

ROSICRUCIANISM AND STOICISM

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In the year 300 BCE, following a shipwreck in which he lost his fortune, Zeno, a merchant from Cyprus, founded Stoicism in Athens, Greece. Initially Stoicism included metaphysics, logic, and ethics, however the Romans, who embraced Stoicism centuries later, focused primarily on ethics and how to live a good and tranquil life. As we will see, Stoicism and Rosicrucianism have a lot in common.

Much of what is known about Roman Stoicism comes from the writings associated with Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

Seneca was a Roman dramatist, statesperson, and the tutor and then advisor to the Roman emperor Nero. He was born in the year 4 BCE and went through transition in the year 65 CE. A number of his writings survive to today. In them, Seneca discusses the questions that occupied him in a way that invites his readers to think about issues in their own lives. His writings are still very relevant today.

Epictetus lived from ca. 50 to 135 CE. He was born to a slave and was therefore a slave himself. One of his owners (a freed slave) allowed him to study philosophy, where he met the Stoic Musonius Rufus, who became his teacher and mentor. Later Epictetus's master granted him his freedom. When

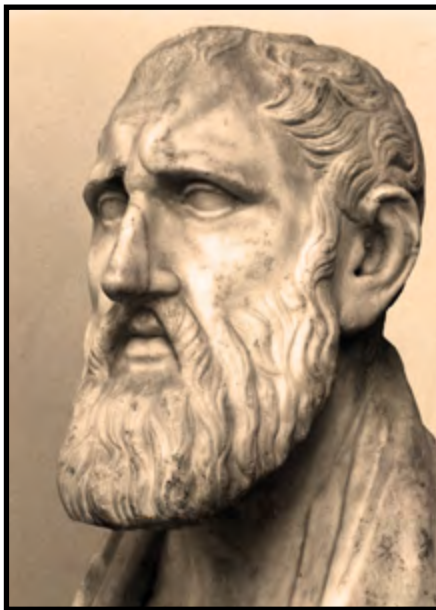
the Roman emperor Domitian banished all philosophers from Rome, Epictetus moved to Nicopolis, Greece, where he led his school of philosophy until his transition at the age of eighty-five. Epictetus probably did not write anything himself. His disciple, Arrian, an esteemed historian, military commander, and philosopher, transcribed excerpts of Epictetus's lectures in a book called *Discourses* and wrote the *Handbook*, which is a compendium of all of Epictetus's philosophical principles.

Marcus Aurelius was born in the year 121 and died in 180. He was from a prominent family but was not in line to be

the Roman emperor. The Roman emperor Hadrian had no children so he adopted a man named Antonius, with the stipulation that Antonius would adopt Marcus, who would succeed him. Marcus was profoundly influenced by the work of Epictetus and was a devout Stoic. The book that is today called *Meditations* was actually Marcus's personal diary, published after his death.

What is Stoicism?

Some people believe that the goal of Stoicism is to not have any emotions, like a robot. However, the goal of Stoicism is not to suppress or stop experiencing emotions. It is to have few negative emotions and



Zeno



to spend less time wishing things were different and more time enjoying them.

The Stoic philosophers stressed that to be alive means to be open to the challenges that arise in our lives, including those that are no fault of our own, and that the attainment of happiness is a matter of ceasing to desire things we do not need to desire.

The four foundations of Stoic ethics will sound familiar to Rosicrucians and Martinists. They are: wisdom, strength, justice, and temperance. Wisdom is knowing how to make the best decision in all circumstances. Strength is having the courage to do that and to face unpleasantness. Justice is social justice or humanism – treating every human being with fairness and kindness. Temperance is self-control.

Similarities between Rosicrucianism and Stoicism

There are many similarities between Rosicrucianism and Stoicism. For example, the Roman Stoic Hierocles encouraged people to greet each other as *frater* or *soror* (brother or sister) as Rosicrucians do. He believed this helps to remind us that we are all part of one big family.

A number of people important in the Rosicrucian Tradition were very familiar with Stoicism or were practicing Stoics – Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola (the great Italian Renaissance Humanists who helped to perpetuate the ancient Mysteries), Giordano Bruno, Francis Bacon, and René Descartes.

Below are a few practices that Rosicrucianism and Stoicism have in common.

Choose a role model

Like the Rosicrucian teachings, Stoicism encourages us to choose a role

model. In the Fifth Temple Degree monographs we are introduced to some of the greatest sages of ancient Greece and are encouraged to attune with them. There are many individuals who were Stoics or were highly influenced by Stoicism who could serve as our role models, for example, U.S. President George Washington, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, and South African President Nelson Mandela. Or we could choose Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin or H. Spencer Lewis.

We can call on these role models to help us throughout the day, in whatever situations arise.

