

LIVE LIKE A STOIC FOR A WEEK

The Stoic Week 2013 Handbook



Monday 25th November
to Sunday 1st December
2013

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Download questionnaires and recordings, etc., from the Stoicism Today blog:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/stoic-week-2013/>

Stoicism for Everyday Life public event, 30 November 2013:

www.stoicismforlife.com

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

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Introduction

Welcome to this opportunity to take part in a unique experiment: to follow the two millennia old *Stoic Philosophy as a Way of Life* in the modern day! This handbook stems from a project bringing together academics and psychotherapists who want to explore the potential benefits of ancient Stoicism. In November 2012 we ran the initial Stoic week pilot study to see if the idea was feasible. It proved to be more popular than we could have anticipated. This year we are repeating the experiment in the light of the feedback we gained from the pilot study.

In this handbook, you will find guidance on how to adapt and follow Stoic principles, with a combination of general theory and more specific, step-by-step guidance on certain Stoic exercises. These materials have been prepared by experts in the field and give you an unusual, and free, chance for personal development.

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

A: You don't. Indeed, one of the reasons we are conducting the experiment is to find out whether, and how, Stoic practices can help us to live better lives. We found that most of the people who took part in the pilot study last year found the exercise a very positive one. On a number of well-validated and widely used wellbeing scales, there was a 10% in wellbeing. The benefit for you may be educational - in understanding what Stoicism is about - it may be psychological - helping you become more resilient and possibly even happier - it may be moral - you may find that the week helps you develop certain desirable ethical qualities. Or you may find that Stoicism as a philosophy just isn't for you, which might in itself be a valuable thing to learn.

Q: What's the basic idea?

A: This is what you need to do:

1. Complete the questionnaires at the beginning and end of Stoic Week (see below).
2. Follow the daily schedule, consisting of a text for reflection and Stoic meditation morning and evening. At lunchtime, or at another time that is good for you, consider the Stoic exercise for that day.

The morning and evening meditation practices will provide you with a daily routine or structure to help you reflect on what happens each day. You'll begin by learning to keep a record of your thoughts, actions, and feelings, and to start observing them in a more detached and "philosophical" way. One of the main practical themes that runs through Stoicism, and therefore this Handbook, is the strategy of distinguishing between things under your control and things not. The Stoics believed this takes training to do well but that it's the key to self-discipline and overcoming emotional disturbance. This requires continual attention to your own thoughts and judgements, so we can describe it as a kind of "mindfulness" practice. We'll then build upon this foundation by exploring different Stoic concepts and techniques each day, through the course of the week.

Q: I'm worried I may not have time to do everything. How can I give myself the best chance of making the most of it?

A: It will probably be helpful for you to think of this as a definite, short-term commitment - similar perhaps to the effort you would put in to rehearsing the week before appearing in a play, or an exam, or training for a sporting event. Ideally, this might take about 15 minutes in the morning and evening, and the same at lunchtime, although you might want to spend more or less.

Q. How could I use of modern technology whilst living like a Stoic?

Here are some ideas:

- Record a video diary of your experiences of living like a Stoic - then, if you want, post it to YouTube or the *Stoicism Today* blog.
- Blog about your experiences.
- Record your experiences on Facebook.
- Tweet about your experiences, or tweet Stoic adages as you go along (#stoicweek).
- Each day summarise what you have learnt as a tweet.
- Use your phone to set reminders to start your Stoic practices.

Which of these appeal to you? How many other ways can you use technology to help you live like a Stoic? If you are doing the experiment with other people, it might help to discuss your experiences each day. Perhaps you could have a 10 minute Stoic coffee each day where you touch base with others and discuss how you are doing. If you are not geographically close to other participants, you might use the *Stoicism Today* blog to connect with others, and indeed there will be opportunities to post on the blog daily about how the week is going and to post any general reflections, or quotations from Stoicism which you particularly find useful.

If you want to have your video diaries or blog entries about Stoic Week featured on the Stoicism Today blog, contact [Patrick Ussher](#).

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

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

Q: How do I register for Stoic Week?

To register for Stoic Week, please fill out the pre-week questionnaires on the weekend, or on Monday if you miss doing it on the weekend, before Stoic Week. All questionnaires and other downloads are available from the Stoic Week 2013 page on the Stoicism Today blog:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/stoic-week-2013/>

You can find further information about the questionnaires in the relevant appendix.

Who Were the Stoics?

Although you don't need to know much about the ancient Stoics themselves in order to take part in Stoic Week, it might be helpful to say just a little bit about who the Stoics were.

The Stoic school of philosophy was founded in Athens around 300 BC by Zeno, who was originally from Cyprus. After studying for many years in different schools of Athenian philosophy he eventually set up on his own, meeting with others at the Painted Stoa on the northern edge of the Athenian marketplace, hence the name. Zeno was reputedly very highly regarded by the Athenians for his exceptional self-discipline and reputation as a teacher, and as a role-model to youths. After his death his student Cleanthes took over as the head of the school. He was succeeded in turn by Chrysippus, regarded as one of the greatest intellectuals of the ancient world, who is said to have written over 700 books. Sadly all of these are lost apart from quotations in later authors and a few papyrus fragments recovered from a famous library of philosophical texts at Herculaneum.

The Stoa continued as a school in Athens probably right down to the first century BC, during which at some point Athens lost its status as the preeminent centre of philosophy in the ancient world. From the first century BC onwards Rome became the dominant force in political and intellectual life and we know of a number of important Stoics from the first and second century AD. The most famous of these are Seneca, Epictetus, and the emperor Marcus Aurelius. For our purposes these three Roman Stoics have two great advantages over their Athenian predecessors: first, their focus was very much on how one might use Stoicism as a guide to living well, and second, large parts of their writing survived and we can read them today.

The Roman statesman Seneca, who was originally from Spain, suffered at the hands of a number of emperors, and was banished for a time to the island of Corsica. He later became tutor to the Emperor Nero, who degenerated into a tyrant and finally ordered his execution by forced suicide. Many of his *Letters* and *Essays* address the challenge of coping with extreme situations.

Epictetus was a slave originally from Asia Minor whose Roman master eventually freed him. He went on to set up his own philosophical school in Nicopolis on the western coast of Greece, and became a highly-regarded Stoic teacher. He wrote nothing, but his pupil Arrian took notes of his conversations and turned them into the *Discourses*, which he then summarized in the shorter *Handbook* (*Enchiridion*).

Marcus Aurelius was Roman Emperor from 161 to 180 AD. Much of his reign was spent on the borders of the empire, fighting the Germans, who had invaded Italy. His work, the *Meditations*, seems to be a philosophical notebook or diary, some of which was composed during his time on campaign. This is his attempt to reflect on the various difficulties and pressures that come with the job of ruling the known Western world. He refers to the teachings of Epictetus, although neither he nor Epictetus appear to make any mention of their predecessor Seneca.

Much of the material in this handbook is drawn from the works of these three Roman Stoics, particularly Epictetus whose short *Handbook* offers clear advice to someone who wants to live a Stoic life. In a sense, the handbook you're currently reading is intended as a modern version of the ancient *Handbook* of Epictetus, although we strongly encourage you to read the original as well as other classical texts, and modern commentaries, to deepen your understanding of Stoic philosophy and practices.

Central Stoic Ideas

What is Stoicism? How might it help us to live better, happier lives today? Some of you will be drawn to this experiment because you already know a little bit about Stoicism and want to put it into practice for themselves. Others may know very little about Stoicism and are simply curious to learn more. The ancient philosophical system of Stoicism was traditionally known for being both large and complex, addressing a wide range of topics. So it will be impossible to introduce it all, but here are three central ideas that are at the heart of Stoic philosophy.

1. Value

The Stoics argued that the most important thing in life and the only thing with real value is ‘virtue’ or ‘excellence of character’. This includes the traditional virtues like moderation, courage, justice, and wisdom but should also be understood more broadly as an excellent mental state. They identify this with rationality. It is this excellent, rational, virtuous character that enables human beings to act as best as they can in any given circumstance.

The central Stoic claim is that this excellent mental state is ultimately the *only* thing that really matters; it is the only thing that is really good and it is the only thing that can bring us wellbeing or happiness. Without this we shall never be happy. Cultivating this excellent character ought to be our top priority, above all other things, if we want to live a good, happy life.

Conversely all those external things that people often pursue for the sake of happiness – a good job, money, success, fame, and so on – cannot guarantee us happiness, the Stoics claim. They could well be parts of a happy life but, on their own, they will never deliver – not without an excellent, rational frame of mind.

However this stress on the role of virtue does not mean that those things that people normally think of as good are not important – things such as health, having good friends, and financial means. It is just that whether you have any of these other things or not does not make any difference ultimately to your ability to live a good life.

