

Ancient Greek Philosophy for Modern Living

- ▶ Tim Seid
 - ▶ Matt Hisrich
 - ▶ Carol Herse
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Background to Contemporary Groups

- ▶ In the last century classical scholars began emphasizing that modern analytical philosophy has largely ignored the way in which ancient Greek philosophy was meant to teach people the art of living.
- ▶ In the mid-20th century several scholars (Paul Rabbow, Ilsetraut Hadot) published monographs in German that developed the idea that Greek philosophy was concerned with the leading or guidance of the soul.
- ▶ Pierre Hadot became influential with the publication of his book and its translation into English: *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*.
- ▶ In the past few decades there have developed groups and organizations seeking to put into practice the teachings of philosophy, particularly ancient Greek philosophy, most notably that of the Stoics.

My Basic Overview

- ▶ The goal of human life is for people within communities of friendship to progress in their psychological, moral, and spiritual development toward a mature form of life in which they thrive or flourish in spite of hardships, pain, suffering, lack of basic necessities of life and regardless of their wealth, status, physical appearance, or national/ethnic identity.
- ▶ This is accomplished by forms of therapy that correct wrong ways of thinking about what is most important in life, making proper judgments about what is beneficial, what is unnecessary, or what is harmful to our progress.
- ▶ Negative emotions and desires have to be avoided, while we must strengthen our ability to think properly about what is best in life. This therapy involves knowing what is good and what is evil and making proper choices.
- ▶ We train our mind not to succumb to irrational fears, to give in to lusts and desires for things that only harm us, to indulge ourselves in wealth and leisure, and to seek fame, reputation, status, and personal glory.
- ▶ We meditate on the good, imitate examples of the best sort of life, encourage each other, and also warn each other and give each other criticism when we allow ourselves to go wrong. The result is that we are able to live above our circumstances. We can experience joy in life whether we have an easy life or a hard one.
- ▶ The more mature we become the less selfish we are and we come to place the needs of others as more important than our own and treat all people as our brothers and sisters in the world.

Contemporary Movements

- ▶ Philosophical Clubs
 - ▶ Philosophical Counseling
 - ▶ Modern Stoic Groups
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Philosophical Clubs and PIPs

- ▶ In France in the 90s a group started meeting at a café. In a few years it had grown to several hundred people, a hundred other groups meeting in France, and 150 meetings worldwide.
- ▶ In the UK they are also known as “philosophy in pubs” (PIPs) or “pub philosophy”

The London Philosophy Club holds regular meetings and claims 3,000 members.

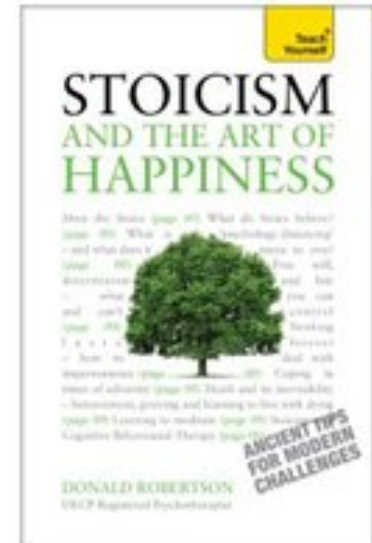


Philosophical Counseling

- ▶ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - ▶ Early examples in Germany and Israel
 - ▶ Two main US organizations
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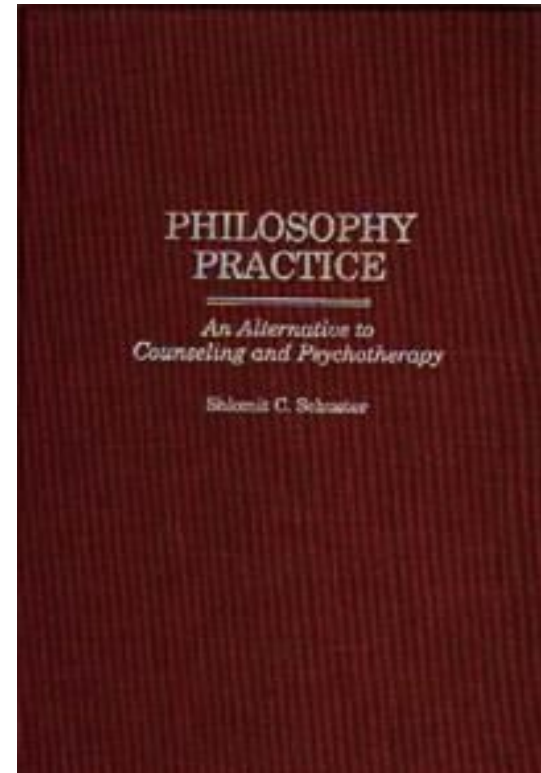
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has its roots in Stoic philosophy

