'In story after page-turning story, *Lives of the Stoics* brings ancient philosophers to life'
David Epstein, author of *Range*

LIVES OF THE STOICS

The Art of Living from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius

Bestselling Authors of *The Daily Stoic*

RYAN HOLIDAY
and STEPHEN HANSELMAN


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Praise for *Lives of the Stoics*

'Stellar work ... This illuminating collection of biographies makes great use of Stoic wisdom to demonstrate the tradition's values'

Publishers Weekly

'There is philosophy for school and philosophy for life. This book is about the lives of men and women who lived their words and shows you how to do the same'

Thomas Tull, founder of Legendary Entertainment

'Whether you're a general or a gardener, a stockbroker or a senator, there is much to learn from Ryan Holiday's excellent *Lives of the Stoics*'

US Senator Ben Sasse

'At a time when public nobility is hard to come by, this is a good reminder of the power of ethical leadership'

Kirkus Reviews

'Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman have achieved something remarkable with *Lives of the Stoics*. It's a gift to the many of us today who are searching for inspiration and sense a deep connection with the thought of Zeno, Cato, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Indispensable to anyone who genuinely wants to learn about Stoic philosophy'

Donald Robertson, author of *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor*

'With its emphasis on individual success and perseverance, stoicism is seeing an American renaissance. The authors offer brief instructional biographies of its major ancient practitioners'

The New York Times

'Entertainingly, and yet thoughtfully, introduces us to the philosophers – and mere human beings – who shaped ideas that guide us over 2,000 years later. A great read, particularly for a tough time'

General Stanley McChrystal, author of *Team of Teams*


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Stephen Hanselman has worked for more than three decades in publishing as a bookseller, publisher and literary agent. He is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, where he received a Master's degree while also studying at Harvard's philosophy department.

Ryan Holiday is one of the world's bestselling living philosophers. His books, including *The Obstacle Is the Way*, *Ego Is the Enemy*, *The Daily Stoic* and the #1 New York Times bestseller *Stillness Is the Key*, appear in more than forty languages and have sold over 6 million copies. Together, they've spent over 300 weeks on the bestseller lists. He lives outside Austin, Texas, with his wife and two boys ... and a small herd of cows, donkeys and goats. His bookshop, The Painted Porch, sits on historic Main Street in Bastrop, Texas.

www.ryanholiday.net
@ryanholiday

Also by Ryan Holiday

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LIVES OF THE STOICS

THE ART OF LIVING FROM ZENO TO MARCUS AURELIUS

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INTRODUCTION

The only reason to study philosophy is to become a better person. Anything else, as Nietzsche said, is merely a "critique of words by means of other words."

No school of thought believed this—in the power of deeds over ideas—more than Stoicism, an ancient philosophy that dates to Greece in the third century BC.

It was Seneca, a Stoic philosopher of the Roman era, far removed from the academy, who would say quite bluntly that there was no other purpose to reading and study if not to live a happy life.

Yet this is not the role philosophy plays in the modern world. Today it's about what smart people say, what big words they use, what paradoxes and riddles they can baffle us with.

No wonder we dismiss it as impractical. It is!

This book will be about a different and far more accessible type of wisdom, the kind that comes from people like Seneca, a man who served his country at the highest levels, endured exile and loss, struggled with ambition and personal flaws, and ultimately died tragically and heroically trying to make good on his theories. Unlike the so-called "pen-

and-ink philosophers," as the type was derisively known even two thousand years ago, the Stoics were most concerned with how one *lived*. The choices you made, the causes you served, the principles you adhered to in the face of adversity. They cared about what you did, not what you said.

Their philosophy, the one that we need today more than ever, was a philosophy not of ephemeral ideas but of action. Its four virtues are simple and straightforward: Courage. Temperance. Justice. Wisdom.

