

A compilation of all (non-workshop) content posted to the Facebook group Applying Stoicism from March 20th 2014 to January 16th, 2017.

If the material is **NOT** written by Travis Hume, the author's name will be attached.

Central concepts of Stoicism.

1. Virtue is the only good.

Vice is the only evil.

All else is indifferent (in their own categories: Preferred/Non-preferred).

2. Reason is the chief quality of humans, and connects us to one another.

The "Sage" is a human that has become fully good and fully reasonable. Reason is our connection with Nature.

3. Humans are acting and reacting agents.

Our lives are split into two spheres: Free Will (our internal workings, desire/fears/choices/opinions) and Determinism (external workings, fame/reputation/wealth/country of origin/etc).

4. Nature as a whole is synonymous with the higher power (whatever its form).

Nature consists of the universes generative process; All the things that are/have been/will be/the mechanics and patterns of the world.

Nature may be conscious/unconscious/consist of a series of causes and effects/or everything happens randomly.

5. The formation of judgments and beliefs:

An involuntary (instinctive) value judgment combines with an account of the given situation (the "impression") to form a "proposition."

Example: "It seems like 'X' is happening, and this is bad."

"Assent" (belief) is either granted to the proposition, or withheld from it.

If assent is granted (i.e. the proposition is asserted to be true), the emotions associated with the belief result.

6. Both difficulty and pleasures can be utilized for personal training. The most severe incarnations of difficulties/pleasures are given the namesakes "contests/competitions/trials."

Example: "These are the experiences i've had that resemble this situation. This is what training I have to put towards not being swept away or crushed by this."

7. A number of common turns of phrase have either Stoic connotations or are applicable to Stoic concepts/techniques.

"I was under the impression..." "Everything happens for a reason."

"Shit happens." "It is what it is." "Life is short."

"Its whats on the inside that counts." "Water under the bridge."

"Thats life." "Crying over spilt milk." "Keep calm and 'do X'"

- 12/13/14

Traditionally, teaching how and why to practice Stoicism was the responsibility of the Stoic doing the teaching, and the learning and application was placed firmly in the hands of the students. The process was markedly different than modern methods, because it required the student to test and advance their progress through everyday trials and events.

Practicing Stoicism was likened to an athlete training for the Olympic Games, or a soldier preparing for a battle. Every small life event could be used for practice. Every large life event was considered a test for what has been learned, and insight for what one may come to achieve.

Practicing Stoicism does not mean you need to drop a way of life, or replace that way of life with Stoicism, or that you're expected to become a "Sage" (the Stoic 'ideal'). The practice of Stoicism will benefit you as far as you choose to take it.

- 3/20/14

Things are rarely as they appear to be. We can see this, by remembering very large numbers of instances in which we perceived a situation to be a certain way, and later discovered the situation was different. Many times, we believe something happened or will happen that hasn't happened, or does not happen.

Most commonly, we react to situations based off of very few details, and those details can excite us or frighten us to the point that we latch onto them, whether they match what is actually happening or not. One of the earliest and most useful Stoic practices to learn is consciously telling yourself to "wait and see" when experiencing a situation, or expecting one.

Think "You (the situation) are an impression, and not what you appear to be." Through this practice, you will halt any additional expectations from forming, and mentally buy yourself time until you can learn more about the situation, and how it actually develops. This will in turn allow you to concentrate more time and effort to reacting appropriately.

Even in the circumstance in which a situation turns out as you thought it did (or would), you will have prevented the situation from "arresting" you. Additionally, you will build experience in holding off the many other situations that do NOT turn out as your initial impression made them out to be.

– 3/20/14

In Stoic theory, all people are born from the same, and return to the same. People are not physically gifted in the same way that other animals are. Comparatively, we are not as swift or strong, and our natural defenses are generally lackluster. We have survived as long as we have as a species by working together, and applying our faculty of reason towards this end. According to the Stoics, this faculty of reason is our defining quality as human beings.

Without keeping in mind that we are effectively born for the sake of one another, we are more likely to turn on each other in the pursuit of things, or avoidance of things. It follows that it is both prudent and beneficial to act and speak with the deliberate intention to inwardly regard other people as friends and allies, even if you don't know them, or they've acted poorly towards you.

You can practice this anytime you encounter another person, for whatever reason, in whatever circumstance, by inwardly reciting: "You are a human being, just like I am. You are a friend and ally. It doesn't matter if you know it; I know it, and that is enough."

– 3/22/14

When you are afraid of something that's about to happen, such as meeting someone important, or going on a first date, you can quiet the fear by considering the different ways the situation could pan out. The key is 'considering' and not 'worrying'. Consider that the person may change their mind, or that something may get in the way of your meeting with them, and if that becomes the case, then your fears would have been for nothing. Consider that you DO meet the person, but that the meeting may not go as planned.

Consider what your role in the meeting is, and draw all concentration to that. You may not be able to control the environmental or circumstantial parts of the meeting, and you are not able to control the behaviors, speech, and action of the person you're meeting with, but you can control your approach. If you regularly change your view from "I hope x goes well" to "I'm going to genuinely represent who I am whatever ends up happening" you will begin replacing fear with confidence. Whatever ends up happening, you will have effectively "seen it coming" by considering the various possible outcomes. You will have prevented the situation's initial "shock."

– 3/23/14

It is possible to reach a point in the practice of Stoicism that your mind will be clear and independent in most circumstances. This will not happen immediately. It will involve training your mind carefully, as if it were a stubborn horse, at least at first.

You will gain this clarity and mental independence by degrees in every way that you attempt to practice, because the various techniques interrelate and support the development of one another.

One of the most effective ways also appears to be the most simple and obvious, but putting it into practice is more difficult than it seems.

There will be points in time in which you may not have access to the things you normally have access to. There will also be times where you will empathize with others that may not have access to the things you do. Independence from circumstance and the ability to resist satisfying bodily, immediate wants go hand in hand.

You can practice building this mental independence with small things, such as going to the food court to satisfy a craving for spaghetti, and making the deliberate, conscious choice to ignore the want and have a sub instead. Another example is making a conscious choice not to wear a hat when its a little cold out.

I will stress that the point is NOT to 'punish' yourself arbitrarily. The point of these small, conscious choices is to build resistance to circumstance, build courage and endurance, and to more easily stand going without these things in situations in which there isn't a choice.

– 3/24/14

Stoicism is difficult to learn and practice effectively, because much of what the philosophy asks you to do is in some part counter-intuitive to the ways we have learned to speak, act, and think. Due to this, there will likely be missteps. You may learn and make use of some Stoic practices more quickly than others. Some practices will be more difficult, with reasons varying to the person. Do not easily give in to the desire to blame yourself.

Choose instead to pick yourself back up, and calmly return to the mindset to learn. In Stoic practice, trying is more important than the doing. Likewise, intention is everything. If you are unable to do something well immediately, it does not follow that you lack the ability.

– 3/27/14

Reducing the power that circumstances have over you requires considering several things. Bring to mind the different material compositions of the things that have your attention. Consider where they came from, how they got there, and how long they will last in the "grand scheme of things." Think of your relationship to the things, and the relationship of the things to the "grand scheme of things."

After all of this, you have effectively stripped away the appearances that cling to the things in question. You will be far closer to seeing the things for "what they really are." This practice requires considerable time and effort, but it is a Stoic technique that is applicable in nearly (if not every) situation.

– 3/31/14

It is entirely possible, useful, and necessary for the practicing Stoic to practice reassigning judgments of value from objects outside of themselves, to characteristics within themselves. It is helpful, and recommended, to consider previous successes and/or failures during success and failure, so long as they are approached from the appropriate perspective.

It is beneficial to consider previous successes during moments of success, to acknowledge that you are on the right track, and have been on the right track, consistently. (A note: Missteps along the way do not mean that you have fallen off the track. If you understand where the misstep occurred, why it occurred, and take steps to self-improve, you convert the misstep into a boon, and gain from it.) Successes are appropriately interpreted as confirmation that the things that you're doing, and saying, are having the intended beneficial impact on others. Pleasure that comes about from interpreting success this way should be fully embraced and enjoyed, as it is a product of right action, thought, and intention.

It is beneficial to very carefully consider failures amidst successes, to prevent the pleasure that you feel from doing the right thing for the right reasons from turning into vainglory. It is not easy without practice and vigilance to be able to discern the point at which pleasure from accomplishing the right thing (which is a pleasure that can, and should be fully embraced as a good that you earned,) turns into pleasure derived from being praised by others.

Contemplating failures can be a boon, in different ways. You can relate the progress that you've made towards self-improvement to your state of being at the time the failures occurred, i.e., to

gauge how far you've come. You can look back at the failures, study them, and ask yourself what all could, and should have been done (within reason) that may have changed the outcome of the failure, based on what you know now, and the progress you've made. You can look at past failures as checks against behaviors you observe in other people, as you will better understand why others are doing what they do, in similar situations. Both successes and failures can be used to hone your rational skills.

- 4/2/14

While practicing Stoicism, occasionally you will latch onto an awareness of the "mortal" nature of the things in the world. It is not helpful to think about necessary (unavoidable or difficult to avoid) events in life in terms of things being taken away from us, or us coming into ownership of things. It is helpful to think about it in terms of giving these things back, or things being lent to us. There was a time where not even our own lives were in our possession. There was a point in time where we never had a car, or a computer, or a girlfriend, or a house, or a job, or anything that follows and is connected to that chain of thought. There was a point in time where we did not have self-awareness, or a conscience, or a first breath.

We have received everything we now possess as a consequence of a series of causes spurred from the powers that be (Whatever form they take). It is appropriate, helpful, and beneficial to be thankful for everything that we receive, because we can never so conventionally poor as we were at our birth, and especially so, before we were born. Our own bodies, and lives, were 'given' to us. It is appropriate to treat everything we receive as if it were borrowed from another person; we should treat what we borrowed with respect, in thankfulness for the time its lent to us, conscious that we could have never received the opportunity, and in readiness to return what was lent to us when it is asked to be returned.

Your favorite coffee mug falls, and breaks? There was once a time you never had a favorite coffee cup, and you did without. You fill your favorite coffee mug with coffee, and enjoy your coffee? There was once a time you never had a favorite coffee cup, and presently, its intact and fully able to be enjoyed. Practice thinking in terms like these in relation to other things, and you have yet another means to make progress, and a means to be thankful.

- 4/3/14

All human beings are "in this together." We were not born as physically strong, fast, or capable as other creatures. The quality that defines us is our ability to reason. It is a rational and social quality that allowed us to survive by working together.

All human beings possess this ability, but modern culture does not often or adequately prepare us to use it well. The result is the tendency to use reason in the pursuit of things that seem pleasurable and avoidance of things that seem painful. In other words, instead of acting in accordance with our social nature, by supporting, benefiting, and empathizing with one another, we see other people and events as potential obstacles to the things we want, or the things we wish to avoid.

It is believed in Stoicism that this disconnection from our design as social, rational animals is the cause of all cruelties and greed. It is due to an inability or unwillingness to act in accordance with this design that wars begin, and various horrors occur. All human beings are allies, but this view is clouded when we do not look further than our desires and fears.

- 4/7/14

Human beings will always do what appears best to them, whether the result is a benefit or a detriment to themselves or others. The patterns of thought that lead to these courses of action are tied to desires and fears. In other words, a person does what appears best to them in the belief it derives an apparent benefit, or mitigates the opposite.

In order to improve the accuracy and clarity with which you form judgments about things, you must necessarily recognize that these patterns occur in yourself. The manner in which you desire and fear, the types of things that you desire and fear, and the way in which you react to desire and fear decide whether your judgments, opinions, and choices are Stoically sound as they are formed.

Be patient with yourself and with others by learning to understand and follow patterns of thought. Withhold judgments about others until you have observed a great deal of the types of things they pursue, and avoid. Should they pursue and avoid the types of things that you do, and you find

yourself admonishing them, immediately admonish yourself. Work to correct the patterns of thought that lead to the behaviors, but so long as you display those behaviors, blame no-one sharing the same.

– 4/14/14

I am by no means an expert on Stoicism. Inwardly, I refer to myself as a "practicing Stoic," and refuse to call myself a "Stoic." I will likely not refer to myself as a "full" Stoic until I see how my practice holds up against certain unavoidable life events. I have made significant progress, but I intend to carry my practice much farther, with the end goal being to resemble Epictetus if my life is misfortunate or Marcus Aurelius if my life is fortunate.

It follows that I am trying to heavily incorporate into my life what i've read in the very few materials that I have access to (Marcus Aurelius: Meditations, Epictetus: The Discourses, Seneca: Essays and Letters, and Musonius Rufus: Lectures & Sayings). I attempt to accomplish this at the same time that I am fully cognizant that I need to account for modern conventions. I have accepted by degrees that I am not likely to teach Stoicism on a professional scale, but I have observed that I can help others find and apply it through modeling it within myself.

I experienced a great deal of difficulty initially incorporating Stoic practices into my life, however hard and how often they resonated. If I had the choice to return to the moment that I made a choice to try to practice Stoicism (about two years ago) I would choose this path again as many times as it was offered. Whether you are considering incorporating Stoic practices into your personal philosophy, or taking it up as your philosophy, above all be patient with yourself during the course. It is a hard road, but a worthy and needed one.

– 5/17/14

Harsh to hear, but no less true. I have never been a proponent of the idea that things or positions would make me happy, but I didn't exactly have an idea of what could, in their place. So

the majority of my life was spent drifting, trying to take hold of things that only distracted me, and didn't fulfill me.

The video does not do a particularly good job of answering "whats important," although it alludes to it. It is my belief that the things that are most important are also the most taken for granted, until tragedy or life events "jostle" them to the forefront. Cooperation and community with other human beings. Seeing the beauty of life in the fragility and regeneration of its individual parts. The embodiment of honor, duty, and virtue, of which many give lip service that is itself drawn from some part deep inside, but overlooked by habit.

Appreciate, protect, and assist others to the degree that you are able. Practice embodying the characteristics of a heroic person. Make the person you wish to be your guide. Account for modern conventions, but assert to yourself, for yourself, not to allow them to easily rule you.

- 5/19/14

Hardships have use. The Stoics stressed choosing to view difficulties as opportunities instead of obstacles. This may not be immediately intuitive in thought or memory, but it will become clear when you consider the different ways that difficulties have shaped you for the better.

It may be surprising to account for the improvements that were made to your character upon overcoming misfortune. Of instances in which you had been forced to call upon aspects of yourself that you doubted existed. Look back at these experiences and answer yourself honestly whether you would today have your best qualities if they had not been tested and trained by hardship.

This is not to say that you should go looking for the types of significant hardships that i'm talking about. Only that when they come, to try to see them as opportunities to grow and test yourself.

- 5/24/14

Practicing Stoicism can be easier at certain times more than others. When everything seems to compact together and onto you, what you have learned becomes tested. Sometimes this stress

threatens to cause you to question yourself, or the strength of your principles. When the pressure is great enough, you then find yourself in positions Stoics have found themselves experiencing for thousands of years.

Your choice during those incredibly difficult times is either to listen and adhere to the claims the Stoics made, or to flee and choose the alternative reality. The Stoics lived by their principles, and many committed themselves to attempting to do what was right in those dire situations, regardless of what happened to them.

The fear to avoid such situations commands you when it is permitted to, and desire in those situations threatens to subvert you, if you allow it to do what it will. Knowingly and consciously commit yourself to seeing beyond, in order to understand how best the good man or good woman should respond to the difficulties.

Then act.

- 6/23/14

It can be beneficial (and frequently is) to look deeply into everything that happens to us, whether it appears good or bad. You can accomplish this by taking hold of the appearance of "whats happening" in your mind, and separating away each of the things within that appearance.

With the pieces of the appearance of "whats happening" separated, look at each of those pieces individually. Remind yourself of where that particular thing came from, how it came into being, the composition of the physical parts that make up the thing, and whether or not the control of that thing is -entirely- within your power. Do this with each and every one of the remaining pieces.

Finally, put the pieces "back together" in your mind, and then ask yourself if the situation itself is entirely within your control. In addition, ask yourself what qualities exist within you that can help you make the most of the situation. Define for yourself what the most appropriate and virtuous reaction to that situation is. After all of this, commit yourself to act, speak, and behave in what is then the most appropriate and strengthening way.

Persistence and courage are critical when doing this, in order to make a habit of it. You will build persistence and courage with every attempt. Once a habit, you will discover more and more how difficult you are to disturb or shake up.

– 6/29/14

Metaphorically speaking, the human body is made of clay. The hands and feet are tools, the muscles and skin are light armor, and the voice, eyes, and ears are machines that help communicate thought. The things that go on inside of it and outside of it are in a constant process, and necessarily when something presses upon something else, the something else must react.

The only things that cannot be influenced by external forces (including the body and all of the parts listed), are human judgments, choices that are exercised, the practice of virtue, and the mitigation of personal vice. The only argument against this refers to chemical or physical problems in the brain. Depending on the severity of the problems, cognitive abilities can be seriously affected, and the grip on the ability to reason is lessened. Although this particular train of thought isn't often touched on in remaining Stoic texts, it has been.

Paraphrasing Marcus Aurelius, as one ages it becomes more likely that the ability to exercise appropriate choices and judgments will progressively weaken because of disease or physical deterioration. It is that much more important that we come to grips with the truth of each thing as early as we can, to knowingly become good in the time we're able, and to help others find the same. The body is metaphoric clay, and the brain is a part of it, serving its own purpose and usefulness.

– 7/27/14

The appearances of things are just that: appearances. Recall to mind how many times you believed something to be happening that never came about. How many times you've been afraid of something day-to-day that never appeared. How many things you weren't aware of that never caused you pain when you weren't aware of them.

The ideas of things often cause more panic in us than things themselves. It is worth considering how often we pile on undue stresses on ourselves. If the time comes that you must confront your

fears, then it will come. Until that time however, be mindful of the nature of the things you choose to believe are happening. Things are rarely as they first appear.

– 7/30/14

It is our duty to look at each thing not as it first appears, but strictly as it truly is. We must represent the example of the "good man," (or woman, it is genderless) to dispel common and mistaken views, and replace them with words and actions that resonate with all.

Taking on this responsibility means looking beyond your small, limited, and individual portion, and to the interests of all, independent of race, religion, nationality, culture, disposition, philosophy, or enmity towards you. By singling out even one human being from this process, you deny yourself your greatest opportunity for growth and peace, which lies in the reasonable care, guidance, and protection of other human beings.

– 8/27/14

"Stoicism is a reference against which I evaluate the quality and integrity of my life. Through the philosophy, I can withstand great duress without being compromised, or losing perspective. I am able to maintain peace, integrity, and independence of mind in the presence of people in positions of power.

I am thankful for all I have in times of prosperity or difficulty. I've learned to accept everything I experience with a frame of mind that accounts for the cause of the experience, its composition, its relationship to myself, its relationship to the world, and its function.

Every hardship is an opportunity to improve the characteristics best suited to confront it. Every situation is an opportunity to learn from others, whatever the context. Stoicism allows me to perceive the human role within nature, how to act in accordance with it, and why."

From personal writings.