Let's do that now. Choose your role model and ask her or him to stand with you throughout your day. Imagine a situation that has the potential to be challenging and see your role model right there with you, providing guidance and support.

Review your day

Like Rosicrucianism, Stoicism encourages people to review the day. Benjamin Franklin and the Pythagoreans also practiced this.

Seneca shared many examples of reviewing the day. When doing so, he wrote in the third person, in a way that anyone can relate to. For example, he wrote that Seneca was at an event where people made jokes at Seneca's expense and he did not just brush them off. He then assessed the situation. In this case, he concluded that Seneca should keep away from low company.

Try this yourself. Review something challenging that has happened recently, as dispassionately as possible and from a third person perspective. Then assess the situation, again from the perspective of the third person.

Some things are in our control and others not

The first lines of Epictetus's *Handbook* state: "Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are the body, property, reputation, authority, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions."

This sounds a lot like the modern "Serenity Prayer":

God grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I
can, and
Wisdom to know the difference.

When choosing what to focus our energy on, we can consider placing things we can control in one stack and the things that we cannot control in another stack. We will find that the stack with things we can control is much smaller than the one with the things we cannot control. Those things do not concern us. There is nothing we can do about them. It's helpful to remember that just because something affects us, doesn't mean that we have control over it.

Some modern Stoics suggest that there is a third stack for things that we have some control over, but not complete control. For example, if we are running a race, we can develop our muscles, build our endurance, eat right, and get plenty of rest, but we cannot guarantee that we will win the race. A Stoic's goal would be to run our best race possible, irrespective of who wins.

In the same way, we cannot guarantee that someone will love us. This is not within our control. It is within our control, however, to act in as loving a way as possible. Also, we cannot control whether or not we will get a promotion, however it is within our control to do our job as well as we are able.

This resonates with the Rosicrucian practice to bring the best of ourselves to every situation, something that we have control over.

Think of a situation now where you can apply this practice. For example, rather than trying to get someone to love us, imagine that we are as loving as possible to this person. The focus is on our actions, something we have control over.

Prescribe a character for yourself

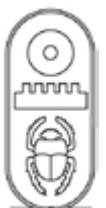
Rosicrucians are encouraged to visualize in the morning how we want the day ahead to go. Stoics would do this too, however they would also prepare for when things don't go as expected, in order to achieve a secondary goal in every situation – that is, to stay true to our values and character. Rosicrucians might call this living up to the Rosicrucian ideal.

Epictetus wrote that we should prescribe for ourselves a certain character when we are alone and keep our will aligned with it, no matter what we might encounter during the day.

Think about a situation that you expect to encounter that has the potential to be challenging. Perhaps you will be meeting with someone who doesn't fully support you. Visualize the meeting going well for everyone involved and then prepare yourself for something unpleasant to arise. Make your second goal be staying true to your values, behaving in the ideal way that you have prescribed for yourself.

Observe yourself

Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* includes his personal observations. He asked himself what motivated his actions and how did they reflect his values. Were they governed by reason or by something else?– The soul of a child? A tyrant? A dumb ox? A wild beast?



Carl Jung may have referred to these aspects as our shadow sides. We're embarrassed to think that we may have acted like a child or a tyrant, however by acknowledging that this is indeed what happened, we can understand why we thought this was a good idea. We can understand what motivated our actions and in what way we thought acting this way reflected our values. When we shine light on and embrace our "dark side," it feels heard and no longer needs to act out.

Think about a recent situation in which you may not have been governed by reason. Who was in control at the time – The soul of a child? A tyrant? A dumb ox? A wild beast? (If you are having trouble coming up with an example, it may be helpful to imagine someone cutting you off in traffic.) Consider why you felt that you had to call upon this aspect of yourself rather than reason.

Justice

In Stoicism, justice is social justice, which correlates to Rosicrucian Humanism – meaning treating others with kindness and respect.

Marcus Aurelius was in many ways an amazing example of Stoic Justice. His morning meditation went like this: "Today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill-will, and selfishness – all of them due to the offender's ignorance of what is good or evil." He focused on treating others with kindness

and respect, believing that their disloyalty, etc., was just due to ignorance.

Most of Marcus's nineteen-year reign was marked by conflict and war. Avidius Cassius, chief governor of the eastern provinces, claimed the title of emperor for himself. Of Marcus's eleven beloved children, eight died before he did. His only remaining son, the tyrant Commodus, schemed behind his back. Marcus wrote, "The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing," yet he stayed committed to helping others.



Marcus Aurelius

Marcus worked to protect the weak, to make life less difficult for slaves, and to rear and educate poor children. He wrote that he didn't do this for acknowledgment or thanks. He helped others because it was the right thing to do. It was his duty and happiness was his reward.

