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**PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP:
HOW STOICISM CAN BEST PREPARE OUR
FUTURE LEADERS**

by

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June 2021

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PREPARE OUR FUTURE LEADERS**

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ABSTRACT

The ability to act ethically is a vital characteristic of a strong leader. Currently, the Navy lacks formal education on ethical frameworks. Instead, it relies on initial training, various commissioning sources, and on-the-job training to ensure cursory knowledge, thereby leaving ethical foundations unaddressed. Moreover, reliance on traditional Consequentialist and Non-Consequentialist norms and rules leaves little room for ambiguity in the gray area so prevalent in today's decision environments. Because one cannot prepare for every ethical challenge, one must be well versed in a virtuous principles-based approach to ethics rooted in Stoic ethics. In this thesis, I discuss why Stoic philosophy is the most advantageous approach to Navy leadership training by focusing on the Principles of Stoic Leadership and how they can be put into action.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to act ethically is a vital characteristic of a strong military leader. Currently, the Navy lacks formal education on ethical frameworks. Instead, it has placed a heavy value on “on the job training” to provide the necessary skills leaders require. During initial training at various commissioning sources and recruiting locations, incoming leaders briefly discuss ethics in the form of a manual or set of rules. However, in these instances and during this particular time in a career new leaders are more concerned with successfully navigating baseline tactical training and gaining skills needed to be technically proficient, not necessarily ethics.

Nonetheless, ethical dilemmas occur at every stage in a military leader’s career, and comprehensive ethical training is essential to ensure the development of influential ethical leaders. In short, due to the evolving political and military landscape, the study of ethics must be central within military training pipelines to curtail instances of ethical blunders, be they personal or professional. Moreover, military planners and leaders cannot foresee every ethical challenge and cannot write a set of rules to prepare leaders for every eventuality. Therefore, one must be well versed in a principles-based approach to ethics to properly establish oneself as ethically virtuous at the core of their identity.

Challenges faced by all military leaders range from the routine to the complex. Yet, current available military ethics training, sparse as it may be, is also not always appropriate for all situations. Barring some outliers, current forms of military ethics are primarily Consequentialist or Deontological in their approach. Rules and potential outcomes to specific situations guide leaders to make decisions. However, these rule-based and outcome-based normative ethical theories driving most military ethics training, raise the following question: In the likely event that a military leader faces an unforeseen challenge not addressed in the “rule book,” how will the leader know what is ethically correct?

To ensure military leaders can answer this question, the military should work to prepare our leaders for these challenges, rather than simply handing future leaders a book of rules, laws, or procedures. Essentially, our leaders must strive toward an ethical *mindset*

and *way of being*, rather than a particular set of rules—this preferred mindset is not achievable under current military ethical frameworks.

A. NORMATIVE THEORIES

There are three leading schools of thought in the study of ethics—Consequentialist, Deontology, and Virtue Theory. Each is valuable, valid, and complex, with various sub-categories and theoretical approaches. When trying to decide what ethical approach is most suitable for military leadership complexities, it is essential to understand the difference.

B. CONSEQUENTIALISM

Classic Consequentialism asserts, simply enough, that (1): Consequences arise from every ethical situation and action; and (2) People should base their decisions upon the perceived or expected outcome of that action.¹ Consequentialists hold that to find “the good,” be it personal or for all concerned, one must consider the consequences of one’s actions. The good to be sought in our ethical deliberations is the “good” in which those outcomes consist. One should or should not act without first understanding the resulting consequence, and then act accordingly.²

A specific and often most recognizable version of Consequentialism is Utilitarianism, which states that the ethically correct decision in any scenario is that which would result in the greatest “good” for the highest number of people. Utilitarianism argues that we should aim to maximize the good ends for all, all things considered.³

Additionally, there are several other categories or branches under the broader Consequentialist view. Still, the overall concepts are all similar in that one must assess consequences to actions to determine the highest good for the highest number of people. This line of reasoning is not always ideal for military applications. There are scores of examples when this theory would invite disaster for our forces. At the most basic level,

¹ “Consequentialism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, June 3, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>.

² Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

³ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

imagine an outnumbered platoon on a battlefield. Using Utilitarian logic, a leader could simply make a mathematical calculation and see that the overall most significant number of people would survive if their Platoon surrendered; therefore, the overall most significant number would benefit. Clearly, surrendering is generally not in the interest of military objectives and therefore not an option. In this case, the outcome of the surrender is the determining factor, not the question of whether or not it is the right thing to do for the right reason. Endless other examples can be articulated where simply “maximizing the good” fails to respect other interests or goals, sacrifices respect for individuals rights, or does not properly weigh the means to accomplish a given end as ethically relevant. In short, using only Utilitarian concepts is insufficient for ethical decision making by military leaders.

C. DEONTOLOGY

Deontology, a form of Non-Consequentialism, is the school of thought that people should do the right thing based on moral principle, rather than simply aiming to maximize the good outcomes.⁴ Often framed as a “rule-based” approach, Deontology contends that a given moral rule, principle, or maxim says an action is the right thing to do or not, and doing the right thing itself is the “greater good.” These theories often deal in moral absolutes—actions are right or wrong in principle, rather than dependent on a consequentialist calculus. Following this theory, straying from a moral absolute is not in keeping with the “greater good” as it would fail to accomplish the “right.” Therefore, one should live within the constraints of these moral principles in all circumstances. For example, under Kantian Deontology, all leaders would be considered moral agents (those with the capacity to make ethical decisions) and should not lie under any circumstance because it is dishonest, and dishonesty is morally wrong in principle. However, what happens when the leader is captured and confronted by the enemy? A Kantian deontologist would maintain that telling a lie to throw the enemy off would not be within the confines of the “right action” and therefore should be avoided to keep your moral authority, regardless of the “greater good” of consequentialist outcomes. Clearly, there are going to

⁴ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

be serious problems for this this ethical framework applied in such fashion for the military leader.

The concept of duty plays a prominent role in most non-consequentialist theories as well. This could lead to another example of how non-consequentialist approaches might fail the ethical military leader. For example, some may interpret duty to convey that leaders should never question seniors because leaders would be “duty-bound” to follow orders blindly. Using the above example of the captured leader, they would be “duty-bound” to remain loyal to their team to lie on their behalf, creating a contradiction in their ethical framework.

D. VIRTUE THEORY

Virtue theory is a third approach to ethical decision making and reasoning. Virtue theory centers on the notion that people should always act with Virtue in any situation, because of a virtuous identity they have cultivated. Indeed, rather than *acting* with Virtue, it is perhaps better to say that Virtue theory focuses on *being* virtuous. Meaning people should derive their actions based upon the good in itself: the virtuous path and the way to eudaimonia, a loosely held word for “happiness” or “contentment.”⁵ Virtue Theory does not maintain moral absolutes. Instead, it deals in varying degrees of truth, fairness, and justice. Virtue Theory argues that “goodness” is intrinsic to the person and that having a characteristic of Virtue is necessary for recognizing oneself as an ethical person, which in turn is necessary for individual contentment.⁶ Most versions of Virtue theory, such as Aristotle’s, most prominently, place heavy emphasis on the cultivation of one’s habits which ultimately form their character. Having a virtuous character, it is argued, enables the individual to navigate difficult ethical situations by following their own virtuous character, staying true” to themselves in a sense.

⁵ “Virtue Ethics,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, December 8, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>.

⁶ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

E. TO WHAT ETHICAL THEORY DOES THE MILITARY CURRENTLY SUBSCRIBE?

Currently, the concept of military ethics appears to consist of a blend of both consequentialist and non-consequentialist ideas. Predominantly, leaders use rule-based tools such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Ethical Field manuals, and Codes of Conduct to drive ethical decision making. Some adhere to “duty” or “calling” to serve honorably and are bound to moral absolutism.