It should not surprise us then that we can learn just as much from the Stoics' lived experiences (their works) as we can from their philosophical writings (their words). The wisdom offered by Cato the Younger's published works is scant—as a lifelong public servant, he was too busy in office and in battle to write down more than a few sentences. But the story of how he comported himself—with ironclad integrity and selflessness—amid the decline and fall of the Republic teaches more about philosophy than any essay. Along those lines, little survives to us about the theories of Diotimus, an early-first-century BC Stoic, but the legend of his literary fraud shows us how easily even righteous people can go astray. The same goes for the life of Seneca, whose eloquent letters and books survive to us at length, and yet must be contrasted with the compromises required by his job in Nero's administration.

And it's not just the lives of the Stoics that teach volumes but also their deaths—every Stoic was born to die, whether it was by assassination, suicide, or, most uniquely, of laughter, as was the case for Chrysippus. Cicero once said that *to philosophize is to learn how to die*. So the Stoics instruct us wisely not only in how to live, but in how to face the scariest part of life: the end. They teach us, by example, the art of going out well.

The Stoics profiled here are mostly men. This was the curse of the ancients: It was a man's world. Still, they were diverse. The philosophers

in this book hailed from the far-flung corners of the known world, from Cyprus, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Iraq. And though their philosophy would take root in Athens, the Stoics saw the whole earth as their country. The founder of Stoicism, Zeno of Kition, a Phoenician, would famously refuse Athenian citizenship because it conflicted with his sincere belief in cosmopolitanism. Stoicism eventually made its way to Rome, where it loomed large in Roman life, directing the course of one of the biggest and most multicultural empires in history.

Across the first five hundred years of Stoic history, its members form an astonishing spectrum of stations in life, ranging from Marcus Aurelius, the all-powerful emperor, to Epictetus, a lowly slave who was crippled in captivity but whose writings and life were an example that inspired many, including Marcus. Some of their names you may already be familiar with, and others (Aristo, Diogenes of Babylon, Porcia, Antipater, Panaetius, Posidonius, Arius, and Musonius Rufus) likely not. But each is worth knowing about, whether they were merchants or generals, writers or athletes, parents or professors, daughters or diplomats.

Each has something important to teach us. Each walked the path of virtue in a way that we must learn from.

The word "stoic" in English means the unemotional endurance of pain. Yet even a cursory look at the stories of these (mostly) men proves an enormous difference between the expectations of that lowercase stoicism and the realities of the philosophy, uppercase Stoicism. Stoicism is a vibrant, expansive philosophy filled with people who loved, who grieved, who strove, who fought bravely at close range in the great battles of history, who raised children, who wrote important works, who stood tall, who believed, and who *lived*. In their own time, these philosophers resisted the stereotype of lowercase stoicism, that they were unfeeling beasts of burden who suffered through life and looked only inward.

The Stoics were never simply resigned to the current state of things, accepting without objection the injustices of the world. Rather, they formed the most ardent "Resistance" to the tyranny of Julius Caesar, Nero, and others in the ancient world, even influencing popular democratic reforms. Just as Stoicism was the "stern nurse of heroes during the first century of the Empire," to borrow historian Richard Gummere's expression, it would play a similar role for many centuries after, including inspiring the leaders of the American Revolution as well as patriots like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who led a black regiment for the Union cause in the Civil War (and was a translator of Epictetus). The Stoics have always been people who bled and died for change, whether it was appreciated or successful or not.

"I know," Seneca wrote in 55 AD in a book on mercy written for the young emperor Nero, "that the Stoics have a bad reputation among the uninformed for being too callous and therefore unlikely to give good advice to kings and princes: they're blamed for asserting that the wise man does not feel pity and does not forgive.... In fact, no philosophical school is kinder and gentler, nor more loving of humankind and more attentive to the common good, to the degree that its very purpose is to be useful, bring assistance and consider the interests not only of itself as a school but of all people, individually and collectively."