See yourself acting for the good of others with no expectation of thanks or acknowledgment. Envision yourself being a Rosicrucian Humanist.

Stoicism also provides excellent guidance for other challenging situations.

Insults

Stoicism advises that when we feel insulted we should consider whether or not we respect the person who insulted us. If we don't respect the person, we shouldn't care what she thinks. If we do, then we should think about whether she might be right. We can also consider if she possibly doesn't have all the facts and would see things differently

if she had more information. We are also reminded that we are the ones who have perceived the comment or action as an insult. We can change our perception of what was said or done.

Anger

The Stoic philosophers also presented helpful techniques for dealing with anger. Marcus Aurelius wrote that we should remember that we too sometimes anger other people. We should also think about the impermanence of the world around us and notice that the things that anger us usually don't cause all that much harm. Seneca recommended that we fight our tendency to believe the worst about others.

Grief

Stoic philosophers acknowledged that grief is a normal emotion to feel when someone we love has passed on, however they recommended that we not extend our grief too long or allow it to incapacitate us. They also warned about “catching” grief from someone else.

The “Negative Visualization” described below helps us to prepare for being separated from those people we love. This can help to remove some of the shock when they do pass on and can inspire us to take full advantage of our relationships.

Seneca suggested that we remember that the person who went through transition would not want us to grieve for them forever, causing us to be unhappy.

Negative Visualization

Also, like the Rosicrucian teachings, Stoicism reminds people to not overvalue wealth or fame. One of my favorite Rosicrucian monographs, which is in the First Atrium, deals with the concept of property and possessions. It's thought-provoking to consider – what do we really possess when everything is a gift of the Divine?

Roman Stoics worshipped a goddess named Fortuna, who controlled fate. She was depicted holding a cornucopia, the symbol of abundance, in one hand, and in the other, a rudder, showing that she was steering the course of life. She also stood with one foot on a wheel, symbolizing the endless changes of life. The Stoics believed that everything we have is on loan to us from Fortuna and she can take it back at any time.

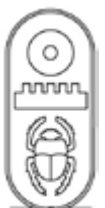


Fortuna

Stoics encouraged people to practice what is called the “Negative Visualization,” to remind us of the impermanence of things. For example, if we feel proud or overly attached to the car that we just had to have, or the house that we saved for years to buy, or to our great looks, we should imagine not having that object or state. They are truly only on loan to us.

The goal of this exercise is to anticipate events that can cause us grief, thus softening the blows of life and helping us better appreciate what we do have.

Think of something now that you may be attached to (your car, your house, your



job) and imagine that it is no longer in your life.

The Negative Visualization can be extended to our loved ones. Many people are uncomfortable giving even one thought to the fact that someday we and our loved ones will no longer be together on the earthly plane, although this is obviously an inevitable fact of life. They, and we, are going to go through transition some day.

This seems to me to be one of the major causes of strife and war in the world. Many people are in such deep denial about death and have created such elaborate belief systems perpetuating that denial, that if anyone threatens to dismantle that belief system (their religion, materialism, or something else), they fight to the death to protect it.

Epictetus wrote that we must remind ourselves that we love a mortal and that nothing that we love is our very own.

Stoic philosophers suggested that we visualize our loved ones no longer being with us, again using the Negative Visualization. I have found this exercise to be extremely powerful. It made it crystal clear how I want to act with my loved ones. When we think about the day that we and our loved one will no longer be together, it creates great appreciation for the time that we do have together, in the present moment. This can also prevent feeling guilty after the person has passed on, as we would have fully engaged in our relationship with him or her. In my experience, this exercise created a new commitment to my closest relationships. This doesn't need to be done often, as we don't want to start clinging to our loved ones.

If you like, let's practice this now: Imagine that you and your most beloved one no longer walk together on the earthly plane.

Page 28

Julius Canus – my Stoic role model

A man named Julius Canus is one of the most inspiring philosophers for me. He was a Roman Stoic whom the tyrant Caligula condemned to death. When the Emperor announced his order, Canus calmly replied, "Thank you, excellent prince." After the required ten-day waiting period, a soldier came to get Canus for the execution. He was playing a board game at the time and instead of begging for mercy or running, Canus simply asked to be allowed to count the points in order to show that he was ahead in the game. Then, as his execution was about to take place, one of his friends asked him what he was thinking about. Canus replied that he was preparing himself to observe whether at the moment of death the soul is aware of leaving the body.

That is how I want to approach my Great Initiation.

Take a moment now to consider how you want to face your transition. See yourself in your final moments living out the values you have chosen to embrace, acting in harmony with the character that you have prescribed for yourself, living the Rosicrucian ideal.

So Mote It Be!

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