- ▶ Aaron Beck: “The philosophical origins of cognitive therapy can be traced back to the Stoic philosophers, particularly Zeno of Citium (fourth century BC), Chrysippus, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.”
- ▶ Don Robertson



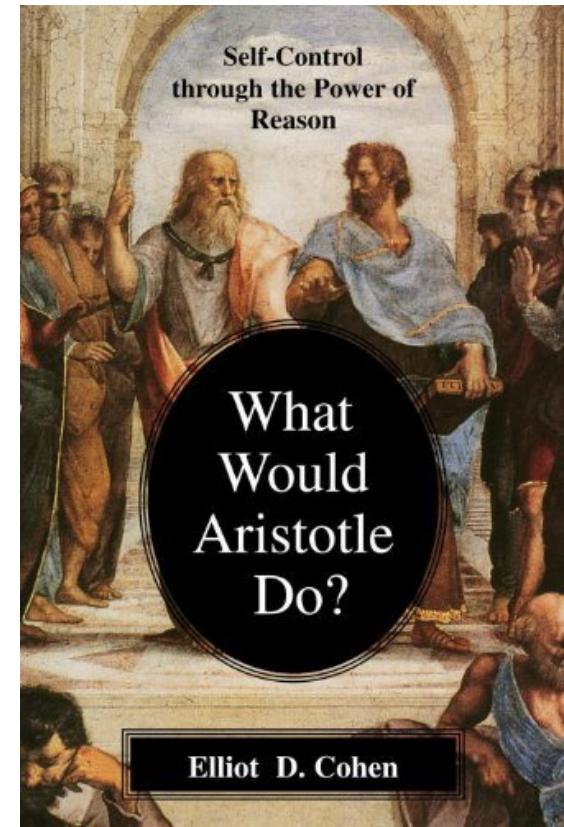
International Organizations – 80s

- ▶ In Germany: Gerd Achenbach, Internationale Gesellschaft für Philosophische Praxis
- ▶ In Israel: Schlomit Schuster, Israel Society for Philosophical Practice and Counseling



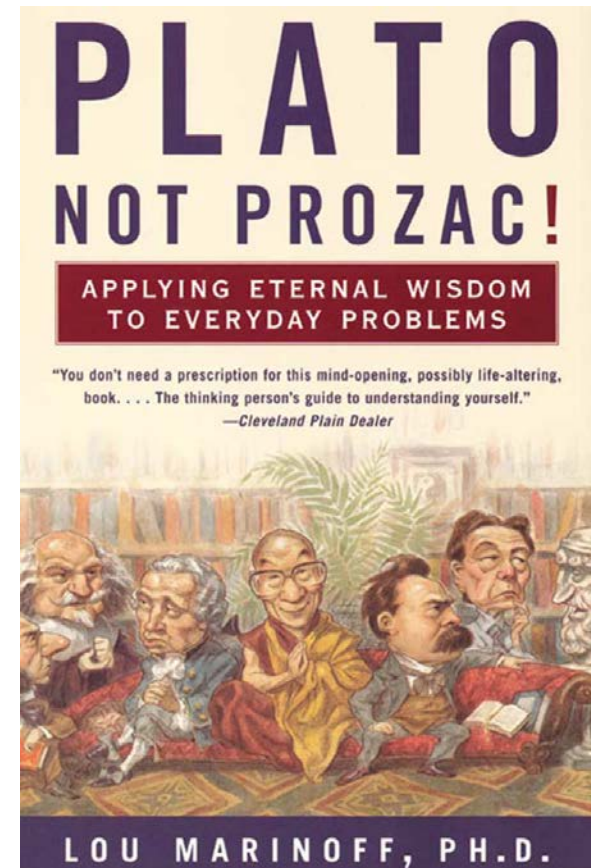
National Philosophical Counseling Association

- ▶ The National Philosophical Counseling Association was formed in 1992 by Elliot Cohen and Paul Sharkey along with a peer-reviewed journal and a training institute.

