

32 PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES OF THE STOIA ©

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Physics

I. God, the One

God, the One, the Logos, reason, is continuous in space and time and corporeality. It is the activating Force permeating and organizing inert matter to create the living body and fate of a cosmos with these attributes:

(1) **The Logos**, an artistic Fire, the *active principle*, creates as it expands pervading inert matter, the *passive principle*, and defining existence as an evolving, dynamic process. Logos is the Seminal Reason of creation, the past, present, and future of the cosmos existing in potential at the beginning. Just as the apple seed contains the intelligence to grow into a tree, so does the universe evolve from the seed of its intelligence at birth.

(2) **Pneuma**, Air, the Divine Breath that enters, defines, and rules inert matter produces an internal tension (*tonos*) by moving from the center of an object to its surface, then returning to its center again. Pneuma is the World Soul that pervades and directs the cosmos just as it pervades and directs a material body with a human soul (*pneuma psychikon*) extending a spark of divine reason, the Logos, to human kind.

II. Active & Passive Principles

World Soul, the active principle (*to poioun*), and inert matter, the passive principle (*to paschon*), are both corporeal bodies that occupy space and are causally efficient. When the active principle enters the passive principle each body occupies the same space by total blending (*crasis*), just as wine is totally blended in water. Stoicism is both a physicalist and vitalist philosophy. Bodies can be dominated by either principle: the more the active principle dominates a body, the more rational and divine; the more the passive principle dominates, the less rational and divine.

III. A Dynamic Continuum

God and matter, opposite principles of active and passive are united into One, a continuum without independent parts, fluid, and in a state of becoming. It is a closed system, a spherical body existing as an island in an infinite sea of void, a cosmos feeding and growing out of itself, made up of imperfect and incomplete parts in mutual exchange and dependency with each other to create the perfect whole. On the Stoic continuum there is a dynamic interaction of forces where time is inseparably bound to events as an interval of cosmic motion, beginning and ending with the life of the universe.

IV. Four Elements

Stoics distinguish between the Principles and the Elements. The four elements are Earth & Water, Air & Fire. Earth & Water are heavy elements dominated by the Passive Principle; Air & Fire are light elements dominated by the Active Principle. Organic bodies are distinguished from inorganic bodies by the composition of the active elements that animate them.

V. Four Categories

Scala naturae, a physical continuum where each category is increasingly specific and complex and includes the category before it. That is, category four builds on category three, which builds on category two, which is built upon category one. The Four Categories are:

1. Substratum: shapeless matter before it is permeated by the Pneuma.
2. Quality: the Pneuma totally blended with the substratum creating a body.
3. State: each body made cohesive and defined by its unique mixture of the Pneuma:
 - a. Cohesive state – *hexis*. Bodies are held together by a two-way motion. Pneuma motion begins at the center of the object, simultaneously moving to the surface and back again producing an internal tension, *tonos*, that creates the cohesive state.
 - b. Organic nature – *hexis & phusis*. Bodies that grow and reproduce but have no apparent cognitive ability or soul.
 - c. Non-rational animals – *hexis, phusis, & psuche* (soul). Animals with impulse and perception but not reason.
 - d. Rational animals (human) – *hexis, phusis, psuche, & Logos* (reason). Reason is a collection of conceptions and preconceptions gradually accumulated from birth and formed in the manner of internal speech, the language of thought.
4. Relative State: external relationships between any two bodies and internal changes taking place within a body, thereby changing that relationship. (e.g., Man has a heart attack and leans against a tree for support. Man dies, falls to the ground, disintegrates, and the tree uses man for nourishment.)

VI. Incorporeals

A distinction is made between the corporeal and incorporeal (*lekta*, void, place, and time). Only corporeal bodies exist; the incorporeal subsists. The test of what is corporeal and incorporeal is that only a body, that which exists, can act and be acted upon.