- 9/1/14

Since the beginning of man, the life of a human being has been regulated by two elements: Desires and fears. The two, while appearing to be opposites of one another, are in fact tied together. Desire is a hope for something to happen, and fear is the hope that nothing gets in the way. Said another way, fear is the hope that certain circumstances will not come to be, while desire is the hope that other circumstances will take their place instead.

The effect and stability of these desires and fears is dependent on their foundation: Whether the object of the desire or fear lies outside oneself, or within oneself. If outside, the person depends themselves upon variables that are themselves dependent on other forces. If within, the capability of choice allows the person to use their will to determine whether the desire or fear is realized.

Whether instilled in a human being by a conscious, cosmic entity (or entities), by a worldly generative process, or entirely randomly, the faculty of reason affords a person the ability to found and complete goals within themselves that are utterly independent of external forces. Reason is that which governs our impulses, the composition of our desires and fears, the nature of our judgments, and ultimately the choices we commit.

In a word, humans are provided the tools necessary to fulfill their own design as a human being (By whatever forces that be). To act as a willing member of the worldly process. Peace of mind, independence of will, happiness, a sense of purpose, and confidence in your own powers, is both the greatest confirmation and benefit of this manner of life. Reflect on the mode of life alternative to this one, its flow, and its composition.

- 9/7/14

The concept of wealth appears to "promise" the ability to get, and the power to avoid. Money has no inherent value: Gold bricks, dollar bills, or silver coins do not tell you that they were useful, and their practical applications are limited (gold bricks suffice for paperweights, dollar bills as

bookmarks). Money is valuable only so far as it is valuable to others, and while currency and the resources it purchases have physical limits, human avarice does not.

A life of constant acquisition is all that some know. Many more seem to believe that that manner of life is all that there is, arguably because they have never known or been convinced by an alternative. It is possible to be in a position of great power and wealth, and delegate resources according to reason and need and not personal motive and greed, but the possibility strictly depends on the character of the person in the position.

Take away the appearances from a "conventionally" successful person, i.e., the dressings of reputation, wealth, and status. Then look at their choices, and the composition of the judgments attached to those choices (the one is tied to the other). You will then see the person as they "truly" are, when all else is unadorned.

– 9/13/14

If you find yourself struggling, whether you apply only choice parts of Stoicism, or want to train yourself fully in it, you may find that it helps to deeply consider the personal nature of the path you've taken. From the beginning, it has been the goal of the Stoic to understand what it means to be human, to act in accordance with that understanding, and why to try to accomplish either.

Though a sliver of Stoic material remains, and a handful of Stoics are available for significant study and analysis, it is enough to depict a pattern of what it means to be a Stoic in virtually any environment. You are, in essence, picking back up what the Stoics had placed down. Your attempts to be a good man or woman is synonymous with those of the past Stoics, and not just one, but all of them. The sole difference between you is the progression of time.

– 9/13/14

To many people, this path of life appears to be the only one: A journey of total dependency on external forces, of self-doubt, of endless acquisition, and finally, a briefness of clarity before being

ripped from life. It is harsh when shaped in this context, but scrutinize the words. Test them fully, and in every way. The path described is not the only one: Another is discoverable with careful self-examination.

Virtue, the Stoics claimed, is the sole good in the universe. Personal vice, the sole evil in the universe. All else is said to be indifferent, because objects and events external to our mind are in no way in the power of the will.

How can this be? Further, how was this stance reached? Through the recognition of patterns. The exercise of reason, i.e. virtuous action, compromise, friendship, depends entirely upon human will. The violation of community is a deviation from reason, i.e. stealing, assault, abuse, is again entirely dependent upon the human will.

The design of the universe by the powers that be (itself deserving exploration for a future time) placed its various parts in various domains, forever determining the flow and boundaries of the world. The benefit and pleasure of social acts is under no compulsion from outside. The harm and pain of unsocial acts cannot be rid of by any external force. External events and objects however, are at permanent mercy to the constant flow of all else that presses upon them.

So the world's design is itself split into two spheres in reference to the human design: That which lies within, and that which lies without. The human being alone possesses the ability to recognize their own design, act in accordance with it, and attain sources of happiness that are outside the power of external forces.

Whether things as they are were designed by a conscious entity (or multiple), or by a universal generative process, or entirely at random, the human ability to secure fulfillment through ones own internal resources is unchanged.

The path within, to true security and fulfillment.

The path without, to uncertain hopes and unstable peace.

– 9/24/14

There is a great deal of importance in learning how to assess our impressions correctly.

When something befalls us, it will mean the difference between being brave in the face of it, or

being tormented and dominated by it.

When opportunity comes around, it will mean the difference between maintaining independence of self, or being pushed and pulled according to the whim of the elements directing the opportunity.

When assessing every impression (new or old), it is critical that you always draw your attention to the question: Is what I think that i'm experiencing reflect the true nature of the things in the experience? In other words, asking every impression "Are you really what you appear to be?"

Other questions follow: Are my desires and fears twisting my assessment? If so, where do those desires and fears come from? If my assessment is being twisted, should I not wait to pass judgment on what is happening until my mind is clear?

If these questions aren't asked, nearly every impression has the capacity to threaten or compel you fully. Should that happen, your will is subjugated to the forces with the power to grant you the things you desire, or to expose you to the things that you fear.

Conscious, deliberate, methodical contemplation is your greatest defense.

– 10/5/14

“You have a choice: Either to shape yourself into a Cato, or a Marcus Aurelius. The former, utterly independent and focused on embodiment of Stoic principles. The latter, entirely concerned with the well-being and support of others. Your inclinations tend you towards the latter.

This means you must make yourself more accessible, which is entirely possible, as Marcus Aurelius has shown. Your language must soften. Your expression and air must be more gentle. You must be more forgiving, and learn to let go the moment the situation calls for it.

You will still act immediately and resolutely as the situation demands, but when the moment passes, your transition must be simultaneously purposeful and relaxed, like finishing a deep breath. In a word, you must care indiscriminately for them, whatever they have said and done to you and others. You must speak and act genuinely, and show them an example of what it means to be a Stoic.”

From personal writings.

– 10/13/14

Modern Stoics have a taxing but necessary task that mirrors the mission of the ancient Stoics: To see each thing we encounter as it is, and not as it appears to be.

In the time since the early Stoa, technology has leapt forward. Human psychology however has changed little in the past two thousand years. The result is an age of information and technology that presents new challenges for an individual seeking independence of mind. Notably, the skills that the ancient Stoics used to achieve independence of mind in their time can be fully and readily employed today.

I am comfortable making the argument that modern practice of Stoicism may be more beneficial and prudent than in the past. Technology affords the modern individual the ability to tap their desires efficiently and quickly, as long as resources hold. Merely speaking about suffering and misfortune (particularly death) is a social taboo, outside of small, personal circles. It is treated as fantasy in everyday media, particularly in movies. A communal unwillingness to come to terms with necessary life events is created.

The desire of having something new is difficult to resist, when the means and results are many times more available than in the past. A socially-driven combination of individualism and materialism drives persons to do all that they can to acquire that "next big thing." Human beings have followed this pattern for countless years, but never before has technology afforded it be done with such efficiency.

It is required that the modern Stoic approach this era with a degree of rational inquiry, self-control, and maturity more vigorous than in past eras. It will mean the difference from being swept away by innumerable ways to satisfy desire on tap, and being crushed by circumstance when the veneer can no longer be propped up.

- 10/15/14

The path that Stoics walked, and now walk, has been a difficult one. Beset on every side are counter-productive influences that at best distract and at worst compel. Despite this, it is possible to weather it all and come out stronger than before, but accomplishing this takes consistent practice and the exertion of willpower. Managing this will become progressively easier with time, provided the consistency is rarely broken, and it falls to the Stoic as an individual to maintain that consistency.

In the circumstances in which Stoic principle and practice come together to show that both are useful, it is easy to be excited and proud. When practice and the products of that practice are successive, it is critical that the Stoic takes care that they do not become lethargic with their practice. The skills that a Stoic applies to their minds can lax much in the same way as other skills. If left alone for too long, it becomes necessary for the Stoic to work their way back to the point they once reached.

Their knowledge is there, in addition to the examples of the effectiveness of that knowledge, but the edge must always be carefully maintained. Should (or when) the time comes that a Stoic is confronted with a situation that calls upon the fullest use of their mind and skills, they will be prepared if they have stayed attentive to their mind and abilities.

– 10/29/14

It is unlikely that anyone but the persons that have the fullest grasp of Stoicism (i.e., the sage) will be able to completely weather some scenarios. Fearful scenarios seem to threaten you, and pleasurable scenarios seem to compel you. Depending on how far along you appear to be in practicing Stoicism, you may feel disturbed when scenarios that you believe should have no control over you cause an initial, unwanted reaction in you.

A pretty face may disarm you, or a flash of jewelry or money, or the presence of a person you've had many memories with but have since parted from.. Or someone "calling you out" openly, or coming back to your car to find your tail-light busted, or a breach of trust by someone.

These initial reactions do not report the amount of progress you have made. It is your actions and reactions to follow that accurately portray your progress. Do not be disheartened or harsh on yourself for this reason when the impressions of these things first grab you. They are similar to other bodily reactions, such as reacting to a loud noise.

At times, particularly after experiencing a series of setbacks, obstacles, or losses, you may feel wearied. The strength of the habits built through Stoic techniques will weather a considerable variety of difficult events without losing effectiveness, but occasionally that isn't the concern. The concern follows the question: "For all my endurance, for what am I enduring these things?"

After all, your goals as a Stoic may not align fully with cultural expectations of what is valuable or important. A fancy car, a more prestigious job, a position of authority are nice, yes, and it is even better to aim for them with the intent to utilize them as a part of your practice, but whether they are achieved or not, it is important to have a goal that is independent of material success or defeat. Such a goal will stay accessible whether you are at the height of power or at the end of a string of losses.

The expressed concern and goal has been discussed by the Stoics. If it is believed that Nature is conscious (whatever its form), you are provided events and obstacles in order to prove to others that it is possible for a person to skillfully handle both success and defeat, while providing you the material you need in order to advance in your practice.

If it is believed that Nature is unconscious, or there is otherwise an ordering to the world of some kind, you are able (in likewise fashion) to show that though one person is but one cause in the series of causes, nevertheless each person is integral. Through the conscious, deliberate conversion of events into material for you to practice from, you can improve your abilities to withstand duress and make the most of successes. In turn, this influences the future.

If it is believed that there is no order at all, and more or less things happen as they do by patterns coming into contact with patterns, you remain able to lessen the suffering of others in the midst of this, and raise them up by your example. You are able to recognize that there exists tools within you that allow you to assess what happens outside you. It is possible to maintain peace of mind even when considering a "ruling" chaos by refining and applying these tools.

In all of these discussions, the original concern is addressed: "For what am I enduring these things?"

To lessen the suffering of other human beings, to inspire them by your example, to improve the quality, strength, and finesse of your mind, and to revitalize the study and pursuit of what it means to "live in accordance with Nature."

– 11/13/14

You will maintain yourself in conversations with others about unfortunate events, and while experiencing unfortunate events yourself, by recalling to mind similar events you've observed, heard of, experienced, and discussed yourself. Many of the things that we deem unfortunate occur regularly elsewhere, and have occurred innumerable times over many years between many people.

It is important to consider how many of these situations are deemed "normal" during the course of life by third parties. I.e., that "these things happen." Third parties are largely unaffected (at least in comparison) until they experience unfortunate events themselves. The only addition that facilitates the reaction is judgment.

In the course of life certain elements must necessarily impress on others. Some persons, objects, and events are brought into being and others be brought out of being. How we react to these elements and their impressions determines whether we fluctuate with them or turn them into material to build the characteristics best suited to addressing them.

The more often you practice assessing the patterns of events occurring to you, around you, elsewhere in the world, and through history, the better prepared you are to understand how those events come into being, how they will impact you, how to most effectively approach them, and most importantly how to turn them to the advantage of your reasoning abilities.

– 11/14/14

You are not alone.

It is important to deliberately remember this when you find yourself in a situation that you understand you are not yet able to properly assess and withstand. Every individual will experience

events that are necessary parts of life. Sometimes when the individual is prepared, other times when they have a little preparation, and yet others when they are entirely unprepared.

It is important that a newly practicing Stoic (or any) make it a reigning priority to habitually assess their strength when facing these various life events. If they are not yet strong enough to properly address the effects of the events on themselves, to then weather the events as best they can while consistently gathering trustworthy perspectives and information. Then, to apply careful responses.

Doing this is not an admission of weakness or betrayal of the self. It is a well-reasoned acknowledgement of the current strength of your own powers, and an exercise of choice that is alternative to submission.

– 11/17/14

If you are early in your practice of Stoicism, it can be very difficult, frustrating, and tiring to understand how and when to apply the little you feel you know. There are myriad counter-intuitive influences (events, people,) that may discourage you along the way. There may even come times in which you doubt your abilities to grasp the material.

This is not unusual. I experienced these things personally. Over time, you will collect experiences that lend credibility to the idea that Stoicism is relevant and effective. The development of those experiences will require no small effort on your part however, as something can't be exchanged for nothing.

In a word, you will be training yourself to think as most people do not commonly think, to speak as most do not commonly speak, and to act as most do not commonly act. The active practice of Stoicism requires the same attentiveness and care one would expect from an aspiring student of any other kind of discipline.

You have support, and that is important to remember. From this group, from others, from the writings of the Stoics themselves. Most critically, you have the support of yourself. A principle aspect of Stoicism is learning how to communicate meaningfully with yourself.

"To know thyself."

– 11/28/14

Although only a very small portion of Stoic texts remain, there is nothing preventing us from pursuing the practice of Stoicism with the same dedication as past Stoics. We may look up to them, but it is helpful to keep in mind that they were once as we are. They worked to learn these various concepts, had to practice them regularly, and needed to test themselves in different situations.

Zeno (the original founder of the school) was a student himself at one time, and studied under several schools in the pursuit of what it meant to be human, or to be good, or the purpose of life. He was a human being, and we should take care to remember that, as it forces the mind to admit that our capacities are similar. I will grant that the gifts of some make certain concepts easier, or more familiar, but the key is the idea that just as Zeno had to start somewhere, so do we.

The development of Stoic concepts, methodology, and arguments was headed by human beings. If we take the remaining Stoic texts and use them as a foundation, carefully and purposefully navigating through them, would we not uncover the arguments and thought processes that the Stoics encountered themselves? It is worth reflection.

– 11/30/14

There will be no end to conflict, unless by our own judgments we no longer desire conquering other people for the things they possess.

There will likewise be no end to envy or jealousy, so long as we hold the objects of our envy and jealousy higher than respect for humans.

If the Stoics claims that we are born for the sake of one another are true, by disserving other human beings, we are simultaneously acting in disservice to ourselves. By benefiting other human beings, and seeking to help them improve themselves, we are improving our capacity for gentleness and compassion.

All of this depends upon the judgments we choose to act upon.

– 12/4/14

Whether you become aware of it or not, it is likely that you positively influence others through your personal practice of Stoicism. This is the case even in instances in which you are entirely reserved about it. The changes in your "air" are simultaneously subtle and impactful. As an effect of your becoming concerned with the accuracy and substance of your judgment, your every action, word, and thought is underlain with purpose.

This is not cause for vanity or vainglory, but is more properly thought of as an acknowledgment that your practice is benefiting others in addition to yourself. So long as you're certain that your intentions are honest and appropriate, there is no harm in carefully expressing your thought processes with those that are benefited by them, and are curious of them.

– 12/10/14

Forgiveness is a very difficult but important skill for a Stoic to develop. The difficulty of forgiving a person scales with the severity of the perceived insult or injury. Acceptance is a skill close to forgiveness, and your practice in acceptance of things will help you here. It is true that as a Stoic one of your primary concerns is to fashion yourself into an individual that is able to act, think, and speak reasonably and with good intentions consistently (i.e., living in accordance with nature).

Another of your primary concerns is acknowledging that you are a human among humans. That in the least, you are meant not to harm or manipulate others; At best, that you serve as an example and assist others in whatever you do, indirectly or otherwise. If you do not learn to practice forgiveness, you create a gap in your otherwise encompassing thought process. By singling one person out for a perceived injury and having them remain that way in your mind, you restrict an opportunity for growth.

Try to see them not as the hurt makes them appear, but as they really are. To learn to withdraw hate from even the most harmful people (while accounting for what likelihoods they may try to harm again) is progress.

- 12/12/14

Be compassionate with yourself when you make missteps, if the missteps are caused by errors in thinking that you then intend to mend. Censure yourself when the missteps are the result of decisions that you know you should have or should not have made. In both cases, explain to yourself what the situation was, what your part in it was, what would have been the appropriate action, and why it was appropriate to have taken that action. Envision the type of person you wish to become, and then imagine that person as your teacher or judge.

It doesn't necessarily have to be an imagined version of yourself. It can be any figure that you look up to, and would want as a guide. "Would Cato be concentrating on this aspect of a problem i'm having in this or that way? If not, then how would he?" "If Marcus Aurelius were experiencing this, what would he be trying to concentrate on or will himself to do?" "If Musonius Rufus were about to go into this situation, what would he be running through his mind?"

- 12/28/14

Be kind to others as far as you can. Show by your example that it is possible to live virtuously, and in so doing, improving the world. Work hard to understand the root of every situation. Choose your words carefully, after putting yourself in the mind of those you are with. What you are trying to do and the person you're trying to become is helpful and needed, in such a world.

- 12/31/14

""Yes, you are attractive, but what does that mean?"

Vanity is one of the greatest disturbances to afflict humans. It suppresses the clarity of the rational element, and causes the affected person to forget who and what they are. An emphasis on personal beauty is to presume control over the quality of appearance itself. At the same time, personal beauty is mentally associated with 'ability' or 'strength,' becoming the foundation of a consuming pride.

For these reasons, should external forces (inevitably) cause harm to personal appearance, it becomes a source of severe distress, as if it threatened the quality of the person themselves.

A person that has not learned to resist another's beauty (by excessively valuing it themselves) becomes enthralled by it, subjugating themselves to the will of the person bearing the appearance. The untrained discipline to resist beauty, either one's own or another's, has been a source of conflict for humans past and present.

The triumph over excessive desires towards appearance affords the observer the clarity to properly assess the person behind the appearance. To be beautiful and appear beautiful is a preference, but at potential cost to peace and accuracy of mind, is a preference best approached with great caution.

– 1/1/15

Persistence and self-compassion are two of the most important qualities a practicing Stoic can offer themselves at any stage. Desires and fears can offer unique challenges between them. Overcoming a certain fear can require a different type of approach or thought process than overcoming another. Depending on your characteristics, you may be more comfortable overcoming desires generally than you are fears.

In some cases, you may overcome many fears but struggle with a particular one, and the same may be experienced with desires. I posted recently about being firm with yourself when it comes to knowingly acting inappropriately or withholding actions you know are appropriate, and I still hold to that. However, it is important that you do not leave it at that. After being firm, guide yourself back to the thought processes that are most likely to help you recover yourself.

Stoicism demands a mental fortitude and discipline that few expect of themselves. You are instructing yourself as to what it means to live, to be good, and to withstand the difficulties of life that most others prefer to pretend do not exist. It is as important to be your own support system as it is to be your trainer. It is worth the challenge.

- 1/4/15

Of this writing, within the last couple of hours I experienced something abrupt and unfortunate, without warning. I saw this as an opportunity to detail my reaction on paper, and the result may or may not help you in your own practice.