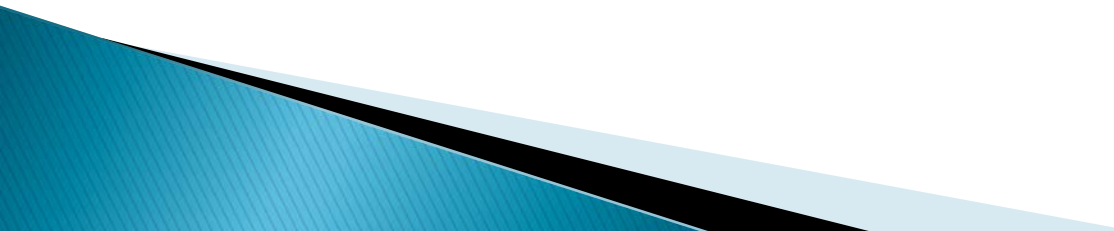


American Philosophical Practitioners Association

- ▶ Lou Marinoff co-founded the American Philosophical Practitioners Association, which publishes a journal *Philosophical Practice* and conducts a certification program for philosophical counselors.



Modern Stoic Groups

- ▶ Stoicon, Stoicism Today, Be a Stoic Week (UK & US)
 - ▶ Society of Epictetus and the Chrysippus School of Theology
 - ▶ The Stoic Life
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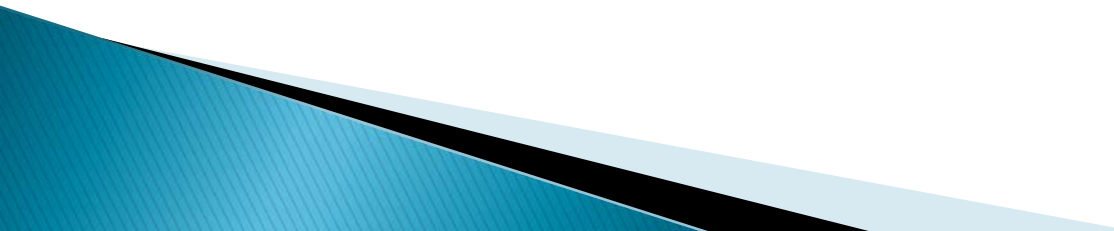
Stoicon

- ▶ In 2012 an annual event started at the University of Exeter in which classicists, philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists collaborated to host Be A Stoic Week.
- ▶ Participants engage in philosophical meditation and practices throughout the week and respond to a survey.
- ▶ In 2016 the conference, now called Stoicon, will take place in New York City hosted by the New York City Stoics.

“From this, it is clear that stoic philosophy, unlike most versions of philosophy today, was not just a matter of theory and argument. Rather, its main emphasis was practical: philosophy conceived as a way of life supported by a sophisticated and credible understanding of human psychology and giving rise to a rich armoury of methods for mental discipline and training.”

– Patrick Ussher

Society of Epictetus

- ▶ One of the earliest groups (1996) to organize was the New Stoa, the Online Stoic Community (nearly 2,000 members) and now the Society of Epictetus. Erik Wiegardt is the founder and director.
 - ▶ Their educational effort has been the College of Stoic Philosophers.
 - ▶ Recently they formed the Chrysippus School of Theology which program leads to licensing and ordination.
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The Stoic Life

- ▶ A Canadian couple, self-professed Neo-Pagans, Michel and Pam Daw, who came to embrace Stoicism, have had a website on The Stoic Life and some Facebook groups.
- ▶ They have organized and led workshop groups that continue to meet together regularly.

