns out to be the most difficult question of all."¹⁴ Marcus Aurelius gives us a practical activity to help us with that task: consider what words you would want to describe your life. We should know what things we want to be remembered for when we leave this tour, this career, this life. For Marcus Aurelius, it was to be upright, modest, straightforward, fair-minded, co-operative, and disinterested. Each of us might have a different list, but we should know what those words are; we might even want to write them down. I have a colleague who has them laminated on a card, and he takes that card out of his wallet to read every day. What do we want to be remembered for? That's what Marcus Aurelius would tell us.

Second, we can make it a habit to review each day, to consider how we are progressing toward our ideal and how we are falling short. Seneca said that when we reflect on the day, we should be ready to say about ourselves exactly what people are far too quick to say about others: the harshest assessment of the facts. He says we should get used to speaking the truth to ourselves *and* be willing to hear it. We should concentrate on those areas where our character is weakest. Epictetus's teacher, Musonius Rufus, said that this kind of reflection ought to feel like a trip to the doctor's office, for we do not come in healthy, but diseased: literally not at ease with ourselves. Much like cures in medicine, the cures for character will often be uncomfortable—even painful.

Third, the Stoics say you should sometimes go without. The Stoics trace their lineage from the Cynics, a famous school of philosophy that believed that all these externals, things like honor, wealth, and reputation, were actually *detrimental* to our virtue and our happiness. We have to renounce all these things because they are corrosive to our virtue, to our happiness. The Stoics are a distinct school of

philosophy because they altered that assessment, holding that these externals, everything that was beyond a person's control, lacked any value at all, either positive or negative. Excellence and virtue were the only things the Stoics believed had value. Everything else was instrumental. So all these externals—our possessions, our reputations, our power—don't have positive value, the way many believe they do. But they don't have negative value either, the way the Cynics believed. Since such externals are neither good nor bad according to the Stoics, we don't need to forsake them entirely, but we should be ready when we don't have them. We should occasionally go without the luxuries that the Cynics disdained, the things Stoics warn distract us from what really matters.

So what, then, does matter? What, then, do we ultimately control? We control the decisions we make today, here and now. Epictetus famously said that we should always remind ourselves that the Olympic Games have arrived. Today is the day when we can perform at our best and make progress . . . or not. This is what we have control over. Don't worry about the future: that will come. Seneca famously said that the future will come and you'll face it with the same character that you have today or, one hopes, a slightly better one. So let go of worrying about the future. Then—and unsurprisingly, this is the part of ancient Stoicism that is least represented on the internet version of Stoicism—we're also supposed to go without judging others. One of my favorite quotes is from Marcus Aurelius, who says you can either help others become better or endure them as they are. Those are your options. If you're focusing on what you can control, those are your options. We should go without: without luxuries, without worrying about the future, and without judgement.

Last, and most important, we should change our perspectives by preparing ourselves for what is to come. In one of the most quoted bits of Epictetus's *Enchiridion*, he says that if you're fond of a cup, you have to remind yourself of the kind of thing a cup is. Now, a lot of people may think that Stoics aren't supposed to have a favorite cup, but that is absolutely not the case. I have a favorite cup, a mug from one of the most glorious places on earth: Waffle House. Every major event in my life until I was 30 was celebrated in a Waffle House, including the day of my wedding. So I take great joy from my Waffle House mug. But here's the thing about mugs: they break. Does this mean I don't or shouldn't care about this cup, and all it reminds me of? On the contrary, I actually enjoy it more because I realize its finite nature.

What's more important, as Epictetus tells us, is that what's true for cups is even more true for our fellow human

beings. The Stoics say that if you're going to love someone or something, you need to love them as they are, not as you want them to be. There is perhaps no greater way to *fail* to love someone as they are than by wishing for them to live forever. That is not the way life works; that's not the kind of being we are. So we should recognize that fact and nonetheless be able to feel gratitude. At the end of a relationship, of a loved one's life, or of an opportunity, we can always ask ourselves, would I have invested my time in this person, this relationship, this opportunity, if I knew from the beginning that this is all we would have? Could we be grateful for that time we did have, for that relationship? The way to prepare ourselves, the Stoics would say, is to think about those things: to recognize and accept the nature of things as they are.

To put it another way, if you knew you were going to die today, how would you wish to live the rest of your life if given a second chance? Marcus Aurelius said, "Think of yourself as dead, as if you have already lived your life to its predetermined length. Now, take whatever extra time you may be given and live it properly."¹⁵ Look at the rest of your time as an unexpected opportunity. How are you going to live it? How are you going to prepare yourself to be the person you want to be in five years, in ten years, at the end of your career, at the end of your time in the military, at the end of your life? How would you have to live?

So Stoicism is not about analgesics; it's about seeing the world differently. The Stoics will tell us that any philosophy that doesn't recognize that this world of ours is full of piss and shit, death and suffering, is woefully insufficient when we are forced to endure the fire of the kiln ourselves, or when those who are near and dear to us suffer and die. But any philosophy that denies the second part of life's proposition—that through it all, this world of ours is also rich and lush, sexy and beautiful—will prove woefully insufficient when we are free to live and not merely to endure.

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NOTES

¹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

² Cato the Younger was a prominent Stoic hero. For more on Cato, see the chapter entitled “Cato the Younger, Rome’s Iron Man,” in Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman, *Lives of the Stoics: The Art of Living from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius* (New York: Portfolio, 2020), 135–152.

³ Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman, *The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations on Wisdom, Perseverance, and the Art of Living* (New York: Portfolio, 2016). For more on Ryan Holiday and his work, see <https://ryanholiday.net/>

⁴ For more on Stockdale, see James Bond Stockdale, “Courage Under Fire: Testing Epictetus’s Doctrines in a Laboratory of Human Behavior,” Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, 1993: <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/StockdaleCourage.pdf>

⁵ Mark Manson, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

⁶ See Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (New York: The Modern Library, 2003).

⁷ For more on Wesleyan University’s “Live Like a Stoic Week,” see <https://livingagoodlife.com/fall2021/live-like-a-stoic-week/>

⁸ Although Nelson Mandela was not formally an adherent of Stoic philosophy, he embodied Stoic ideals in his own life, which is why I refer to him as a Stoic hero. His favorite poem was “Invictus.” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51642/invictus>

⁹ Epictetus, “The Enchiridion 21,” in *A New Handbook for the Modern Stoic: Selections from Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Epictetus, and Others*, Marcus Hedahl and Don Koomar, eds. (unpublished manuscript): https://usna.edu/CoreEthics/Essays/stoic_handbook.pdf

¹⁰ Seneca, “Letter to Lucilius 12.10,” The Stoic Letters, 12 March 2020: <https://thestoicletters.com/letter-xii-on-old-age-stoic-seneca/>

¹¹ Seneca, “On the Shortness of Life 3.3-3.4,” in Hedahl and Koomar, *A New Handbook for the Modern Stoic*.

¹² Seneca, “On the Shortness of Life 3,” translated by Marcus Hedahl.

¹³ Epictetus, “The Discourses 1.6.2,” in Hedahl and Don Koomar, *A New Handbook for the Modern Stoic*.

¹⁴ Cicero, “On Duties 1.107,” in *ibid.*

¹⁵ Marcus Aurelius, “Meditations 7.56,” in *ibid.*



Marcus Aurelius