"This is not the 'bad' that the impression would make it appear to be. It is instead an opportunity; an opponent of competent strength. This is what could happen to any person, in similar circumstances. There will be no pining, no struggling, and certainly no panic.

It is a situation entirely organic: look at its parts, and call each one by name. Identify the judgments that amounted to this. See what characteristics have been tested, and what ones have been disturbed, if even to a lesser degree.

You are seeing that this is not appropriately thought of as a misfortune, but a litmus test for characteristics not often called to action.

This is the competition."

- 1/15/15

(Regarding a hostile work environment, brought about by an aggressive boss.)

It (the situation) is a chance to examine the judgments that lead to the behaviors of the boss. The purpose of doing this is to watch for similar judgments in yourself, and head them off, so that you too don't 'forget' yourself. It helps to keep in mind that the boss has never been convinced that there is an alternative and more humane way to act. It follows that her intentions and actions are unnecessarily hostile to herself and discomfoting to others.

You can be an example for your boss. That said, it is ultimately your boss that must recognize there is an example other than her own to follow, and that is a personal matter that noone may influence but her. Much in the same way that the exercise of your mind depends utterly on the choices you make and the intentions behind them.

If (when) the time comes that you have the resources and authority to influence the lives of other people, you will be prepared in what you should not do, leaving you free to concentrate on what you should do. There is nothing preventing you in any case from doing what you must do - according to the given role - with appropriate intentions and to the best of your ability.

As a practicing Stoic, accomplishing this is your first and top priority, and it falls under the heading of your primary role: Being a virtuous human being, and everything that that entails. That, and not your career, is your 'real,' occupation. That is your 'real' work; it happens that your day-to-day work will be improved and made easier by it.

She may yell. In the moment, say to yourself "The screams are noise and air. I will set that aside, and listen for what she is asking."

She might give unreasonable commands. "I will do what I can with what I have and with the time i'm given. If this proves not to be enough, then necessarily that must be the case, and no amount of frustration or resentment can make unreasonable expectations reasonable."

The paper that is in front of you, the words on the computer screen, have no connection to the boss herself. She may have been responsible for instigating the events that brought the work before you, but the work itself has no tie to her. It is an independent object (or objects) apart from the human being that guided their formation.

Conceptually separate the elements of your work life into parts and bring each part in front of your minds eye. Each time that you do this, ask yourself if you are afraid, angry, or saddened by that part when it is by itself. Do this with each part down to the last. Then, 'recombine' the elements together into their whole concepts, and ask yourself "If I wasn't afraid, angered, or saddened by these things when they were by themselves, what difference does it make if they are arranged together?"

- 1/21/15

It may sound like an oxymoron, but it is often the expectation of success that introduces variables that may reduce the chances of success. In my own experience, for the majority of my life I took into account how well others did, noticing most often when they did better than me at this or that. That concern acted like a limiter, because it introduced ideas that were self-depreciating or anxiety-

inducing: "Why am I not doing as well as I used to?" "Is there something new wrong with me?" "Am I falling behind?"

The only way to prevent those questions, prevent them from worsening, and to return to a healthy outlook of your own skills, is to firmly reign in the habit of comparing your progress to others. Focus instead on doing the best you can, with what time, information, and tools are available. No amount of care you spend on the progress of others will reduce their success, or improve your own.

That is not to say that you should not ask for help, but do so to better understand and improve your own work. Similarly, extend your help to others that seem to be struggling, wherever reasonable. Your "role" as a veterinary student is to learn to care for animals, and indirectly to improve the quality of life of those that own them. If you place your whole effort into fulfilling that role, your grades will improve to scale. - If they do not, the importance of your role (as a student and future caretaker), and the intention to improve your abilities in kind, remains the same.

- 2/2/15

If you wish to develop your self-sufficiency and compassion, practice acts of kindness without any deliberate intention of their being noticed. You can be most sure that you're doing something for the right reason and for its own sake when you restrict yourself from mentioning it to anyone, and if you can do it anonymously.

Will yourself to ignore looking around you or listening for anyone that may be observing you. Make your motions simple and purposeful, and then move on from the act. Do this again (and again), as each opportunity presents itself.

- 2/14/15

In a circumstance in which you are content and nothing appears to be 'wrong,' recall to mind various past experiences in which you were anxious, afraid, and pained by what you expected to

happen. Ask yourself "where is that fear now?" Try to remember this practice whenever you are confronted by a new fear, and you will help ground yourself.

- 2/16/15

It is precisely when you feel that you are at your weakest or most vulnerable that you should attempt to fight the hardest.

When things seem to be crowding onto you or around you, and you are feeling drained and worn, if even then you can assert that it is an opportunity to practice, what more can strike self-doubt in you?

There are countless examples throughout human history that depict uneven fights, bouts, and battles that have been won, mitigated, or offset because individuals did not yield to panic, fear, or pain. If your goal is to learn and not to yield even when many of your stresses and pains seem to converge all at once, you will have won something that will remain ever helpful: A proof that you are more than prey to circumstance.

- 2/25/15

Although the Stoics were in consistent agreement over certain things, the "nature" of Nature appears to be where a number of Stoics digressed. It appears to me that Nature is the namesake for the ostensible design of the universe by the power(s) that be. This includes the concept that the "powers that be," the universe, and "Nature" are synonymous.

By "design," i'm referring to the (seeming) patterns and mechanics between any number of objects and events. Humans for example are "designed" with the faculty of reason, just as a fish is "designed" with fins to swim and a bird is "designed" with wings to fly. If you accept the metaphors, it follows that human beings are "meant" to be virtuous through the application of reason.

Whether there are gods, or a singular all-powerful entity, or Nature itself (the universe) is conscious "through" us, or everything happens in an "ordered" manner in a series of causes and

events, or things happen seemingly randomly, the concept that humans are "meant" to make the most of reason as their chief, defining quality doesn't appear to change significantly.

In my personal interpretation, I struggle to believe that gods or a god exists (i.e., entities that are perceiving me), but that there is an "ordered" series of causes and events. In order to positively guide that flow of events as far as one can (thereby contributing as a part), I must do everything I can to refine my reasoning ability through actions intended to improve virtuous characteristics.

- 2/22/15

Many Stoic principles are intuitive. They "hit home," and in addition are often difficult to argue with. Some dispositions (a person's collection of traits and experiences) may or may not make the study of Stoicism easier by degrees. That said, I would argue that no person is barred from its effective practice, or from drawing veritable meaning from it.

Beginning is difficult, but with time, many of the more simple exercises become "second nature" (the turn of phrase), such as the constructive interpretation of your favorite mug breaking. Some of the more difficult exercises, such as making a concerted effort to forgive someone that may have deeply wronged you, is more difficult. As the apparent severity of a circumstance increases, the amount of discipline and effort to process it appropriately rises to scale.

It is in every way like practicing a craft. The more often and sincerely you practice, the more proficient you will be. Be mindful of what you can reasonably expect of yourself at the given moment - if you cannot be sure you are handling something correctly, look for advice and support where you feel it can be found. Consider even the (seemingly) smallest amount of progress to be significant, if it is the result of your deliberately putting the principles to practice.

- 3/24/15

The more potentially severe the outcome appears, the more difficult it is to effectively come to terms with it. The rational arguments seem to have a power all their own, in that it is difficult to

argue with them. Somewhere within you your judgments are "hitching," and aren't smoothly integrating the arguments. In other words, you may be consciously agreeing that the arguments are true and are what you "should" be thinking, but they do not fully line up with one or more judgments you are still holding to.

You may be able to identify which judgment is the opposing one by outlining and exploring each of the details of the situation you're referring to. Ask yourself through thought how you feel about each part of the situation, why you believe you feel that way about that part, how the part integrates into the situation, what you can or cannot do to constructively guide that part along, what the imagined victory or failure looks like and what it portends alongside plans to make the best use of either, and how the event fares in the depiction of the universal timeline.

Remind yourself what your "true" objective as a Stoic is: To fashion yourself into a person that does their best regarding each role, to do good, and be good, independent of outcome or circumstance. Whereas external conditions come together and part in a continuous stream that we cannot always mark upon, the mentioned objective is forever within your ability to effect. Whenever the anxiety seems to "encroach" on you, remind yourself of this objective, and "pull yourself" back to yourself.

This can and will take some time; you may wish to commit it to writing, listen to music, or find a spot to rest for a while. I would argue that because this practice necessarily influences whether or not your level of anxiety continues or decreases, I would make time for it if none seems available.

Every difficulty can be used for training to improve your self-awareness, assess your capacities, expand those capacities, cultivate your appreciation, and develop the characteristics best suited to addressing the problem. The more severe incarnations of difficulties can be appropriately thought of as competitions; nowhere else will you have the chance to test your abilities so thoroughly and fully.

– 3/26/15

It is difficult not to lose heart when many misfortunes come about, or when persons about us make many (seemingly) disappointing, selfish, and self-destructive decisions, or when we become aware of a laxing in our personal efforts to exercise Stoic doctrines and principles.

To address this and recover, we must prioritize self-observation. We must behave as if we are our own general, judge, trainer, and "physician of the soul;" unafraid of seeking qualified second opinions, and driven in the assessment and treatment of disturbances within ourselves.

Guide the development of your faculty of reason through deliberate application, whether or not you are being observed. Command yourself to assess, say, and do the right thing mindfully, purposefully, and efficiently in every instance. Evaluate the intention, content, and bearing of each of your choices; allow no ill-motive to form the base of your decisions - sooner make the decision not to act, if this seems to be the only recourse that preserves your true self.

Upholding these roles necessarily influences the ability to act and react as a good man or woman would to each new or familiar circumstance.

- 4/1/15

For your own growth, it is best to try to inwardly make peace with all others. This includes those that may have caused you great pain. By all means continue to account for their behavior, but establish to yourself the kind of reasoning they have for acting in such ways. In so doing, you will cease to be surprised that they speak, think, and act as they do, and you build your resistance to any attempt they make to affront you. You will also be better prepared to appropriately react to their decisions, should they hold a position of power or leverage in relation to you.

A Stoic is a leader, protector, guide, and humanitarian. Experiences like crossing paths with a person you once felt wronged you is valuable practice towards these ends. When seeing other persons of this kind, be quick and deliberate to remind yourself "This person is my ally, even if they don't know it, and it is my role to be kind to them. I gain nothing by surrendering my mind to this person, but I gain a great deal by harboring no ill will."

- 5/1/15

There accompanies each new place, position, choice, and condition several types of fears that seem to threaten with their appearances, despite their sources having always been familiar to us. A move to a new area appears to be a change in surroundings, but is nevertheless on the same world, the same earth, and under the same sky. There are buildings here, as there were before. There are new people, but as with people familiar to us, these people too seek things, fear things, taking up callings and putting them down, fighting and making peace, becoming angry, then sad, then excited, then restless.

Though it would not seem it if you were to listen to some, the world is immediately familiar to us wherever we are and whatever we are doing, if we acquire the habit of looking beyond appearances to the heart of each person, event, and object. This habit is key in maintaining the cosmopolitan outlook that will help us in whatever situation we find ourselves in, whether by chance or by our influence. Practice by saying "I know where I am; On such a world, with such people, as such a person, and with what things. I knew I was bound to move, and encounter new things besides. Soon these new things will be familiar to me, and each new thing to follow. Where will my fear be then?"

- 5/17/15

It is entirely possible, and useful, to reassign judgments of value from objects outside of ourselves to characteristics within ourselves. It is helpful and recommended to consider previous successes and/or failures -during- success and failure, so long as this is accomplished from the appropriate perspective. For example, it is beneficial to consider previous successes during moments of success, to acknowledge that your approach has remained effective towards its intended end. (A note: Missteps along the way do not mean that you have fallen off the track.

If you understand where the misstep occurred, why, and take steps to self-improve, you convert the misstep into a boon, and gain from it.) Successes are appropriately interpreted as confirmation that the things that you're doing and saying are effective in beneficially impacting others. Pleasure (joy) that comes about from interpreting success this way should be fully embraced and enjoyed, as it is a product of appropriate action, thought, and intention.

It is beneficial to carefully consider failures amidst successes, to prevent the pleasure that you feel from doing the right thing for the right reasons from turning into vainglory. It is not easy without

practice and vigilance to be able to discern the point at which pleasure from attempting to do the right thing (which is a pleasure that can, and should be fully embraced as a good that you earned,) turns into pleasure derived from being praised by others.

Contemplating failures can be a boon. You can relate the progress that you've made towards self-improvement to your state of being at the time the failures occurred to gauge how far you've come. Look back at the failures, study them, and ask yourself what all could, and should have been done that may have changed the outcome of the failure, based on what you know now, and the progress you've made. Look at past failures as checks against behaviors you observe in others, as you will better understand why others behave as they are in similar situations. Both successes and failures can be used to hone your rational skills.

– 5/20/15

Believe in who you are, what you are doing, and the type of person you're aiming to become. Seek to continuously remind yourself of this, whatever the conditions or circumstances. The world may call upon your all, needing you at any moment. Remember what it means to be a Stoic.

– 5/31/15

"I am sitting here, contemplating the last four years. It occurs to me the effect that philosophy has had on my life, and the personal discoveries i've made while incorporating it into my behavior.

I had once believed (as many did and still do) that philosophy was useless, a waste of time, incapable of being meaningfully applied, and contributed nothing towards what our culture deems important for happiness: fame and fortune. I was forced in college to take an intro to philosophy course, and I held to my bias until I was exposed to virtue ethics.

Virtue ethics is the application and study of what it means to do and be good. In my sophomore year in college I changed my major to philosophy, hoping that through virtue ethics I would eventually understand the nature and purpose of my life. I knew the risk that I was taking, and the

cultural stigma that attended it. I believed it was worth a greater risk to potentially understand who "I" was supposed to be, than to one day live very comfortably at the expense of forever questioning.

The "me" of four years ago is a shadow. He is unrecognizable to me. He lived moment-to-moment in fear, confusion, sadness, irritation, and self-doubt. I genuinely believe that if I did not take the risk that I had for the reasons that I did, I would still be that "me."

Without philosophy, I would have never believed I could have become a resident assistant. I would have never believed that I could be a genuine leader, inspire others, teach others, or help others. I would have never joined student government. I would have never devoted myself to my work. I would have never participated in campus life or politics the way that I did. I would never have the girlfriend that I do now. Neither would I have my experiences working with those with special needs.

I owe everything that I am to the examples of the philosophers that taught me that it was possible to be simultaneously driven and at peace, no matter the circumstances; that it was possible to draw happiness from doing and being good, in itself. I would willingly trade potential fame and fortune for that, again and again."

– 6/8/15

We (Stoics) claim that we understand the nature of the universe and the relationships of all things within it, as closely as it may be understood. Inherent in this claim is the assertion that we understand the nature of humankind, and the purpose and meaning of life. We state that we have identified the appropriate way for a human being to live, naming it "Living in accordance with Nature." We affirm that living in accordance with Nature is the sole means of securing Eudaimonia: A state of being that is simultaneously composed of tranquility, fulfillment, self-sufficiency, and happiness. The path to Eudaimonia is the deliberate cultivation of the Virtues: Characteristics that are beneficial to the social and rational health of human beings.

The Virtues can be deliberately incorporated into oneself and put into effect under all circumstances – independent of occupation or material resources. Occupation and material resources are intentionally thought of as opportunities and tools to practice and refine the Virtues. A circumstantial absence of an occupation or material resources presents alternative challenges that

too can be converted to useful experience. With a careful and disciplined perspective, both fortune and misfortune can be used for self-improvement.

– 6/18/15

Be firm with yourself. Draw value away from "accomplishing" and place it strictly in "attempting," independent of the situation, the resources intended for use, and the severity of the outcome.

In the last month my attention to this incredibly important concept has suffered. It did not suffer because of a weakness in the concept, but my reduced diligence in applying it. I have allowed financial and personal hardships to distort the principles with the greatest chance of confronting and converting the difficulties into opportunities to build virtue.

I have been retracing my thoughts, actions, reactions, and speech in this last month, and I have identified the errors in my reasoning. I have reminded myself that if I care at all for my true well-being, the line must be drawn here, and I need to reorient. The community we have here, full of individuals with similar aims and concerns, is another reminder of the importance of remembering my deepest-running priorities.

– 6/23/15

We (practicing Stoics) are aiming to redefine to ourselves what is or is not to be valued. The aim is pulling value away from external things and events and placing it firmly into self-development through the practice of virtue and curtailment of personal vice. The external goals then become internal ones, which depend alone on our intentions and efforts to be fulfilled (independent of the external results). It is consistently up to the Stoic whether they fail or fall, for this reason and in this sense.

– 7/6/15

Every day, carefully observe what has gone through your mind, and what is currently there. Try to determine the sources of the things, and what desires or fears are associated with the things themselves. Then, ask yourself if you are certain that you are thinking about and approaching them fully properly. If you are unconvinced that you are, take additional time to surveying why.

Prompt yourself with questions: "Is the thing in my mind fully in my control or not? If it isn't, have I done all that I could to maneuver the situation concerning it for the better? If I have, what is left that can or should concern me? Will the addition of my concern compel the thing how I wish it, or will I be responsible for creating new anxieties, and new anxieties mounted upon those?" Participate in your life as you would a caring, concerned, and studious guide - one that knows you better and more fully than any.

- 7/14/15

You are your own material, and your choices are the tools with which you either improve or cause harm to yourself. Stoicism challenges you in a way few religions or other philosophies do, as it prompts you continually and deliberately to take your self-development seriously. The greatest and smallest opportunities, positive or negative, are valuable practice to hone your careful and intentional exercise of choice.

Each thought, small task, work period, doctors appointment, vacation, night, accident, promotion, - in a word, every event - is a chance to intentionally exercise virtue. Happiness and peace cannot be your goal, though through the effective practice of Stoicism, they will attend you all the same. You cultivate self-development through the moment-to-moment exercise of virtue within every choice and every situation. Approaching each circumstance with this firmly in mind is more important than any other task, hobby, or vocation, as it necessarily and irrevocably affects all of them.

Consistency and deliberate application are simultaneously important. As your own crafts(wo)man, your skills improve with every individual, intentional exercise of choice. If you do not practice, your skills plateau and regress in a way that is nearly imperceptible until circumstances force you to make

use of them. Do your best in each case, intently, virtuously, and hold yourself to letting all else happen as it must.

– 7/20/15

Compassion is a crucially important element of Stoic practice. The deliberate practice of compassion taps into both the social and rational aspects of human beings. By willingly sacrificing external things to improve the circumstances of another person, you build independence of mind from those external things.

In addition, the knowledge of your committing a good act for an appropriate reason (not for show, but because it should be done) is an irrevocable good.

Lastly, by knowingly fulfilling your role as a rational and social (good) human being, you have succeeded in earning your place in "all this (Nature)." It falls to you then to keep it through consistency in your character. You encourage others to accomplish the same, whether they or you are aware of it.

– 7/29/15

A seemingly negative situation (one that causes you to think to yourself: "I don't want to be here. I don't want to be doing this. I'd rather be doing something else.") is an opportunity to develop characteristics that will help you in every situation. If you are in a situation in which you are limited to a certain area for an extended period of time, it is an opportunity to build patience and mindfulness.

