



**The
erotic Stoic**
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“Erotic love, ... would keep the city safe, and offer everyone the advantage of belonging to a family of multiple parents and close kinships.”

Early Stoics on erotic love

The fact that the word “stoic” and the Stoics in general have become associated with being unemotional, or even unfeeling, might have surprised many of the early Stoics, including Zeno, Persaeus, Ariston, Sphaerus, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. This is because all of them wrote about the Stoic concept of erotic love!

Had more than a slither of such fragments survived, it is likely that today we would have seen the Stoic school in an entirely different light! Rather than cold, calculating machine-like individuals, might Stoics, often compared to the British stiff upper lip, been seen them more like the smooth, sensual, and sexy French?

Zeno and Chrysippus argued for polyamory (open, non-monogamous relationship) on the basis that it is one way of ensuring that paternal affection and protection isn’t restricted to a tiny subset of children. Incidentally, this would heighten the odds of survival for all children, not just a lucky few.

The early Stoics’ view of polyamory was also that it prevents people from being seen as each other’s property, removing the envy that often comes with such a view. In other words, in Zeno’s utopia, creating and raising children was a communal affair.

Stoics did not regard erotic love as sexual

In this regard, the Stoics did not regard erotic love as sexual or like the sexualized personal relationship we conceive of it today. Erotic love, for the reasons we have just described, instead cements the interpersonal relationships of the entire community. It would keep the city safe, and offer everyone the advantage of belonging to a family of multiple parents and close kinships. In the context of pre-modern societies, this is helpful when you think of the dangers of pregnancy and the invasions of other tribes.

For the Stoics, erotic love is not a type of desire or passion

For the Stoics, erotic love is not a type of desire or passion merely for someone’s body, but rather a deeply loving relationship focused on a person’s character. A love that binds the community, enhances friendship and values above all the beauty of a harmonious existence that serves the entire community and not just the needs of a smaller family unit. For Zeno, erotic love when understood in this manner is a driver of virtue, as those who partake in it focus on how they might improve their beloved’s character.

Going beyond the physical aspects of love

Moreover, it encourages people to set an

example and help others do likewise, rather than focus merely on indifferent things like physical appearance (beyond being clean and groomed) and sexual prowess. It was this reason that Zeno placed eros at the core of his utopian cosmopolis, as a protector of the city; and why the assumption that the ancient Stoics were unfeeling or repressed in some way is so far off the mark and needs rectifying.

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