So the Stoics suggest that if we are serious about leading a good, happy, contented life we ought to focus our attention inwards, not outwards, at least until we have started to make progress towards developing an excellent character. But this doesn’t mean they suggest we turn our backs on the outside world. On the contrary, the reason for developing a virtuous character is that it enables us to interact with the world in a better, kinder, and more positive way.

The best way to approach life, the Stoics suggest, is to think of oneself as an archer who does his or her best to fire the arrow well but accepts that once it has flown it may be blown off course and miss the target. In this analogy, our intentions are like preparing to fire the arrow, but the outcome of our actions, like hitting the target, is beyond our control and partly the result of external events.

Although the Stoics are not against pursuing external things or preferring one external thing over another (it is better to be healthy than sick, better to be rich than poor), they do warn that if we get too carried away in the pursuit of such things we run the risk of compromising the one thing that is most important – our excellent, rational character. As soon as we start to get stressed, annoyed, impatient, frustrated, or angry about any of the external things that we are pursuing in our daily lives, then we run the risk of compromising the one thing that really can enable us to live a good life for the sake of something that ultimately cannot. That’s the line the Stoics say we ought not to cross.

2. Emotions

In the popular imagination a Stoic is someone who denies or represses their emotions in a potentially unhealthy way. This is largely just a widespread misconception, though. The real Stoic position is different from this in a number of ways. The central claim the Stoics make is that our emotions are ultimately the product of judgements we make. If we feel fear it is because we have judged that

something terrible might be about to happen to us. If we feel anger it is because we have judged that something bad is happening to us right now.

The Stoics do not suggest that we should repress or deny these – instead they want to show us how we can uproot these sorts of unpleasant emotions altogether. This is something we can do, the Stoics say, because these emotions are the product of our judgements about what is good and bad in life. Change the judgements and you will change the emotions. Our emotions are typically within our control, even if it might not feel like it some of the time.

However, the Stoics also acknowledge the existence of certain reflex-like aspects of emotion, physiological reactions, such as blushing, stammering, or being startled. These typically remain *involuntary* and beyond our direct control, although we can choose how we respond to them and whether we allow ourselves to dwell on or escalate our first impressions and initial reactions. Crucially, in the same way that faulty judgements lead to irrational emotions or unhealthy desires, so too will wise judgements lead to healthy desires and emotions. For example, the Stoics claimed there were three broad categories of good desires and emotions, which are both rational to possess and naturally follow as a consequence of developing virtuous attitudes:

1. Joy or delight, in the experience of what is truly good, as opposed to empty or unhealthy pleasures.
2. Caution or discretion, toward the prospect of what is truly bad, as opposed to irrational fear or cowardice.
3. Wishing or willing what is truly good, including the wellbeing of others, as opposed to excessively craving health, wealth or reputation.

So the Stoic Sage is not a cold fish. In fact, the ancient Stoics repeatedly said their goal was not to be as unfeeling as someone with a heart of stone or iron but to develop the natural affection we have for those close to us, in accord with wisdom and virtue, ultimately extending it to all of mankind. Marcus Aurelius therefore praised his own Stoic tutor, Sextus of Chaeronea, for being full of love, or natural affection, and yet free from unhealthy passions (*Meditations*, 1.9). Later, Marcus asks when he will achieve such an affectionate and contented state of being himself (*Meditations*, 10.1).

Now, let's connect this with what the Stoics say about value. Take a trivial example like being late for a meeting or appointment. If we are running late due to bad traffic or public transport delays or whatever and we start to get annoyed it is because we are at some level judging that something bad is happening, that it really matters that we get to the appointment on time, that something bad will happen if we get there late, and so on. But of course none of these things really matter for they are all *external* to us. It is always good to be on time and we would prefer not to be late, but whether we are on time or late won't really affect our well-being, in the sense that it doesn't make us ethically bad people. By contrast getting annoyed will directly affect our well-being because it will undermine and damage the only thing that can guarantee it – a good state of character.

3. Nature & the Community of Humankind

Sorting out our judgements about the world brings us to the nature of the world itself. One of the most famous ancient Stoic slogans is that we ought to live in harmony with Nature. What did they mean by this? Well, the Stoics thought of Nature in two key ways.

The first is as a single, organic whole in which everything is interconnected. The cosmos is like a single living being. Like all other living beings it is in a continual process of change. So, when facing the world we ought to see ourselves as part of it. We are but one small component or element within a much larger entity. We are not the centre of the world and it is not all about us. The larger process of change, growth, and decay that take place in Nature are inevitable and ultimately out of our control. There is nothing to be gained from trying to resist these larger processes and resisting them produces frustration, anger, and disappointment. Instead, we ought to embrace Nature on its own terms and accept our place within it as limited, finite beings, with limited power and a limited lifespan – but also as parts of something much greater than us.

Nature is not just something 'outside us' however, but is something 'within us'. All living beings are 'parts' of nature and reflect her laws. The Stoics believe that nature has made most animal species, and especially the human species, to be social in character. We form attachments, we live in community, and we wish to find a partner and raise children. The 'self' in Stoic thought is intrinsically a 'social self'. From this natural affection stems the Stoic ideal of the 'community of humankind'. As Marcus Aurelius writes (2.1) 'We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. So to work in opposition to one another is against nature: and anger or rejection is opposition,' and Epictetus also writes that we should consider ourselves to be 'citizens of the world' (1.9). So we, in a sense, fulfil our own natures when we act kindly or benevolently, whether or not they are following their natural social instincts.

* * *

If you are going to follow Stoic Week then you need to be open to these three central ideas. You don't need to accept them uncritically but you do at least need to be prepared to explore them further and consider whether they seem to you actually true as well as potentially beneficial to you in how you lead your life. The Stoics claimed that they do offer some therapeutic benefit, precisely because they are true!

Nevertheless, our aim in this project is not to try to convince you of the truth of these claims but simply to see if they are helpful for you in how you lead your life. If these three central ideas seem completely absurd to you then it may be that Stoic Week is not the right experiment for you.

Daily Stoic Meditations for Stoic Week

Over the course of Stoic Week, we'd like you to commit yourself to employing certain Stoic practices every day. These are the morning and evening meditations, which will form the basis of your Stoic practice this week, giving you a structured morning and evening routine. This combination of a structured morning and evening routine and Stoic mindfulness will give you a good starting point and daily framework. Let's now explore the morning and evening meditations in more detail.

Early-Morning Meditation

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

1. Marcus Aurelius talks about walking on one's own to a quiet place at daybreak and meditating upon the stars and the rising Sun, preparing for the day ahead. You can also do this at home, sitting on the end of your bed, or standing in front of the mirror in your bathroom, and still think of the sun rising against a backdrop of stars.
2. Pick a specific philosophical principle that you want to rehearse and repeat it to yourself a few times before imagining how you could put it into practice during the rest of the day. You might choose the key general Stoic theme: "Some things are under our control whereas others are not", and to think about giving more importance to being a good person and acting well and treating things you cannot control as ultimately much less important.
3. Alternatively, you might pick a specific virtue that you want to cultivate and prepare yourself mentally for your day ahead, in broad outline, imagining how you would act if you showed more wisdom, justice, courage, or moderation.
4. Practise this meditation for about 5-10 minutes, picking out key events or specific challenges that might arise.

Once you've got into the habit of doing this, try imagining greater challenges in the day ahead such as some of your plans not going as you hope and dealing with difficult people. As you consider a possible difficulty, think about how you could tackle it with a Stoic principle or virtue.

You can download a free video and audio exercise on the Stoic Early Morning Meditation from the main Stoic Week 2013 page below:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/stoic-week-2013/>

During the Day: Stoic Mindfulness

Nowadays, we understand 'mindfulness' to be about paying attention to one's present moment experience with kindness and non-judgementally. The Stoics also had a technique, called *prosoche*, which involved paying attention to the present moment.

'Stoic mindfulness', however, is not *just* about paying attention to the moment. Neither is it about focussing on your breath, or things you are doing at the level of *sensation*, as it is in Buddhist mindfulness. That is not to say that such Buddhist mindfulness techniques would not complement a Stoic's actions. Indeed, they would: focussing on the moment, and doing what you do with care, is a key Stoic quality. But 'Stoic mindfulness' is also a gentle yet consistent monitoring of yourself throughout the day, which asks: 'am I concerned here with something which is in my control or not in my control?'