When you are in such a situation, think over the fact that the time spent in that certain area is itself limited, and will end. Consider how many situations you've spent in similar constraints, and how many of them you've forgotten. Consider to yourself that your agitation, sadness, and anxiousness add nothing to you, while patience and thoughtfulness do. Every available minute is valuable for the development and refinement of your mind. If others are in similar constraints around you, think of

how you might best serve as an example to them. Design each act with self-improvement at its core and humanitarian aims as its shell.

After the period that you've been in these constraints, think of each action you've created and committed in this way. Reflect on the feelings they inspired in you, and use those experiences to guide others who seek your advice.

– 8/17/15

Try to place yourself in the minds of those around you. Try to understand other's desires and fears. You can assess this with careful observation. There are many reasons to try to accomplish this.

The first is to learn lessons, checking your behavior and motivations against those of others. The second is to understand how to effectively help and guide others when appropriate. The third is to assess the kinds of actions others are likely to take, and to prepare yourself mentally accordingly.

In addition, work to keep yourself consistently aware of your own intentions and motivations. Keeping this all in mind, you will be much more likely to be prepared, patient, empathetic, and unsurprised by others.

– 8/31/15

Time doesn't wait for anyone. If you are not careful, day-to-day circumstances will blind you to the things that are truly important. Don't wait for unfortunate circumstances to force you to recognize that, because the blow is (then) much more severe.

In every situation there lies an opportunity to make the best of what is available, and to help and guide others to improve themselves. Delaying acting on that intention only serves to sacrifice that opportunity, and that sacrifice remains as a memory for you and potentially others.

– 9/6/15

"You are worried about money, when your basic needs are met, you have numerous options for recreation, your mind is sound, your body is strong, your home life is pleasant and stable, and your work life allows you to exercise your grasp of Stoic philosophy.

It follows that your worries of not having enough money either have no bearing, or have yet to have bearing. If they have no bearing, it means that your worry is based on things you cannot have, or things you may not yet have.

Such things, as they cannot add to you as a good man, are in a way poisonous to obsess over, as even if you did have them, it is a kind of desire that inflates and can never be sated. It follows that it must be reigned in and contained, as a weed would be.

Any circumstances that would cause want of money will be resolved by one or another event, and even in the case that they are not resolved, the outcome would be the same whether you were at peace and prepared, or obsessed and disturbed.

So trust in your training, and do not give into the thing that would incite thinking that weakens and worsens the parts most likely to help you."

– 9/20/15

Attempt to always do the right thing, whether or not you are offered a reward. Do this even when noone is looking, so that you gradually instill the habit in yourself. As the habit forms, you will notice that your opinion of yourself becomes increasingly important to you, and your self-esteem becomes less dependent on the opinion of other people. The knowledge that you are always attempting to do the right thing is untouchable by other people. The only person that can take it away from you is you.

– 9/25/15

"Is it ever going to be enough?"

Desires, if left unchecked, adapt. Many of the things that are desired and then obtained seem to lose their desirability over time. The charm and excitement of the new thing is often weathered away. A desire to feel the rush of a new thing surfaces, creating and inflating new desires. The process feeds into itself due to the common belief that all desires must eventually be satisfied. Allowing the process to continue without trying to understand and properly manage it is problematic, because it is endless.

This is not to say that the obtaining of things is bad, or that constant self-denial is necessary. Instead, we should practice the ability of telling ourselves "no." We cause potential harm to ourselves when we depend our peace of mind on the things we cannot have or wish to have. We arguably become vulnerable to the persons that have the greatest ability to give or take away those same things.

Once you are in a state of mind where you can successfully tell yourself "no," you give new options to yourself. Instead of "desires" and "fears," there are "preferences" and "dispreferences." They appear similar, but there is a key difference. There is a distinct element of choice in considering things as preferences and dispreferences that is no longer compulsory or vulnerable to others.

– 10/3/15

Whether a Stoic is the leader of an organization or a new member, their principles remain the same. Their priorities are likewise the same, despite occupational differences. Every moment, a Stoic assesses the potential impact their decisions make on others, their physical and material limitations, how to make best use of their situations, studying their own motivations for vices to correct, ensuring their every action is founded on a virtuous and sound judgment, pursuing helpful advice, and attempting to be a good example through even very simple actions.

A Stoic in a leadership position tries to put themselves in the shoes of those that depend on them in any capacity. It is understood by the Stoic that the effect of their nearly every action is observable, and may make the difference between encouraging virtuous or vicious behavior. Their opinion of a member is based on consistent merits and behavior, and not flattery, status, or past titles. In mind,

they approach every member as a friend or ally (their behaviors accounted for), even if the member does not believe themselves to be one.

The Stoic in a member position forbids themselves to put any weight into praise or blame by their superiors, unless the superiors have proven themselves to be consistently good. They forbid themselves from interpreting promotions as good things because of increased pay or status, instead seeing them as an expansion of tools and opportunities to help others. Where possible, the Stoic member tries to see into the minds of the organizations leadership, meeting and holding discussions with them. The purpose is to better account for the types of decisions the leadership may make, and the impact they may have on others.

If a Stoic is in the leadership of an organization, and another Stoic is a member of the same organization, it is highly likely that they will both be trying to accomplish the same types of goals, whether they ever become aware of it or not.

– 10/11/15

"Today I didn't give into anger. I approached everything in the appropriate way. If I stumbled, I was quick to recover and remember who I am."

Guide every thought, action, and spoken and written word so that you can honestly make this statement to yourself at the end of the day.

– 10/26/15

Remember, expect nothing from fortune. Expect nothing to happen but what does. Assess the likelihood of each event based on who you are with, and what is happening around you.

Do not yield to excessive fears about what may happen. Instead, consider what may be appropriate reactions to them. Should any of the considered events come about, you are already strengthened to meet it.

Guide yourself in this way towards all potential events, and do not allow the potential pain or pleasure of each possible outcome to dissuade or steal you away from yourself.

Let your sole goal be approaching each thing as a good man or woman would, keeping each well-approached event close to your mind as a deserved source of peace, contentment, and motivation.

– 11/6/15

Only a very small amount of Stoic texts remain, but what remains is enough to shape you into the type of person you wish to be: Grateful for opportunities, doing the right things for their own sake, being a good example in each thing you do, and actively and passively helping others independent of any kind of material reward.

– 11/29/15

Intimidation is hollow. It has no influence unless it is granted power by the target of the intimidation. In other words, a person that is trying to intimidate another cannot succeed without the mental assent ('agreement') of that other person. The character of the intimidator should at all times be taken into consideration before choosing any outward action or reaction towards them.

Ask yourself: What are the kinds of choices that I know this person has made? What kind of choice are they making now? Given this, is it appropriate for this person to have influence over me?"

Then: "If it isn't, I need to remind myself that all that intimidation is is a lack of space, and noise and air. What they are saying and doing can't have force if I don't give it force. This person can't harm my virtue without my permission. They are acting this way because they don't understand that we are allies.

I will take precautions to protect myself and others if necessary, but only as a last resort if the situation can't be resolved peacefully by seeking help, purposefully leaving, or by calmly expressing the error this person is making."

- 12/3/15

The "heart" and "mind" of a person are conceptually different, and are sometimes described in conversation as being at odds with one another. In truth they are deeply connected, and are more appropriately thought of as two conceptually distinct sides to a single coin.

The judgments that a person forms about things serves as the foundation for that person's choices and emotions towards those things. As the judgments change, so do the actions, reactions, and emotions towards things. Observing and understanding this process as it occurs within yourself is very difficult to do in the beginning. That said, it is something that has bearing on every short and long-term aspect of your life.

- 12/15/15

It is possible to shape your mind so that it stays composed and reliable even in very unpredictable situations. You begin working toward this by guiding yourself carefully through simple, chaotic situations. In these simple chaotic situations, describe to yourself what individual things are causing this situation to seem chaotic. Such as: "Someone is being stern and a little loud behind me towards someone else." "These papers are out of order, making it difficult to find what i'm looking for." "This person isn't being as responsible as they should be for having their position."

Once you have singled out each of these things in your mind, remind yourself that these kinds of things occur constantly throughout the world, yet they don't affect you in any way until you become aware of them. These things are still happening without your being aware of them or exposed to them; so when you are exposed to them, it means something additional has been added that is causing you to be bothered. The "something" is your judgment that it is appropriate in some way to be disturbed by these things.

Once you have separated each individual disruptive thing in the situation and identified your judgment, inwardly examine the individual disruptive things much more closely. Separate the

individual disruptive things into the things that join together to make that individual disruptive thing. An example is a very angry person: "This person is shouting at me and mocking me. Shouts are noise and air. The person themselves is flesh and bone. The person is acting this way because of a belief that I am responsible for their anger. If I am not afraid of noise, air, flesh, bone, and poor assumptions by themselves, why should I be disturbed if they are combined together?"

Coaching yourself through difficult and seemingly chaotic situations becomes second nature through careful practice. By establishing these things to yourself, you give your mind more time and "room to breathe." You are trying to enable yourself to think "above" what is currently happening, to determine the kinds of behaviors that a good person would respond with. You will then be simultaneously doing the right thing without being negatively influenced, while being a role model most likely to inspire others to try to do the same.

– 12/26/15

Below is a description of my approach to each work day. It may be something that helps if you wish to try it.

Every morning before work, I devote an hour to reading the Meditations, the Discourses (of Epictetus) or Seneca's Essays and Letters. In that hour, I normally find a few sentences or paragraphs that would serve as a strong reminder of Stoic principles. I write and print the reminder off of microsoft word (or equivalent) and put it in my pocket.

I think about what I read and interpret different aspects and events within my life in light of it on the way to work. At work, during particularly idle moments, I may take a moment to read the reminder in my pocket. This commonly has a "re-orientating" or "refocusing" effect on me, encouraging me to continue applying Stoic principles to my work with greater attention and care. I consciously maintain this to the end of the day, deliberately choosing words and actions meant to ingrain the reminder and assist others.

I then carry on that "I have accomplished this" to the next work day, starting with the morning pattern.

– 1/11/16

There are daily situations in which most persons hope for a certain outcome and dread another. One of your tasks as a Stoic is to teach yourself to view these outcomes differently. Your goal is to inwardly change "I want x" and "I hope x doesn't happen" into "I'd prefer that x happens, but I will make use of whatever does." In so doing, you steel yourself against any outcome, prepared and ready to appreciate preferred outcomes and overcome others.

Ahead of time, visualize the preferred and not-preferred outcomes side-by-side. Consider the likelihood of each outcome coming about, based on similar events you've seen or experienced before. Expose to yourself the fact that your preferring one outcome over another is the result of a judgment. Judgments can be changed.

Change the judgment of the not-preferred situation by telling yourself the characteristics you can build by meeting it head-on - provided it happens at all. Say plainly to yourself "I have faced things like this before, and I will again. Should this situation come about, it will find me ready and waiting, and I will prove to myself it is nothing to dread by facing it willingly. I will turn a difficult situation into a good, showing others that it is both possible and meaningful."

- 1/28/16

"I have committed myself to understanding Stoic principles and putting them into action. Stoicism is the primary reason why I have come so far, why I have confidence in my abilities, and why I am as prepared as I can be for the future. Of the things I'm currently afraid of or anxious about, I am confident that Stoic principles will help me through them, exposing them to be what they truly are: transitory and feeble for someone that's prepared to overcome them. I'm driven by the knowledge that the things I'm currently afraid of have been overcome by Stoics for two thousand years; that they are nothing new.

My current primary fear: I am afraid that in my daily balancing of work with leisure, I am not properly dedicating enough time to writing material for books on Stoic practice; that I am instead put off this strong desire (to write on Stoic philosophy) from one day to the next, indefinitely, out

of a pitiful concern that I have not given myself enough time to rest. Instead, I am likely procrastinating in a foolish fear that I will not do the subject material justice.

The answer: Not all Stoics had the same ability or proficiency for each kind of work, yet many of them dedicated time each day to committing their practice to writing. Stoics held occupations that were difficult and grueling in addition to those that conventionally attracted a great deal of wealth. The Stoics holding the difficult occupations converted the difficulties of their occupations into training for their principles. Stoics were laborers AND writers, athletes AND writers, soldiers AND writers. The occupation you hold (a caretaker of emotional support and special needs students) is difficult, but does not in any way prevent you from properly committing your practice to writing. You are creating excuses where excuses do not need to be created. Whether you remain in this occupation or attend to another, your duty to your craft (Stoic philosophy) must always be your primary concern. This is so, because it is a craft that influences and guides the appropriate handling of every aspect of life."

- A self-examination of a recent concern.

- 2/8/16

The Difference between Psychology & Sage Advice [A Meditation]

:

Much psychological advice is specific to situations: i.e.- a depressed person may be advised to pamper oneself with activities one like....but it is important to realize that such actions are merely therapeutic and are 'prescribed' as temporary remedies....however, advice by Sages transcend time, situation or person...that impermanence is inherent in all phenomena was preached by the Buddha and He showed that once the causes responsible for the existence of such phenomena cease, the products too disintegrate; thus, attachment to such perishable phenomena cause suffering. Therefore, his advice was detachment....likewise, the Stoics showed that Nature was rational and ordered rather than random...also a spark of that reason was present in man...that is why we can understand processes in Nature and also why we like order over disorder....therefore, in order to live according to Nature, the Stoics advised us to be rational rather than emotional....more than 2,500 years have elapsed since these Sage Philosophies were articulated, but since they are based on general reality, are still valid today, to everyone, everywhere....

~ Upendra.

– Author: Upendra De Silva

–2/9/16

Query:

Some concrete help would be appreciated if anyone has any. How do you in your day to day lives deal with incompetence and laziness in others whom you depend on to accomplish your work? When it is recurrent, pervasive, and you have little control over who you work with. How do you deal with this in the moment when you feel your head exploding with frustration?

Response:

Very few people have developed a philosophy of life or system of thought within themselves - or at least, are consistent with the belief system they claim they possess. Some of the same people believe that it isn't necessary to develop one, or that their current belief system (whatever its state) is sufficient. The remaining others may not even be aware that there exists philosophies or systems of thoughts that are highly applicable for them. All people will do and say what appears to be right, based upon their judgments about the world.

Foremost, your responsibility to yourself in this kind of frustrating situation is to firmly but calmly tell yourself truths about it. Is it possible for these people to do anything other than what seems to be right to them? If it didn't seem appropriate for them to do the things they're doing, they wouldn't choose to do them, because noone does anything without some internal confidence that its appropriate for them to do. If they are going to have a chance to change, they need to be around someone that continually does right for its own sake, strictly speaks with the intent to help and guide, and does not buckle easily in the face of stresses that would compromise most people.

If you embody this, there is still no guarantee that they will change, because their will and the application of their reasoning ability is ultimately out of your control, just as your will and reason is out of their control. In these cases, it is helpful to remind yourself of this, and focus your effort on precisely identifying the characteristics you can reinforce by interacting with people of this kind. Humility, patience, endurance, empathy, compassion, and others. In short, they present obstacles that you can and should use to refine your abilities as a Stoic.

- 2/12/16

"Your confidence in Stoicism, at its least, props you up under undesirable conditions, allowing you to weather circumstances that would uproot many others.

At its greatest, it affords you the full use of your abilities. You may take on whatever challenge, whatever the sacrifice or odds, while able to account for conditions that would otherwise remain hidden. You are able to do all this, without true strain or fatigue, in the name of that which drives you: Virtue.

With this skill comes a trade, as everything in life is exchanged for something else. You accepted the first half of the exchange long ago: That you will no longer think as most commonly think, behave as most behave, speak as most speak, and act as most act.

You made this trade in order to be unshaken by circumstance, independent of others opinions, self-sufficient in resolving your desires and fears, and united with yourself and the world.

Now the second part of the exchange comes into play. You are now fortified by practice and experience. Any missteps are immediately recognized by their nature and composition. Your confidence in your words and actions is itself represented -in- your words and actions."

- A year old excerpt from my Stoic journal of an attempt to understand my progress.

- 2/23/16

There might be chaos all around you. There may be a great deal of motion and noise, and even the potential for physical violence against you. This kind of situation could go on for hours on end, leaving you feeling drained and struggling to stay motivated. When you are feeling this way, it is very important that the part that is -you,- not your body, but -you,- don't yield to these forces.

Every choice that you make to do the right thing independent of the conditions surrounding you is an irrevocable victory. It is something that you've earned, and something that is very difficult for most to accomplish - much less day after day. It is a quality of a Stoic to endure great pressures

without compromising integrity and losing sight of the "bigger picture." As hard as it can be sometimes, this can always be accomplished - we have numerous examples of past Stoics as proof.

- 3/7/16

Inattention in putting Stoic principles to practice begins to show its effects over time. The change is very slow and nearly imperceptible. Practicing Stoicism is akin to practicing any other skill or art. One can lax in putting it to use every day due to negligence or a misplaced belief that it's been "mastered" it and the practice will continue without one's direct attention. The danger in allowing this to happen with Stoic principles is that the situations in which they can be applied cannot be replaced or substituted. In addition, Stoic principles apply to all other roles one possesses and takes on. For the practicing Stoic, inattention to Stoic practice feeds inattention elsewhere.

If you find yourself becoming inattentive to Stoic practices, calmly and gently lead yourself back into the habits of thinking you've waned from. Accustom yourself again to a caution against taking anything at face value, suspending first judgments until sound ones can be made, and assessing other persons, places, things, and events carefully, paying particular attention to your role as a human being in relation to them. Forbid yourself from falling prey to the kinds of thinking you once experienced daily prior to taking up Stoic philosophy; the kinds of thinking that turned you often against yourself and others.

- 3/14/16

Each of us is important to the well-functioning of the world. Our exercise of well-intentioned choices becomes part of the flow of causes and effects. These well-intentioned choices help to combat and control for our own poorly-intentioned choices and those of others. In our attempts to be good human beings, we are likely to inspire those who (then) go on to make similar attempts. Keep this close to mind always, guiding your thoughts and choices in light of it.

- 3/23/16

"Something should be done about that."

"Someone should do something about this."

"He/she needs to know that this is happening."

These and others are common workplace phrases. These sentiments can be abundant, but are often rarely brought to the attention of those with the (on paper) capability to address them. This may be due to fear, half-hearted judgments, a lack of confidence in those capable of addressing the issues, and more. As a Stoic, you are uniquely equipped to bring these issues to attention, resolve them in part, and lead by example.

If you find yourself asking "well, why not someone else? Why me? Why do I have to be the one to do the hard thing?" Reply "why not me? If not me, then someone else must be the one. I have devoted myself to doing the right thing in difficult situations, rising above material difficulties, thinking and doing nothing that does improve myself as a social and rational being. I am the one best suited to bringing attention to this issue and participate actively in its resolution. Should I fail, or even if I am in some way punished, I have ensured that I understand that I have done nothing to betray the thing most precious to me - my virtue."

- 3/29/16

Whenever evaluating whether or not you should do something, try hard to identify if you are hesitating because it is difficult, and not necessarily because you are unsure if it is the right thing to do. If you decide to avoid doing the right thing because it is difficult, even if the choice is small or will very likely be unnoticed, you have fed the habit. It becomes increasingly difficult to overpower the habit the more that it is fed. In order for you to possess the greatest command over yourself, both you and your desire to be a good person must be carefully and firmly joined together.