1. *Lekton*: the meaning of a word. A spoken word exists as a body of vibrating air; a written word exists as a symbol acting on a surface such as a piece of paper; but the meaning of a word is incorporeal (see XIV).
2. Void: infinite in every direction, the void begins at the edge of the cosmos. There is no void within the cosmos.
3. Place: the place a body occupies is incorporeal.
4. Time: only the present is real, and it is comprised of the past and future. Time is continuous, without independent existence, and is rationally divided into parts, such as past and future, to understand the movement of the corporeal.

VII. Eros: The Creative Force

Eros, what the ancient Greeks called the God of love, is the creative force that unifies opposites, the male and female as active and passive principles of existence. All living things perceive this phenomenon from their own perspective according to their ability to understand and participate in it. Life is created, nurtured, and recreated by what we experience as and have named *Love*. As a physical manifestation and drive of nature it is as necessary as eating, sleeping, growth, and dissolution. Because human beings are rational creatures we can conceive of love in its purest form: love without attachment or reference to any person, place or thing. We can also experience such love, and meditate and act upon it. It is from our unique perspective of this higher love that the virtues are born.

VIII. Death

Cosmic Death. Early Stoics believed Cleanthes' interpretation of Heraclitus that the cosmos was periodically destroyed by the purifying fire of Logos (*ekpyrosis*), then reborn again and again. The mythical phoenix was a commonly used metaphor for this phenomenon of rising from the ashes of fiery self-destruction. And by this recurring event, the cosmos was never created, never destroyed, always was and always will be eternal and divine. When the universe was burned away the only thing remaining of the World Soul was Pure Soul. Later Stoics, such as Panaetius and Posidonius, rejected both *ekpyrosis* and individual immortality.

Human Death. When the two bodies of the active and passive principles are totally blended they retain their individual properties and can be separated at death. The human soul, *pneuma psychikon*, loosens its tension and separates from the mortal body at death. After leaving the material it eventually merges with the World Soul, sooner or later, depending on differing opinions. Some Stoics believe the human soul returns to the World Soul right away; some believe the souls of the wise are caught up with the conflagration, *ekpyrosis*, at the end of the current cycle of the universe. On one thing all Stoics agree, there is no heaven or hell.

IX. Determinism, Fate, & Causal Nexus

The proof of the existence of cause is in the ordered appearance of all effects: a tree produces a tree, a man produces a man, and summer follows spring. The course of the universe is predetermined by

a chain of causes continuous through time and space. Free will is the appearance of conscious participation in a determined chain of multiple events. Free will is attitude, best exemplified by Chrysippus' story of a dog tied to the moving cart of destiny. The dog can rebel, twisting and turning however it will; or, it can trot along happily behind the cart. Either way it will be compelled to go in the direction fate has chosen.

X. Human Soul Structure

The structure of the *pneuma psychikon* is made up of eight parts or streams: the five senses, plus the faculties of reproduction, speech, and command — the *hegemonikon*. Stoics believe that the five senses, plus reproduction and speech, are extensions of the *hegemonikon*, the command center they believed was located in the chest, the heart. All cognitive functions take place in the command center as a two-way system, from center to surface and back again. The pneuma of the soul begins in the heart, the first functioning organ of the infant body, with all other faculties

maturing at later dates as the person reaches adulthood. The relationship of the command faculty to the other faculties is sometimes compared to the head of an octopus to its arms, a tree to its branches, or a spider interpreting vibrations directed to the center of its web. The command faculty itself has four essential abilities: presentation, impulse, assent, and reason, the Logos.

Logic

XI. Presentations

For Stoics, logic is the science of Logos and includes both speech and reason. As a unique spark of the divine Logos, the pneuma-soul of the human child begins with innate structure and predispositions but without conceptual content, a blank sheet, *tabula rasa*. With time, the child is exposed to many sensory impressions, called presentations (*phantasia*). Zeno introduced the idea of a presentation as an impression on the soul. Cleanthes likened these presentations to the impression a signet ring makes when pressed into hot wax. Chrysippus disagreed and said that if the soul were like wax the presentations would be obliterated with each succeeding impression. What he proposed was that impressions on the soul were like sound waves on air, not wax, and that the pneuma-soul is capable of receiving many impressions simultaneously and sequentially without eliminating earlier impressions, but with each new impression the soul is modified and changes its condition. In addition to real-object sensory presentations, there are imaginary presentations (*phantastikon*) – dreams, fantasies, hallucinations – which are produced by an internal manipulation of the mental content of previously stored presentations (*phantastikon* from a collection of *phantasiai*).