Epictetus gives us the example of a singer with stage-fright. This person has ‘placed himself’ in something he cannot control, which is what the crowd thinks of him, such that his happiness depends on that. Epictetus says:

‘When I see man in anxiety, I say to myself, “what can it be that this fellow wants? For if he did not want something that was outside of his control, how could he still remain in anxiety? That is why when singing on his own he shows no anxiety, but does so what he enters the theatre, even though he has a beautiful voice. *For he does not wish merely to sing well, but also to win applause, and that is no longer under his control....* Why is this? Why, he simply does not know what a crowd is, or the applause of a crowd...hence he must needs tremble and turn pale.’

2.13.

This is because the singer did not ask himself: ‘Where, in this situation, should I ‘place myself?’ Had he asked this, he would have decided to focus purely on the performance of his art. Of course, the Stoic singer will be glad if the crowd applauds, but applause was never the *point* of his singing. The irony, of course, is that the one who focusses on the performance of his art, on being ‘in the zone’, is more likely to do his or her task well, and to win the applause of the crowd anyway. In any event, the key practice is to ask yourself: ‘where I am placing myself here?’ and if, as Epictetus told his students, you find your thoughts are concerned with things you cannot control, remember to say to yourself: ‘that is nothing to do with me!’ [*Encheiridion*, §1].

Late-Evening Meditation

Epictetus and Seneca both allude to the use within Stoicism of a form of contemplative, philosophical self-analysis, practised regularly, each evening, which was borrowed from Pythagoreanism. For example, Epictetus quoted the following passage from the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras* to his students:

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

Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.10.2-3

For Epictetus and his students the students of Epictetus, the evening meditation was apparently composed of three key questions:

1. Where did I go wrong in matters conducive to serenity and personal flourishing? (What errors of judgement did I make?)
2. What did I do that was unfriendly, or antisocial, or inconsiderate? (Where did I act foolishly?)
3. What duty was left undone in regard to my personal serenity and social relationships? (What could I do differently next time?)

Seneca described a *slightly* different set of questions:

1. “What evils have you cured yourself of today?”
2. “What vices have you fought?”
3. “In what sense are you better?”

We can probably assume that a Stoic whose self-analysis and review of the preceding day leads him to conclude he has erred in his judgement, acted badly, or failed to follow his principles, would seek to learn from this and act differently the following day. On awakening the next day, you'll probably find it natural to base your morning meditation, in part, on your reflections made before going to sleep the previous night. These meditations therefore appear to combine to form a "learning cycle", planning how to live and act more wisely, putting it into practice during the day, and then reflecting upon the outcome afterwards, which leads to the same cycle the following day.

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

1. What did you do badly? Did you do allow yourself to be ruled by fears or desire of an excessive, irrational, or unhealthy kind? Did you act badly or allow yourself to indulge in irrational thoughts?
2. What did you do well? Did you make progress by strengthening your virtues?
3. What did you omit? Did you overlook any opportunities to exercise virtue or strength of character?
4. Consider how anything done badly or neglected could be done differently in the future – do this by criticising your specific actions rather than yourself generally as a person.
5. Praise yourself for anything done well.

In doing this, as Seneca put it, you are also rehearsing the role of a friend and wise counsellor, toward yourself.

The advice from modern psychotherapy would be that you'll need to be cautious to avoid reflection turning into morbid *rumination*. Don't dwell too long on things or go around in circles. Rather, try to keep a practical focus and arrive at clear decisions if possible; if not then set your thoughts aside to return to them in the morning. There are many hidden aspects to this exercise, which will become clearer as you progress in your studies of Stoicism. For example, bearing in mind that the past is beyond your ability to control, as a Stoic you should arguably use this "review" to practice acceptance and Stoic "indifference" toward your own failings, in a sense forgiving yourself while resolving to behave differently in the future. Hence, as Seneca emphasises, when describing his use of the same evening routine, we should not be afraid of contemplating our mistakes because as Stoics we can say: "Beware of doing that again, and this time I pardon you."

You can download a free video and audio exercise on the Stoic Evening Meditation from the main Stoic Week 2013 page below:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/stoic-week-2013/>

Instructions on how to use the Stoic self-monitoring record

1. **Date/Time.** Note the date and time of the event, when you started to feel angry or afraid, for example, and briefly describe the actual situation you were facing, e.g., perhaps someone criticised your work, or maybe someone offered you some unhealthy junk food while you were trying to follow a diet.
2. **Feelings.** What emotions or desires did you actually experience (the Stoics use the technical term "passions" for both). Remember, we're only really interested in feelings that might be considered irrational in the sense of being unhealthy. So, following on from our examples above, you might write down that you felt excessively anxious or angry

about being criticised, or that you felt a strong craving to eat junk food, which you found hard to resist. Remember that you're also trying to catch these feelings early, so try to note "early-warning signs", which are often sensations such as trembling when afraid, although sometimes they might be thoughts such as telling yourself "just one won't hurt" when you're tempted to eat something unhealthy.

3. Thoughts. What related thoughts went through your mind? Stoic psychology held that our emotions and desires fundamentally depend upon our thoughts, particularly our value-judgements about specific things. Be forewarned that most people find it difficult at first to identify the specific thoughts that are responsible for their feelings. You'll probably need to work on this but with practice, and study, it should become easier. Were you telling yourself that something external is very good (desirable) or bad (upsetting)? Later you'll learn to question these thoughts but for now just notice them and take a step back, observing them in a detached way – you don't need to try to block them from your mind but neither do you need to do what they're telling you. Epictetus advised his students to begin by noticing such thoughts, or "impressions" as Stoics called them, and rather than allowing themselves to be "carried away" just waiting until later, when they've calmed somewhat, before evaluating them rationally and philosophically – perhaps during your evening meditation period. For example, someone who feels anxious and angry about being criticised might come to realise that they're thinking "I must be respected at work" and placing great importance or intrinsic value on other people's opinions of them.

4. Control. As we'll see, this is the central question that Stoics use to evaluate their impressions: "Is it up to me?" They meant "Is this – the thing that my feelings are about – under my direct control?" Again, don't worry too much about this for your first day or so, because as you learn more about Stoicism you'll get better at posing this question. For example, you might observe that other people's opinions of you, and whether or not they criticise you, is ultimately beyond your direct control – all you control in this situation is your current response to their words and perhaps your plans for how to act the future. Even your past failings are no longer within your power to change – you can't rewrite the past. This distinction between what is up to us and what is not is crucial for Stoics, as you'll see, because Stoic "indifference" means accepting those things in life we cannot possibly change, while seeking to change the things we can, in accord with wisdom and our ethical principles. Just write a few words here summing up your analysis of the situation, in terms of which aspects you do or do not control. We'll need to explore this question more carefully in the following parts of the course, though.

5. Actions. What did you actually do? Were your actions helpful or not? Did you act wisely or foolishly, in accord with your ethical principles or in conflict with them? For Stoics, the key question here is whether you acted with "virtue", whatever the outcome, either success or failure. Did you act wisely and with justice, courage, and self-discipline? Did you act foolishly, unfairly, fearfully, or in a slack or intemperate manner?

Try to be on the lookout for unhealthy or excessive emotions and desires, ones it might be irrational for you to indulge in over time. Aim to spot the "early-warning signs" of problematic feelings arising, so that you can "nip them in the bud" before they escalate and take hold. Instead, pause, take a step back from things, and gain what therapists call "psychological distance" from your initial, upsetting thoughts and feelings. Become a detached observer of yourself for a while. Write things down as soon as possible, as doing so will help you view things in this detached way, like a "natural philosopher" or scientist observing events and describing them in a completely objective manner. As you'll learn, the Stoics admired the detached perspective of natural philosophy, the precursor of modern scientific method, perhaps surprisingly, because of the ability it has to calm our excessive emotions and desires. As is often the case, similar advice has often been used in modern CBT, where clients are taught to think of themselves as "scientists" carefully observing their own thoughts, actions, and feelings, recording them, and carrying out experiments by changing their behaviour and

noting the consequences. Because the scientific attitude suspends value judgements, it can help us water-down strong emotions and desires, when we apply it, with mindfulness, to our own daily experiences.

STOIC SELF-MONITORING RECORD SHEET

Use this sheet to record your thoughts, actions, and feelings in challenging situations. As soon as you notice troubling emotions or desires arising (called "passions" in Stoicism), pause and take a step back from the initial "impression" (or thought) underlying them. Then ask yourself whether the thing you're becoming upset about is actually under your control ("up to you") or not. Also try to record your actions, their consequences, and whether they were actually beneficial or not.

Date/Time <small>And briefly describe the situation.</small>	Feelings (Passions) <small>Include early-warning signs.</small>	Thoughts (Impressions) <small>Particularly those causing feelings.</small>	Control <small>Is this "up to you" or not?</small>	Actions <small>Were they beneficial?</small>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

Stoic Week Day-by-Day

In addition to the morning and evening meditations outlined in the last section, each day in Stoic Week has its own central theme. These will build upon one another as the week progresses. This will make the whole week the beginning of a journey into Stoicism.