When this blend of theories falls short, ethical situations turn “gray.” Which is to say, they are seldom clearly defined by explicit rules or moral absolutes. If young leaders only know the rules, they are less equipped to handle ambiguity. Suppose leaders just do what is best for the most significant numbers, as is seen by the concept of Utilitarian consequentialists. In these cases, they will eventually make decisions to the detriment of a deserving minority. If leaders only understand the duty of being loyal to one’s fellow service member, they may be reluctant to speak up when faced with a moral crisis.

F. WHAT SHOULD WE USE?

When confronted by an ethical challenge, a common response is to say that answers are seldom black and white, meaning there is no clear answer or way to move forward with a decision without some sort of repercussion, either professionally or personally. Military ethical challenges often have many answers and sometimes no answers. This blurring of lines between black and white makes many ethical situations “gray” as often there is not a clear “greater-good outcome” to achieve. Military leaders live and breathe in these ethical “gray” areas, which is why it is vital to adopt a theory of ethics that focuses on the ability to act ethically and rationally at all times, absent a clear rule or given procedure.

There is no doubt that all of these ethical approaches are suitable in some situations. However, Virtue Theory allows the leader to do the right thing in almost all events because if a leader is a virtuous person in the core of his or her identity, the ethical “gray” area can be traversed without the reliance on a specific rule or greater good outcome that may lead that person ethically astray.

Leaders should switch from a rules-based and consequences-based approach to ethics to a whole-person, character-based approach to moral understanding. The over-reliance on rules to provide good ethical decision-making often comes up short when faced with moral dilemmas. Leaders must be virtuous in a world filled with ambiguity. Armed with Virtue, a leader can operate rationally and effectively while always maintaining the moral high-ground. Leaders need the tools to make rational and virtuous decisions absent clear higher authority guidance. The best way of achieving this goal, I argue, is to utilize a particular Virtue-based form of ethics called Stoicism. The world we occupy is “gray” and ambiguous. Therefore, we must train our leaders to be morally sound when confronted by ambiguous ethical challenges. Under the umbrella of Virtue ethics, Stoicism provides a solid leadership ethical foundation and framework. It relies heavily on the concept of being a good person because it is ultimately in one’s self-interest to do so.

G. UPCOMING

The key underlying issue is: how can we expect new leaders to know the right thing to do at all times? This text will outline how military leaders can use Stoicism to make sound ethical decisions effectively in the following chapters. Chapter II first lays out why Stoicism is suitable for the military leader. There I discuss the concept of the Cardinal Virtues and explain the moral Passions and how they can serve and hinder us. Chapter III then details the Principles I believe are associated with Stoic Leadership. Finally, Chapter four will describe a way ahead with a readaptation of Epictetus’ handbook on Stoicism, the *Enchiridion*, with one geared toward military leaders. My developed *Military Leadership Enchiridion* will outline how a Stoic Military Leader interacts with others, on and off the battlefield.

II. WHY STOICISM FOR THE MILITARY?

What is your profession? Being a good man. but this can only come about through philosophic concepts—concepts of the nature of the Whole, and concepts of the specific constitution of man.

—Marcus Aurelius⁷

To discuss why Stoicism is suitable for the military as a form of ethical guidelines, we must first understand Stoicism. In ancient Greece, the philosopher Socrates was famous for asking passersby, “How does one live a good life?” Philosophers have attempted to answer this question ever since. The philosophy of Stoicism attempts to answer the question by saying that to live a good life one must pursue happiness through living “according to Nature.” One lives in accordance with Nature by seeking knowledge and happiness through Reason and Virtue. From the Stoic perspective, knowledge is equal to Virtue. Therefore, seeking knowledge is to seek Virtue through Reason, Nature, and rational thought.

To better explain why Stoicism is a model philosophy for military leadership we must first dispel common misconceptions and then better understand what Stoic philosophy means. Once accomplished, we will discuss the inner workings of Stoic philosophy, such as *Internals*, *Externals*, *Cardinal Virtues*, and *Passions*. Once we have a solid foundation of Stoic philosophy’s roots, we can extract the salient portions necessary to develop sound leadership principles.

A. WHAT STOICISM IS NOT

[Stoicism] requires the suppression of emotions and physical appetites. It recommends the resigned acceptance of misfortune rather than active, practical engagement with the fascinating fine-grained business of everyday living and problem-solving. It doesn’t leave enough room for hope, human

⁷ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 149.

agency, or human intolerance of misery. It denounces pleasure for its own sake.

—Edith Hall⁸

Before we discuss what Stoicism is, let us take a minute and unpack this commonly misunderstood philosophical framework so that we may have a level of understanding moving forward. First, it is common for people to think that Stoics are characterized as melancholic and perpetually unhappy. Because Stoicism is a branch of Virtue Ethics where the ultimate goal is to find happiness or fulfillment, this misunderstanding could not be further from the truth. Another common assessment is that Stoics are cold or heartless. In actuality Stoics believe that a person in pursuit of Virtue should be in service of their family and fellow man, thus making them compassionate individuals and engaged with their fellow citizens. Finally, people having “stoic” (with a lower-case “s”) personality traits are commonly referred to as having a “stiff upper lip,” meaning they rarely show their feelings because even having “feelings” could be seen as a sign of weakness. This line of reasoning is also false because the real Stoic (with a capital ‘S’) cares greatly and accepts their feelings, but they do not let their feelings control their actions.

Additionally, the term *Amor Fati* is common when describing Stoicism. *Amor Fati*, or the “love of one’s fate” is used to indicate a person’s willingness to accept things out of his or her control and to live life fully anyway. While not wrong, the translation is a bit tricky because the Stoics had a varying opinion on the concept of Fate or “determinism” versus the concept of “free will.” Many authors have much to say regarding this but Ryan Holliday’s version does fit well, despite the loose translation. He contends that it is the idea that the Stoic should love every obstacle that is thrown at him or her as it is an opportunity to improve their character and ability to overcome adversity.⁹ The ideas themselves are still widely debated among Stoic historians and philosophers.

⁸ Edith Hall, *Aristotle’s Way: How Ancient Wisdom Can Change Your Life* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 11.

⁹ Ryan Holiday, *The Obstacle Is the Way* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 5.

Another inaccurate description of Stoicism is the thought that it is similar to a religion in that it focuses on the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, or the pursuit of happiness, and being one with Nature to appease the God(s). This misunderstanding is forgivable because the Stoics make several mentions of God. However, when “being one with God” is referenced, it is meant in a sense of being one with Nature and Reason, or Stoic Logic as the driving force in the universe, not one with a particular God, per se.

B. WHAT STOICISM IS

Do not hope that events will turn out the way you want, welcome events in whichever way they happen: this is the path to peace.

—Epictetus¹⁰

Stoicism stresses the importance of using Reason and Judgment to discern what you can and cannot control. It establishes and underscores the value of living in pursuit of Virtue, knowledge, and Reason in daily life.

Stoicism is divided into three branches, each interdependent and mutually exclusive. First, the Logic branch encompasses grammar and linguistics, rhetoric, and epistemology; second is Physics focusing on astronomy and cosmology; and third, Ethics, which for the purposes of this thesis we will exclusively focus.¹¹ When discussing Stoicism from a leadership perspective, Logic and Physics, as addressed by ancient Stoics, are less important and so we will not cover these topics except to say that they are an essential aspect of pure Stoicism.

So how do we achieve Virtue and knowledge? We achieve it through sound Reason, rational thought, and proper judgment. Through these concepts and the Stoic Leadership Principles, military leaders can divest themselves of negative “passions” and live within the four “Cardinal Virtues” of Moderation, Courage, Justice, and Wisdom.

¹⁰ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. Robert Dobbin (New York: Penguin, 2008), 224.

¹¹ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations: The Annotated Edition*, ed. Robin Waterfield (New York: Basic Books, 2021), xxxv.

C. UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTERNALS AND EXTERNALS

We are responsible for some things, while there are others for which we cannot be held responsible. The former include our judgment, our impulse, our desire, our aversion, and our mental faculties in general; the latter include the body, material possessions, our reputation, status—in a word, anything not in our power to control.

—Epictetus¹²

The first step towards Reason and Virtue is to understand the difference between “Internals” and “Externals.” All Stoics discuss these concepts. No one, however, captures it more concisely than Epictetus. In his crucial text, *The Enchiridion*, the very first thing Epictetus teaches us is the value of knowing what we can and cannot control when he discusses the balance of “Internals” versus “Externals.” According to Epictetus, this concept is essential because if we understand what we control, we have power over ourselves. If we attempt to control aspects of life over which we have no control, we will be slaves and subject to restraint. True freedom means letting go of “External” things and managing our internal mind. When presented with any situation, we can use Reason and make a judgment based upon “Internals” (what we control) versus “Externals” (what we do not control). Stoics say that we should only concern ourselves with that over which we have control. After all, if a situation is external to our capability to change and detracts us from what we actually can accomplish, worrying about it is a waste of time.

D. INTERNALS

Remove the judgment, and you have removed the thought “I am hurt”:
remove the thought “I am hurt,” and the hurt itself is removed.

—Marcus Aurelius¹³

In this quote from Marcus Aurelius he is asserting that we are in control of our opinions and thoughts. If we properly control our opinions and thoughts we are on the path towards knowledge and Virtue. We are in control of our pursuits, desires, and aversions,

¹² Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 221.

¹³ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 36.

and because of that, we decide what to pursue, what is desirable, and what we wish to avoid. Essentially, Marcus is claiming that our minds are paramount and therefore should not be tainted by outside opinions or happenings.

E. EXTERNALS

The faculty of desire purports to aim at securing what you want, while aversion purports to shield you from what you do not. If you fail in your desire, you are unfortunate, if you experience what you would rather avoid, you are unhappy. So direct aversion only towards things that are under your control and alien to your nature, and you will not fall victim to any of the things that you dislike. But if your resentment is directed at illness, death, or poverty, you are headed for disappointment.

—Epictetus¹⁴

What do we not control? Notably, we are not in control of our bodies because health and injury lie around any corner. Poverty, because we do not control money, prosperity or wealth. Our reputations, because we cannot control the thoughts of other humans. Of course, we have some ability to influence those things that lie outside our control and we should try to influence favorable outcomes in these areas. However, Epictetus says it best when he says that by Stoic definition, “Externals” are whatever is not within our own actions.

F. INCORPORATING THE “PREFERRED INDIFFERENT”

A single example of extravagance or greed does a lot of harm—an intimate who leads a pampered life gradually makes one soft and flabby; a wealthy neighbor provokes cravings in one; a companion with a malicious nature tends to rub off some of his rust even on someone of an innocent and open hearted nature—what then do you imagine the effect on a person’s character is when the assault comes from the world at large? You must, inevitably either hate or imitate the world.

—Seneca¹⁵

¹⁴ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 222.

¹⁵ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robert Campbell (New York: Penguin, 1969), 43.

Things that are not within our control but are still desirable are referred to as the “Preferred Indifferent.” The “Preferred Indifferent” is something that you want to happen but you do not have direct control over. How we decipher what we want and need comes to us in the form of the “Preferred Indifferent.” The “Preferred Indifferent” is acknowledging that we are not in control of certain things, which is okay. Still, of those things we do not control, there are things that we prefer over things that we do not in order to live a happy life in pursuit of eudaimonia. For example, we prefer good health, wealth over poverty, respect for our peers, rewarding careers, and loving families.

G. EXAMPLES OF THE PREFERRED INDIFFERENT

1. Health

He lives badly who does not know how to die well.

—Seneca¹⁶

Good health is essential for obvious reasons. However, health is technically outside of our direct control by Stoic standards because accident and injury may befall us at any time. Absent the concept of the “Preferred Indifferent,” and taken at face value, we should not need to go to the gym and take care of ourselves because the body is out of our control. We cannot control it with our minds, and therefore, we should not waste our energy trying to control it in the first place. However, good health is essential to remain healthy enough to work hard. It is natural for humans to prefer to be in good health therefore this is in keeping with Nature and Reason. Ultimately, good health is something Stoics value because without a strong body, our minds can become soft.

2. Money

All the greatest blessings are a source of anxiety, and at no time is fortune less wisely trusted than when it is best; to maintain prosperity there is need of other prosperity, and in behalf of the prayers that have turned out well

¹⁶ Seneca, *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*, ed. James Romm (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), Preface.

we must make still other prayers. For everything that comes to us from chance is unstable, and the higher it rises, the more liable it is to fall.

—Seneca¹⁷

Stoics concede that it good to prefer fortune over poverty because it is also human Nature to want to succeed and be comfortable, provided that fortune, or pursuit of it, does not control the man. According to Seneca, wealth can be a “wise man’s servant, and the fool’s master.”¹⁸ Seneca says that we should embrace being uncomfortable every once in a while to remain thankful for what we have. True, Seneca had enormous wealth, and to live as a Stoic without money is easier said than done, but the sentiment remains true.

3. Career

Reasons for anxiety will never be lacking, whether born of prosperity or of wretchedness; life pushes on in a succession of engrossments. We shall always pray for leisure, but never enjoy it.

—Seneca¹⁹

Regarding our careers, although we assume we have control over what we do within our career path, we do not because it is not us who decides who gets promoted, who gets fired, who gets picked for specific deployments or assignments. So, with all of these outside influences affecting one’s career, how can one say that they have control over any of it? Thinking about our careers thorough the lens of the “Preferred Indifferent,” we work hard for our family and fellow man. We do the right thing and live virtuously so we may provide for our families and strive for a good future. This is truly in harmony with Nature and Reason, thus, expected within the Stoic philosophy.

¹⁷ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, trans. John Basore (Vigeo Press, 1932), 35.

¹⁸ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, 11.

¹⁹ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, 40.

4. Family

When giving your wife or child a kiss, repeat to yourself “I am kissing a mortal.” Then you will not be distraught if they are taken from you.

—Epictetus²⁰

Regarding family, Epictetus states that a person cannot control the health or actions of each member of your family. All you can do is love and value them. Everything that follows or happens to them is out of your actual control. If your spouse gets into a car accident, although very tragic, you had no control over it, and therefore it should not weigh on you too heavily. This is highly controversial and potentially where the Stoics earned their reputation of being cold and heartless. However, discussing this concept more deeply, Epictetus hardly means one should shrug the loss of a loved one off and move on with life. He means that the person who was lost was simply returned from where they came from, Nature. Because we all come from Nature, we should accept the loss of a loved one sadly, but with the understanding that they have fulfilled their purpose to Nature. Essentially, mourning the loss of a family member is necessary. We must experience grief; however, it should not consume a person beyond Reason.

H. INTRODUCING THE STOIC CARDINAL VIRTUES

The Stoics placed an enormous value on the “Cardinal Virtues” originally derived by Aristotle at the onset of Virtue Ethics. These are the Virtues of Wisdom, Courage, Moderation, and Justice. These Virtues provide the very foundation of Stoic teaching and therefore are essential to our Stoic Leadership Principles.

1. Wisdom: Knowledge of Good and Bad

If someone can prove me wrong and show me my mistake in any thought or action, I shall gladly change. I seek the truth, which never harmed anyone: The harm is to persist in one’s own self-deception and ignorance.

—Marcus Aurelius²¹

²⁰ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 222.

²¹ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 71.

Wisdom is the continuous pursuit of knowledge. Humans have the ability to Reason and learn and therefore it is within the laws of Nature to strive towards learning. Additionally, wisdom is the understanding that because a person is always learning, they inherently will not know everything, and must act accordingly. As we see in the quote above by Marcus Aurelius, no person, not even a Roman Emperor, is above learning and consistently trying to better themselves.