Once you have created the habit of acting consistently to do the right thing, persons and circumstances will likewise lose the lion share of their power to (seemingly involuntarily) direct you to do or say one thing or another.

- 4/20/16

Every person's individual actions alters the flow of causes and effects that drive human events. Even the smallest decisions that affect another person has an influence. At the core of these actions are the individual person's judgments about what is good and what is bad. There is no human-driven event that was not initiated by individuals acting upon their judgments.

For example, a person that believes it is better to have more material possessions than friends will behave accordingly, unless convinced that there is an error in that thinking. Understanding the quality and content of one's own judgments is important for personal well-being. Further, this self-understanding is important for the well-being of those that interpret actions of particular persons for guidance - chiefly children.

- 5/5/16

If your day-to-day work is dynamic and difficult, it may help you to reserve time at the beginning of each day to writing out in detail what may make the day difficult, what your judgments are about those things, and if those judgments are appropriate in light of Stoic philosophy. If you conclude your judgments are inappropriate, write to yourself why they are, what judgments should replace them, and for what reasons. Only you truly understand your own judgments fully, affording you the opportunity to make the greatest difference in your day-to-day life. Once you've completed the writing, fold and take it with you, reading it where appropriate and as needed.

- 5/19/16

Whether you are sick or well, tired or well-rested, do not act without the intention to take care of your mind. If you do not continually act with this intention, you run the risk of becoming susceptible to things you've long overcome and things you've yet to experience. When broken down into their component parts, these things lose their force and stop compelling you one way or another. It is through our judgments and the choices that follow that we ultimately determine what power and to what degree other people and things have over us.

As human beings, we are meant to help one another as far as conditions allow. Once we have accomplished this, it becomes an error to assume control over what happens beyond that point. In other words, do your best in each situation, and permit the rest to happen as it will - you cannot do more than your best. Your example can function as a means for others to assess and guide themselves, but do not act or depend on public opinion. Train yourself to act and speak "because it should be done," than for any other reason.

- 5/24/16

It is important to keep in mind that, in themselves, spoken words are noise and air. Noise and air in itself cannot bring you to feel one way or another. Insults and verbal challenges cannot achieve their intended objective unless they achieve that objective through you. This objective can only be fulfilled through your agreement that what is being said to you is damaging in some way.

The intent by the aggressor is to inflict harm through their words and gestures to cause you to react in a particular way. Therefore, if you agree that the exchange is in some way harmful to you, you necessarily and predictably react, granting the control that the aggressor intended. Yet, if you (paraphrasing Epictetus) "Listen like a stone," what could the aggressor possibly do? They are not accustomed to how a Stoic carries themselves. These situations are not only opportunities to practice Stoic resolve, but to provide an example of appropriate behavior in like situations.

- 6/6/16

Be mindful of possible dependence on others opinions. A desire to be seen and heard doing good disrupts your ability to focus on doing good for its own sake. Unlike fears, wayward desires are more difficult to determine and control because they are often more subtle. The desire to be continually seen in good graces is no different. It can come about during efforts that began with appropriate intentions, subverting you to change your behavior depending on those you are near or with. This is problematic as a practicing Stoic because it undermines an overarching task to develop independence of mind.

If you find you have this kind of desire and wish to command it, remind yourself of these things and commit yourself to "starting over," refocusing on the initial appropriate judgments that lead you to start your efforts to begin with. Do this as many times as needed.

– 6/22/16

Query:

Good morning. As a novice to Stoicism, I would greatly appreciate hearing from the members of the group regarding their approach on how to practice it, on a daily basis. Thank you all for your advice.

Response:

Every day I read a half hour of Stoic texts, in no particular order. I try to reflect on what i've read throughout the day, applying it to relevant situations. Occasionally I will print and carry Stoic quotes with me, reading them during free moments of the day, or after experiencing something difficult. If i'm troubled by something, I try to discover why by writing down my concerns, then writing Stoic responses (why it is happening, what can be done about it, and what my duty is in relation to it).

A helpful practice is choosing Stoic quotes that particularly resonate with you, mentally reciting them to yourself throughout the day, and seeing what situations they apply to.

– 7/7/16

Stoicism is very effective in helping you confront difficulties, but it is equally helpful in helping you learn to appreciate everyday things. Many things that are often daily taken for granted can be seen differently, fostering new appreciation for the present. Consider that there was a time in which you did not have the things you currently enjoy or use daily. Contemplate how differently you would perceive the world if it happened that you did not have the capability to see, hear, smell, grasp, or more. There was a time in which nothing was considered in your possession - at birth.

All things that you have received (and will receive) have fallen to you from one or another source. For the time that you have them, approach them as a Stoic would - understanding your role and duties in relation to them, and where and how they fit into the generative process that makes up Nature. You are both a guest and participant in this world. It follows that it is your responsibility to handle each thing you receive in life with care and humility.

- 7/21/16

Query (#1):

I'm essentially struggling with a neighbour who is a bully and likes intimidating women! He's being very unpleasant. I'm trying to forgive and be 'stoic' about it, as he's obviously insecure but it's proving difficult!! He left a nasty note on my vehicle last night! I can't prove it's him but I know it's him :-(

Response (#1):

Inwardly approaching the situation this way may help:

For a limited time, you are paired with a particular sort of being; one that is not rare, that acts on poorly founded judgments resulting in angry, exploitative, manipulative, impulsive, and/or greedy behaviors. The nature of this kind of person is exceptionally prone to turning on others the moment it suits him and without hesitation. He believes (evidenced by his choices) that intimidating others is of greater value to his self-worth than honor, self-respect, and friendship.

The composition of his judgments create obstacles for him to properly assess what he has done and is doing, and to communicate meaningfully with himself. In addition, the circumstances of his birth, family, and life history may have created obstacles of their own, which he may lack the self-training to overcome. The end result is what you necessarily see: A person that desires to make others uncomfortable to maintain a crafted appearance to himself that he is a person of greater value. Due to his behavior, others may be treating him (and have treated him) as an anomaly in what may otherwise be a peaceful place. Perhaps he is aware of this to a limited degree. There could be some evidence of this awareness in his behavior, as in his choices he moves and speaks with an assumed impunity.

He does not understand the true differences between right and wrong. His aims are continually shifting, his emotions are inconsistent and raw, and he is at the complete mercy of impulsive and self-compromising desires and fears. The only expectation you can have in relation to him is of your own appropriate conduct, your strict attention to self-examination in your dealings with him, and using your experiences with him as material for your practice.

Not by blood, but by Nature, this person is your brother, friend, and ally. He may not know it, but you know it, and so your focus should be acting appropriately around and toward him when circumstances call for it. The words he speaks and writes are sound, air, ink, and paper, and do not carry the weight he intends unless you agree that they do. If his behaviors become more severe and frequent, contact the appropriate authorities and discuss it with them.

Query (#2):

I have tried to approach him before and talk, like sensible adults, but he just became horribly abusive and I could barely get my words out!! I especially needed reminding of your last paragraph: "The words he speaks and writes are sound, air, ink, and paper, and do not carry the weight he intends unless you agree that they do". I am already miles away from the wishful thoughts of wanting to run my keys down his car paintwork, which of course I never would have done - but was for a time a pleasant thought and was this thought that I knew to be unhealthy. I am letting it go and will focus on having empathy for his failings..... Thank you again :-)

Response (#2):

You're welcome. In the moment, it will be very hard to recall and put it into practice, but you will gain the most valuable experience in applying Stoic principles when "in the thick of it." The Stoics

oftened likened these kind of situations as being the "contest" or "competition" that you've been waiting for - to assess and build on your strengths as a practicing Stoic. Feel free to update the group on how the situation develops, your approaches to it, and what you've discovered and found effective.

Query (#3):

So far I have written a note (not necessarily to be given to him) as to the reasons I now forgive him for his actions but this is based on him not knowing any better way to behave and not having any moral boundaries... I'm not sure how else to forgive him without passing judgement on his own failings in character? I do feel much better though as the feeling of retaliation is gone and I just feel sorry for him...

Response (#3):

The best chance that he has to changing the judgments that leads him to act the way he does is to be convinced by example that there is a meaningful alternative. In other words, be a role model for him, reminding yourself continually that he is your "friend and brother," to pace yourself through your interactions with him.

Your forgiving him for his missteps isn't inappropriate. It is acknowledging that, for reasons truly known only to him, he has developed a set of beliefs that prompts him to behave as he does. If he were convinced that to turn against others unnecessarily were harmful to him as a social and rational animal, he would act differently. Accomplishing this would require him to develop this judgment, confronting the series of judgments long-since in place - something only he can ultimately do.

Being a role model around him is what I believe to be the best solution - speaking courteously and with strict attention to the truth, saying only what needs to be said in the given moment. The only other alternatives are to try to convince him through clear philosophical principle that he is in fact causing harm to himself by being abrasive (something that is very difficult) or to avoid interactions with him until such a time that you feel you are ready to approach interactions with him or around him without compromising your grasp of your practice.

- 7/23/16

A person invests the most effort in what they believe is in their best interests, drawn from currently held judgments of what things are good or evil. One that places great value in their appearance will necessarily go to great pains to draw others attention, evaluate and compare their features against others, and continuously invest in products they believe will enhance their beauty.

The person that believes wealth is the greatest good will buy many differently sized and stylized objects, frequently presenting these things to themselves and others, seeking always to practice new or more effective ways to gain property.

A being that aims to be well-known will pursue avenues by which their name might spread the most quickly, rising and falling in their perception of themselves as their peers opinions shift, interpreting and testing different behaviors to maintain their popularity and reach into new inner circles.

For the Stoic, virtue is the only true good, and vice is the only true evil. All else is indifferent, but may be selected as preferred or non-preferred. This valuation is determined by careful evaluation of what helps and harms the constitution of a human being. A human being is a rational and social animal. Wealth (for the physical comforts it brings), fame, and beauty are beneficial to humans merely as animals, but we are not merely animals.

The rational and social elements of human beings are our chief qualities, and our greatest attention should be paid to studying and making the most of them daily. A Stoic believes it is in their best interests to cultivate virtue and reign in their vices, seeking to assist the well-functioning of the world by guiding and helping others, practicing converting difficulties into boons, and tasking themselves to take little for granted.

- 8/3/16

For some, the main appeal of Stoicism lies in the idea of becoming more resistant to fear and pain. Learning how and when to overcome desire is often less immediately attractive, yet it is equally important. This is because there is little difference between giving control of your mind to someone or something in the hope you will experience or avoid an event. Learning to overcome unwanted

desires begins with courses of action and thought that seem basic but are more difficult than they first appear. It is not likely that you will learn to reign in complex, unwanted desires until you have learned to consistently overcome basic ones.

The desire for pleasant food and bodily comfort is the most common, basic, and deceptively difficult to overcome. Overcoming the desire for pleasant food and bodily comfort provides building blocks to reign in more complex desires, such as owning a very large home or being very well known. This is due to the frequency by which we act and have acted in reference to our bodies in our daily lives. The more often you deliberately act upon a Stoic principle, the more ingrained it becomes, and the greater your strength and control in applying it to other areas of your life.

It all begins with simple, conscious changes in how you act upon your preferences. If you go to the grocery store, and you've written ice cream on your list, make a point of purposely choosing something less sweet or in a smaller amount than you intended. If you are at a restaurant, instead of ordering the chicken parmesan you set out to get, intentionally order an alternative, such as a salad. If it is a little cold outside, choose instead to wear a long-sleeved shirt in place of a jacket.

The purpose of doing these things is ingraining the habit of acting upon deliberate choice. The knowledge that you have acted upon deliberate choices instead of (seemingly) automatic reactions on the original desires becomes a source of reinforcement. This knowledge is an important foundation for the will to eat and exercise with the sole intention of taking care of your body and not for show, speaking genuinely with others without pressure to impress, and learning to make best use of what is available for the time its available in the workplace, without the desire to need to be seen doing so.

– 8/13/16

There may be times where everyday responsibilities seem to be draining. On awareness of this lack of daily enthusiasm, you may feel troubled. That troubled feeling may seem to complicate your ability to "give your all" to endeavors that you feel are important to you, such as an interview for a prospective new job, going above and beyond in your work, maintaining a difficult nutrition and exercise regimen, or others. In an effort to avoid these feelings, a search for distractions may begin, nurturing a preference for distractions above your duties. If you permit this search, a cycle takes

hold that becomes harder to control over time. Rest and recreation is important (even Cato the Younger took time for himself), but not in excess and at the dependence of your peace of mind.

Your duties are discernible by examining your roles. For example, roles as a mother, police officer, teacher, roommate, or volunteer. All of your roles and duties serve as material for you to improve your practice as a Stoic. By carrying out your roles with intentions, actions, thoughts, and speech molded with Stoic principles, the everyday drain recedes and daily enthusiasm renews.

To do this, deliberately frame your thoughts about your duties in terms like these: "I'd prefer not to do this because it is difficult and time-extensive, but by doing this, I am fulfilling my role as a "x" to the best of my ability. I am providing a good example to others, and helping myself develop patience, courage, humility, and more. After all of this, I will let the rest happen as it will, because I necessarily cannot do more than what is in my power. I will overcome laziness, discomfort, and self-doubt through my decisions. As a Stoic, I will prove to myself that I am my own master, and not my body."

- 8/17/16

Practicing Stoicism to the fullest, and therefore drawing the most meaning and use from it, requires consistent, deliberate effort. When a person wants to learn a trade or profession, they typically must start from the beginning. They need to practice dozens, hundreds, sometimes thousands of times on certain things over many hours before it becomes second nature to them - even then, they are aware they sometimes need to return to and improve the basics of their crafts. The same principle applies to Stoicism. The difference is that you aren't working with wood, music, bodies, or others - the material is your mind and how it works; the way it interprets events and forms judgments.

The Stoic craft, because of its effects, affects every other role in life. It invests new, different meaning into individual actions through mental tools and skills that have been hidden all along. Yet to access these benefits, it is not enough to claim to yourself that Stoic principles "make sense," while doing things that run counter to them. You cannot believe the Stoic idea that doing your best with what you have for the time you have it is enough, while becoming envious, jealous, or angry that someone else was recognized in place of you at work. Or, holding the belief that a persons title, wealth, fame, or authority is not in any way indicative of their true value as a human being, and falsifying what you say in order to impress "powerful" individuals.

Each individual, exercised choice can either harm or help your progress as a practicing Stoic, down to the smallest public or private action.

– 8/25/16

It is impossible that an event will turn out any other way than how it does, when the circumstances surrounding it are taken into account. These circumstances may or may not be immediately apparent. Anger or sadness towards events is drawn in some part from a common belief that there could have been an alternative state of affairs, given the conditions. New conditions are introduced as people actively participate in the world.

For example, if a person is sick, the event of going to the doctor and the event of receiving treatment become part of the chain of causes that influence whether or not the person recovers. Whether the person recovers is influenced by often less obvious events that follow, such as the person's body's physical reaction to the treatment, and the person's consistency in following the treatment regimen as directed.

Stoicism does not encourage fatalism, because it acknowledges that events are "co-fated." Our actions become part of the series of causes that influence the outcome of each event, and the events that follow in kind. It is one reason that a Stoic does their best with what they have for the time that it is available, and allows the rest to happen as it will.

– 9/7/16

Consider that when you first wake up, there are a few moments when your concerns are not present in your mind. It is only when you recall the concerns that your feelings about them come back. The things concerning you are still present in some form in the world, yet you are affected only when you remember them. Likewise, there are things that happen every day that are likely to concern you, yet you are unaffected unless you become aware of them. The things that greatly concern other people may not cause little if any concern in you. Finally, there are things that may

not concern you at all, yet cause you concern later, even if the conditions surrounding the things themselves have not changed much.

When something concerns you, the conditions have not changed with the exception of one, new addition: your judgment. Your judgments are responsible for the way and severity that you are affected by new, and old events. You can train how your judgments form, are held, and change. The end goal of this training is to "live in accordance with nature," i.e., consistently using our reasoning ability to understand the patterns and mechanics of the universe, and our role(s) as a human being in relation to them. The self-training must start small, with judgments concerning very common concerns.

A good example is from the Stoic Epictetus, who recommends training by thinking of the event of one's favorite cup breaking. Paraphrasing: "When someone's favorite cup breaks, and they're very upset, we're ready to say "things like that happen." If our favorite cup breaks, we should remember to view the event in the same way." By recognizing that "fragile things are likely to break if dropped," "the function of the cup is to hold {fluid} and other cups are available," and "there was a time when I did not have this cup and I did alright without it," the strong, initial, negative feeling from the impression and judgment that "my favorite cup broke and this is bad" is heavily reduced.

- 9/18/16

As a Stoic, you must ensure that each of your choices are intended to improve your practice as their foremost goal, with any material gains or losses being ultimately incidental. If you choose not to do something because of a judgment that it will not gain you money or popularity, even if the action is appropriate as a Stoic, understand that you are making a choice that holds externals to be more important than the progress you may have made otherwise.

If you follow this train of choice often, you grow a habit of treating externals preferentially, even if you are convinced that practicing Stoicism is the only true means to finding enduring peace and happiness. It is akin to treating Stoic philosophy like a supplement, which strips it of its lasting impact and prevents you from applying it fully, meaningfully.

Behaving with this in mind is simple enough when the risks and rewards are arguably small. It takes on new meaning when the externals involved include persons that have the authority to help or harm your conventional efforts. If you are unprepared due to a lack or falling out of practice, you will find yourself manipulating your words and actions in an attempt to please these persons; so that they may grant you more externals, or withhold taking externals from you. In other words, you

subjugate yourselves to them in the hopes to gain or prevent something through them for as long as the things in question continue to hold relevance for you.

If you are not satisfied thinking this way, choose a different approach. As mentioned, each of your choices should ultimately refer to your progress as a practicing Stoic. Externals then are materials for your "true work" - their absence does not indicate a failure, and their presence does not suggest success. They (wealth, power, fame) will come and go like a tide, and it is not necessary for you to rise and fall with them when you have the mental tools to interpret them differently, and as they are.

Edit, continued: The role of the Stoic is to "Live in accordance with Nature;" to cultivate virtue and reign in vice within oneself - virtues being the characteristics that benefit and develop a human being as a social, rational animal, and vices being characteristics that harm this nature. In addition to using external events and things as means to practice virtue and control our vice (the rational end of our nature), we should attempt to help others through them, if and when opportunity allows (the social end of our nature). Despite appearances, success or failure is not gauged by the end result of attempts to assist others - success depends entirely on the composition and commitment of the choice to help.

Money, power, and fame are materials for the Stoic to aid others. The Stoic understands that these things only hold temporary relevance, because they are held to be relevant by others, and opinions often shift as easily as they are granted. For the time they are held to be relevant, then, the Stoic employs them to help those that cannot easily help themselves, while encouraging others to do the same through example.

- 9/25/16

If it seems like something very favorable is about to happen, do not lose control of your imagination. What you have in your mind in that moment is only the appearance of a seemingly good thing. Be careful not to admit the appearance into yourself without properly determining why it appears to be a good thing. Once you believe that the appearance is true, all emotions associated with the imagination will result, as well as fresh imaginations built on top of the belief. If you believe that the appearance is good - in any part - because of the potential authority, fame, or money it suggests you'll receive, you create an unnecessary vulnerability within yourself.