Take some time out at lunchtime each day, or any time that suits you, to reflect on the day's theme and think about how it might shape the various activities in which you are engaged.

Each period of morning and evening reflection has its own Stoic text. You can read and reflect on this for a few moments before and after your meditation period. Ponder the words slowly, and see which parts of the reflection resonate with you. Bear in mind that the Stoics had their own world-view with which you may or may not agree, but try, in your reflections on the extracts, to understand the *essence* of what they are saying.

Monday: What is in our Power?

Some things are under our control, while others are not under our control. Under our control are conception [the way we define things], intention [the voluntary impulse to act], desire [to get something], aversion [the desire to avoid something], and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, position [or office] in society, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing.

Epictetus, *Handbook 1*

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: What is in our Power?

We begin our first day by reflecting on a central idea in Stoicism that can be found in the opening lines of an ancient guidebook to the Stoic life, the *Handbook* of Epictetus (see above). You may have already started practising Stoic Mindfulness and noticing whether your concerns are about things under your control (“up to us”) or not. If you've started using the Stoic self-monitoring record sheet from the previous chapter then you might like to use one of the situations you've written about there. Now you're going to explore this concept further by using the following questions to help you evaluate a specific situation, practising the skills you're going to be using regularly over the next few days. Starting now, begin training yourself to firmly grasp what's under your direct control and what isn't in any situation, particularly those that evoke strong desires or upsetting emotions. Take a few minutes to write down your answers to the following questions, in relation to the example you've picked.

1. What's the situation?
2. How much control do you have over the situation as a whole (0-100%)?
3. Why isn't it 100%? What aspects don't you have direct control over?
4. Why isn't it 0%? What aspects do you have direct control over?
5. What would happen if you made a conscious effort to adopt a more Stoic attitude towards this situation by completely accepting things beyond your control, and taking full responsibility for things under your control?

Having a Stoic attitude means completely accepting that things outside of your control *are* outside of your control. It also means taking fuller responsibility for those things under your control, and viewing these as what's ultimately most important in any situation.

For the Stoics, only our own voluntary actions are ultimately “up to us” or under our direct control – everything else is, at least to some extent, in the hands of fate. It's true we can influence external events, and our own body, and normally take this for granted. However, we only do so by means of voluntary actions, the outcome of which can always potentially be thwarted by factors outside of our direct control. I normally assume that I can open and close my hand, but if I'm injured or very tired, even this simple task may become difficult – only the *intention* to act is truly under my control.

Take a few minutes also to imagine the short-term consequences of adopting a Stoic attitude toward the things under your control and the things not in a challenging situation. What would happen over the following minutes? What would happen

over the medium term, during the following days and weeks? Finally, what would the long-term consequences be of adopting this attitude, over the years to come, and throughout the rest of your life?

Practise contemplating this question frequently throughout the day: “What aspects of this situation are up to me?” Learn to do it more quickly and, in particular, in response to situations where you’re faced with a challenge such as handling difficult desires or emotions. You’ll probably start to notice that this simple way of appraising situations has deeper implications for your attitude toward events.

Evening Text for Reflection:

Let us go to our sleep with joy and gladness; let us say 'I have lived; the course which Fortune set for me is finished.' And if God is pleased to add another day, we should welcome it with glad hearts. That man is happiest, and is secure in his own possession of himself, who can await the morrow without apprehension. When a man has said: 'I have lived!', every morning he arises he receives a bonus.

Seneca, *Letters* 12.9

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

Tuesday: Self-Discipline & Stoic Simplicity

Morning Text for Reflection:

It is not that we have a short space of time, but that we waste much of it. Life is long enough, and it has been given in sufficiently generous measure to allow the accomplishment of the very greatest things if the whole of it is well invested. But when it is squandered in luxury and carelessness, when it is devoted to no good end, forced at last by the ultimate necessity we perceive that it has passed away before we were aware that it was passing. So it is—the life we receive is not short, but we make it so, nor do we have any lack of it, but are wasteful of it. Just as great and princely wealth is scattered in a moment when it comes into the hands of a bad owner, while wealth however limited, if it is entrusted to a good guardian, increases by use, so life is amply long for the one who orders it properly.

Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life* 1

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: Stoic Simplicity

For the Stoics, one major challenge we face in life is excessive desire for wealth, or 'more stuff'. In training themselves to overcome this, they would adopt a simple life, periodically undergoing voluntary deprivation and hardship. Some Stoics apparently trained themselves to embrace voluntary hardship, like their predecessors the Cynics, whose philosophy Zeno had originally trained in for many years. That meant consuming very plain food and drink, wearing simple clothes and sleeping on a rough straw mat. However, at other times the Stoics appear to suggest this level of hardship is unnecessary as long as we grasp the basic attitude of Stoic "indifference" toward external things and learn to become sufficiently detached from things the majority of people tend to worry about and desire. Seneca, for example, recommends practising voluntary hardship for a few days each month, whereas for the Cynics it was their entire lifestyle.

If what Seneca and other Stoics describe doing sounds austere, consider that it's not much worse than the "voluntary hardship" endured by people who like to go camping in the wilderness as a hobby, where they may eat plain food and sleep in a tent for several days – even Boy Scouts can manage that! In any event, the point is that we should, with courage and related virtues, practise enduring discomfort, such as the fatigue of exercise, when it is useful and healthy for us to do so. We should also practise renouncing our craving for empty pleasure.

So don't worry, we're not going to ask you to live like a Cynic. (Unless you really want to, of course!) It's enough just to practice self-discipline by starting with small steps. Anyone who tries to follow a healthy diet or engage in more exercise, for example, will require self-discipline. You might just want to "renounce" coffee or snacks for a week, or "endure" doing stretches or sit-ups each morning, pushing yourself a bit further than normal, but in a way you judge reasonable and healthy.

That might seem like rather bland advice. There's a crucial "Stoic twist", though. For the Stoics, physical health is naturally "preferred" but ultimately "indifferent" with regard to our wellbeing, compared to virtues, such as self-discipline and endurance. Zeno was renowned for his physical self-mastery and Cato, the famous Roman Stoic, for his commitment to vigorous exercise and self-discipline. They didn't exercise to look good on the beach, though! For Stoics, the benefits that self-discipline and endurance have for our character are all that really matter, whatever the outcome in terms of our physical health and fitness. However, they would add, if we're going to renounce some habitual pleasures and endure certain physical hardships then it is rational for us to prefer doing so in a way that's physically healthy. That's part of what

they mean by “prudence”, or living wisely. Notice that whether or not we actually lose weight, or live longer, is partly in the hands of fate – there’s no guarantee that exercise or diet will do this for us – that’s not “up to us” or under our direct control. You could put the difference like this: Health is not 'up to us', but 'looking after our health' is. Likewise, it is “up to us” whether we act with self-discipline or not, at least in terms of our *intention* to endure some things and renounce others.

So this is a different sort of exercise, but an important one, and one that you’ll find fits well with the self-monitoring exercises you’re doing each day. Set goals for yourself in terms of your own conduct – that define the type of person you want to be. Try to become someone who exhibits self-awareness, practical wisdom, and corresponding self-discipline and endurance, where appropriate. Challenge yourself to do this by making some appropriate changes in your daily routine: simple, healthy changes, which will require self-discipline and patience on your part. For example, get up earlier in the morning, drink only water, eat a healthier diet, set aside time for simple physical exercise. For example, Musonius Rufus, who was Epictetus' teacher, described the purpose of food as the following: 'I maintain that its purpose should be to produce health and strength, that one should eat for that purpose only, and that one should eat with moderation, and without any haste or greed.' You might find Musonius' advice about eating simple food with mindfulness helpful in setting up your goals for a simpler life during the rest of this week.

It’s up to you exactly what changes you make but do so with self-awareness and practical wisdom. Focus on doing these things for the sake of developing greater self-awareness and strength of character, but view any other “external” benefits as just a kind of added bonus.

Evening Text for Reflection:

This was the character and this the unswerving creed
of austere Cato: to observe moderation, to hold to the goal,
to follow nature, to devote his life to his country,
to believe that he was born not for himself but for all the world.
In his eyes to conquer hunger was a feast, to ward off winter
with a roof was a mighty palace, and to draw across
his limbs the rough toga in the manner of the Roman citizen of old
was a precious robe, and the greatest value of Venus
was offspring ...