2. Courage: Knowledge of What to Fear and What Not to Fear

No, you do not have thousands of years to live. Urgency is on you. While you live, while you can, become good.

—Marcus Aurelius²²

It is essential to understand that there are different forms of Courage, such as Courage to do the right thing when nobody is looking, Courage in the face of danger, Courage in the face of loss, and Courage in the face of humiliation. Courage is vital in the military because we are here to put ourselves in harm's way to serve and protect the constitution. However, being courageous in its true Stoic sense is being able to make decisions for the good of yourself and your team. It may also mean having the Courage to conduct yourself with Virtue when it is disadvantageous to do so.

3. Moderation: Knowledge of What to Pursue and What Not to Pursue

Finally, everyone agrees that no one pursuit can be successfully followed by a man who is busied with many things—eloquence cannot, nor the liberal studies—since the mind, when its interests are divided, takes in nothing very deeply, but rejects everything that is, as it were, crammed into it. There is nothing the busy man is less busy with than living: there is nothing harder to learn.

—Seneca²³

Seneca is saying here that people should moderate their life while directing their focus on what is most important to living within the parameters of a virtuous life.

²² Aurelius, 38.

²³ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, 12.

Moderation does not imply the total abstinence of all pleasurable things, however it does imply that moderating pleasure increases the overall enjoyment of life due to less access to pleasure. Essentially, moderation means to take nothing in excess.

To further demonstrate the concept of moderation, let us take a look at work-life balance. In his sixth letter to one of his pupils, Lucilius, Seneca presents an example of an unnamed Roman lawyer who worked too hard and claimed that he had never taken a sick day. However, he only did this to garner sympathy, support, and admiration from his peers. He then vented about all the woes of his life and immediately fell back on his routine. He would not fix what he claimed had been ailing him. When he suddenly died, nobody was surprised, nor did anyone envy his situation. He squandered his life, devoid of all real meaning because he refused to moderate his work and life balance.²⁴

4. Justice: The Knowledge of What to Give and What Not to Give

For every challenge, remember the resources you have within you to cope with it.

—Epictetus²⁵

Justice asserts that fairness and balance are necessary for a person to remain faithful to his or her Nature. The concept of Justice is also that of fairness and equality. Essentially, Justice is that all things should balance out to be one with Nature. Two great examples of how to live a life of Justice are the philosophers Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus was once a slave who was set free and rose to become a great thinker of his time. While Marcus Aurelius, not traditionally thought of as a true philosopher, was born into wealth, adopted by the emperor, and became the most powerful and arguably most revered emperor in Roman history. They both felt that they lived within this Virtue despite very different upbringings because they treated people fairly, with proper benevolence and care. Justice ensures humanity remains balanced and in accordance with Nature.

²⁴ Seneca, 11.

²⁵ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 225.

I. STOIC PASSIONS

How to understand your own good: the lover of glory takes it to be the reactions of others; the lover of pleasure takes it to be his own passive experience; the intelligent man sees it as his own action.

—Marcus Aurelius²⁶

How do we go wrong when dealing with what is up to us. We allow passions to get in the way of our Reason. The Stoics are insistent that we not become slaves to our desires. What exactly does that mean? Epictetus said that allowing passion to interfere with our rational thought is akin to mental disease in that it clouds our ability to think clearly and coherently.

What are the passions? The Stoic Passions vary by translation but are generally, recognized to be *Fear, Distress, Pleasure, and Desire*. *Fear* is the dislike of a perceived negative event in the future such as death or disease. *Distress* is the dislike of a perceived negative event at the current moment such as anger, hate, or fury. *Pleasure* is the perception of an apparent good thing happening at the current moment such as vices like nicotine and alcohol. Finally, *Desire* is the anticipation of an apparent good thing happening in the future such as lust or longing.

The Stoics understand that these passions are extremely difficult to discard altogether. It is natural to succumb to anger and find release in the immediate pleasure of certain vices. What we aim to understand here is that the Stoics wish for these Passions to not control our actions, lest we lose our control over ourselves.

J. INCORPORATING VIRTUES AND PASSION INTO MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Having a leadership mentality based upon Virtue is imperative. Deciphering the difference between “Internals” and “Externals” while avoiding passion is also key. With this tenet in mind, one can say that every effort should be made to make Virtuous decisions. How best to incorporate Stoic Virtue will be discussed in Chapter Four, but we should

²⁶ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 80.

understand Virtue as a leadership tool for now. Decisions made with ethical Virtue at the forefront allow for greater control when passion is involved. Passions may hurt leadership when not in proper balance because they can distort an ethical situation. However, not all passions are destructive. Leaders can use Stoicism to focus their passion for certain things using “Internals” versus “Externals” and the “Preferred Indifferent.” We decide what to care about while not concerning ourselves about what we cannot control.

A leader is in control of him or herself, even when events are out of their control. To achieve this, one must train the mind as much (or more) than the body to act and react appropriately in the face of moral dilemmas. As discussed, it’s imperative for military leaders to understand what is within and outside of their control. Often times, leaders hope to sway opinions and policies that are vital for military interests. Although outside of our actual control and thus considered to be “External,” these things are still essential and bear weight in our decision-making processes. We should incorporate this balance between “Internals” and “Externals,” along with living with the four Cardinal Virtues, and avoidance of inappropriate Passions into military leadership by introducing the Stoic Principles into ethics training in the form outlined in the following chapters.

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF STOIC LEADERSHIP

In leaving the more academic portion of this text and moving into the practical portion, a caveat should be addressed: True Stoicism will not always fit in every situation. Undoubtedly, most of the decisions and ethical challenges military leaders encounter are “Stoically” out of their immediate control. The following principles are intended to equip leaders with options on managing the “Externals” with which they are presented.

Based on an understanding of Stoicism and the concept of the “Preferred Indifferent,” we can now look at what I define as the Principles of Stoic Leadership: Judgement, Time Management, Presence, Competence, Humble Confidence, Appropriate use of Passions, and Kindness. These Principles should be viewed through two different lenses. First, inward towards the self and second, outward towards the world. The Principles presented in this chapter, provide a baseline from which leaders can base their newly formed Stoic leadership style in an attempt to further their personal or professional goals in a truly virtuous fashion.

A. JUDGMENT: THE ABILITY TO DISCERN “INTERNALS” FROM “EXTERNALS”

Revere your power of Judgment. All rests on this to make sure that your directing mind no longer entertains any judgment which fails to agree with the Nature or the constitution of a rational being.

—Marcus Aurelius²⁷

1. Judgment Looking Inward

When looking inward, it is easy to see how Judgment plays such a crucial role in Stoic Leadership. Most notably, through the use and Judgment of all things “External.” There are many reasons why a person should not desire “Externals.” In his book *Stoic Ethics*, William O. Stephens points out five of Epictetus’ main reasons. First is the unavoidable hindrance in the acquisition of “Externals,” which means that the pursuit of “Externals” might lead a person to forego their pursuit of Virtue and therefore hinder their

²⁷ Aurelius, 28.

moral progress.²⁸ The second is the difficulty in managing “Externals” once obtained.²⁹ In the Stoic view, managing “Externals” is tantamount to juggling chainsaws: unnecessary and potentially painful towards moral growth. Third is the inevitable insecurity a person will have due to the continued possession of “Externals.”³⁰ The fourth reason is the hostile competition of the acquisition of “Externals.” When multiple actors vie for one “External,” this competition breeds negativity which corrupts our moral worth.³¹ The fifth reason one should not desire “Externals” is because of the sacrifice of a person’s moral worth that can be involved in acquiring and maintaining “Externals.”³² Ultimately, if one values an “External,” they will be angry or sad and prone to react with Passion when lost. “Externals” do not contribute to happiness in the same way that proper management of “Internals” does and the value placed on “Externals” drives conflict by competitors.³³ With this knowledge of the desire for “Externals” in mind, it is clear that a Stoic Leader should use their Judgment on a situation involving an “External.”

