

# Against overly intellectualising the simplicity that is the Stoic rationale

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Zeno and his followers were caught up in the Athenian intellectual arena whereby every aspect of the teachings of any of the schools of thought were gone over with a fine tooth comb. As such the simplicity of the rationale of Zeno's teachings tended to be overlooked. Every aspect had to be defined and explained in ever greater detail in order to counter the assault by the intellectuals of the other schools.

While there was a serious aspect to the teachings of the various schools, to a great extent 'the love of wisdom' became a mind game for those who saw themselves as members of a society of what would today be called the 'intelligentsia'.

In recent years professors of Academic Philosophy and professors of the Classics have tried to collate what is known of Zeno's teachings. In that they have tried to present their ideas based on what writings that are available and in that what writings there are that can be attributed to those of the Stoic school are thin on the ground, they have looked to other schools and commentators of the time to try to flesh out what they believe is the technical detail behind much of the Stoic ideas.

All of their work is to be applauded, but being academic professors they are often seeing Stoicism as a subject matter that needs to be critically assessed against their modern academic standards. However, in that Stoicism is a faith based belief system, academic analysis is not necessarily the best way for a would-be Stoic to approach the subject, albeit that some of the academic writings can provide some useful background and understanding of the climate in which Zeno thought through his ideas.

But once the would-be-Stoic has achieved an understanding of the background ideas, they are best served by moving on from treating it as an intellectual 'subject of interest' to instead looking to Stoicism as a spiritual faith and a practical guide to living life where our path is best served by knowing our place through understanding that we are manifested out of 'the body of God' and so learning how to be a good person.

And here, starting from the Stoic belief in the nature of the Deity, the Stoic rationale leads the Stoic on to the simplicity of what it is to serve society and the Cosmos.

As an example of the simplicity of the Stoic rationale, we are told that all we need to do to know how a person aiming to be of good character should act is to look to the 'common perceptions' of humankind that tell us what it is to be a good person. And through this method even the 'bad' person recognises what it takes to be a good person.

Of course at times people can view matters through tinted glasses. Which is why another simple aspect of the Stoic rationale is to see life as it really is and not as we or our emotions may wish to see it.

Stoicism involves many simple ideas that are to be seen to combine with other ideas that the Stoic rationale throws up. This offers a rational understanding as to how to deal with any situation one may encounter in life. One simple observation of the nature of an aspect of life, combined with many other simple observations, sometimes based on a different point of view, will lead to an understanding of what is appropriate regards the individual's input into the moment by moment living of the life they have been born into.

We look to the nature of things in order to learn how to live and, in that things are forever changing, we also maintain an element of awareness of the need to be ready to adapt to circumstance while also looking to the wisdom that has been passed down over the ages – wisdom that may guide us with the voice of experience.

As a result we are accepting of what life throws at us, including loss and death in that these are aspects of the nature of things. Step by step we follow the simple rationale of the Stoic study of the nature of things to ensure that we are able to be accepting of the realities of life whereby any natural feelings/emotions will remain proportionate to any situation that triggers them, so avoiding them becoming 'perturbations' that divert us from our aim to be good and to 'live in accord with Nature'.

There is nothing complicated about the Stoic teachings. Nothing is complicated or counter intuitive. There is no need for some academic level of study. Stoicism is simplicity itself in that it is grounded in the common beliefs of the world faiths and it looks to the 'common perceptions' of humankind for guidance. All that is needed to learn what the Stoic life involves is a mind that is capable of a level of sound thought together with an element of self-discipline.

All that Stoicism asks of us is that we choose to align our will with the will of God (that we 'live in accord with Nature'), which involves us trying as best we can to be aware of what our sense 'impressions' of the world are telling us while also being as aware as possible as to what the consequences of our chosen actions are liable to be on the whole, be they intentional consequences or otherwise. To this end we try to live in a manner that is, for the good person, appropriate and of benefit to the wellbeing of all around us according to circumstance, and sometimes that means looking to the bigger picture and putting what may be seen as our own self-interests to one side.

The Stoic's selfish self-interest is served through living selflessly.