



# Stoicism

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# Learning Objectives

- Know the founder of Stoicism and how it achieved its name
- Understand the major sources for Stoicism
- Understand the Stoic view of
  - Theory of Knowledge
  - Theory of Reality
  - Theory of God
  - Physical Theory – Four Elements and Pneuma
  - Theory of the Soul
  - Ethics and Apathy
- Understand the influence of Stoicism on the Roman state and on Christianity

# Stoics

- Founder Zeno of Citium in Cyprus (336-264 BCE)
- Arrived in Athens at age 22
- Zeno Began teaching in his early thirties
- *Stoa* - Open colonnade in the Agora at Athens



[http://project.athens-  
agora.gr/index.php?view=kti  
rio&pid=1&lang\\_id=en](http://project.athens-<br/>agora.gr/index.php?view=kti<br/>rio&pid=1&lang_id=en)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stoa\\_in\\_Athens.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stoa_in_Athens.jpg)



# Stoics

- Famous for their views of ethics
- Thought of philosophy as a “way of life”.
- Defined philosophy as a practice or exercise (*askêsis*) in the expertise concerning what is beneficial

# Works

- No Complete Copies Of Works By The First Three Heads Of The Stoic School:
  - Zeno (D. 264 BCE)
  - Cleanthes (D. 232 BCE)
  - Chrysippus (D. 206 BCE) – Wrote Over 165 Works
- Secondary Sources
  - Plutarch's *Philosophers' Opinions On Nature*
  - Diogenes Laertius' *Lives Of Eminent Philosophers*
  - *Stobaeus' I excerpts*
  - Christian Writers – Hostile

# Roman Works

- From Roman Imperial Times
  - Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE)
  - Epictetus (C. 55 – 135)
  - Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180) *Meditations*
- Cicero – Important Source Although Not A Stoic

# Theory of Knowledge

- Used sense-impressions
- Two elements to determining its validity
  - “Assent”
    - To take A sense-impression’s content as true.
    - Withholding assent is to suspend judgment about whether it is true
  - “Cognitive impression” – an impression that commanded one’s assent by its very nature

# Theory of Reality

- Plato – something is real if it has the capacity to act or be acted upon
- Stoics – only bodies can act or be acted upon thus only bodies exist.
- Stoics – what is incorporeal “subsists” but does not exist
  - *Lekta* – the meanings of some words
  - Place, time and the void outside of the world
  - Imaginary things - centaurs

# Theory of God

- God is identified with an eternal reason (*logos*) or intelligent designing fire
- Shapes and creates all things
- Immanent through the whole of creation
- Directs all events for purposes which are good
- Soul of the world

# Theory of God

- The history of the universe is determined by god's activity internal to it
- Epictetus (60-120 CE) –gave the logos (reason) A religious emphasis - speaking of it as god and human beings as “A fragment torn from god
- God orders misfortune so that the soul can be tested

# Physical Theory - Four Elements

- Active – fire and air
- Passive – water and earth
- Reject the existence of empty space or void (contra epicurus)
- Active elements combine to form breath or *pneuma*

# Physical Theory

## Pneuma

- “Sustaining Cause” Of All Existing Bodies
  - Guides Growth And Development Of Animate Bodies
- Simultaneous Movement Inward And Outward
- Passes Through All Objects (Bodies)
  - Keeps An Object From Falling Apart
  - Outward Movement Gives An Object Its Character
  - Inward Movement Makes It A Unified Object
- Considered A Body – It acts and blends with matter

# Human Pneuma(Soul)

- The soul's faculties are parts of the commanding faculty associated with the physical sense organs
- Sense-impressions are affections of the commanding faculty
- Soul survives death

# Ethics

- Highest good = acting in accordance with its nature
- Nature acts in regular, orderly ways which can be discovered by human reason
- Life of human beings can be ordered by reason

# Ethics

## What is Good

- Stoics claim that whatever is good must benefit its possessor under all circumstances
- Only things that are good are the characteristic excellences or virtues of the human mind
  - Prudence or wisdom
  - Justice
  - Courage and moderations
  - Other related qualities

# “Indifferent Things”

- Are neither good nor bad
- Some have value like health or wealth have value
  - To be preferred
  - Appropriate, fitting or suitable for us

# Impulse

- The movement of the soul towards an object
  - Subject to “assent “ in fully rational creatures.
- Original impulse of rational creatures is towards
  - What is appropriate for them
  - Aids in their self-preservation
- Not toward what is pleasurable
- Things that are usually preferable

“things according to nature”

# Ethics

- “Living in agreement with nature” – works at a variety of levels
- Idea that happiness consists in the rational selection of things according to nature
- Circumstances can demand selections of thing that are not appropriate to nature
- Ought to choose in accordance with what will in fact happen
- When unknown choose as we can see from experience usually happens

# Ethics - Duty

- Duty is the obligation to live the life dictated by reason rather than feelings (anti-hedonistic)
- Because all things (both good and bad) are ordered by the Logos – it is our duty to accept our fortunes without feelings – with apathy

# Apathy

- Concept Very Important In Stoic Thought
  - **Apathy (*A-pathos* “No Feeling”) Is A Permanent State Of Soul To Be Desired And Finally Achieved As The True Conditions Of Happiness**
  - Emotional Indifference – Not Rational Indifference
  - Not Psychologically Subject To Anything
  - Achievement Of Apathy Called For A Great Deal Of Training, Self-denial, And Self-discipline

# Rome

- Epicureanism Favored In The Ranks Of Rome's Military
- Stoicism Appealed To Members Of The Senate And Other Politicians
  - Cato The Younger, Scipio Aemilianus, Marcus Brutus
  - Octavian Had A Stoic Tutor
- Contributed To The Administration Of Rome - Distinction Between Local Laws/Customs And Laws Necessary To Rule The Empire.

# Marcus Aurelius

- Marcus Aurelius – the last of the great stoics (121-180 CE) – the universe is a divine order – one living being, possessed of A single soul [logos] and that soul is in every person
- He considered social responsibility in the order of things – “all that is rational is akin, and it is man’s nature to care for all men”

# Influence on Christians

- Idea that all things were created by A cosmic reason carried into the church and holy roman empire
- Church – order of right and wrong revealed from god by the logos incarnate in Christ and continued by apostles

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