2. Judgment Looking Outward

Another facet of Judgment is regarding the measure of people. Understanding that although we might have the ability to influence others, we ultimately cannot control any other individual. Marcus Aurelius makes this point abundantly clear in his passage in *Notebook Two of Meditations*. While this passage varies among translations, the core point is that a leader will encounter countless people who may not have the best motives or values. They may lie, cheat, and steal to get their way with little regard to second or third-order effects to others. They may attempt to disrupt a virtuous leader, but if the leader is

²⁸ William Stephens, *Stoic Ethics: Epictetus and Happiness as Freedom* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 10.

²⁹ Stephens, 10.

³⁰ Stephens, 11.

³¹ Stephens, 12.

³² Stephens, 14.

³³ Stephens, 14.

genuinely grounded in virtuous behavior, they are immovable. “None of them can harm me, anyway, because none of them can infect me with immorality.”³⁴

B. TIME MANAGEMENT: THE APPROPRIATE USE OF THE MOST FINITE RESOURCE, TIME

It is not that we have a short space of time, but that we waste much of it. Life is long enough, and it has been given in sufficiently generous measure to allow the accomplishment of the very greatest things if the whole of it is well invested. But when it is squandered in luxury and carelessness, when it is devoted to no good end, forced at last by the ultimate necessity we perceive that it has passed away before we were aware that it was passing.

—Seneca³⁵

1. Time Management Looking Inward

The one thing that we alone own in our lives is the time that we are given. How we spend that time is the only thing that is really up to us. Some individuals will put the majority of their efforts into career endeavors, some on family, some on vices, and others on the arts. In the quote above, Seneca is saying that despite the things required of you for day-to-day life, where you put your energy and interest matters in the long run. It matters because each person has a finite value of *focus time*. To the degree you focus on one area, you have less to offer another area. If you are going to try to manage multiple things (as we all attempt to do with varying degrees of success), you should understand that to the degree your time is consumed with trivialities, the less able you are to focus on essentials. This is the opportunity cost of leadership, making a decision to focus on one matter unconsciously or consciously makes the decision to ignore something else.

2. Time Management Looking Outward

To the military professional, time management is essential because we are often compelled to focus our attention on external influences of military life under the implied assumption that our careers are more important than any other aspect in life. Where that

³⁴ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 13.

³⁵ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, 4.

mentality falls short is after the military career comes to an end. Too many people forego responsibilities and interests to work hard for a promotion only to realize that they have forgotten to live outside the uniform. Families may suffer from misaligned priorities and other life interests are left unfulfilled. Unfortunately, sometimes we forget to realize that we are spending our time focusing on the lesser “Preferred Indifferent.” This is, of course, not to say that our careers are unimportant in any way. What is intended here is that a well-rounded Stoic leader understands that appropriate time in our lives must be managed between career, family, friends and interests.

C. PRESENCE: THE ABILITY TO FOCUS IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME

Every hour of the day give vigorous attention, as a Roman, and as a man, to the performance of the task in hand with precise analysis, with unaffected dignity, with human sympathy, with dispassionate justice—and to vacating your mind to all its other thoughts.

—Marcus Aurelius³⁶

1. Presence Looking Inward

One of the most important leadership qualities is the concept of *Presence*. Stoicism is imparted into *Presence* by calling for mindfulness through meditation and journaling. A leader focuses on practicing mindfulness by meditating, journaling, and focusing on calming their mind and narrowing their focus to what is essential. In his writings, Marcus Aurelius implores himself to stop unnecessary distractions and focus on what is valuable and just.³⁷ A leader allows him or herself to be active and present at the moment, not focused on the future or the unknown. A leader has a solid belief in their capabilities to lead and makes the appropriate decisions based upon their “Judgment” of any given situation. A leader who controls their emotions, grounded in the present, can focus on the matter at hand and effectively lead.

³⁶ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 15.

³⁷ Aurelius, 14.

2. Presence Looking Outward

As previously stated, *Presence* indicates a person who is in control of their emotions, not the other way around. This is outwardly displayed through the ability to focus on the essential aspects of daily life, which is to take care of the community around them, the team in which they are a part, the family whom they value and love, and the command where they have a voice. The intent here is to say that the Stoic Leader is able to be in the present moment, focused on the task at hand.

D. COMPETENCE: THE DRIVE TO CONTINUOUSLY PROGRESS

If you undertake a role beyond your means, you will not only embarrass yourself in that, you miss the chance of a role that you might have filled successfully.

—Epictetus³⁸

1. Competence Looking Outward

Leaders in the military are expected to be experts in their field. They are sponges soaking up knowledge from experienced professionals by whom they surround themselves, in addition to staying current on the latest technology and tactics by reading and discussing ideas with their team both above and below the chain of command. Understand that you will never know everything but know what you can and constantly try to improve.

Epictetus makes a critical point in the quote above in that each person has their ability and skill level. It would be Stoically incorrect for a person to not strive for their full potential. Essentially, one must work hard to progress and learn throughout one's life, but do so while understanding one's limitations.

2. Competence Looking Outward

As a military leader progresses, they will eventually be sought after for their opinion to solve a particular problem or analyze a critical issue. In this instance, a good leader takes the opportunity to teach from experience and embrace all viewpoints that are

³⁸ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 239.

not their own in order to broaden their scope of knowledge. Marcus Aurelius, again, serves as a good example for our purposes. As the most powerful man in the western world, as Emperor of Rome, Marcus Aurelius might have just declared his decisions and opinions were the only important things in any matter, but demonstrating his steadfast Stoic convictions, he refrained from this approach as it would have been counter to the Cardinal Virtue of *Wisdom*. Instead, he made it a point to encourage his subordinates to question him, respectfully of course, and prove that their way was the right way. The ability to show vulnerability and willingness to look for the best way, not just his way, is one of the things that made Marcus Aurelius such an effective and ethical leader. He was extraordinarily competent in his own right yet knew he needed to learn to stay that way consistently.

E. HUMBLE CONFIDENCE: LEADING CONFIDENTLY AND WITHOUT ARROGANCE

Vanity is the greatest seducer of Reason: when you are most convinced that your work is important, that is when you are most under its spell.

—Marcus Aurelius³⁹

1. Humble Confidence Looking Inward

Humble Confidence means to always look for ways of improvement and correction of character and ability. In *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius consistently reminded himself to never think so highly of himself that he would consider himself a better human being. True, he was the Roman Emperor and had the luxury of fame, wealth, high standard of living, and many other things which enabled an easier lifestyle and made him prone to not exhibit *Humble Confidence*. However, in light of his vulnerability he identified a need to show humbleness to be an effective and ethical leader so as not to let Passions corrupt him.

2. Humble Confidence Looking Outward

A leader outwardly displaying *Humble Confidence* does so by conveying a message that they are capable of controlling themselves, leading others, adapting to adversity, and thriving in chaos. They are able to do this because they realize that they cannot control

³⁹ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 67.

everything external, but they are prepared to deal with the “Preferred Indifferent” and its opposite, the “Unpreferred Indifferent” without regard to what others may think of them. An arrogant leader will walk into a room and need to explain that he is in charge, a Stoic Leader should never need to as they readily demonstrate it through their actions.

F. APPROPRIATE USE OF PASSIONS.

Never regard as a benefit to yourself, anything which will force you at some point to break your faith, to leave integrity behind, to hate, suspect, or curse another, to dissemble, to covet anything needing the secrecy of walls and drapes.