If something seems to get between you and the way you imagine things will turn out, you will variously become anxious, angry, or sad at what you believe is responsible. Given the nature of the world we live in, in which all external things are acting on one another in a series of causes, it is

unavoidable that things will not always go our way. By placing our hopes in external gains, we are in fact subjecting ourselves to any number of influences that may act on those things.

For this reason, forbid yourself from believing that the external gains (wealth, notoriety, power) from a seemingly favorable event are goods. Deliberately refer to them within yourself as means to test your abilities as a practicing Stoic. "These things are not the goods that they appear to be - they exist as means for me to gauge and refine my Virtue, while simultaneously helping others. Even if things do not turn out the way I hope, I will use the experience to my benefit all the same - the external gains were not mine just because I aimed for them. It is my goal to approach each and every event as befits a Stoic, and either circumstance provides that training."

- 10/3/16

There will be events that task you deeply. On their surface, they may lead to something very preferable or disconcerting. It is critical that you try as hard as you can to push out of your mind any external gains or losses, and concentrate purely on how the event relates to you as a practicing Stoic.

Common circumstances afford many opportunities to practice Stoic philosophy, quickly strengthening our abilities in relation to them due to happening often and generally not being severe. When an upcoming event seems severe because of potential radical changes in reputation, living conditions, physical health, wealth, or authority, it is in facing that upcoming moment that you have the greatest opportunity to determine if you truly believe what you claim to believe.

As befits your role as a Stoic, you will do all that you can to conventionally prepare for the upcoming event, so that you have a basic understanding of all the tools available to be applied.

In the time remaining, remove yourself from all distractions as far as possible, leaving only the kind of space and conditions in which you are likely to concentrate. Make an account of all the conventional information, procedures, and tools that are available to you that concern the upcoming event, and study them in depth until the day prior, as time and circumstances reasonably allow.

The morning of, read through your account either aloud or to yourself, and then take time to write how to approach the situation as a Stoic philosopher does. Sit quietly listening to music or in the shower, thinking on your role as a Stoic, viewing the event and its potential gains or losses in light of Stoic philosophy. Alternate between these until the moment comes, and then face it fully.

You will not have many opportunities like these to test yourself, which is what truly makes them valuable.

– 10/10/16

If you devote yourself fully to a pursuit, intending to use the resources gained to improve the quality of life of others and your practice of Stoic philosophy, you have done your part. A line must be consciously drawn between your genuine effort and what will follow. To this point, you will have done your research, having developed an understanding of all tools and information related to the pursuit (as time and circumstances permitted). You will have thought heavily on your intentions with the pursuit, reigning in thoughts that have to do with an increase in reputation, wealth, or authority, while thinking at length on how the pursuit can be used for self-improvement.

It is possible that those in a position to help you further that pursuit will not grant you the opportunity. Only those persons truly know the reasons that they forego giving you the opportunity. Sometimes, there is little to no information provided in this circumstance. During this period of time, the way that you deliberate on what has happened will make the difference whether you become deeply discouraged or see it as a potent, rare test of your progress as a Stoic.

For many, this scenario is heavily demoralizing. Yet it seems so until a closer look is taken at the circumstances and judgments involved. Each individual expends time on many pursuits at once to different degrees, with varying intentions based on various judgments. As a result, some persons will have greater on-paper qualifications (education and/or experience). Others may have spent far greater time practicing speaking persuasively and eloquently. A few may be preferred over you for some pursuits because of time they have invested in establishing relationships.

What have you given your time and attention to? - What advantage have you developed for yourself? In the time you've invested in practicing this philosophy, you will have subsequently gained improvements in mindfulness, resilience, empathy, courage, humility, endurance, and other qualities. Ask yourself, truly, if you would prefer trading these improvements for greater authority, some more money, or being more often recognized. If you find that you don't prefer it, then keep on the path. A day may come where you will be granted the pursuit you sought after. When that day comes, you will show by example what can be done with the position in the hands of someone that believes in doing the right thing above all else, regardless of the circumstances.

– 10/26/16

Early in my college sophomore year, I began practicing Stoicism. I believed I needed a way to test and expand my comprehension of the philosophy. Pursuing a Resident Assistant position was the clearest course at the time. Being an RA would provide me the "training ground" I was looking for - financial and logistic resources to benefit other students, the authority to ensure others safety while leading by example, and an environment in which I was held accountable for every decision.

I did not get the position when I applied to it the first time, despite my best efforts. I didn't immediately know of any other similar opportunity. While I initially felt aimlessness, I held close the idea that the absence of the position did not prevent me from helping others. In the following three months, I received a call that an opening had appeared. The position was offered to me, and I accepted.

From then to my graduation day, I deliberately chose opportunities to train my abilities as a practicing Stoic: "One day, it may happen that a large number of people will come to depend on me. My decisions will directly or indirectly affect the quality of life of these persons. I must prepare myself before that day, - if it comes - so that I will fulfill my new role to the best of my abilities."

In the last two months, I have been applying regularly to Residence Director positions at various colleges. As it was with the RA position, this appears to be the clearest course to improve my grasp of Stoic philosophy. I've been unsuccessful thus far; I understand that success cannot be guaranteed, regardless of the strength of references, performance in interviews, and breadth of undergraduate involvements. Paraphrasing Epictetus, if I am truly serious about "competing," I must be willing to persevere through all the difficulties that normally happens during this process. It may happen that despite my best efforts, I may not secure a position for a great while - perhaps ever.

The Residence Director position is, was, never mine simply because I aimed for it. It is not mine to take, or receive. It depends entirely on factors outside of my control - on others acting on a choice to reach out to me, possibly at a risk of foregoing others with greater education or more experience. Yet nothing prevents me from drawing endurance, patience, and courage from the conventional "failure" of being turned down at any point of the process; something I would do well to keep close in mind, as I had in my sophomore year.

- 11/3/16

(Concerning carrying physical objects as reminders of Stoic concepts):

In my personal experience, much of the difficulty of learning to apply Stoicism appropriately in my daily life was in recalling Stoic concepts in the moments they most highly applied, and recognizing the association in-the-moment. It took more than six months of deliberate practice of recalling then contextualizing Stoic concepts before I developed a habit of it.

In order to remind myself of what I was trying to remember to apply for the day, I kept a Stoic text with me. The function of carrying the book (even in circumstances where I knew I wouldn't attempt to read it) was as a reminder by its presence and weight. I understood that there would come a time where I would feel capable enough of recalling Stoic concepts in applicable moments without this kind of physical reminder. A necklace ... could also meet this function; a physical reminder that is hard to ignore by being worn. Eventually, through practice, it will no longer be needed.

– 12/15/16

(Response to a post on labeling others):

Stoicism holds that human beings are social and rational animals by design by Nature (whether consciously/purposefully, unconsciously/according to balance, as the result of cause-and-effect, or by random/accidental properties coming together).

Its up to the individual, practicing Stoic to recognize that they are one of many persons linked by common possession of the faculty of reason. This extends to personal conduct in conversation, where the individual, practicing Stoic will aim to understand the judgments underlying the mindset of the person(s) they're speaking with. If the practicing Stoic maintains a belief about something, it is with the self-expectation that they make themselves aware of the implications of it, and are prepared to discuss their position appropriately - conscious of the line between constructive and unconstructive discourse. ...

– 12/15/16

(Regarding the Stoic approach to regret.)

In short, the Stoics often refer to one's past experiences (or of other persons), preferable or not, as opportunities to learn. The difficulty of really approaching past events this way rises with their severity, but the goal is to eventually view all past events this way. The circumstances and their end results of non-preferred past events are unalterable, so wishing "one can go back" or "have done something different," is unhelpful, distracting, and reinforces the inaccurate judgments underlying the sentiments that result in distress.

– 12/17/16

(Concerning the orthodox Stoic position on the soul and death.)

In short, the orthodox Stoic position is that Nature (the universe, and all the patterns, mechanics, and material that comprise it) is sentient, self-directing, and rationally-ordered. The Stoics were materialists at the same time, believing that all things in the universe consists of matter at various "tensions," including the human soul. If this is the case, then Nature changes the soul into another form after death, according to universal need. As noone survives death (as far as we're capable of knowing, given our sensory abilities), it isn't knowable whether this repurposing includes a consciousness, or at least of the kind we were accustomed to in life.

In my belief, this is the thought-process behind Epictetus' and Marcus Aurelius' statements that (paraphrasing) concerning ourselves with death is purposeless given our mortal condition, and because it represents no evil due to being an inevitable natural process; too, that it may or may not include a consciousness that changes with the loss of our bodies. ...

- 1/3/17

Stoics perform well in uncertain situations through steady inner dialogue; close attention is paid to:

- 1) reminding oneself which characteristics are best suited to meeting the situation at hand,
- 2) the individual pieces making up the situation - that they are transitory, and when considered separately are of no great terror to you,
- 3) the premise that practicing Stoicism uniquely suits you to challenging circumstances,
- 4) the fact that there will be no second chance to approach the situation as one aiming to overcome fears and train willpower,
- 5) an awareness that confronting the situation in a philosophically consistent and constructive way will remain with you as a genuinely good thing, to be reflected on as often as you incline,
- 6) historical examples of approaches taken to similar situations from past Stoics (or persons whose actions had Stoic connotations).

- 12/19/16

Erroneous judgments form the basis of greed, anger, vengeance, deception, coercion, exploitation, humiliation, jealousy, envy, selfishness - among other sentiments.

The moment-to-moment, careful examination of our judgments is paramount to all of our endeavors as practicing Stoics. Without accurately identifying our judgments, and then explicitly spelling them out to ourselves, our progress in understanding and applying Stoic philosophy will be disjointed. We cannot know where our weaknesses are, much less how to improve them, if we're idle or careless with self-observation. We should work to be in such a state to promptly name unsound judgments to ourselves, as if we were simply "pointing" at them. Once we've accomplished this, we can then "respond" to them, through self-dialogue.

An example of a judgment: "I believe that time is a good thing, because with more of it, I can do more things that seem pleasant."

The response: "Time does not belong to you - it belongs to noone. Both good and bad persons can have a lot of free time; you should be concerned with what you will do with it if it appears. By believing time to be a good thing, you are giving unnecessary influence over yourself to the persons or events that can affect it. Learning from the tasks at hand should be your concern; free time is preferable, and you should aim for a balance between work and relaxation, but if the circumstances don't yet enable it, it serves as more practice for self-improvement."

- 12/31/16

Since I began practicing Stoicism in earnest, I have been searching for opportunities to improve and test my understanding of the philosophy. I pursued positions for the characteristics I could build upon, to guide others through example, and to improve the quality of life of others as far as I was able. If I had even the slightest inkling that I was pursuing positions for any other reason, such as praise, notoriety, authority, or material gain, I would cease my efforts entirely until I could pinpoint and address the judgments underlying them - often by reading relevant passages from Stoic authors, or through stern, purposeful written self-reminders.

I believe that I had succeeded in all this, including at the height of what I considered my greatest personal test - attempting to prevent the falling of programs into moratorium under questionable premises at my university. I devoted the full extent of my personal resources to this effort, even in the understanding that my chances of success were negligible. My intention was both the ignition and the aim. I met with administrators, faculty, and staff, to gather information and discuss my thought process - with the explicit self-imposed condition that I must speak to them first as one human being to another, internally divesting any value from their reputation or position in relation

to mine. When all was said and done, I happened to have succeeded - the program I had preferred the most strongly to save was spared.

Today, I contend with faulty judgments that have frustrated my ability to reclaim that frame of mind. For example, I am under the impression that not being in a managerial position is indicative of something evil, because I had spent the majority of the last several years preparing myself for properly handling crisis situations, leading team-members by example, and making the most of minimal resources. In truth, certain occupations were never mine to own simply because I aimed specifically for them. This was something I understood as second nature in the past, and it is only for a lax in practice in this area that I find myself feeling as I do now.

The practice of Stoicism is a profession. Like a profession, it is possible to take the basics for granted. There is no shame in returning to the basics if it means the rest of the craft does not suffer. There is only shame in persisting, despite an awareness of this.

- 1/9/17

(Response to a suggestion to adopt a Syncretic (eclectic) approach to supplement Stoic progress.)

It's true that Zeno combined elements of several philosophies to form the basis for Stoicism. On the surface, I don't believe adopting teachings that are consistent with Stoic premises to be harmful, given that a great deal of material on the Stoic system has been lost, and said teachings may provide additional clarity where none or little may be. That said, I would be very cautious with adopting an eclectic approach before attempting to learn and apply as much as one is able of Stoic philosophy - answers may already be there.

Personally, in the past, i've made use of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian philosophy. Although I would argue that they have helped me during various times to various degrees, the methods to make use of those teachings vary with the approach intended to be taken. I believe that attempting to adopt differing, simultaneous methodologies at once comes at a risk of understanding one or the other philosophies more shallowly. In short, I personally believe that attempting to apply and restore the Stoic system is a higher priority than attempting to add more to it.

- 1/16/17

The decision to begin practicing Stoicism is not a light one. Before taking up Stoic philosophy, you must be willing to potentially challenge long-standing perspectives, opinions, and beliefs. You will no longer be able to speak or behave as you once did, as your full attention will be redirected to understanding and reorienting your motivations. You will need to commit firmly to the care of your mind, and the development of your self-discipline.

A great deal of your initial effort will be invested in trying to navigate Stoic text; thankfully, there are modern resources that will help you do this. You will need to practice with the very basics for a very long time, such as practicing abstaining from eating on the basis of taste (such as cake or ice cream), withholding speaking if you would otherwise return someones insult or say something crude to draw laughter, and reminding yourself in-the-moment that accidents happen should something of yours break. Seek out passages and precedents in Stoic texts for situations that are concerning you, and try to recall them whenever you feel worn down. Do not be harsh with yourself if you happen to stumble many times; pick yourself back up calmly and deliberately, and ask yourself to begin again. The beginning of Stoicism is largely the careful replacement or adjustments of years of entrenched habits.

- 1/30/17

Desire for external things is very difficult to contend with. In the case of fear, you are driven from something. In the case of desire, you are subverted. It is not always clear that you are subverted. In the case that you become aware that you are, you owe it to yourself not to ignore it. You must find the judgments at the root of the desires and scrutinize them - refusing to permit them to keep their sway over you. The distinction of being an "indifferent" cannot be separated from the external things you prefer to keep or gain. As this distinction blurs or falls from your mind, you will no longer be able to let go of those things when the moment comes that they must be lost - and they must one day be lost.

If you find that you have fallen into a state of mind where you are no longer able to receive something without conceit or release it without regret, you have an opportunity to return to form. Yet you can only meet this opportunity if you approach it with the same dutifulness, willingness to learn, and aim for self-discipline you had when you first developed the state of mind. The state of

mind of being able to appreciate each thing for the time it is present, while taking care not to forget the nature of the respective thing, does not come quickly or easily. It does not come at a call when it is most needed - it depends on many multiples of decisions which a specific intent to see through to the material foundation of each thing within each circumstance, depict how each thing fits into the framework of the workings of the world, and what your role is within the world and in relation to other things, persons, and events.

- 2/9/17

There was a time (about three years ago) in which I was prepared to make philosophically-consistent choices without hesitation or consideration for material rewards or sacrifices. I abandoned any ascribed value to external things, such as my reputation, personal wealth, or authority assigned to me. I was in full command of the direction of my life, as I pursued opportunities strictly on the basis that they would provide me opportunities for self-improvement, and my ability to help others through force of example.

I succeeded in my goals because I firmly cast off the idea that self-actualization was bound to the amount of funds in my bank account, or the respect or admiration of many people. In addition, it was because I was mindful of my limits. While I continually sought to expand them, I did so carefully, forbidding myself to take on too many roles at once (circumstances permitting). I understood that I would be of little benefit to anyone, far less myself, if I voluntarily put myself in a position where I could not properly withstand the brunt of what was in front of me.

I was cautious not to lose sight of the premise that there were things in life yet far stronger than my ability in contending with them - time spent too highly distracted or invested was time I could spend making certain that my intentions were appropriate, my judgments well-examined, my choices carefully committed, and to be accepting of the result. I have recently been feeling as though my past self has a great deal to teach me, and I believe the sentiment is accurate. The tools to pick myself up where I "left off" have not gone anywhere - they're still there, ready to be used. I believe it is the case for anyone here, and elsewhere.

- 2/17/17

For all practicing Stoics, there may come a time where one's grasp of the core concepts may remain strong, but one's tenacity in continually applying them seems to be weakening. Whether due to negligence, or in experiencing new, varied, or many non-preferred events without an opportunity to square each one away, the effects are similar. It may result in a sentiment that one is "not cut out" to be a Stoic, one is "undeserving" of referring to oneself as a Stoic, or one is unable to meaningfully reassert the mindset that has resulted in all the progress thus far.

Life and its many events may seem relentless and overwhelming at this time, particularly so if one makes the mistake of agreeing that there is substance to the sentiments mentioned before. Inherent in these sentiments is the threat of belief that Virtue is not the only good, and Vice is not the only evil. While it is possible for one to allow Stoic habits to weaken when navigating the world, it is not possible to backtrack from proofs in one's life that Stoic claims are accurate and practicable. This means that as one allows their practice to falter, it creates a sense of deep strain - of knowingly committing to choices based upon erroneous judgments.

If you find yourself in such a state, there are a couple of options. The first: separating yourself from the non-preferred events as far and as often as possible, yet remaining near enough to follow through with each of your duties with respect to them. Take time to refocus your efforts on rebuilding the core of thought processes that once lead your every action - there is no shame in this, just as there is no shame in taking the first steps to treating an illness or wound. Prioritize the care of your mind, with the understanding that you will not be of use to yourself, much less anyone, until you've started "healing."

The second: Allowing yourself to give weight to the sentiments bearing down on you. Effectively, this is a choice to abandon Stoic principles. For practicing Stoics that have had numerous experiences where Stoic philosophy has had a meaningful influence in their lives, this will be a very difficult decision - perhaps more difficult than the initial choice to begin practicing Stoicism to begin with. I believe this would be far more harmful than helpful.

The Stoics held that you have within you the resources to have full command of yourself, and can reclaim this command at any time you commit to doing so. These resources exist regardless of the circumstances.

- 2/23/17

Daily, there will be those aiming to manipulate you or others, inconveniences, things not going as planned, and potentially very difficult events. In light of this, it is easy to turn to distractions for respite - to games, drinking, television, and the like. So days are spent distracting oneself from thoughts of upcoming difficulties, and difficulties are withstood as long as there is some assurance some distraction will soon be available. It is a cycle that does not stop unless a stop is voluntarily imposed on it.

Maintaining progress as a practicing Stoic depends on an active willingness to implement Stoic philosophy into moment-to-moment decision-making, which includes firmly addressing one's own missteps. Even one choice made to suspend applying Stoicism has ramifications, though they may not be immediately clear. Actions taken for the sake of something other than the cultivation of virtues and reigning in vices cannot be taken back - they impede self-development until addressed through careful self-examination.