XII. From Memory to Reason

Presentations are stored, becoming what we know as memories. As the child matures, there is a gradual accumulation of real and imaginary presentations in the command center (*hegemonikon*), which the pneuma-soul organizes into groups or collections according to families of similarity. This we know as experience. An example of a family of similarity may be a collection of all the different kinds of dogs one has seen, heard, smelled, felt, and otherwise experienced in one's life. These collections of like presentations Chrysippus called *common notions*. These collections of memories

increase in quantity and quality as the child becomes an experienced adult, providing a basis upon which the individual makes judgments about the truth or falsity of each new presentation received throughout the course of that life. These judgments we know as reason, which is apparent in a child by the age of seven and fully developed by the age of fourteen.

XIII. The Criterion of Truth

It is the work of the ruling center of the pneuma-soul, the *hegemonikon*, to discern which presentations are real or imaginary and which are true or false. It does this by comparing the immediate presentation with its common notions or collections of like presentations experienced in the past. The *Chief Criterion of Truth*, then, is the common notion, and the common notion is a collection of like presentations. By having a common notion with which one can compare to the immediate presentation, one can anticipate what is its nature and can give assent to its legitimacy or truth. If one does not have a common notion to serve as a guide in judging a presentation, one

has uncertainty and should withhold assent.

XIV. *Katalepsis*

The mental activity generated by a presentation is a physical event of four distinct stages:

(1) Presentation, (2) Assent, (3) Apprehension, and (4) Knowledge. After the Presentation there is Assent, a modification of the pneuma-soul which the *hegemonikon* identifies on the basis of a common notion, the criterion of truth, the collections of like experiences accumulated by memory. Apprehension is the cognition of the Presentation, the *katalepsis*, a grasping of the Presentation by the *hegemonikon*. According to the early Stoics, Knowledge is true understanding and is possessed by none but the wise.

Zeno's Presentation Teaching Method. According to Cicero, Zeno used to illustrate the concept of the Presentation by holding up his hand with outstretched fingers; when he bent his fingers a little, that was Assent; when he made a fist, that was Apprehension; and when he grasped that fist tightly with his other hand, that was Knowledge, possessed by none but the wise.

XV. Thought

Presentations are either rational or non-rational. Stoics believe that only human beings are capable of rational presentation, and this we call thought (*noesis*). Thoughts are also corporeal, or physical states of the pneuma-soul, which have the structure of language. Language is the medium that preserves and represents our knowledge, and every experience we have is mediated by language. Thought is language. Thought is divided into three parts which are connected to one another: (1) the Sign, (2) the Significate, and (3) the Denotation. The Sign is the spoken word, which can be spoken either silently to oneself as an internal movement of the pneuma, or an external sound, a material vibration of air; the Significate is the meaning (*lekton*) of that word, which is incorporeal and does not have a separate body because it subsists as meaning connected to the Sign and Denotation parts of thought; the Denotation is the actual material to which the Sign and Significate refer. For example, when I see a dog (the Presentation), and say the word, 'dog,' this is the Sign; what dog as a concept means is the Significate; and, the actual dog, a real material object, is the Denotation.

XVI. Discourse

When I see a dog and *say* the word, 'dog,' I'm making a sound which means a real dog. Whereas Aristotle thought meaning, the Significate, was identical with its verbal expression, the Sign, the Stoics believed it to be separate, which can be illustrated by the rather common occurrence of a slip of the tongue when one says something they don't mean. To fully understand the meaning of words in thought and speech requires they be analyzed within the context of discourse, their parts of speech. Stoics are credited with naming the parts of speech, as well as the cases of nouns and tenses of verbs.