Lucan, *The Civil War*

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

Wednesday: Action & the Stoic Reserve Clause

Morning Text for Reflection:

Say to yourself first thing in the morning: today I might meet with people who are meddling, ungrateful, aggressive, treacherous, malicious and unsocial. All this has afflicted them through their ignorance of true good and evil. But I have seen that the nature of good is what is right, and the nature of evil what is wrong; and I have reflected that the nature of the offender himself is akin to my own - not a kinship of blood or seed, but a sharing in the same mind, the same fragment of divinity. Therefore I cannot be harmed by any of them, as none will infect me with their wrong. Not can I be angry with my fellow human being or hate him. We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. So to work in opposition to one another is against nature: and anger or rejection is opposition.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.1

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: Stoic Acceptance & Stoic Action

One of the most fundamental ways in which Stoics achieved serenity was the practice of Stoic acceptance. Epictetus encapsulated this as follows:

Seek not for events to happen as you wish but rather wish for events to happen as they do and your life will go smoothly.
Epictetus, *Handbook* 8

This doesn't mean passively resigning yourself to events, though. It's important to emphasise that Stoic acceptance primarily means recognising that some things are outside of your control, and that if those events have *actually happened*, this must be acknowledged and accepted. However, you still try to do your best in responding to these events, for that is something which *is* under your control. Put another way: Stoic serenity comes from "accepting reality" or "accepting the facts" – but not giving up! It is about establishing a sense of purpose within the events of your life. The famous Serenity Prayer used by Alcoholics Anonymous provides a memorable summary of the Stoic doctrine:

God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
Courage, to change the things I can;
And Wisdom to know the difference.

For example, there's no point *worrying* about the past or the distant future, although of course we can learn from the past and prepare for the future. What's beyond remedy is beyond regret. Stoics focus on acting with virtue in the "here and now", insofar as that is within their sphere of control, from moment to moment. Practise the attitude of Stoic acceptance, therefore, during your morning and evening meditation, by reminding yourself to patiently accept the fact that it's too late to change the past, and that the future may always turn out against your plans. Stoics desire only what it is within their power to change, which means desiring only to excel in terms of their character and conduct, while graciously accepting external events, even when they go against our plans or preferences. Throughout the day, as you bring your attention continually back to the distinction between what is under your control, and what is not, bear this in mind.

As we have just seen, whilst accepting there are some things we cannot change, the Stoics did focus on how you could act as well as possible in the things which are *under* your control. And in order to act as well as possible, the Stoic focussed on

ensuring he was cultivating wise intentions for action. Marcus Aurelius said an intention should have three principal qualities:

1. It should be undertaken “with a reserve clause”, an attitude of somewhat detached “indifference” toward the actual outcome.
2. It should be “for the common welfare” of mankind, which perhaps comes closest to what we mean nowadays by saying that something is “ethical” – taking into account the wellbeing of others as well as our own, as if all of mankind were part of a single family.
3. It should be “according to nature”, meaning that some things are naturally worth pursuing and preferring over other things, both for ourselves and others, such as physical health, although these things are not considered intrinsically “good” in Stoic ethics.

Let's focus here particularly on the “reserve clause”. As we saw earlier, some people mistakenly assume that Stoics will be passive doormats, because they emphasise *acceptance* of external things. This should seem puzzling because history teaches us quite the opposite: that famous Stoics were often very brave, determined, and active in the world. The “reserve clause” allowed Stoics to reconcile action in the external world with a “philosophical attitude” of acceptance toward their fate. Put simply, it's like qualifying every intention by saying “I will do such-and-such, if nothing prevents me” or “fate permitting”. Stoics aim to undertake every action with this in mind. They may begin each day, as this morning's passage from Marcus shows, by mentally rehearsing the many ways in which people and events could thwart their plans and preferences, while training themselves in serene acceptance, whether they meet with success or failure. And what is the Stoic aiming to do? As Marcus' key points show us, he wants to perform ethically sound actions for both oneself and others, cultivating positive states of mind, and obtaining positive 'externals' as far as possible, such as good friendships and a healthy body.

From now on during your morning meditation, you can practise incorporating the 'reserve clause', saying to yourself: “I will do xyz, fate permitting” or “if nothing prevents me” (or words to that effect). Imagine all the things that could go wrong, and rehearse an attitude of detached acceptance toward them, as if the only thing that really matters is that you “do your best” and that you intend to act wisely and virtuously. Do what you must; let happen what may.

Evening Text for Reflection:

Every habit and faculty is formed or strengthened by the corresponding act - walking makes you walk better, running makes you a better runner. If you want to be literate, read, if you want to be a painter, paint. Go a month without reading, occupied with something else, and you'll see what the result is. And if you're laid up a mere ten days, when you get up and try to walk any distance, you'll find your legs barely able to support you. So if you like doing something, do it regularly; if you don't like doing something, make a habit of doing something different. The same goes for the affairs of the mind...So if you don't want to be hot-tempered, don't feed your temper, or multiply incidents of anger. Suppress the first impulse to be angry, then begin to count the days on which you don't get angry. 'I used to be angry every day, then only every other day, then every third...!' If you resist it a whole month, offer God a sacrifice, because the vice begins to weaken from day one, until it is wiped out altogether. 'I didn't lose my temper this day, or the next, and not for two, then three months in succession.' If you can say that, you are now in excellent health, believe me.

Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.18

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

Thursday: Stoic Mindfulness

Morning Text for Reflection:

Train yourself to think only those thoughts such that in answer to the sudden question 'What is in your mind now?' you could say with immediate frankness whatever it is, this or that: and so your answer can give direct evidence that all your thoughts are straightforward and kindly, the thoughts of a social being who has no regard for the fancies of pleasure or indulgence, for rivalry, malice, suspicion, or anything else that one would blush to admit was in one's mind.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.4

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: The Practice of Stoic Mindfulness

A large part of Stoic 'mindfulness' is concerned with the 'discipline of assent'. Epictetus said (*Discourses*, 3.2.2.) that this is about 'freedom from deception and hasty judgement, and, in general, whatever is connected with assent.' Essentially, that means developing more self-control over our thoughts and judgements. It involves a kind of continual mindfulness of our thinking processes, which the Stoics called *prosochê* or "attention" to yourself. Epictetus says that it requires training ourselves to avoid rashness or errors in our judgements. For Stoics, the key error of judgement that we make, as we've seen, lies in treating external things as if they were intrinsically good or bad, and forgetting that virtue is the only true good, as they claimed. We've already looked at this aspect of Stoicism when we talked about the practice of evaluating whether our judgements refer to things under our control or not. However, the discipline of assent also involves a process that's perhaps even more fundamental, which Epictetus alludes to as avoiding "rashness" or being "carried away" by our thoughts and feelings. He says the key to retaining our grip on objective reality and not being swept away by irrational desire or emotions is that before we even begin to challenge our thoughts, we must learn to step back from them temporarily. The key passage here occurs at the start of the *Handbook* where Epictetus tells us to respond to each troubling thought or "impression" by saying: "You are just an impression and not at all the thing you claim to represent."

This isn't a familiar concept to most people. To understand what Epictetus may have meant, it helps to compare it to a psychological strategy commonly employed in modern cognitive therapy called "psychological distancing" or "cognitive distancing". (So this is a modern interpretation and not something you'll find explicitly stated in most books on Stoicism.) In cognitive therapy, which was originally inspired by Stoicism, it's understood that before we can learn to challenge unhealthy patterns of thinking, we have to first spot them, and place our thoughts in question – they have to be "up for debate". This is sometimes described as being able to see our thoughts as *merely* thoughts, rather than confusing them with facts or external events. Cognitive therapists commonly explain this by using metaphors. Imagine, for example, that you're wearing coloured glasses, they could be "rose-tinted spectacles" or they might even paint the world in dark and gloomy colours. When you lack "cognitive distance" it's like you've forgotten that you're wearing coloured glasses, and you assume that the world really is, objectively, rose-tinted or gloomy, etc. When you engage in "cognitive distancing", it's like taking the glasses off and looking *at* them, rather than *through* them, or just *realising* that you're wearing glasses that distort the colours you see. The first step in responding to troubling desires and emotions, in Stoicism, is therefore to gain psychological distance from them by reminding ourselves that the impressions they're based upon are just impressions, just thoughts, and not the reality they claim to represent.

One quotation from Epictetus puts this so well that it is still taught to clients in cognitive therapy today. "It is not the things themselves that disturb people but their judgements about those things" (*Handbook* 5). Epictetus repeatedly advised

his students that remembering this Stoic principle could help them to avoid being “carried away” by their troubling emotions and desires. We should be alert for the early-warning signs of problematic emotions and desires, which are often habitual and barely conscious. When we spot these initial signs, often certain bodily sensations or internal feelings, we should quickly try to identify the initial impressions and underlying value-judgements that are causing them. For example, the modern cognitive model of anxiety, which is derived from Stoic psychology, says that anxiety is caused by a thought or judgement along the lines of “Something bad is going to happen and I won’t be able to cope with it.” Distancing would consist in saying “I notice I’m having the thought ‘something bad is going to happen’ and that’s upsetting me” rather than being swept along by the impression that something bad is going to happen and allowing your fear to escalate unnecessarily.