Making progress as a Stoic depends on the commitment of choices that are consciously made for no other reason than a desire to perform virtuous actions - these choices will be absent of any external tethers; they will not depend on others being there to witness it, or on material property being gained or lost; they will need no other person to validate them. This state of mind is achievable, but not without great personal effort. The alternative is necessarily for things to remain as they are.

- 3/12/17

The Stoics referred to hardships as tests of our grasp of Stoic philosophy. They suggest further that these tests may be either purposefully introduced by Nature as a part of its self-arranged order, or if Nature is unconscious, as the result of a series of causes. They acknowledge that some hardships will seem overwhelming; beyond one's current skills in applying Stoicism. This has been likened to being paired with a particularly strong wrestling opponent, as sometimes happens.

We have the capability to endure and overcome these hardships and help others do the same, but these capabilities are not automatic responses. Personal effort, deliberate decision-making in the face of preferences or things we don't prefer, and a willingness to reign in the view that hardships are arbitrary punishments; these are all necessary factors in withstanding, recovering from, and turning difficulties into something useful.

Call to your own attention the fact that these hardships are transitory, and will cease one day; either as the result of efforts, their own fixed terms, or at the end of life. Everything that we possess, including our bodies, is effectively on loan to us. As something on loan, we have a responsibility in

our role as a borrower to care for the things in our care, but we must always keep in mind the difference between responsibility and direct ownership. For example, if one or more hardships have to do with the care of your body, you can help yourself achieve the correct perspective by saying "It is my duty to take care of this body, and to take reasonable efforts to help it, for as long as it is under my care." The same applies to your home, to your car, to your savings, and others.

As difficulties do not depend on the exercise of choice, they are not the evils they may appear at first to be. Each depends on forces outside the will, and as only Virtue and Vice lie within the will, they cannot affect us anymore than they're permitted. This will become clearer to us the more time and effort we invest in setting ourselves aside to examine our related judgments. If we give up any ground to the impression that there exists a real evil in these difficulties, then functional resistance is hamstrung before it begins.

"What has once changed will never again exist in the infinity of time. Be content to pass through this brief time in an orderly way. What matters and opportunities for action are you avoiding? For what else are these things than to exercise the reason when it views and examines the nature of what happens. Persevere until you have made these things your own as the fire makes flame and brightness out of everything that is thrown to it."

- Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations*, Book X, 31.

"It is they who have bidden me to keep steadfast watch, as on a sentry post, to forestall Fortune's every sally or attack in force long before it occurs. Her assault is formidable only when it comes as a surprise; it is sustained with ease if one is always on the alert for it. Even an enemy onset confounds only those it takes unexpectedly; those who are prepared for war before it strikes, ready marshaled and armed, can easily parry the initial charge, which is the most violent."

- Seneca, *the Consolation of Helvia*, 5.

- 3/18/17

Some of our day-to-day circumstances, such as those at a job, will have lengthy periods that will be taxing without a clear end. In order to derive benefit from the difficulty of these kinds of situation, you must be on top of your mind moment-to-moment. Fulfilling your undertaken roles in the situation to the best of your ability is your highest priority, as it is imperative to growth as a practicing Stoic. You should not think of doing your best in terms of who may notice, or whether your work will be appreciated, or what you might gain from it (such as tips).

You should instead be thinking of how your actions may improve the quality of life of those that will be directly and indirectly impacted by your performance - of leading by example by enduring, unceasing dedication to actions that are appropriate to a social and rational being. The materials of the situation, which include all inconveniences, are suited to this purpose. It is during the most difficult times that you have the greatest opportunity to assess and expand your limits as a Stoic. If you can persevere to the end of each taxing situation, remaining consistent with your philosophy, and practicing self-correction as you determine errors in your reasoning, rest assured you are making progress.

- 3/25/17

Stoicism can be studied for a long time; the surviving texts can be memorized, and it may seem clear to us where the material may or should be applied. We may feel comfortable discussing Stoic philosophy at length with others. Yet the key component in whether we advance in our practice lies in our choice to apply the philosophy during the times we know we should, cognizant of our true motivation, willfully following through with the choice to correct errors in our thinking, and accepting of the external results (even if uncomfortable, or not preferable). We must do this at every opportunity that presents itself. Failure to do this is effectively a voluntary step back - a fresh misstep to be recovered from, and a reinforcement of the habit of behavior that lead to the misstep.

- 4/7/17

Focus intently on doing the right thing in each given situation, as far as you're able to discern. Aim to speak to each person as one human being to another; do not allow any abrasiveness or contention they may have to do anything other than fall on your ears. Work to make yourself an example to others, and to model yourself after the examples of the Stoics (and like others), whether or not there are those that will witness what you do and say towards this end. Only by your will alone can it ever be the case that you fail utterly, and don't attempt a recovery. We are aiming to be able to endure the harshest aspects of life while turning them to our benefit, just as we aim to be able to appreciate even the most common and frequent events in life taken for granted - e.g. the heat of the sun, the sound of the wind, the sight of rain, the colors of flowers, and similar things.

- 5/7/17

Our judgments on what we consider good or evil form the basis for our feeling one way or another towards life events. Put another way, our judgments concern what we believe is beneficial or detrimental to us personally. The judgments of many persons hold some external things to be goods, and some external things to be evils. It is commonly the case that conflict comes about as the result of individual disagreement over who should possess something, when individuals mutually hold that something to be good. Another common source of conflict arises when individuals hold a set of circumstances to be good, and works to realize those circumstances, while opposing individuals believe those same circumstances to be evil, and works to suppress those circumstances.

In this way, individually-held judgments on the possession or aversion of external things are the source of all conflicts, public and personal, between organizations, nations, families, friends, and others. The root of our judgments can be examined and changed to control and prevent conflict in ourselves. We are also capable of developing the ability to persuade and encourage others to accomplish the same, provided we have sufficient skill, possess the appropriate intentions, and the person(s) in question is receptive to it. Initially, for many, the aim in changing personally-held judgments will be a heightened resistance to difficult or unpredictable circumstances, a deeper, more pervading sentiment of appreciation, and a greatly increased sense of independence and self-command. The composition of these goals is likely to change as progress is made; trending away from an emphasis on personal behavioral benefits, and trending towards self-actualization.

The Stoics held that the primary goal of life is learning to “live in accordance with Nature,” which is accomplished in tandem with attaining “Eudaimonia,” the state of self-actualization as human beings. For the Stoics, Nature is a namesake for the powers that be – the patterns and mechanics that make up the universe, whether sentient, unconscious, or consisting of a series of causes. To “live in accordance with Nature” is to act upon an understanding of our roles, abilities, and faculties as human beings in relation to one another and to the universe.

- 5/10/17

Be mindful that you're not overwhelmed with the great many sounds and images that abound as part of everyday life. Concentrate on your core purpose in each given moment as closely as you can, mindful all the while to act and speak in a way that helps this purpose along, or at the very least not to say or do anything that will harm it.

There will not be a second chance to approach a situation differently; your choices ultimately reflect the true state and composition of your mind to yourself. In short, do the best that you can to make philosophically consistent decisions (i.e. aim to do the right thing and help others do the same), and let the rest happen as it necessarily will.

- 5/15/17

During my first year in practicing Stoicism, I began thinking and referring to the philosophy as a "web." An improved understanding of one piece of the system tends to lead to an improvement in understanding of the others. Conversely, it can be very difficult to know how to start practicing, as each piece of the system depends on others in varying degrees. There were a number of places that I began with, with what I could pull from the various texts I read.

1. We should be constantly working to view and deliberately refer to other persons as friends, brothers, and sisters; not by blood, but linked by the mutually-shared quality of being social and rational animals. We should even extend this thinking to those who have intended to greatly wrong us, or openly consider us to be enemies. We should ascribe this sentiment from others to an incorrect understanding: "This person does not know that we are meant to work together, but I do."
2. Learning to come to terms with common, everyday losses and the following frustrations by inwardly stating some variation of the following: "There was a time when I did not have these things, and I was alright then." "I will not always have this thing, but it is here with me now." "If I were a third party, would this bother me, or would I try to console a person that this happened to by telling the truth?: This sort of thing happens sometimes. If not to you, then to someone else."
3. Committing to a self-imposed condition that we say and do nothing for the sake of reputation, or otherwise impressing someone. Avoiding being vulgar for the sake of making others laugh, or attempting any action to manipulate or exploit others for personal, external benefits (such as money, or letters of recommendation).

4. Recognizing that all persons do what seems best to them according to their judgments of what they consider to be good or evil; a person will always prioritize and act according to what they believe at the time is ultimately appropriate. Necessarily, if these judgments change, so do the nature of their desires, fears, opinions, and choices.

- 5/23/17

We cannot make progress as practicing Stoics if we keep a finger on our old habits of behavior. If we make any progress at all while doing so, it will likely be heavily reduced and disjointed.

Paraphrasing Epictetus, we will be attempting to pursue two contrasting modes of life: 1) As one acting on the premise(s) that Virtue is the only good, Vice is the only evil, and all else is ultimately indifferent. 2) As one acting on the premise(s) that pleasant/preferable things are good, and painful/inconvenient things are evil. The second mode of life is not compatible with the Stoic framework.

Behaving in a philosophically consistent way throughout the day is very difficult to accomplish without deliberate on-going practice. Part of this is due to an extremely high number of counter-intuitive influences many of us encounter on a day-to-day basis: e.g. non-stop streams of product-pushing media, the ability to order and obtain said products within days, those openly associating money, property, and titles with achievement, and fast, straight-forward, and easy access to numerous distractions at any given moment. Turning our full attention to our philosophical practice is a goal made harder by daily difficult circumstances many of us live with, or have lived with. Yet it remains our goal, and we should be trying moment-to-moment to recenter ourselves towards it if we find we have deviated.

- 6/2/17

If you are in a position where others directly or indirectly depend on you, you will do the most good by trying to ensure your choices are philosophically consistent. As a product of doing this, you will lead by example. Prevent yourself from asking anyone to do anything that you would be unwilling to do yourself. When you speak to another individual, assert yourself to do so "as one human being to another," independent of their title, reputation, or appearance.

If you are in a position where you are required to discipline others, do so with the frame of mind to ultimately help them; an effort that should be reinforced by your daily, genuine example. Consider that each interaction you have with others, preferable or not, can be appropriately thought of as a test, or as material to practice with.

- 6/14/17

Once you've determined a course of action should be taken, after making certain that it is consistent with our goal of improving ourselves through Stoic practice, you must not let any notion of discomfort get in the way - it will ultimately be brief and transitory. As practicing Stoics we are trying to shape ourselves to be able to approach each and every situation in a philosophically consistent way from the outset, through the middle, and beyond the circumstances. We must always keep in mind that all persons do what appears best to them according to their judgments about what is good or evil, and that events are driven by a series of causes acting on causes.

External events, even the very severe and uncomfortable ones, do not tell us that they're evils. Likewise, the very preferable and pleasant ones do not tell us they're goods. These are qualities that we invest in them; an investment that is reinforced whenever we act on the premise that the events are goods or evils to the fullest extent they are represented to be. What is preferable is meant to be appreciated for the time that it is there, but we cannot make the mistake of declaring ownership over its presence or absence - a declaration that gives the impression it can be ours forever.

What is unpleasant and difficult is meant to improve our skills in recognizing it for what it is, and overcoming it. It is not a punishment from outside; it is the result of causes coming together to produce what faces us in that moment, whether the actions of individuals, events, or physical properties. I say this knowing full well that though I've personally experienced some very difficult situations, there are many more extreme versions of situations I've yet to experience myself. It is why I look to the precedents the ancient Stoics set in their reactions to extremely difficult situations; we should emulate their example, and try to shape ourselves accordingly.

- 7/25/17

Commit yourself to doing nothing for show, or for the sake of being well thought of by others. As far as you are able, cast away all fears of discomfort or inconvenience if the choice to complete the task at hand is consistent with the duties set by your role and does not conflict with your greater purpose to improve yourself as a practicing Stoic (i.e. behavior that is beneficial to you as a social and rational animal meant to work with others).

Even if you're given considerable praise from others, including those with higher titles or significant reputations, you must not consider the praise to be a good thing; you should treat the praise as a method of testing your grasp of your duties. On doing the best that you can with what you have for the time that you have it in a philosophically consistent way, the rest should be left to happen as it necessarily will.

- 8/17/17

If you work in a high-paced, high-foot-traffic environment, you must take special care to guard against counter-intuitive influences on your behavior. As practicing Stoics, we must keep continuously in mind that every person does and says what appears best to them according to what they currently judge to be good or evil. We must also keep in mind that we are here to serve as examples of behavior to others as far as we are able to do so genuinely.

The nature of our environment predisposes our work-day to any manner and number of inconveniences and obstacles, and it is unlikely that our day will have a smooth and straightforward flow. There are those that have come before us that have handled this kind of environment either properly or improperly, and it is by our choice of approach that will ultimately determine how we fare. Actively rebuff against any thoughts that would cause you to think of those you come across in your day as anything else than brothers and sisters by Nature - not by blood, but by the common thread of reason - whether or not they may think in those terms.

- 9/6/17

Stoicism proves its usefulness the most clearly under stressful, painful, or exhausting circumstances. For example, when we are in a situation where we can regularly expect very difficult or unpredictable situations day-to-day, we can act on Stoic principles to reliably build resilience. At the

least, Stoicism provides the opportunity to appreciate "the small things" even when deeply struggling. Other times, it enables us to stand and stay upright and at peace when faced with seemingly unending setbacks.

When said circumstances improve however, there comes the risk of assuming that the benefits instilled by Stoic practice will always be there without similar dedication to living by the principles. In other words, there is a renewed risk of taking things for granted when things seem to be evening out or improving. Its perhaps more critical than ever when things seem "better" to not lose sight of Stoic principles. If we lose clarity of mind over the things that happen to us or around us, we are likely to backslide into harmful habits. Worse yet, the awareness of the missteps being made will affect us as Stoics in a particularly significant way, as they were avoidable. We should remind ourselves periodically that "if we care at all about ourselves, we need to keep a steady eye on who we are trying to be, and what the true state of things are around us." There is no other way that we can keep ourselves truly steady.

- 9/20/17

If you are being confronted by someone that is upset, try to tell yourself the moment the confrontation starts that "this is an opportunity to determine what i've learned, and I won't get a second chance to handle this situation correctly." Try to recognize what the person is saying and their body language as sound, air, and motion. In addition, remind yourself that it may be the persons objective to make you upset, or to "win" the confrontation through intimidation. If you manage all this, it is unlikely you will give the control over your mind to the person by becoming equally upset, and you will have more reign over yourself to respond in a conventional, appropriate way.

After the situation ends, you will likely feel all the normal physical symptoms that follow: increased heart rate, paling, mild shaking or trembling. This will happen even if you are very comfortable applying Stoic principles to uncomfortable situations like this. From then on, occasionally remind yourself that nothing and noone can take away the fact that you responded as a Stoic should, and you have every right to feel pleased and happy with that.

- 9/28/17

Regardless of how comfortable we may believe we are in putting one or more Stoic principles into practice, we should never allow ourselves to become complacent. We are not Sages (the Stoic ideal), and must take care not to lose the frame of mind that we are still learning, regardless of how well we may have handled difficult events in the past. Time and circumstances will not wait for us - they won't hesitate if we happen to be caught mentally out of position. What i'm describing isn't a call for unbending adherence, but for a calm, purposeful return to form for those of us that may need it. I have variously succeeded and failed throughout my personal experience as a practicing Stoic, and thinking in these terms has always helped me "upright" and "reorient" myself when needed.

- 10/23/17

As human beings, we should reasonably expect that we will be in the presence of others, or will need to communicate with others on a daily basis. We are not telepaths or fortune tellers, and so we're compelled to make inferences about these encounters. The behaviors we show others are based in part on these inferences, and from what things we believe are good or evil and why. In short, we gather information from our surroundings to form impressions: first looks at what seem to be the state of affairs. If we don't hesitate to question the state of affairs, we then insert our judgments into that account, telling ourselves that "if this is the case, then this is bad," and/or "this part is good." This process takes about a second, occurs constantly, and accounts for our every action, word, and behavior.

Once we become aware of this process, we can try to watch for it. By watching for it, we can prevent ourselves from "jumping to conclusions," thereby developing resistance to being swept away the daily situations that seem to often catch us off guard. In addition, we can direct ourselves to be aware that this same process is happening in others. This is a level of self-instilled self-awareness that is difficult to achieve and maintain, but it is possible to do so. We should only be concerned with what improves us as human beings, and to control for what causes harm to us as social and rational beings. We cannot do that if we're seemingly besieged on a moment-to-moment basis by impressions that someone "gave me a funny look" or "the guy that cut me off probably did it on purpose" for example.

Merely being aware of this process in ourselves and others as it occurs goes a long way towards preventing ourselves from being frequently caught off guard. Additionally, it is fundamental to our acting constructively; in ways that purposefully help us train the characteristics most likely to help

us day-in and day-out. How this works: When confronted with a situation where someone seems to be acting rudely towards us, we have the initial option whether to accept as truth the first impression that “based on their words and actions at this moment, it seems like this person is being rude to me” alongside approving the judgment “someone being rude to me is bad.”

If this impression is allowed by us to run its course without any interference, we will necessarily feel everything the judgment would incline us to feel: irritability, anxiety, and resentment. We can, however, say to ourselves “Give the moment an opportunity to settle. If it is the case that this person is trying to be rude, what does that mean? Is there anything else to rudeness other than sound and air? Taken by themselves, the words they’re using have never been a threat to me before, so why would they seem to now? Is it reasonable to behave in the way they may be wanting me to behave: to be intimidated, or compromised? If this is what the person is trying to make me feel (something only they can ever know), does this kind of person deserve control over my mind? I should show them a better standard of behavior, and I can only do that if I aim to develop patience, compassion, and courage through my chosen response.

- 10/6/17

Regardless of how comfortable we may believe we are in putting one or more Stoic principles into practice, we should never allow ourselves to become complacent. We are not Sages (the Stoic ideal), and must take care not to lose the frame of mind that we are still learning, regardless of how well we may have handled difficult events in the past. Time and circumstances will not wait for us - they won't hesitate if we happen to be caught mentally out of position. What i'm describing isn't a call for unbending adherence, but for a calm, purposeful return to form for those of us that may need it. I have variously succeeded and failed throughout my personal experience as a practicing Stoic, and thinking in these terms has always helped me "upright" and "reorient" myself when needed.

- 10/23/17

"Do you think the Stoics themselves didn't struggle the same way as they were learning? What you've read is from those that - at the time of writing - had years of practice, and were intent on dedicating the remainder of their lives to it.

You are not a Sage. You are a student, so you will misstep; only make certain that you do not do so through negligence by giving in to your own discord. This path is yours to choose, but you cannot travel it properly while still holding onto the habits and thought processes that have so often and readily harmed you."

A fragment from past writings.

- 10/30/17

Prior to any expected sustained difficult period, take into consideration the many severe difficulties the ancient Stoics faced, or likely faced. We must try to think as they did before, during, and after each difficult period. They would have likely needed to navigate their own self-doubts - of their competence with the philosophy, and their abilities to hold themselves to it when circumstances became the most pressing. Just as we do.

In all of our training, we are preparing for just these kinds of strenuous circumstances - to exemplify the "sinews of a philosopher" (quoting Epictetus), confirming for others that it is possible to stand and stay upright even when seemingly beset on all sides.