—Marcus Aurelius⁴⁰

1. Passions Looking Inward

The principle of *The Appropriate use of the Passions* does not entirely adhere to the pure Stoic Philosophy. However, an excellent Stoic leader understands the *Passions* as it pertains to Stoicism and can decipher how to best harness them. Ideally, the Stoics teach us that we should avoid all *Passions* at all costs and strive for a life of pure Virtue. Unfortunately, in military service, it is unlikely that we will be able to disassociate ourselves from all *Passions* at all times completely. Additionally, it is doubtful that we will always live within the Four Cardinal Virtues at every waking moment. However, the response to this is simple; be honest with yourself and do the best you can. Make it a daily practice to make legitimate judgments on situations before reacting to them. As a matter of course, as long as a leader is honest with themselves and attempts to improve repeatedly, they are on a path toward Virtue and thus becoming a better leader. One must strive for progress over perfection.

2. Passions Looking Outward

Fear, or the dislike of a perceived negative in the future, can often be a motivator to do something good in the present moment to avoid it. *Desire* or the anticipation of a perceived good is also motivating because it sets up future successes. *Distress* or the dislike

⁴⁰ Aurelius, 27.

of the current situation encourages individuals to seek a more advantageous position. And *Pleasure* or a current perceived “good” is often an excellent reward for an accomplishment. When it comes to the *Passions*, it is most important never to let the *Passions* take control of you because, as stated previously, these can easily lead an ethical leader astray from the virtuous path.

G. KINDNESS: THE EXPRESSION OF COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

Kindness is invincible—What can the most aggressive man do to you if you continue to be kind to him? ... But your advice must not be ironic or critical. It should be affectionate with no hurt feelings, not a lecture or a demonstration to impress others, but the way you would talk to someone by himself irrespective of the company.

—Marcus Aurelius⁴¹

1. Kindness Looking Inward

As we addressed previously, the concept of a kind Stoic, intuitively goes against the common societal misperception of Stoicism. Looking inward, a leader is forgiving, understanding, and kind not only to others but also to themselves. Showing kindness to yourself means finding balance and consistency in how you focus on yourself. Spend time taking care of yourself by exercising, reading, spending time with friends and family.

2. Kindness Looking Outward

As Marcus Aurelius explains in the passage above, aggressive conflict rarely results in anything other than more conflict, so why not exhibit kindness? This is not to say that a Stoic Leader should become a pushover or a doormat. Rather, as Marcus Aurelius explains in the second part of the passage, when met with someone who needs correcting, be kind and address the situation in the same manner that you would wish someone to address you. Showing Kindness in a situation where one would not typically do so is a sign of Stoic strength.

⁴¹ Aurelius, 155.

H. IN SUMMARY

The seven principles that a Stoic leader must concern themselves with are as follows:

1. **Judgement**—the ability to discern “Internals” from “Externals.”
2. **Time Management**—the appropriate use of the most finite resource, time.
3. **Presence**—the ability to focus in the right place, at the right time.
4. **Competence**—the drive to continuously progress.
5. **Humble Confidence**—the ability to lead confidently and without arrogance.
6. **The appropriate use of Passions**—harnessing *Passions* to make ethical decisions.
7. **Kindness**—the expression of compassion and empathy.

Now that we have an idea of Stoic leadership principles let us transition to how they can be used in everyday life. These seven Principles are not the only traits present in Stoic Leaders. However, they provide a good starting point to begin with and which we will discuss in the next chapter when we discuss the *Military Leadership Enchiridion*.

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IV. MILITARY LEADERSHIP *ENCHIRIDION*

To live Stoically is not the same as reciting a rule book, it is the formation of an identity. It is also important to re-state that deontological rules are not without some merit in a military leadership context, of course. Some need rules in order to stay in line with societal and military norms. Rules are not wrong, they are just an insufficient baseline of knowledge for the full measure and importance of leadership. To fill this gap of leadership knowledge I have created the *Military Leadership Enchiridion*, based upon Epictetus' seminal work, *The Enchiridion*. *The Enchiridion*, or "Handbook" is regarded as the "manual" or "handbook" for Stoics. It was transcribed almost two thousand years ago to serve as a quick reference guide for those interested in Stoic Philosophy in the ancient world. The numbered paragraphs and chapters within the original *Enchiridion* are concise words of wisdom over a particular subject and some expansion following. This *Military Leadership Enchiridion* follows the same ancient format.

I have redesigned Epictetus's work into one that is translatable to Military leadership and focuses on day-to-day life, interacting with leadership, colleagues, subordinates, and chaotic events in life. Importantly, this is not another rule book, but rather a guide to shape character. It is meant to be read quickly and often, similar to the way Marcus Aurelius used his *Meditations*. Additionally, this is not an "all-encompassing" document. These are not the only words that new military leaders should ever hear on the subject of leadership or ethics. It is a collection and discussion of keystone Stoic thinkers and an introductory guide to virtuous leadership.

A. ON DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

We are responsible for some things, while there are others for which we cannot be held responsible. The former include our judgement, our impulses, our desire, aversion, and our mental faculties in general. The latter include the body, material possessions, our reputation, status,—in a word, anything not in our power to control. The former are naturally free,

unconstrained and unimpeded, while the latter are frail, inferior, subject to restraint—and none of our affair.

—Epictetus⁴²

The first and most important concept in building a foundation of Stoic Leadership is to pay attention to what we can and cannot control. Focus on what we can control, and disregard what we cannot. A great way of accomplishing this is with what I call the “Stoic Decision Making Process.”

The Stoic Decision Making Process is a simple exercise designed to help the individual distinguish “Internals” from “Externals.” At the beginning of every decision point one must make a judgment about whether or not the issue in question is within your control. Or, more concisely, is what is happening an “Internal” or “External?”

If the problem is to be considered an “Internal” it only matters how you perceive the event because it is either good or bad and it is fairly black and white with respect to how a Stoic should respond. One must adhere to the Cardinal Virtues, divest oneself of negative passions, and move on.

However, if the issue under consideration is an “External,” further development of the situation is required. Managing “Externals” is inherently more difficult. We must ask ourselves, what is the “Preferred Indifferent?” We cannot, strictly speaking, control the outcome of an “External” but we can hope and work towards an advantageous outcome of any situation. One must decide how one’s actions and inactions effect the indifferent outcome. Then, one must act, or not, based upon the most virtuous and preferred outcome. One must remember, however, that the outcome is out of his or her control because it is an “External.” Therefore, it will not always result in our preference.

If you have the right idea about what really belongs to you and what does not, you will never be subject to force or hindrance, you will never blame or criticize anyone, and everything you do will be done willingly.

—Epictetus⁴³

⁴² Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 221.

⁴³ Epictetus, 221.

Stoically, the events that happen to you are out of your control. The only thing that one can control are one's reactions to those events. Marcus Aurelius makes a similar point, noting that if you take away the judgement that you have been "wronged" then the offense goes away for if you are unable to be wronged, there is no way anyone can hurt you.⁴⁴ This concept is extremely difficult to grasp in the military profession but remember that in this instance, we are not talking about the enemy. This pertains to day-to-day life. For instance, when we get cut-off on the drive to work or our computers crash. If you really understand that you had no control over it and therefore you should not have anger towards the situation, you will be much happier, and thereby a better leader.

Don't hope that events will turn out the way you want, welcome events in whichever way they happen: this is the path to peace.

—Epictetus⁴⁵

If we stop hoping that things will turn out a certain way in our lives, careers, families, and such, we lose the expectation that they will in fact actually happen that way. Once we have made peace with the fact that we will never accomplish everything we strive for in life, we are pleasantly rewarded when we do achieve them. Stop trying to take control of things over which you have no control. Use the concept of the "Preferred Indifferent" and work toward your goals, slow down, and appreciate things as they happen.

No, think like this, as if you were on the point of death: 'you are old; don't then let this directing mind of yours be enslaved any longer—no more jerking to the strings of selfish impulse, no more disquiet at your present or suspicion of your future fate.'

—Marcus Aurelius⁴⁶

Simply put, Stoic leaders should always strive to improve their own personal character. Self-respect is a choice. Do not place yourself in a position where you damage your ability to remain respectful of yourself. To the best of your ability, avoid excessive consumption of vices.