XVII. Syllogism

In addition to the structure of language and the relationship of words to things, the science of logic is concerned with what constitutes valid forms of reasoning. Chrysippus developed five basic forms of reasoning connecting not terms but propositions, as exemplified by the typical

Stoic syllogism: “If the sun is shining, it is day; but the sun is shining; therefore it is day.” The five basic forms of syllogism developed by Chrysippus are:

1. If s, d. But s. Therefore d.
2. If s, d. But not d. Therefore Not s.
3. Not both s and d. But s. Therefore Not d.
4. Either s or d. But s. Therefore Not d.
5. Either s or d. But not s. Therefore d.

Due to the highly technical and subtle nature of Stoic logic, no further attempts to synthesize it will be made, except to point out that as a subject the syllogisms of the Stoa, principally of Chrysippus, were misunderstood, disparaged, and/or largely ignored for more than 2,000 years until the mid-twentieth century when it was more fully understood and became the leading school in the development of formal logic.

Ethics

XVIII. Preconception

The Doctrine of Preconception (*prolepsis*) recognizes that although the human infant is a blank sheet, *tabula rasa*, at birth, it has a number of preconceptions or innate dispositions towards forming certain kinds of concepts. The greatest of the preconception impulses are those two that encourage the formation of a concept of God and of the Good.

XIX. Impulse

Impulse is the movement of the soul toward or away from something according to whether it appears to be beneficial or harmful. All living animals are spurred to action by impulse. Our first impulse is not to seek pleasure, as the Epicureans believe, but to seek that which is most fitting for our survival. Pleasure is incidental to this primary impulse. It is natural for human children and other animals to live by the primary impulse, which we call instinct, which non-rational creatures will live by all their lives. But when the human child matures, presentations are examined by reason, and the impulse immediately following presentation only continues to exist when there is assent. A bird who sees a worm will immediately pick it up. Impulse follows presentation. A small child may do the same, but with experience will learn that the worm is of no use to its personal well being. Thus, whereas the bird will pick up the worm all its life, the human child changes, and in a few years the presentation of a worm no longer elicits the response of an impulse to pick it up. The reasoning soul does not assent to the presentation. No impulse, no action.

XX. Appropriation

There are two stages of impulse beginning in our relationship with ourselves, followed by our relationship to others. The dearest thing each living thing knows is its own self, and the primary impulse from birth onward is self preservation. How could nature be benevolent or even survive if it created life forms that felt alien to their individual selves? Nature created the most basic impulse of all life forms to have an affinity to the self, to seek that which is appropriate to the survival of this self, and to avoid that which threatens its survival. But, as reason and socialization develop in the human self, so too does our relationships to other selves, and we

come to know there are times when virtuous acts, such as duty and altruism, may be the only good, even when detrimental to self-preservation. The natural affinity we feel to our self, spanning the two stages of impulse, from self-preservation to other preservation, is the Doctrine of Appropriation (*oikeiosis*).

XXI. The Good

Human excellence is moral excellence. The wise man will always do what is right, what is right is what is good, what is good is what is virtuous, and therefore the wise man is the virtuous man. There are four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and decorum. These virtues are the good (*agathon*), the only good, and their achievement is the good or excellence of the wise man, the philosopher. Moral excellence is the perfection of virtue (*arete*), which the wise man cultivates as an art, the art of living. Because the perfection of virtue is the work of the wise, only the wise truly know virtue. And, because virtue is the only good, it alone is sufficient for happiness (*eudaimonia*). All those things which people commonly call good (e.g., health, wealth, and powerful position) may be preferred when compared to their opposites (sickness, poverty, and servitude), but when compared to virtue they are matters of indifference. Only that which is good and can never be used for undue gain and immoral purposes qualifies unequivocally as good. Only the virtues are good in every situation, and on every occasion, and therefore qualify for the name that must always be honorable, the Good.