One of the simplest ways of responding to troubling impressions, when you spot their early-warning signs, is to *postpone* doing anything in response to them. Modern researchers, for example, asked college students simply to spot when they were becoming anxious and starting to worry, and to postpone thinking about their perceived problems any further until a set time, later in the day, when they would try to problem-solve more calmly. Within about a week, this was found to reduce the frequency, intensity and duration of worry episodes by about fifty percent on average. Epictetus gave very similar advice to his Stoic students, nearly two thousand years ago. He says when we spot initial troubling impressions, especially if they seem overwhelming, we should “gain time and respite”, by reminding ourselves that these are just thoughts and waiting a while, until we’ve genuinely calmed down, before thinking about them any further, or deciding what action to take. The Pythagoreans mention a similar technique, which involved pausing, walking away, and waiting until your anger has naturally abated before rebuking someone over their behaviour. In modern anger management, this is sometimes called the “taking a time-out” strategy. The Stoics talked of withholding our “assent”, or agreement, from upsetting initial impressions. They knew that although some thoughts and feelings may appear to be very rapid or automatic, we do then typically have an opportunity to step back from them, spot what’s happening to us, and suspend judgement until things have calmed down enough for us to evaluate our thinking rationally.

You have already started self-monitoring your thoughts, actions, and feelings, and distinguishing between things under your control and things not. From this point onward, try to catch the early-warning signs of strong desires or upsetting emotions. Pause to give yourself thinking space and gain psychological distance from your initial impressions. If your feelings are particularly strong or difficult to deal with, postpone thinking about them any further until you’ve had a chance to calm down, which may be during your evening meditation practice. Epictetus advises his students to do three main things when they return to the thoughts they’ve previously withheld their “assent” from:

1. Most importantly, ask yourself whether the impressions that upset you are about things under your control or not and if they’re not under your control, accept this fact, and remind yourself that external things are “indifferent” with regard to your own flourishing and virtue.
2. Ask yourself what someone *perfectly* wise and virtuous person would do when faced with the same problem or situation. This is the ‘Stoic Sage’, whom the Stoics treated as an ideal for imitation. Who would you pick as a wise role model?
3. Ask yourself what strengths or resources nature has given you to master the situation, e.g., do you have the capacity for patience and endurance? How might using those potential virtues help you deal with this problem more wisely?

In a nutshell, don’t allow yourself to be carried away by irrational feelings, whether through force of habit or because they arise unexpectedly. Remember that you are upset by your own thoughts and value-judgements rather than by external events. Use this realisation to help you gain psychological distance, and the time and respite required to return to the subject later and evaluate it calmly and rationally, in accord with Stoic principles, using strategies like the three lines of questioning above.

Evening Text for Reflection:

There is one type of person who, whenever he has done a good deed to another, expects and calculates to have the favour repaid. There is a second type of person who does not calculate in such a way but who, nevertheless, deep within himself regards the other person as someone who owes him something and he remembers that he has done the other a good deed.

But there is a third type of person who, in some sense, does not even remember the good deed he has done but who, instead, is like a vine producing its grape, seeking nothing more than having brought forth its own fruit, just like a horse when it has run, a dog when it has followed its scent and a bee when it has made honey. This man, having done one good deed well, does not shout it about but simply turns his attention to the next good deed, just like the vine turns once again to produce its grape in the right season.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.6

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

Friday: Emotions & Preparation for Adversity

Morning Text for Reflection:

Be like the rocky headland on which the waves constantly break. It stands firm, and round it the seething waters are laid to rest.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.49

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: Controlling Emotions

The Stoics developed many strategies for controlling unhealthy and excessive desires and emotions. For example, a whole text by Seneca survives on Stoic remedies for anger. We've already looked at many aspects of Stoic "therapy of the passions". However, in this section we'll look in more detail at one of the most famous Stoic psychological exercises: the premeditation of future "evils" or adversities (*praemeditatio futurorum malorum*).

There are many references in the surviving Stoic literature to the strategy of anticipating future catastrophes and preparing to face them in advance by patiently imagining them, *as if* they were happening already. Typical examples include bereavement, poverty, exile, illness, and, perhaps most importantly of all for the Stoics, one's own death.

By repeatedly picturing future "catastrophes" as if they were already happening, the Stoic could not only reduce anxiety about them, in a similar way to how 'exposure therapy' in CBT today can reduce anxiety attached to specific situation, but also rehearse judging them in accord with his ethical principles, as being "indifferent" with regard to his ultimate wellbeing and fulfilment. Picturing even their own death in this way, repeatedly, day after day, allowed the Stoics to develop a habitual "philosophical attitude" in the face of adversity, when it happens for real. We know from modern research that the best way to overcome anxiety is to actually "expose" yourself to the feared situation in reality, repeatedly and for sufficiently prolonged periods. However, we also know that simply picturing the same event in the mind, repeatedly and for long enough, often works almost as well.

To begin with, you should not do this with anything that seems like it might lead you to "bite off more than you can chew". Don't imagine things that are deeply personal or traumatic until you're definitely ready to do so without feeling overwhelmed. Begin by working on small things that upset you. Don't let yourself worry about them, just try to picture the worst-case scenario patiently, and wait for your emotions to abate naturally. Remind yourself of the Stoic principles you've learned. In particular, the maxim that people are upset not by external events but by their own judgements about them, particularly value-judgements that place too much importance on things that are not under your direct control. Try to spend at least 20-30 minutes doing this each day. You might find it helpful to keep a record of your experiences as follows:

1. **Situation.** What is the upsetting situation that you're imagining?
2. **Emotions.** How does it make you feel when you picture it as if it's happening right now? How strong is the feeling (0-100%)?
3. **Duration.** How long (in minutes) did you manage to "sit with it" and patiently expose yourself to the event in your imagination?
4. **Consequence.** How strong was the upsetting feeling at the end (0-100%)? What else did you feel or experience by the end?

5. **Analysis.** Has your perspective changed on the upsetting event? Is it really as “awful” as you imagined? How could you potentially cope if it did happen? What’s under your control in this situation and what isn’t?

If your anxiety level hasn’t reduced to at least half its peak level then you might need to pick an easier subject, or else spend more time on things to benefit. Use the natural “wearing off” of upsetting feelings as an opportunity to re-evaluate the situation in a more rational and detached manner, i.e., from a more “philosophical” perspective. What do you think a Stoic like Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius would make of the same situation? How might you view it differently if you had mastered the “virtues” of practical wisdom, moral justice, courage and self-control? Take your time to note down what you can potentially learn from this experience.

Evening Text for Reflection:

At every hour devote yourself in a resolute spirit, as befits a Roman and a man, to fulfilling the task in hand with a scrupulous and unaffected dignity, and with love for others, and independence, and justice; and grant yourself a respite from all other preoccupations. And this you will achieve if you perform every action as though it were your last, freed from all lack of purpose and wilful deviation from the rule of reason, and free from duplicity, self-love, and dissatisfaction with what is allotted to you. You see how few are the things that a person needs to master if he is to live a tranquil and divine life; for the gods themselves will demand nothing more from one who observes these principles.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.5

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

Saturday: Philanthropy

Morning Text for Reflection:

At break of day, when you are reluctant to get up, have this thought ready to mind: 'I am getting up for a human being's work. Do I still then resent it, if I am going out to do what I was born for, the purpose for which I was brought into the world? Or was I created to wrap myself in blankets and keep warm?' 'But this is more pleasant.' Were you born for pleasure - all for feeling and not for action? Can you not see plants, birds, ants, spiders, bees all doing their own work, each helping in their own way to order the world? And then do you not want to do the work of a human being, do you not hurry to the demands of your own nature?

