

How to measure ourselves



We live in an age of measurement. Data is constantly being gathered about us and used to measure and predict how we behave. When we go online we are being tracked and assessed, feeding into marketing profiles. Even in the physical world, cameras are recording us, and our iPhones and smart watches absorb a huge amount of information about our activity, down to our stride length.

But to measure and track our personal moral and ethical progress – and how our actions impact our world – is quite another matter.

How do you review your actions and thoughts, to check that you're on the right path?

Ancient Stoics looked back to Pythagoras' *Golden Verses*, where the Greek philosopher advocated reviewing our own behaviour daily:

*"Never allow sleep to close your eyelids, after you went to bed,
Until you have examined all your actions of the day by your reason.
In what have I done wrong? What have I done?
What have I omitted that I ought to have done?"*

*"If in this examination you find that you have done wrong,
Reprove yourself severely for it;
And if you have done any good, rejoice."*

My version of this practice is to write about my life, choices, and challenges I face as a person and a parent on my blog. I hope to share questions and ideas that others are also struggling with, forming a community of practice around Stoic ideas.

I also makes notes in a journal (or on my Notes app). This kind of writing enables me to capture a moment, reflect on a problem, or even transform a difficult experience into a few lines of lyrical blank verse. The point is not just beauty and self-expression. It is to review what matters to me and why. And it is to become more aware of what's eating away at me or holding me back, too.

There are, in fact, many new modern tools that could help us do this kind of review in very specific ways. I recently tried an app that asked me to listen closely to how I talked to myself, and to write down the thoughts that popped up when I felt worried. I found it to be a surprising exercise. I noticed how many unexpectedly

negative thoughts kept rising up. But as the tool stated, it's only by recognizing this way of thinking, and confronting it, that progress can be made.

Stoic ethical self-measurement doesn't require a complex interface. To figure out if we are doing well in our human flourishing and virtue-based choices, we need to stop and assess our actions and thoughts. And the simplest way to do so is to sit down and make notes, on paper or digitally, at the end of the day, and to examine what we've done well, done less well, and left undone.

I urge you to try it. You may find yourself asking pointed questions. And that's a good thing. If the actions we've taken and choices we've made don't align with the Stoic pillars of wisdom, justice, courage, and self-control, and if they aren't pursued with deliberation and honesty, then we owe ourselves a reminder of why we adopted this life philosophy in the first place.



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