- 11/15/17

Consider that whenever you get something that qualifies as a nice material thing, you have an opportunity to "see it for what it is," and dispel any kind of undue impression about it. It is perfectly alright to feel appreciative about something given to you, or something you expect to receive, but as practicing Stoics we should be very cautious not to presume ownership over it.

To presume ownership over the thing is to instantly pit yourself against any number of events, very likely leading to missteps. It may also incline you to pit yourself against others, in such cases where others may receive the thing you expected to receive, the thing isn't received at all, or events simply prevent you from receiving the thing altogether. We aren't forced to bind our peace of mind to every nice thing that comes along; we do the binding ourselves. Whether the thing in question is inexpensive or expensive does not reflect whatsoever on that.

- 12/13/17

"Much of what you're feeling is the result of errors in your reasoning, or the result of poorly formed or inappropriate judgments. Nothing that makes you good comes from externals; cease making this mistake. Nothing that makes you evil comes from externals. This misattribution has formed the core of human ignorance since the beginning. No amount of money, recognition, or power can make one happy; no absence of these things can make one worse without the judgment that it is so.

Whatever your occupation, you are in the first degree a Stoic. All your thoughts and actions must consciously refer to this, as Stoicism concerns itself with all aspects of life and their use.

Conventional occupations, their associated tasks, and the externals they involve are the elements by which the Stoic improve their practice - in the same way that doctors do by doctoring, and builders by building."

Written for myself a little more than a year ago while job searching. It seemed that I had come very close to getting the career I had aimed and prepared for throughout college, and without warning the opportunity seemed to disappear. Stoicism allows one to turn some of the most disheartening situations on their heads.

- 12/23/17

The noise and bustle of the every day is just that: noise and bustle. It should invite no greater influence over us than necessary. Even when we become apart from it, the noise and activity never ceases; it's occurring in some part of the world, without us. The only added or subtracted element under consideration is our judgment, and our judgments fall under our control. Withhold or change the judgment, and any adverse effects become muted or turned to our advantage.

We are capable of applying this method to other aspects of life: to physical attraction, money, fame, and power. We should be wary of the very first impression we have of a situation; the substance or form of it may be dramatically different than the initial appearance. There is otherwise a risk of immediately giving in to initial impressions without testing them. "Is this within my control, outside my control? Am I believing this thing to be good or evil? If so, who am I placing myself under the influence of? Is it appropriate to give this much control of my mind over to this or that person?"

We are not sheep, birds, or other animals that must be tossed about by appearances. We are humans, and practicing Stoics. For ourselves, we must continuously try to recover our footing if mistakes in our reasoning crop up. It is the path by which we will find out who we are, and what we are capable of.

- 12/27/17

"Approximate date: Unknown (2014/2015)

Stoic concepts involved:

Nature of Judgments

Nature of Impressions

Nature of Emotions

Nature of Humans (Social/Rational Animals)

Difficulties as practice

Eudaimonia

Approximate situation: Unknown

“Understanding how to properly interpret difficulties (as material for use in self-improvement) requires an understanding of the manner in which we interpret events. A collection of sensory information (what the Stoics refer to as an “impression”) nearly simultaneously combines with an involuntary value judgment (what the Stoics refer to as a “first movement of the soul”). This produces an account of the situation we can understand and respond to (what the Stoics refer to as a “proposition”). The judgments we currently hold (of what should be deemed good or evil) inclines us to act upon the proposition in a particular way; either to agree that the proposition is an accurate depiction of the circumstances (that “x is happening, and this is good/bad”), or that it is inaccurate: more information is needed, or the information at hand needs to be reconsidered.

The act of agreeing that the proposition is accurate is what the Stoics refer to as “assent.” If we assent to a proposition, we experience a strengthened version of the “first movement” we’re accustomed to: the emotions. If the emotions are tied to choices that are consistent with our nature as social and rational animals, they are “rational emotions.” The Stoics consider rational emotions to be the only form of emotions that are fully acceptable to embrace, and consider all other emotions

to be “passions,” i.e. erroneous and harmful. Interpreting difficulties as means for self-improvement leads us closer towards “Eudaimonia:” self-actualization.”

A piece of writing some years old.

- 12/28/17

Our conventional roles should be used as material for our core objective: learning to be Stoics. As Stoics, we are aiming to maximize our potential as social and rational animals. We accomplish that through careful, consistent self-observation, self-discipline, exercising our will by attempting to do what seems to be the most philosophically consistent even if it is difficult, and acting continually upon a willingness to help others in a simultaneous effort to encourage them accomplish the same.

We must hold ourselves as closely to this frame of mind as we can, from the time we wake up to the time that we sleep, if we're truly serious about discovering what it means to be a Stoic, and who and what we really are.

- 1/5/18

Becoming a Stoic starts off simply enough: a choice to pursue courses of action, like any other plan. Unlike other kinds of plans, the materials and opportunities start off completely within our control, though they will (at first) only rarely appear that way. It is also something that we can stop any time, and there will likely be many times early on where stopping seems very appealing. Pressures from within ourselves and outside ourselves can mix with the simple difficulty of necessarily becoming our own firmest set of checks and balances - as Stoics the successes and failures rest purely with us.

We must develop a habit (often where none/little existed) of telling ourselves “no,” explain why to ourselves without shying from acknowledging uncomfortable truths, and deliberately choose an alternative action. Likewise, as practicing Stoics we work towards self-command - of choosing what will help us build endurance, patience, compassion, discipline, acceptance, appreciation, even if the circumstances are volatile, lengthy, and grating. Every victory achieved early on becomes something a practicing Stoic will come to know they can never lose, and that peace and fulfillment needs to be sought inside ourselves; the only place it can be found in any lasting or significant degree.

There will be a time where you will first look back on the previous path you walked, almost unable to recognize who it was that was walking it; as well as all the misgivings, terrors, pinings, and guilts that once harassed you.

- 1/8/18

After genuine and consistent application of Stoic philosophy, a sense of calm and purpose tends to settle over a person. So long as the dedication and care to Stoic principles is kept up, it will be more rare for circumstances to upend this sense of calm and purpose. The risk of being upended then falls to the person themselves from taking for granted that sense of calm and purpose; believing it will always be there without the attention and care that brought it on. i.e., "letting go for once."

The enduring Stoic frame of mind and the benefits i'm describing cannot be switched on at will. Once something external gains leverage "even if its just one night," or "just this one time," it simultaneously prevents the opportunity to improve as a Stoic, while undermining the very Stoic principles that helped thus far. There is a very real difference between appreciating something for the time we have it or "playing the game" as far as work occupations go, and willfully lapsing in our duties to ourselves and others as Stoics.

- 1/18/18

Instability, inconsistency, and disingenuity in people and events are brought about by a series of causes acting upon one another. The difference between the internal causes and external causes, as far as a person goes and how it affects their behavior, is that a person's choices are driven by (what seems to them) a sensory account of the situation that is then evaluated through their current judgments about the things involved, and finally whether or not they then believe that both the account and judgments are accurate. This differs, in that external things have no other properties than to exist and be acted upon. In short, a person does what they believe is best according to what they believe is good or evil and what they believe has happened, is happening, or will happen. We should try to keep this in mind whenever anyone (including us) does anything, but particularly when they are acting out of anger, greed, envy, or so on; so that we might act and react appropriately as practicing Stoics.

The Stoic philosopher Chrysippus referred to this general concept of how human behavior and external forces interact by using a "cylinder" as an example. The shape of the cylinder (representing internal causes) affects how it will roll on a decline, but its physical properties will cause it to roll regardless.

- 2/11/18

Things can appear to us to be the case, and are.

Things can also not appear to be the case, and are not.

Things can appear to us to be the case, and are not.

Things can appear to us not to be the case, but are.

Before we choose to agree to the idea that the appearance of circumstances is in fact an accurate representation, we should first choose to consider it may not be.

Likewise, we will stall whatever would have been our (possibly inappropriate) reaction. Consider that the conditions may not be what they appear to be, and the following courses of action you initially intend to make may likewise be poorly founded.

Similarly, if those courses of action are based upon erroneous (as far as a practicing Stoic is concerned) judgments, such as "what just happened to me is bad, and its a bad thing I need to devote time/energy to correct it," we will be doubling down on the very deconstructive thinking we're trying to reign in.

We should always make the "first move" against impressions and "command" them to wait for us until we can be confident we're reacting to them properly, and have examined the situation closely.

- 2/14/18

It can be difficult to do "the right thing" (what seems to be the most philosophically consistent thing for a Stoic to do in a given situation; a choice that appears befitting of a social and rational animal) when the opportunity presents itself AND when making that choice could have conventional, external consequences. It is easier to do the right thing when we've already instilled the habit to do so, largely independent of the circumstances. It can be more difficult to do so when we're early in

developing that habit, even if the circumstances aren't severe. It can be greatly difficult to do so when we're early in the habit and the potential outcome(s) seem more severe to us than getting the practice.

Yet as practicing Stoics, we are ultimately trying to reach the point in which we can assess and do what seems to be the right thing independent of what may happen to our things, or ourselves. Paraphrasing Epictetus, sometimes we will be challenged by an opponent that is much stronger than ourselves; we should take advantage of that experience. Again, paraphrasing: So long as we don't (inwardly) give in, we are perfectly free to recover and reorient to try again. Paraphrasing various Stoics: the situations that seem stronger than us are what we've been training ourselves to confront, now or later; wanting to avoid them for more time to practice is similar to an athlete upset that they can't train while the event is happening.

- 3/5/18

Once we have a thorough understanding that everyone must do what appears best to them, we will be able to control for any surprise that might result from their choices. All actions are brought about by these choices. Choices are formed from judgments of what one considers good or evil, combined with an impression (i.e. "what seems to be happening") that the person believes is accurate. You and I are no different; the reason you are here is because you believed (in some capacity) that the end result may be beneficial to you. Likewise, all courses of action taken by others falls under that same premise, including those that seem vicious, senseless, or destructive.

By thinking continuously in these terms, we will at minimum prevent ourselves from being mentally arrested by the actions of other people. Depending on our grasp of Stoic philosophy, we will be able to disarm much of the impact of those actions, enabling us the freedom to respond inwardly and outwardly without panic, malice, resentment, or any of the other emotions that might result from the idea that "because of what this person did, I am made worse." That freedom, at its height, allows us to model the kinds of behaviors that may very well lead to the other person to recognize errors in their judgment. We can never take ownership of another persons choices, anymore than another person can take ownership of ours; we can and should take full ownership of our choices regardless of those made by others.

Progress as a Stoic is made or lost as the result of a single choice in any given situation.

- 3/18/18

We are responsible for the sincerity, frequency, and dedication to our practice as Stoics. Once we're familiar with basic Stoic tenets, and have established the behaviors consistent with them, we can no longer hide from ourselves. If we act in a manner that is opposed to the tenets, we will have a sense of pain, because we will knowingly be behaving in ways that subvert ourselves for what only appears to be benefits. Likewise, if we are consistent with the philosophy we will likely feel resolved, confident, courageous, patient, and the like. This is no accident.

If you find yourself in a position where you are inwardly pained because you don't feel as though you're applying Stoicism sincerely, I would recommend setting time aside to write or type out a dialogue with yourself in plain language. The purpose of this is to lay out all the impressions plainly so you can identify them, and then react to them (again in writing) as if you were an instructor "replying" to them. Others may be able to provide philosophically-consistent advice for you, however it is up to you to integrate that advice, and only you fully know what you are struggling with, in what way, and to what degree. There is a risk that you may change your behavior or wording when asking others for this kind of advice, yet you can never hide from yourself in this way.

If you feel that you are "pained" in this way, make time for this kind of self-assistance. It should take precedence over nearly everything else.

- 4/6/18

"You are suffering precisely because you believe you have (to some degree) lost your way. While you are aware, generally, of the place you now find yourself in, and the rules of handling yourself according to this new area, you nevertheless feel you are off the path and seek a return to it.

You are quite aware that preferable things, such as money, reputation, entertainment and the like are not goods, yet you nevertheless find yourself factoring them into considerations for your behavior, because you are uncertain if you are handling them appropriately. You are also aware that the absence of those things or the presence of their opposites (e.g. debt, bad reputation, labor,) are not evils, but you are nevertheless factoring them into your behavior for similar reasons.

You recall that at one time, even before you had so thoroughly established Stoic principles into your life, you had correctly and thoroughly addressed errors of these kinds. You lived in a state of being in which you felt spontaneously happy, at peace, resolute, and ready to face whatever seemed to be impending, regardless of how others may interpret your choices, or of any of the external things you are permitting to impress on your mind; muted as the impressions may be.

How could it be that you feel less "capable" now than you did those years prior? Could it be that your knowledge of Stoic philosophy has degraded? - 'No, if anything it has steadily improved, as I can readily call to mind tenets and precedents as they relate to any given situation.'

Well, has your fervor in applying Stoicism decreased? - 'No. Just as I did those years ago, not a single choice, word, or action is committed that isn't framed by or referred to the philosophy.'

What else?

'I cannot with confidence declare that I have carried out my responsibilities to myself as a Stoic in these recent years, instead choosing (as it is nothing else but choice,) to permit a feeling of sadness or loss; to divert or fragment what would otherwise continued to have been effective and resolute self-management. 'Without a teacher descended from the original schools, or more of the original works having survived,' I say, 'how can I be fully certain that I understand how to apply my philosophy to this or that?'

And further, 'If even one person depends on my guidance, it is even more necessary for me to be certain that my judgments are consistent with the philosophy and not only appear to me to be so.'

While you are right to, as Epictetus once stated, "imagine error in yourself as an enemy lying in wait," you are now experiencing a problem that seems similar, but of another sort. You are enabling impressions that you are "unqualified" to provide guidance much farther than you have without a "qualified" second opinion.

Does it appear to you that your choices are largely consistent with Stoic philosophy? - 'Yes.'

Does it appear that your personal efforts to properly and accurately guide yourself are as firm and immediate as ever? - 'Yes.'

Then all that is left, so it seems, is to correct these impressions of "loss," and "uncertainty." For, necessarily, if you cannot be certain you will find someone or something(s) to help you guide yourself because the original paths seem lost to you, you must navigate into and recover that lost territory if returning to your previous state(s) are no longer possible or appropriate."

- Self-guidance written this morning.

- 4/14/18

We may arrive at a point in our practice where it appears to us that we've exhausted the surviving Stoic material, yet we are well aware we've more to learn. The impression may steal over us that there may be nowhere else to turn for concrete guidance, or we're unsure what contemporary material we should turn to, or if it is appropriate to turn to any. At this point in practice we will likely be keenly aware of our remaining flawed judgments. We might find ourselves afraid that there won't be any more opportunities to discover more methods to combat those flaws and reorient ourselves. This particular fear will likely compound on itself, inciting concerns that we are not qualified or no longer qualified to address new situations properly, or even to address ones we've overcome before; a skewed, internal, philosophical version of impostor syndrome.

This set of impressions can and should be addressed by dispelling it just like we would with any other impression(s). First, we have the advantage of memory: of presenting the kinds of behaviors, isolated or collectively, that disprove the impressions. No momentary doubts can rob us of the awareness of what we've done to correct errors in our thinking, or prevent us from executing those exact behaviors in the future. We are the same person that approached "this" or "that" situation properly. Time, place, and circumstances cannot negate that.

Secondly, we may be more aware of our flaws now than we once were. Increased awareness is not the same thing as lapsing, back-sliding, weakening, or inability, although it will feel and appear similar or identical. As we advance in our practice, and maintain dedication, we will necessarily reach a point in which its no longer plausible to keep our initial mentality. We will be capable; this capability can be applied in pursuit of a greater understanding that cannot be properly managed while still in a "Stoic freshman" mentality. In other words, the fact that there are no more surviving Stoic texts to read doesn't prohibit us from improving our understanding through application, or reflection. In fact, that is what the ancient Stoics would have wanted, and often stressed themselves.

Third, we have many resources to collaborate, and compare experiences and methods. This group is one of them. Those that may be able to provide insight (based on your assessment) are others. Discussion of concerns like these cannot be equated with a personal, philosophical failure to address them, because of the intention behind starting the discussion: to improve, and potentially help others achieve the same.

- 4/25/18

There exists a fine line between appreciating something for the time we have it, and ascribing ownership to it. These things were never ours to begin with; we were born with little other than our bodies. All else we received from outside - from external forces. We can and should keep this close to mind whenever any of myriad forces seems to cause us to lose or gain something. Of all the things the Stoics tried to drive home, this concept was often chief in all of their minds because of its implications. It is this ascription of ownership over things and others that leads us to enslave ourselves to the very forces that appear to give or take them away. Correcting this line of thought at every opportunity can be an exhausting and fragile process, yet it is fundamentally important to our growth as practicing Stoics because the flow of life itself changes and depends on this effort. If we are truly serious about our practice and want to make inroads with it, we must be willing to fail repeatedly to accomplish this. If we give up because of a mistaken idea that we aren't "capable of doing it," or "don't have the personality for it," it is little different than saying "I'm not capable of preventing myself from being turned upside down due to this or that, being blindsided indefinitely by things that happen and have always happened, or of applying the knowledge that my value as a person cannot be dictated by outside events, among others." Achieving this state of mind demands a small and careful first approach; circumstances will throw things at us that will jar and uproot us occasionally on that path, but we are not bound to stay uprooted by anything else but our choice.

First, consider the initial example: that we were born with nothing but a frame, and everything else was given to us by outside forces. Everything we've been granted, have, and will be granted can be appreciated and preferred by us, because there was nothing binding them to us to begin with. These things will come and go, but we will never have less than when we were first born.

Second, the things that are now concerning us necessarily came about, are occurring, and will happen in the only possible way that they could. When a situation is examined, and its various parts are separated and identified, we are capable of clearly seeing that "A, B, C, D, etc all interacted with each other in this and this way; had the conditions been different, the result would have been different, yet they were not, and so this is the result." Externals are interdependent. Likewise, all actions we take will themselves become interwoven causes, but not the only causes. This dispels mistaken notions of "if only I had done this - this would have happened" or "if only I had not done that - this would not have happened." This is an error in part because our actions alone do not drive events, regardless of the appearance of our own power/prestige/authority/etc. So long as our intent in each choice is philosophically consistent, everything else will happen the way that it will, whether we internally thrash or not. Note, that this isn't a call for inactivity or non-participation, but observance of how events come about, and how our actions interweave into them.

Thirdly, the things concerning us don't reach into our minds and compel us to behave one way or another towards them. We permit or disallow this influence, whether or not that appears to be the case. A newly purchased phone that is accidentally dropped and cracked doesn't state to us "I've been damaged and this is a bad thing;" it has no means of doing this, as a metal/plastic object. An email detailing thousands of dollars have been taken from your bank account from an unknown source has no means of convincing you that the situation should be panicked over; they are black and white pixels on a screen. Your panic matters little in your effort to address what's happened, and will likely serve to complicate it. A car that is on its metaphorical last legs isn't capable of commanding you to think its appearance or performance is something to be ashamed of.

Ask the ascription of value to "wait until you can get a better look at it," and you reduce the likelihood you'll be upended by appearances. Be willing to fail in this regard, just as any other person starting or perfecting a craft should.

- 5/6/18

To be continued,
as posts are written.