XXII. The Bad

What we commonly call bad (*kakon*) is not really bad. Sickness, poverty, and exile are matters of indifference to the wise. Even death, because it is the inevitable and natural process of change, is neither good nor bad and must be a matter of indifference. There is no evil in nature, only in human beings who live without virtue. Just as virtue is the only good, so it is that the acts of persons who are lacking in virtue are the only sources of evil in this world.

XXIII. The Indifferent

All those things we *commonly* call good or bad (see above) are neither good nor bad and are only indifferent. Only virtue is good, and only the lack of virtue is bad. However, Stoics do recognize that even those things that are indifferent can have value to the flourishing of a human life. Thus, there are some indifferent things that have value and may be preferred, such as health, wealth, and powerful position; there are some things that are without value and not preferred, such as sickness, poverty, and servitude; and, there are some things that are absolutely indifferent, the trivial, such as whether to wear a blue or red necktie, or go to a Chinese or Italian restaurant for dinner. The wise know that among those things which are indifferent and preferred, regardless of whether or not one achieves such goals, is a matter of indifference. For example, one may choose to be healthy and work to improve one's health, but whether or not good health is achieved is neither good nor bad and may be subject to external matters over which one has no control.

XXIV. Right Action

The wise know it is how one aims the bow and arrow in life, not whether one hits the target, that truly matters. And, how one goes about achieving those things that have value and are

appropriate to one's nature is what the Stoic calls *right action*. Right action, then, means using rational choice and action consistent with wisdom, justice, courage, and decorum to obtain those things that have value, and are thus preferred, and to avoid those things without value and not preferred. The regular exercise of rational choice and virtuous acts, right action, is a key to understanding the Stoic's encouragement of all to become active in world affairs. But, it must always be remembered that it is the right action and not the attainment of what one pursues that is the true good.

XXV. Emotions

The emotions are judgments, and this is the most fundamental Doctrine of Emotions. Emotion does not follow judgment; an emotion *is* a judgment. Stoics do *not* believe with Plato that the soul is divided against itself into rational and irrational parts where the irrational, symbolized by wild beasts, continually threatens to overcome the rational. The human soul is all reason with many functions. In judgments, the *hegemonikon* of the soul is reasoning that presentations are either true or false or uncertain. A judgment is an emotional judgment when it is a false judgment. Emotional judgments are false judgements about what is good and bad; false judgments about what is good or bad inflame the impulse of the soul to excessive action. As Chrysippus said, unlike the steady gait of a wise soul regulated by reason's true judgments, when the ignorant soul makes a false and therefore emotional judgment, the steady gait lurches forward. When normal, healthy impulses become excessive, the soul becomes like a man running down hill, unable to stop on command.

XXVI. Passion

An emotional judgment is a false judgment and is therefore contrary to reason. Any judgment contrary to reason is contrary to nature and cannot be appropriate. People commonly and habitually make false judgments about matters of indifference. As we saw above, in the practice of right action, one attends the manner in which the bow is held and the arrow is drawn and aimed – without regard to achieving the goal. But when one's heart and mind are set on achieving the goal, the frustration in not achieving that goal can give rise to a predisposition to the false judgments of emotion. It is natural and therefore proper to experience all manner of emotions, but it is not natural or proper to hold on to emotions about those things over which we have no control. Such emotional judgments are the psychic disturbance called 'passion' (*pathos*). The four general passions are distress, fear, appetite, and pleasure.

The Four Negative Passions

False Judgments	Present (Action of the Soul)	Future (Action of the Soul)
– about what is Good	Pleasure (Elation)	Appetite (Swelling)
– about what is Bad	Distress (Contraction)	Fear (Shrinking)

Because all activities of the *hegemonikon* are corporeal, false judgments about what is good cause the soul to expand, while false judgments about what is bad cause the soul to contract or

shrink. When judgments are contrary to reason they are contrary to nature, and whatever is contrary to nature must be removed. To remove a judgment contrary to nature requires that one remove the cause of the false judgment, and the cause of the false judgment is ignorance. To remove the cause of false judgment requires an understanding of what things are truly good, what are bad, and what are indifferent.