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.1

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: Philanthropy

So far we have focused mainly on the individual. Today we move on to think more about our relationships with other people. The Stoics were early advocates of the idea of cosmopolitanism – we are all fellow citizens of a single universal community, united by our shared nature. The Stoics also place great importance on “natural affection” of the kind of loving attitude that they believed we instinctively feel toward our own offspring, sexual partners, and perhaps other members of our family. Although some people mistakenly believe the Stoics were unemotional, like Mr. Spock from Star Trek, they actually rejected this interpretation themselves and frequently denied that they were advocating being insensitive, like someone having a heart of iron or stone. Instead of eliminating emotions entirely, the Stoics wanted to transform our natural sense of affection, in the light of reason and virtue. Marcus Aurelius neatly summed up the ideal when he praised his own Stoic teacher, Sextus of Chaeronea, as providing him with a living role-model who was “full of love yet free from [irrational] passions”. This Stoic view of love appears to have several implications:

1. Stoics should, as Epictetus says, love others as though they could be taken from us at any moment, i.e., without any trace of clinging attachment, because their presence in our lives is ultimately not “up to us” but lies partly in the hands of fate. (Epictetus notoriously advises his students to kiss their loved ones goodnight while telling themselves silently that they may die at any moment - notice that means still behaving affectionately toward them, though.)
2. We should desire only to love others, while accepting that it is ultimately “indifferent” whether they reciprocate, as again, this is not “up to us” but to them. (Hence, the Stoics foreshadow Christians in loving even their enemies, wishing them to become friends and live harmoniously in the world, fate permitting.) However, Epictetus also encouraged his students to place the 'good' in their *relationships* with others. Your brother might not be 'good' (you can't control your brother), but your attitude toward your brother is something in which you can place the 'good', so that you always aim to act well in the relationship.
3. To love others is to wish them to flourish and for Stoics that means ultimately to attain virtue, rather than health, wealth, or reputation – so our love for others is a wish for them to become virtuous and enlightened. (For this reason, incidentally, Zeno and his followers, like Socrates, dedicated their lives to teaching philosophy to others and training them in the virtues.)
4. As others are external to us, though, we can only “prefer” that they flourish, while accepting their imperfection, folly, and vice, as inevitable and beyond our direct control – with the Stoic “reserve clause”, in other words. (It was often observed, for example, that even Socrates, despite being a man of exemplary wisdom and virtue according to the Stoics, nevertheless had *wayward* followers and children.)

5. We should not discriminate between others, but should aspire to expand our sense of natural affection to encompass the rest of humanity, an attitude sometimes called Stoic “philanthropy” or love of mankind. Marcus Aurelius constantly reminds himself, for example, to love mankind and accept their imperfections with Stoic indifference. Marcus himself was often specifically praised for his “philanthropic” character as emperor of Rome.

Hierocles, a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius, described the Stoic view that we live as though enclosed in a series of concentric circles, representing progressively more distance from our true selves.

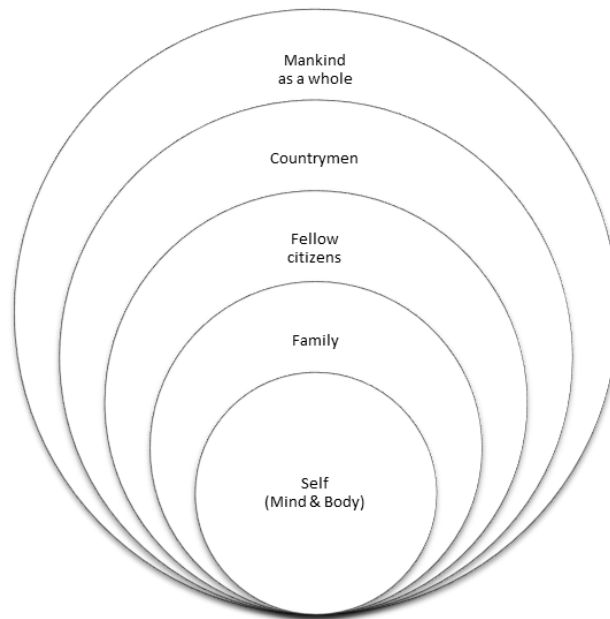


Diagram based on Hierocles' Concentric Circles

Hierocles said that Stoics should attempt to “draw the circles somehow toward the centre”. He explained that, “The right point will be reached if, through our own initiative, we reduce the distance of the relationship with each person.”

He even suggests verbal techniques such as calling one’s cousins “brother”, and one’s uncles and aunts “father” or “mother”. (Think of the way some people use the word “brother” to describe close friends or comrades, even today.) Elsewhere, he says that we should view our actual brothers as if they were parts of our own body, like our own hands and feet. The saying of Zeno, that a friend is “another self” (*alter ego*), also depicts this shift in perspective, taking others one stage deeper into the circle of natural affection and personal affinity. One benefit of doing this, as Seneca argued, is that by expanding love to encompass as many others as possible, through philanthropy, we actually learn to love in a more natural and rational manner, without over-attachment to any individual that we love. Indeed, he goes so far as to say: “he who has not been able to love more than one, did not even love that one much” (*Letters* 63.11). The Sage is not obsessed with anyone, in part, because she loves everyone as much as she is able and does so while accepting that they are changeable and that one day they will die.

The following contemplative visualisation or meditation technique is loosely based on Hierocles’ comments about enlarging our sense of affection towards others:

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

Evening Text for Reflection:

If what philosophers say about the kinship of God and man is true, then the only logical step is to do as Socrates did, never replying to the question of where he was from with, 'I am Athenian' or "I am a Corinthian", but always "I am a citizen of the universe."

Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.9

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

Sunday: The View from Above

Morning Text for Reflection:

The works of the gods are full of providence. The works of Fortune are not independent of Nature or the spinning and weaving together of the threads governed by Providence. All things flow from that world: and further factors are necessity and the benefit of the whole universe, of which you are a part. Now every part of nature benefits from that which is brought by the nature of the Whole and all which preserves that nature: and the order of the universe is preserved equally by the changes in the elements and changes in their compounds.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.3

Practise the Early Morning Meditation

Today's Lunchtime Exercise: The View from Above

On our final day we turn to think about our place within Nature as a whole:

A fine reflection from Plato. One who would converse about human beings should look on all things earthly as though from some point far above, upon herds, armies, and agriculture, marriages and divorces, births and deaths, the clamour of law courts, deserted wastes, alien peoples of every kind, festivals, lamentations, and markets, this intermixture of everything and ordered combination of opposites.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 7.48

The 'View from Above' is a guided visualization that is aimed at instilling a sense of the 'bigger picture', and of understanding your role in wider community of humankind. You can download a recording of the *View from Above* from the main Stoic Week 2013 page:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/stoic-week-2013/>

Anyone who reads the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius is bound to notice a recurring theme that involves contemplating the vastness of the universe, of space and time, the multitude of stars, and also the smallness of life on Earth when viewed from above. The French scholar Pierre Hadot called the deliberate effort to mentally visualise human affairs from high overhead "The View from Above", and he found references to it throughout ancient literature, particularly in Stoic writings.

In a sense, these passages invite us to think like an ancient natural philosopher and simply to contemplate cosmology, the nature of the universe as a whole, in a detached manner. However, the Stoics clearly believed that doing so had profound "therapeutic" value and, as Marcus put it, can purge us of our over-attachment to trivial things by expanding our minds beyond their habitual, narrow perspective. We're less upset about things when we literally picture them as occurring in a tiny corner of the cosmos: as a grain of sand in cosmic space, and the mere turn of a screw in terms of cosmic time. Why should we picture things in this way? First of all, for the Stoics, totality is reality. It's a form of self-deception to ignore the wider context and it helps create the *illusion* that the events we face are somehow more important than they actually are. Second, the ancient Stoics sought to emulate the divine, and the View from Above happens to be the perspective of Zeus. We can even think of it as the Olympian perspective, what Zeus might have been thought to see when looking down upon human affairs from high atop Mount Olympus. If that seems too mythological, then for a more philosophical theology, the perspective of Zeus was perhaps that of *omniscience*, contemplating the whole of space and time in a single

timeless vision. Again, the Stoics and other ancient philosophers aspired to glimpse that vision, and thereby to step into the shoes of Zeus for a moment.

This exercise appears to weave together many different threads within Stoic philosophy. That's something that may become clearer to you if you practice it regularly. You don't need to listen to an elaborate guided meditation, though. Just reading the passages from Marcus Aurelius may be enough to inspire you to close your eyes and contemplate things from a more "cosmological" perspective, in this way. Don't worry if you find it tricky to literally visualise the whole of space and time – that's normal. Just picture things that evoke the concept for you symbolically. You could draw a circle on a piece of paper, symbolising the totality of space and time, and imagine your whole life as an infinitesimally tiny dot in the middle. The Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus, who was influenced by the Stoics to some extent, describes a contemplative exercise that involves visualising the whole of space and time as if encapsulated in a glass sphere, like a kind of cosmic snowglobe. Take your time. Allow these images to interact with your wider understanding of Stoic philosophy and practices. Try to take away some piece of learning or sense of change from each meditation of this kind.