⁴⁴ Aurelius, *Meditations*.

⁴⁵ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 224.

⁴⁶ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 14.

In every aspect of thought, use Reason and live according to nature.

—Marcus Aurelius⁴⁷

A life lived according to nature is an interesting concept because of its many interpretations. One should never be something that he or she is not naturally. They should never strive to be something that they are not. Regardless of sexuality, orientation, identification or otherwise, be true to who you are.

B. ON INTERACTING WITH LEADERS

If you are ever tempted to look for outside approval, realize that you have compromised your integrity.

—Epictetus⁴⁸

Simply put, there is no need to vie for approval when you know that you are doing the right thing and acting in accordance with nature. This comment by Epictetus means that we are in control of our own “Internals” and have limited influence, and no control over what others say, do, or think. So why bother catering to what others want to see if it lies outside Virtue? There is no need to try to impress anyone for two reasons. (1) If you are truly on a virtuous path, those with whom you surround yourself are also on the same path. (2) Those not on the same path of Virtue, might already be lost.

The end result of this concept might put you at odds with one of your leaders which presents one of the most important concepts for junior leaders to understand. The military has a chain of command for good reason. Often junior leaders are not always aware of the larger situation in which their superiors are navigating. If presented with a perceived ethical challenge, it is imperative that you learn as much about the situation, understand the possible second and third order effects, then state your beliefs clearly, respectfully, and unaffected by emotion. The leader may or may not agree for various reasons, however these situations are “External” to you as a Stoic Leader and you are merely presenting your Preferred Indifferent.

⁴⁷ Aurelius, Book 1.

⁴⁸ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 229.

If you want to make progress, put up with being perceived as ignorant or naïve in worldly matters, do not aspire to a reputation sagacity.

—Epictetus⁴⁹

When we embark on a journey of improvement, be it self or professional improvement, be prepared to be met with feedback or even resistance. Similar to the previous paragraph, if your leaders have a different course in mind you can respond in one of two ways. First, present your idea and accept the feedback, or, second, attempt to persuade them while keeping in mind that you are dealing in “Externals.”

Ultimately, at some point in your career, your colleagues will believe that departure from the status-quo is “foolish or stupid,” when you are convinced that a change is necessary. Many changes in military life will be met with some resistance. However, it is vital to remember that you are only dealing with Preferred Indifferents. Control your emotions so they do not control you.

Self-mastery, immune to any passing whim ... Good cheer in all circumstances ... gentleness, and an immovable adherence made after full consideration; no vain taste for so-called honors; stamina and perseverance; a ready ear for anyone with a proposal for the common good.

—Marcus Aurelius⁵⁰

Incremental progress is almost impossible to see. People work hard at something and become so focused that they miss the proverbial forest because they are staring at the trees. This does not mean that change is not occurring. Push for improvement in everything you do. Be content with what you have while looking for opportunities to grow.

C. ON INTERACTING WITH COLLEAGUES

Say to yourself first thing in the morning: today I shall meet people who are meddling, ungrateful, aggressive, treacherous, malicious, (and) unsocial. All of this has afflicted them through their ignorance of true good and evil. But I have seen that the nature of good is what is right, and the nature of evil is what is wrong; and I have reflected that the nature of the offender himself is akin to my own—not a kinship of blood or seed, but a sharing of

⁴⁹ Epictetus, 226.

⁵⁰ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 7.

the same mind, the same fragment of divinity. Therefore, I cannot be harmed by any of them as none will infect me with their wrong. Nor can I be angry with my own kinsman or hate him. We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like rows of upper and lower teeth. So, to work on opposition to one another is against nature: and anger or rejection is opposition.

—Marcus Aurelius⁵¹

There are people out there that wish to do harm and are not motivated by anything other than their own needs and desires. Stoic Leaders understand good from evil, but sadly, some people do not know that they are acting outside of Reason or out of accordance with Nature. You must remember that they might not know the errors of their ways. Humans, however, are born to cooperate. We may never be completely in sync with those around us, but we must try to work together to achieve common goals.

Most of what we say and do is unnecessary: remove the superfluity, and you will have more time and less bother.

—Marcus Aurelius⁵²

Understand that avoidance of gossip and sincerity are truly virtuous qualities because they are centered on building trust. From a modern-day perspective, nobody trusts a gossip and, therefore, we cannot really trust them to be sincere and true to their word. Avoidance of gossip is an extension of the avoidance of “Externals,” as it is all outside your ability to control, while being sincere and true is something you can wholeheartedly control because it is all derived from your mind.

Wear great learning lightly.

—Marcus Aurelius⁵³

⁵¹ Aurelius, 13.

⁵² Aurelius, 40.

⁵³ Aurelius, 5.

One should be cognizant of their abilities and just simply be humble at all times. Nothing is gained from parading yourself around as a brilliant leader. If you have to tell people that you are brilliant... are you? Speak with eloquence, not arrogance.

Remember, it is not enough to be hit or insulted or harmed, you must believe that you are being harmed. If someone succeeds in provoking you, realize that your mind is complicit in this provocation. Which is why it is essential that we not respond impulsively to impressions; take a moment before reacting, and you will find it easier to maintain control.

—Epictetus⁵⁴

Centered on the concept of “Internals” versus “Externals,” if someone angers you, it is not their actions that cause harm, it is your interpretation of those actions. If you understand the situation for what it is, you will realize that you control whether or not you will allow yourself to become angry. Energy, time, and productivity are wasted on dealing with anger and “Externals.”

D. ON INTERACTING WITH SUBORDINATES

Do not give justice in one court before you have been tried yourself before Justice.

—Epictetus⁵⁵

Never expect your team to hold themselves accountable for something that you yourself do not hold in personal account. Be honest, fair, and just. Lead by example and if you have committed a wrong, own up to it. If your people commit a wrong, hold them accountable. However, also realize that they are human and are a similar work in progress.

Retire into yourself as much as you can. Associate with people who are likely to improve you. Welcome those whom you are capable of improving.

—Seneca⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 229.

⁵⁵ Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, trans. George Long, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 36.

⁵⁶ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, 43.

When you do not have knowledge, learn. When you have knowledge, teach. Never make yourself too busy for anyone else. Proper time management is essential, but more than that, be able to set yourself aside for those around you who need you.

To keep clear of speechifying, versifying, and pretentious language; not to walk around at home in ceremonial dress ... not satisfied with my superficial thoughts or quick to accept the facile views of others.

—Marcus Aurelius⁵⁷

As emperor, Marcus Aurelius was expected to be publicly visible and involved in day-to-day dealings with the public. His opponents criticized him in pamphlets and attempted to goad him into making speeches and debating them in public. Similar to today where we find prominent figures engaging in unnecessary banter on social media and in the news. Marcus Aurelius hovered above the nonsense and noise and focused on doing his job well. It is monumentally easy to be swept up in triviality, but you must remember that it is all an “External.” Focus on the “Internal” mind and influencing your “Preferred Indifferents,” everything else is a waste of time.

Never to give the impression of anger or any other Passion, but to combine complete freedom from Passion with the greatest human affection.

—Marcus Aurelius⁵⁸

When dealing with anyone never let anger get the better of you. Anger is natural and can be motivating, however, as with any passion, too much is destructive. One must train oneself to push through anger to arrive at Reason and sound judgment as quickly as possible so reactions rooted in anger do not make a situation worse. This is done by training yourself to think before you speak in every situation. Be quick to forgive. Praise people in public and punish in private.

E. ON THRIVING IN CHAOS: STRESS, LOSS, INJURY, WAR

If you hear a raven croak inauspiciously, do not be alarmed by the impression. Make a mental distinction at once, and say, ‘these omens hold

⁵⁷ Aurelius, *Meditations*, 4.

⁵⁸ Aurelius, 5.

no significance for me; they only pertain to my body, property, family, or reputation.