The Three Good Passions

True Judgments	Present	Future
– about what is Good	Joy	Wish
– about what is Bad	****	Caution

As is the case with the polarity of true and false, the opposite of disturbance of the passions are the serene and reasonable actions of the soul in the good states, also known as the good passions. Joy is the opposite of pleasure; Wish, also felt as kindness and contentment, is the opposite of Appetite. Caution, also felt as respect, is the opposite of Fear. There is no good state indicated as the opposite of distress (****), because distress is a false judgement about the present, which for the wise is not possible. The wise understand what things are in our power and what things are not in our power. Only virtue is in our power, and because it is always in our power to respond virtuously, there can be nothing bad in the present.

XXVII. Virtue

The virtues, the good, are unified. They are one. Such a thing is possible in like manner as a poet, a farmer, and a statesman can all be one and the same person. To have one virtue is to have them all; to lack one virtue is to lack them all. As the soul is reason itself, all virtues belong to reason, and the nature of that reason is knowledge. Thus, all virtues are manifestations of knowledge, and the lack of knowledge, or ignorance is the cause of the lack of virtue, which is vice, or evil. All virtues are attributes of the first cardinal virtue, wisdom.

XXVIII. Wisdom

Wisdom is the knowledge of what is good or bad or neither. Stoics often equate wisdom with prudence, which is the practical exercise of wisdom. Thinking ahead and weighing the likely consequences of one's actions, then applying knowledge to the decision-making process is wisdom in action. Choosing those things in agreement with nature rather than against nature is the expression of reason, the practice of wisdom, and the exercise of prudence. Only one with perfect wisdom can know the perfection of virtue, and such moral goodness is the ideal of wisdom. According to Zeno, the wise man is attracted to virtue while the fool is attracted to vice, which is ignorance of what is good, or bad or neither. Just as through the soul the living comes into being, so too from the practice of wisdom does the wise come into being. To be wise one must know the world and the self, continually separating the true from the false, the real from the illusion, and to live accordingly.

XXIX. Justice

Justice is the knowledge of how things are to be distributed. Justice begins in human kind's social instinct, strengthening the bonds of society by benevolent acts and weakening the same

bonds by acts which are injurious to another's family, friends, property, or person. Justice in our dealings with others takes into account the fairness of each individual's interest when measured against every other interest in the prevention of harm and in the distribution of benefit.

XXX. Courage

Courage is the knowledge of what things are to be confronted. Courage begins with personal ambition, the desire for greatness in the performance of useful actions noted for their difficulty or danger. The two attributes of courage are bravery and boldness. Bravery is not the lack of fear but the management of it. Boldness is overcoming the temerity that restricts our ambitions and expands our vision of what things are possible. The perfection of courage is in facing what we fear and becoming masters of it.

XXXI. *Sophrosyne*

Sophrosyne has no English equivalent but closely resembles the Latin word *decorum*. *Decorum* is the knowledge of self-control and how to be steadfast. It is the regulation of all of our appetites, emotions, and desires. Reason and experience teach us what things we manage best with moderation and what things we manage best with abstinence. A rational person uses reason to direct and control the appetites as well as the development of a dignified propriety or noble bearing in appearance, speech, and manners.

XXXII. The Goal of Life

The goal of life is to live in agreement with nature. Nature created life so that the dearest thing to each creature is its own constitution. Thus, the primary impulse of all life is to self-preservation, seeking the beneficial and avoiding the harmful according to the special requirements of each constitution. It is natural for small human children and other sentient creatures to live by non-rational impulses, which we know as instinct, but with maturity it then becomes natural for the human beings to live according to their highest faculty, reason. A human being who lives in agreement with nature lives in agreement with reason, because the soul is reason itself, the Logos. The nature of that reason becomes for us a knowledge of what things are truly good, what are bad, and what are indifferent. Only the virtues are always a benefit to us and therefore truly good. Thus, the perfection of reason is the perfection of virtue, human excellence is moral excellence, and the work of perfection is sufficient for happiness (*eudaimonia*). This is what is meant by living in agreement with nature, our nature and all nature, which is the final goal of life.

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