Complete the Post-Week Questionnaires

As this is the final day, it is now time to complete the online scales that you filled in before the week, using the same name (email or pseudonym) as before. Visit the main Stoic Week 2103 page for the links:

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/stoic-week-2013/>

Evening Text for Reflection:

'I travel along Nature's Way until the day arrives for me to fall down and take my rest, yielding my last breath to the air from which I draw daily, falling onto that earth which gave my father his seed, my mother her blood...the earth which for so many years has fed and watered me day by day; the earth which bears me as I tread it under foot and which I make use of in a thousand ways.'

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.4.

Practise the Late Evening Reflection

After Stoic Week

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

At certain points throughout the coming year the Stoicism Today team will write to you to see how you are getting on. Will you still be following the Stoic routines outlined in this handbook? How might Stoicism have changed your attitude to life after, say, three months?

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

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

The follow translations are recommended:

- Marcus Aurelius: Penguin Classics or Oxford World's Classics. Note also the edition in the Penguin Great Ideas series.
- Epictetus: Penguin Classics (only selections) or Oxford World's Classics (due out Feb 2014). There is also a selection in the Penguin Great Ideas series.
- Seneca: Penguin Classics (a selection) or Oxford World's Classics (a selection), who also publish his essays. Note also a selection of essays in the Penguin Great Ideas series.

Appendices

Meet the Team

These are the main people involved in Stoic Week 2013 and in putting together this Handbook, and some of their relevant publications.

Christopher Gill

Professor of Ancient Thought at Exeter University and author of *Naturalistic Psychology in Galen and Stoicism* (2010).

Patrick Ussher

PhD classics student at Exeter University researching Stoicism and organising Stoic Week.

John Sellars

Philosophy lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London, and author of *Stoicism* (2006) and *The Art of Living* (2009).

Tim Lebon

Psychotherapist and author of *Wise Therapy* (2005) and *Teach Yourself Positive Psychology* (2013).

Gill Garratt

Cognitive-behavioural therapist and author of *Introducing CBT for Work* (2012).

Jules Evans

Author of *Philosophy for Life* (2012).

Donald Robertson

Cognitive-behavioural psychotherapist in private practice. Author of *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy* (2010) and *Teach Yourself Stoicism* (2013).

Further Reading

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

Putting Stoicism into Practice

- W. B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- D. Robertson, *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness* (London: Teach Yourself, 2013), due out December 2013
- T. Morris, *The Stoic Art of Living* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004)
- R. Pies, *Everything Has Two Handles: The Stoic's Guide to the Art of Living* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2008)
- P. J. Vernezze, *Don't Worry, Be Stoic: Ancient Wisdom for Troubled Times* (Lanham: University of America Press, 2005)
- E. Buzaré, *Stoic Spiritual Exercises* (Lulu, 2011)
- S. Lebell, *Art of Living* (HarperOne, 2007)

Ancient Stoicism

Introductions to Stoicism

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

Studies Exploring the Practical Side of Stoicism

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

Books on Practical Aspects of Roman Stoicism

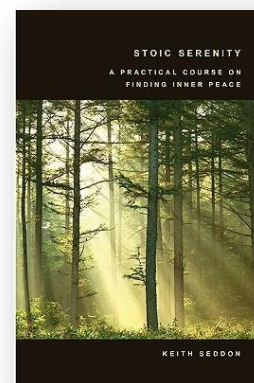
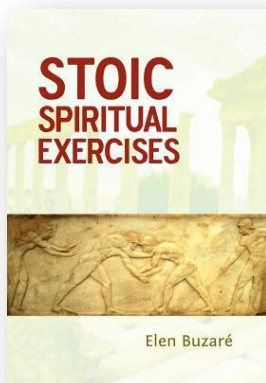
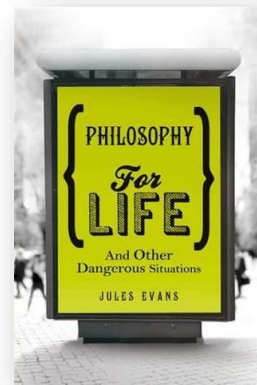
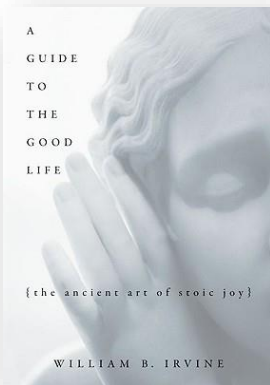
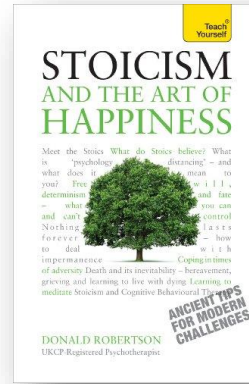
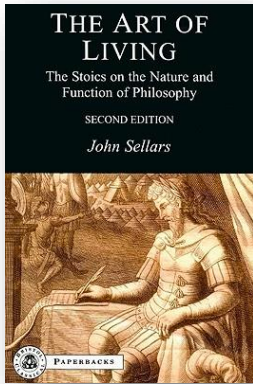
- P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)
- A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002)
- J. Xenakis, *Epictetus: Philosopher-Therapist* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969)

Stoicism and Psychotherapy

- D. Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy* (London: Karnac, 2010)
- A. Still & W. Dryden, *The Historical and Philosophical Context of Rational Psychotherapy: The Legacy of Epictetus* (London: Karnac, 2012)
- A. Still & W. Dryden, 'Ellis and Epictetus: Dialogue vs. Method in Psychotherapy', *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* 21 (2003), 37-55 (reprinted in Still & Dryden 2012).
- A. Still & W. Dryden, 'The Place of Rationality in Stoicism and REBT', *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* 17 (1999), 143-64 (reprinted in Still & Dryden 2012).
- S. A. Moore Brookshire, 'Utilizing Stoic Philosophy to Improve Cognitive Behavioral Therapy', *NC Perspectives* 1 (2007), 30-36.

- R. W. Montgomery, 'The Ancient Origins of Cognitive Therapy: The Reemergence of Stoicism', *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy* 7 (1993), 5-19.

Six Modern Books on Stoicism for Beginners



Information on the Scales

1. The Satisfaction with Life Scale

The SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin 1985) is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgements of satisfaction with one's life. The scale usually requires only about one minute of a respondent's time. Satisfaction with life, along with the balance of positive over negative emotions (as measured by for example the SPANE scale) forms part of Subjective Well-Being, which is the most popular measure used by psychologists to measure happiness. See the following links for more information on interpreting the results.

https://www.psych.uiuc.edu/reprints/index.php?page=request_article&site_id=24&article_id=491

<http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/Documents/Understanding%20SWLS%20Scores.pdf>

2. The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience

The SPANE Scale (E. Diener, D. Wirtz, *et al.* (2009)) is a 12-item questionnaire includes six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative feelings. For both the positive and negative items, three of the items are general (e.g., positive, negative) and three per subscale are more specific (e.g., joyful, sad). The SPANE score can be used to measure the balance of positive over negative affect, which along with Satisfaction with Life is part of Subjective Well-Being. A score of 12 on the "SPANE-B" (positive minus negative experience balance) would represent a high score.

<http://www.goodmedicine.org.uk/stressedtozest/2011/01/two-new-easily-usable-scales-assessing-wellbeing>

3. The Flourishing Scale

The flourishing scale is a 7 point scale developed by Ed Diener *et al.* designed to measure flourishing, a broader sense of psychological well-being than that measured by the other tests. (E. Diener, D. Wirtz, *et al.* (2010), 'New well-being measures: short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings', *Social Indicators Research* 97: 143-56). The Flourishing Scale may therefore correspond more closely to non-hedonistic philosophical theories of well-being than the other measures. To score, add the responses, varying from 1 to 7, for all eight items giving a range from 8 to 56. A high score represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths. A score of 36 or lower places you in the bottom 10% of respondents; 43 or lower places you in the bottom 33% of respondents; 47 or lower places you in the bottom 60% of respondents; 52 or lower places you in the bottom 90% of respondents.

<http://www.goodmedicine.org.uk/files/assessment,%20diener%20flourishing.pdf>

4. The Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours Scale

This scale is currently being developed by the Exeter University Stoic Week team so your scores should be treated as merely indicative.

There are two subscales - Stoic attitudes and behaviour. The first and last 3 questions are included for research purposes and are not included in the scores.

To get your score for having a Stoic attitude, add up your scores for questions 2,3,6,8,9,11,12 and 13 and subtract your scores for questions 4, 5,7 and 10. Your score will range from 52 (most Stoic) to -20 (least Stoic)

To get your score for Stoic behaviours, add up your scores for questions 14,15,17,18 and 20 and subtract your scores for questions 16 and 19. Your score will range from 33 (most Stoic) to -9 (least Stoic)

To get your overall score, add up your Stoic attitude and behaviours scores, which will range from 85 (most Stoic) to -29 (least Stoic)