—Epictetus⁵⁹

Fear unintentionally drives and motivates humans to react out of that fear. We often narrowly focus on what we fear, rather than the reality of any stressful situation. To see things clearly, one must be able to avoid slipping down a spiral of “what if this,” or “what if that?” When confronted by stress, step back and look at what is real, rather than what is perceived.

A man is as unhappy as he has convinced himself he is. And complaining away about one’s suffering after they are over ... is something I think should be banned.

—Seneca⁶⁰

Humans should have emotions; they should just ensure that they always maintain control over their emotions. Sorrow and loss are potentially heartbreaking, but pain, even emotional pain, is temporary.

Sickness is a problem for the body, not the mind—unless the mind decides that it is a problem. Lameness, too, is the body’s problem, not the mind’s. Say this to yourself, whatever the circumstance and you will find without fail that the problem pertains to something else, not you.

—Epictetus⁶¹

Sickness and injury can certainly sideline a person from many things in military life. However, because an injury or sickness has slowed you physically, your mind must remain sharp as it is primary. Injury and sicknesses happen. But the best way through them is by remembering that they are “External” events that have happened to you, and you must make the decision to be positive and strong.

He who fears death will never do anything to help the living. But he who knows that this was decreed the moment he was conceived will live by

⁵⁹ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 228.

⁶⁰ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, 134.

⁶¹ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 224.

principle and at the same time will ensure, using the same power of mind, that nothing of what happens to him comes as a surprise.

—Seneca⁶²

We must be courageous in the face of danger because in the end, our fate is not within our control and therefore we must not fear it.

You have to be one person, good or bad. You have to care for either your mind or for material things; specialize in what is within you or without—which is to say, you have to stick to the role of philosopher or layman.

– Epictetus⁶³

There are only two types of people. You are either a good person or a bad person. You have the ability to choose which. Meaning, if you make the choice to be good and pursue Virtue, you have to work at it. Mistakes happen but those mistakes do not themselves make you a bad person. What makes a person bad, is their decision to stop trying to improve.

F. ON DEATH

Nothing can be of such great benefit to you, in your quest for moderation in all things, than to frequently contemplate the brevity of one’s life span, and it’s uncertainty. Whatever you undertake, cast your eyes on death.

—Seneca⁶⁴

One last point to make that was not previously discussed is the concept and importance of preparing for death. All three of the major Stoics I have discussed place a major importance on the concept of death, however no one more so than Seneca.

This concept is paramount because we understand that our time is finite. Our lives will eventually end no matter what we do. This makes the thought of focusing our energy on “Externals” seem arbitrary.

⁶² Seneca, *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*, 15.

⁶³ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 234.

⁶⁴ Seneca, *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*, 11.

While cultivating a Stoic Leadership identity based upon the principles and concepts discussed here one must remember that the pursuit of Virtue does not end with studying ancient philosophy. One must strive to be the embodiment of Virtue and this pursuit must continue through action. Comprehending our own death makes us realize that for the good of ourselves, our families, our service, and our nation, living with Virtue is not negotiable. We care about the men and women standing to the left and right of us. With them in mind, to pursue anything other than a virtuous path would be unethical.

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V. CONCLUSION

Military leaders are acutely aware of the ethical leadership challenges our newly minted leaders face. These challenges have changed over the years and are likely to grow more complex as the conduct of combat progresses from the traditional battlefield to non-traditional battlespaces. Therefore, military ethics and leadership training must also evolve.

The current blend of Deontological and Consequentialist ethics and leadership culture prevalent in the military has some validity when it comes to basic “do’s and don’ts.” An exclusive reliance on this antiquated mentality, however, leaves our new leaders without a baseline of *Virtue* in favor of a baseline of rules. The incorporation of Virtue Ethics, and specifically the Principles of Stoic Leadership, and the *Military Leadership Enchiridion*, as presented here, will help alleviate that burden.

The Stoic leader is confronted with challenges as much as everyone else, however a person who practices Stoic principles will be equipped to handle challenges based upon Virtue, rather than a binary system of what not to do. The *Military Leadership Enchiridion* uses all of the principles previously described in daily life as a leader. Where this comes to fruition is how these principles are incorporated into daily actions.

It is not enough for leaders to hear this information and change the way they conduct their day-to-day activities, process, etc... What needs to happen is a fundamental reformation in the military writ large when it comes to ethical values. This can begin in the way justice and punishment is handled. Our military leaders must consistently make the correct judgement about what lies within one’s power and what does not. They must ask themselves, “Where is my good located?” They must consistently decide on the correct judgement to be made on the circumstance. In effect, they must be willing to make the right judgement on the situation based upon whether it is “Internal” versus “External.”

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APPENDIX: INTRODUCTION TO STOIC LITERATURE

Stoic Philosophy has had scores of practitioners since its founder, Zeno began teaching in the “Stoa” (hence “Stoicism”) in Athens, Greece in the Fourth Century BCE.⁶⁵ Although Greek in origin, the main philosophers prevalent today are from Ancient Rome. Seneca (4 BCE–65 AD),⁶⁶ Epictetus (55–135 AD),⁶⁷ and Marcus Aurelius (121 AD–180 AD).⁶⁸ This is partly because much of the text from Stoics referenced by these three has been lost to time, and partly because they themselves were the Stoic Sages of the day, though they would all likely not refer to themselves as such.

Although much credit is due to the translator of ancient literature, one interesting thing that I have noticed while researching this topic is the ease at which the ancient writing of the Roman Stoics is digested. If a person develops an interest in this subject, I would recommend they start with the philosophers themselves. The below list is far from exhaustive, but a decent start. Enjoy them in any order:

A. MARCUS AURELIUS’ *MEDITATIONS*

Meditations is easily one of the most recognizable books on Stoicism, Leadership, or Philosophy today. It consists of twelve small books and was originally written by Marcus Aurelius as a journal for him to capture his thoughts and likely not intended for public consumption. One of the major concepts of Stoicism is that one should journal so they are more able to reflect on “finding their good” and that is exactly what he did with these texts. In these books you will find recurring themes and teachings. It has been touted in popular culture and even carried around by countless military and civilian leaders as it proves to be an invaluable source of Stoic knowledge.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Aurelius, *Meditations: The Annotated Edition*, xxxii.

⁶⁶ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*.

⁶⁷ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*.

⁶⁸ Aurelius, *Meditations*, xi.

⁶⁹ Aurelius, *Meditations*.

B. EPICTETUS' *DISCOURSES AND SELECTED WRITINGS*

To best understand Epictetus, I recommend the Penguin Classics version of *Discourses and Selected Writings*. In this version, he has, of course, *The Discourses*, or “conversations” he had with his students on the proper way to live. It also contains what is considered to be the definitive “how-to” of Stoicism, *The Enchiridion*, from which I based my thesis. Epictetus was born a slave in what is now Turkey. He was thought to have been injured while in slavery, giving him a lifelong limp. This possibly explains why the things he stresses often are freedom of the mind while in captivity, and of the body while injured or sick. Once his freedom was granted, he began lecturing on Stoicism and gained notoriety. He was, and still is, regarded as one of the most prominent Stoic thinkers of all time. His pupil, Arrian, transcribed his lectures so his ideas could be passed on to later generations. All burgeoning Stoics will find this a must-read.⁷⁰

C. SENECA'S *LETTERS FROM A STOIC*

Less famous a Stoic than Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus, Seneca's writings are still recognized as essential Stoic canon. Born in a Roman province in present-day Spain, he became a Senator, eventually becoming the leading speaker of the Senate and advisor to Emperor Nero, who eventually forced him to commit suicide. The majority of Seneca's philosophy and teaching came in the form of letters outlining Seneca's Stoic views providing practical advice to his students. These letters and writings have been collected and arranged in specific topics such as: *Anger, Mercy, Favors Private Life, The Shortness of Life, How to Die*. They are very digestible⁷¹

⁷⁰ Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*.

⁷¹ Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*.

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