The structure and style of these pages are inspired by Plutarch, one of the great biographers of history and, as it happens, both a chronicler and a critic of Stoicism.* We will be presenting to you overlapping but independent biographies of all of the major Stoic figures. The aim is to give you a rich resource you can turn to over and over again—as millions of readers of *The Daily Stoic* and *The Obstacle is the Way* have done for years now.

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*His grandson, Sextus, would be a philosophy teacher of Marcus Aurelius.

We have presented each of the Stoics through the lens of a defining characteristic or role they played in the history of their philosophy. You'll meet Porcia the Stoic Iron Woman, Diogenes the Diplomat, Antipater the Ethicist, and Zeno the Prophet. We want to leave you not only with some facts about these figures, but with a fuller sense of their essence and the aspects of their lives that teach us the most about the art of living.

Our aim in these pages is not to achieve strict scholarly accuracy—which is impossible after so many centuries—but to elucidate the moral lessons that can be drawn from the lives of these complicated figures. For many of the early Stoics we turn to Diogenes Laërtius—the so-called "night watchman of the history of Greek philosophy." His classic work, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, compiled in the third century AD, is at times contradictory, offering what is clearly a mix of collected facts and fictions. But it is also filled with beautiful insights and stories. Diogenes cared as much about the personal as the philosophical, and that's why his observations resonate in ways that other ancient scribblers and critics do not.

Because of the proximity of the later Stoics to political power in the Roman era, their names appear in the classic histories of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, often with admiration where they lived up to their ideals (such as Tacitus's accounts of the deaths of Thrasea and Seneca), or with derision where they failed them (such as Dio Cassius's account of Seneca's questionably accumulated wealth). Pliny, Strabo, Athenaeus, Aulus Gellius, and others shed additional light on the lives and teachings of the Stoics. Later, Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, Jerome, and Saint Augustine, who all learned so much from many of the Stoics, also help to bring their lives into focus.

In other cases, we rely on the accounts of writers like Cicero or on

the Stoics themselves for information. Cicero, who identified as a member of the skeptical Academy and kept busy climbing to the top of Roman politics, nevertheless dedicated a huge chunk of his life to a deep immersion in the history and doctrines of the Stoics who preceded him, and through his effort we have access to many sources long since lost. Seneca is another equally valuable source, as he not only crafted new writings on Stoicism but filled them with a wealth of quotations and anecdotes about his Stoic predecessors we'd otherwise not have. It is these intersections that are most interesting, even if we don't always have other confirming documentation, because they show us how the Stoics influenced each other, and how moral tales—like the one generations of Americans taught their children about George Washington and the cherry tree—can demonstrate important lessons regardless of veracity.

What the Stoics were after, what we remain interested in to this day, were lights to illuminate the path in life. They wanted to know, as we want to know, how to find tranquility, purpose, self-control, and happiness. This journey, whether it begins in ancient Greece or modern America, is timeless. It is essential. It is difficult. Which is why we ask, as the Stoics asked: Who can help me? What is right? Where is true north?

"You've wandered all over," Marcus Aurelius wrote to himself in *Meditations*, "and finally realized that you never found what you were after: how to live. Not in syllogisms, not in money, or fame, or self-indulgence. Nowhere."

If philosophy is anything, it's an answer to that question—how to live. It's what we have been looking for. "Would you really know what philosophy offers to humanity?" Seneca asks in his *Moral Letters*. "Philosophy offers counsel."

It will be your job, after you read these pages, to heed this counsel, and to struggle with what Seneca described as the most important job

of a reader of philosophy—the act of turning words into works. To turn the lessons of the lives of the men and women who came before us, their living and their dying, their succeeding and their failing, into actions in the real world.

For it is this, and nothing else, that earns one the title: Philosopher.

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

From the bestselling authors of *The Daily Stoic* comes a powerful exploration of the timeless lessons the ancients can teach us about happiness, success, resilience and virtue.

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