Musings of a Stoic Woman

Musings of a modern day Stoic... This is a daily journal on life, the Universe and everything from a practicing Stoic woman's perspective.

Interview Questions

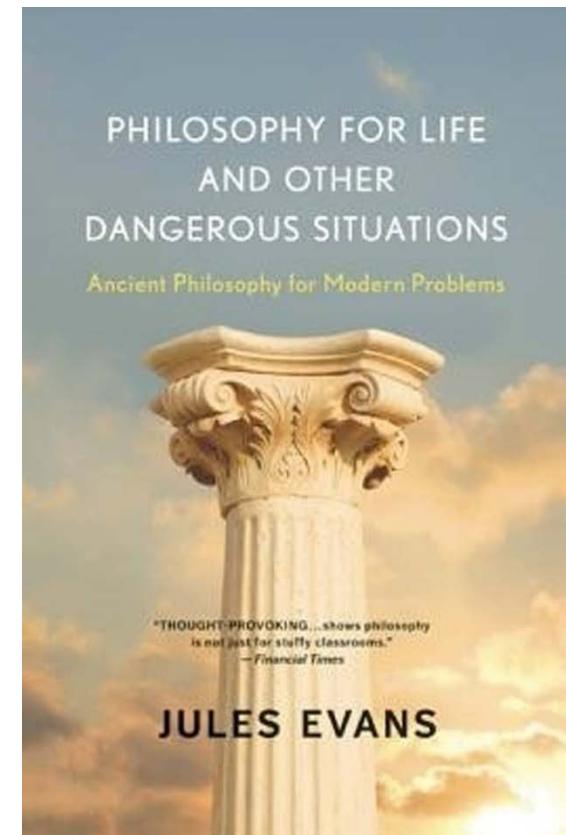
- ▶ **Origins**
 - How did your group begin?
 - Are there people or texts that have been instrumental?
- ▶ **Guiding Principles**
 - What are the foundational principles and mission of the organization?
 - What are the needs of people that are met by being a participant?
 - How does being a participant improve quality of life?
 - What is this group offering that people have not found elsewhere?
- ▶ **Demographics**
 - What are people's educational level?
 - Are both men and women active members of the group.
 - Diversity?
- ▶ **Organizational Structure**
 - Do participants meet with each other?
 - Is there a formal process for membership?
 - Is the group the primary or only group or do people have other connections?
 - What happens when people interact with each other?
 - Are there defined roles?
 - Is there a hierarchical structure?
 - Is there a broader group of which you a part? What is that relationship? Are there meetings together?
 - How are conflicts in the group resolved?
- ▶ **Leadership**
 - Are there primary persons as leaders or specialists?
 - What kind of training would a specialist have and where would they get it?
- ▶ **Finances**
 - Do participants give donations for the support of the group?
 - Are there other ways to raise funds?
 - Are there now paid individuals in the group or might there be in the future?
- ▶ **Altruism**
 - Are there ways in which the group works together for the betterment of society?
- ▶ **Promotion**
 - Does the group actively promote itself and, if so, how does it go about doing that?
 - What is the experience like for new people? Are people generally accepting?
 - What is the response of people when they hear about your group?

Three Interviews

- ▶ Jules Evans
 - ▶ Greg Lopez
 - ▶ Erik Wiegardt
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Jules Evans

- ▶ Jules Evans, is interested in therapeutic practices from ancient philosophies and wisdom traditions, how individuals and organizations use them today, and how they inform public policy ideas about well-being, ethical resilience, flourishing and transcendence.
- ▶ His first book, *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations*, explores how people are rediscovering ancient Greek and Roman philosophies and how Greek philosophy (particularly Stoicism) inspired Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).



Greg Lopez and New York Stoics

- ▶ Gregory Lopez, practicing Buddhist and Stoic, facilitator of the New York City Stoics meetup, co-host of Stoic Camp New York, and co-organizer of STOICON 2016. Also interested in cognitive behavioral therapy and its relations to Stoicism.



Erik Wiegardt



- ▶ The New Stoa, Society of Epictetus, the College of Stoic Philosophers, and the Chrysippus School of Theology