

## 1) Ancient philosophy as self-help / psychotherapy

Epicurus: “Empty is that philosopher’s argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sicknesses of bodies, so too there is no use in philosophy, unless it casts out the suffering of the soul.”

Cicero: “There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavour with all our resources and strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves.”

Epictetus: “It’s not events, but our opinions about them, that cause us suffering.”



*Therapeia* = care

*Psyche* = soul

*Psychotherapy* = care of the soul

## 2) Philosophy will help us achieve *eudaimonia* (flourishing, fulfillment, happiness)

Aristotle: “the philosopher more than any other will be happy”

Zeno of Citium: “Happiness is a good flow of life”

Seneca: “Happy the man who can endure the highest and the lowest fortune. He, who has endured such vicissitudes with equanimity, has deprived misfortune of its power.”

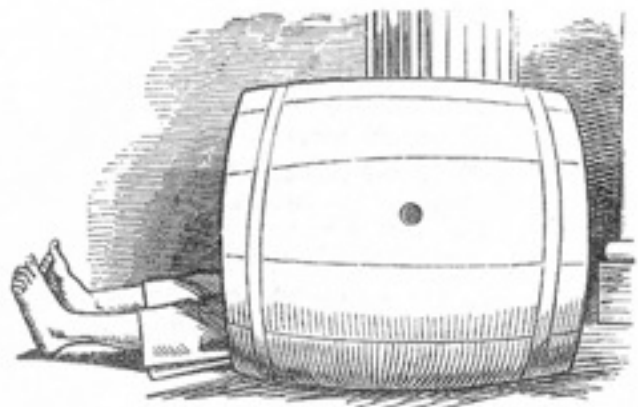
Stoic maxim: “True virtue is living according to nature.”

## 3) Philosophy is a form of training, or *askesis*

Diogenes: “Nothing in life has any chance of succeeding without strenuous practice.”

Aristotle: “we acquire the virtues by practicing them, as also happens in the case of the arts... For example, men become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”

Musonius Rufus: “How could we acquire courage if we had merely learned that the things which seem dreadful to the average person are not to be feared, but had no experience in showing courage in the face of these things? Upon the learning of the lessons appropriate to each and every excellence, practical training must follow invariably.”



Epictetus: “As the case stands now, we are

spirited and fluent in the lecture-room...but drag us into practice, and you will find us miserably shipwrecked”.

#### 4) What went wrong?!

Henry David Thoreau: “There are nowadays professors of philosophy but not philosophers.”

Schopenhauer: “university philosophy is mere fencing in front of a mirror...it’s goal is to give students opinions which are to the liking of the minister who hands out the chairs.”

Marx: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.”



#### 5) Philosophy strikes back (sort of)



James Allen: “A man is literally what he thinks.”

Dale Carnegie: “Eight words that can transform your life.”

Dr Phil: “There is no reality, only perception.”

Paul McKenna: “Your experience of life is primarily affected by the perspective you view it from.”

Eckhart Tolle: “The primary cause of unhappiness is never the situation, but your thoughts about it.”

Albert Ellis: “This principle...was originally discovered and stated by the ancient Stoic philosophers, especially Zeno, Chrysippus, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.”

# The Philosophy First Aid Kit



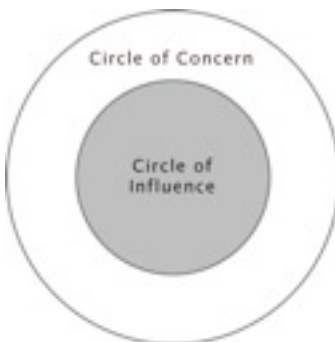
1) **The ABC.** Using Socratic method to question your habitual beliefs. Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

2) **The Journal.** Using self-writing to make your automatic beliefs conscious. Seneca: “Every day we must call upon our soul to give an account of itself...Is there anything better than to examine a whole day’s conduct?”



3) **The Handbook.** Turn your conscious principles into automatic habits, through repetition and memorization. Epictetus: “It is not easy for a man to come to a judgment unless he should state and hear the same principles every day, and at the same time apply them to all his life.”

4) **The Serenity Prayer.** Focus your efforts on what you can control, and learn to tolerate or accept what you can't. Epictetus: “Some things are up to us, and others are not.” US Army Leadership Manual: “It is critical for leaders to remain calm under pressure and to expend energy on things they can positively influence and not worry about things they cannot affect.”



5) **Skillful attitudes towards time.** Focusing on the present. Marcus Aurelius: “All the happiness you are trying to achieve by long, roundabout ways: you can have it right now.”

Focus on the past: the Epicurean practice of savouring happy memories, the Stoic habit of remembering everything that's gone.

Focus on the future: the *premeditatio malorum*. Focusing on

Death? Steve Jobs: “Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most

important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life.”

6) **Skillful attitudes towards space.** The View From Above - zooming out. Cicero's Dream of Scipio: “look always at these heavenly things, and despise those earthly”. Reflecting on Nature.

7) **Skillful attitudes towards others.** Learning to tolerate and accept our fellow humans. Learning not to care too much what they think of us. Shame-attacking.

8) **Skillful attitudes to our body.** Socrates: “You should eat to live, not live to eat.” Not becoming dependent on bodily comforts, no cook-books, no drinking to excess (unless as a spiritual exercise), no cushy mattresses, and no hot baths!!



## Cheers!

Further reading:

Marcus Aurelius: *The Meditations*

Epictetus: *The Discourses*

Seneca: *Letters From A Stoic*

Cicero: *On The Good Life*

Aristotle: *The Nicomachean Ethics*

Plato: *The Last Days of Socrates*

Pierre Hadot: *Philosophy as a Way of Life*

Donald Robertson: *The Philosophy of CBT*

Alain de Botton: *The Consolations of Philosophy*

Martha Nussbaum: *The Therapy of Desire*

AA Long and David Sedley: *The Hellenistic Philosophers*

And, on a less exalted note, [www.politicsofwellbeing.com](http://www.politicsofwellbeing.com)

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