

# Stoicism in Action

Dr. Stephen Minister's PHIL110 How to Live Well - September 8, 2023 - Soobin Rho

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## Essay

My future-self, before you read this essay, let me give you some context behind the time period I wrote this essay in. It was right after 2023 summer when the new semester had begun. I had decided to take only four classes because I wanted to have enough time to do both my cybersecurity part-time job and my coursework. Most importantly, however, it was the time period in which I started an informal group with Deepak and Tianyi.

Each of us set up three rules to abide by everyday. You can set it however you want depending on your own personal goals. The point was to make it easy to follow and make them self-enforceable. We also kept track of daily results in the form of yes or no, so that we can keep each other accountable. It's continuing still today, and we are trying to keep it that way for as long as possible, hopefully lifetime.

Then, after around 21 days we started this thing, my How to Live Well class gave me an assignment where we are to live by the stoicism principles for two days and write an essay about it. It actually turns out my everyday rules and stoicism have a lot in common. Yes, there were a few differences, and I had to make some amendments, but it was as if they were soul mates. Here's my reflection on how it went.

### My Rule #1

*While studying or working, I must not open my phone, unless someone calls me or texts me.*

I don't know exactly how much, but before I started this, I was spending at least three hours everyday on my phone. Usually, it was either LinkedIn or HackerNews, but it wasn't a matter of exactly what it is I spend most of my time on. I would have found something else to waste my time on, even if I was born in an era where technology didn't even exist yet. The biggest problem of all was that I didn't even like any of it. I didn't even enjoy while I was doing whatever I was doing on my phone. Clearly, it was an addiction.

“Continue to act thus, my dear Lucilius – set yourself free for your own sake; gather and save your time, which till lately has been forced from you, or filched away, or has merely slipped from your hands.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius Selection #2, pg. 1)

My Rule #1 and Seneca's one of stoic advices are like soulmates; I was surprised when I first read Seneca's writings. People from two thousands of years ago had exactly the same problem and exactly the same feelings as mine!

This, of course, is only the first of my three everyday rules. Since I don't have enough time and space, however, I'll leave that for later, probably for my final essay. You, too, can see my daily yes or no by the way. It's right here:

<https://github.com/Bolzano-Weierstrass-plan/soobin-record>

## Relevant Quotes for Later Essays

“There are things which, if done by the few, we should refuse to imitate; yet when the majority have begun to do them, we follow along – just as if anything were more honourable because it is more frequent! Furthermore, wrong views, when they have become prevalent, reach, in our eyes, the standard of righteousness.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius Selection #2, pg. 13-14)

Has merely slipped from your hands!! Oh my god, it seems like people in First Century CE has had very similar feelings to mine, even two thousands years later. This, by the way, sounds very similar to what I’m already doing: The B Plan. This will be my focus of the essay, I think. Also tell my readers that they, too, can join me.

“Nothing, Lucilius, is ours, except time ... And yet time is the one loan which even a grateful recipient cannot repay.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius Selection #2, pg. 2)

“It is clear to you, I am sure, Lucilius, that no one can live a happy life, or even a supportable life, without the study of wisdom ... This idea, however, clear though it is, must be strengthened and implanted more deeply by daily reflection ... must develop new strength by continuous study, until that which is only a good inclination becomes a good settled purpose.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius Selection #2, pg. 1)

“Some people, indeed, only begin to live when it is time for them to leave off living. And if this seems surprising to you, I shall add that which will surprise you still more: Some people have left off living before they have begun. Farewell.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius Selection #2, pg. 3)

“The senses do not decide upon things good and evil; they do not know what is useful and what is not useful ... Reason, therefore, is the judge of good and evil; that which is foreign and external she regards as dross, and that which is neither good nor evil she judges as merely accessory, insignificant and trivial. For all her good resides in the mind.” (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius Selection #2, pg. 6-7)

“For indeed the wise person does not deem themselves undeserving of any of the gifts of Fortune. They do not love riches, but they would rather have them; they do not admit them to their heart, but to their house, and they do not reject the riches they have, but they keep them and wish them to be a resource for exercising their virtue.” (Seneca, On the Happy Life, pg. 5)

“Beware of the monkey trap. A child puts his hand into a narrow jar of candy, fills the hand and can't get it out of the jar – and then starts crying. If he drops a few pieces of candy, he'll get the rest out. You too – drop your desire. Demand less and you'll acquire more.” (Stephen Walton, The Enchiridion of Epictetus: A modern interpretation, pg. 16)