

Ancient Philosophy Journal: Your Way of Life

Day 1: Your Way of Life

Text: Hadot, Introduction

1. Describe your current way of life. What kind of person are you and how did you get that way?
2. Describe your ideal self. What kind of person do you want to become?
3. What core beliefs (about human beings, human life, the world, the divine, etc.) are your way of life and ideal self based upon?
4. What foundational experiences made you choose that way of life and that ideal self?
5. What regular practices (physical, spiritual, social, etc.) do you perform to realize your way of life and pursue your ideal self?

Day 2: Your Role Models

Text: Hadot, Chapters 1 & 2

1. Describe the wisest people you know (or have known). If you don't know anyone wise, what does everyone you know lack that keeps you from calling them wise?

2. What does their wisdom consist of? What exactly do they know and do that makes them wise?

3. Describe your role models. What makes them so great?

4. Compare your wisest people, role models, and ideal self. How are they similar and different?

5. Given that comparison, should you change your role models or adjust your ideal self? Do you want wisdom among your models or ideals? Why or why not?

Ancient Philosophy Journal: The Platonic Way of Life

Day 1: Socratic Elenchus

Text: Plato, *Euthyphro*

1. Describe one of your most basic values (freedom, justice, love, beauty, etc.). What is it like? What things (people, actions, objects, institutions, etc.) exemplify that value, and how?
2. State a precise definition of that value. What, exactly, is it? Talk to a friend if you need help.
3. Falsify your definition by describing something that fits the definition but doesn't exemplify the value, or exemplifies the value but doesn't fit the definition. Talk to a friend if you need help.
4. State a better definition, and then falsify it in the same way. Talk to a friend if you need help.
5. After repeating this process with the same value or a different value, reflect on the experience. Do you really know what you think you know? How can you be sure?

Day 2: Socratic Choice of Life

Text: Plato, *Apology*

1. What personal characteristics (traits, skills, qualifications, etc.) do you want on your resume?
2. What personal characteristics do you hope to be remembered in the eulogy at your funeral?
3. Compare the characteristics from your ideal resume and eulogy. How are they similar and different? Which of the two sorts of characteristics are most important to you, and why?
4. How much time do you spend cultivating each sort of characteristic? Can you cultivate both sorts in one career? If so, how? If not, what should you do?
5. How do your ideal resume and eulogy compare to your current way of life and ideal self? Do you need to make any changes or adjustments?

Day 3: Preparation for Sleep

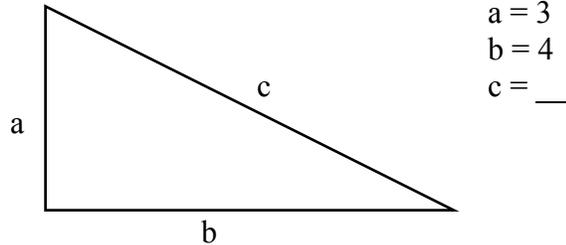
Text: Hadot, "Plato and the Academy"

1. Right before going to sleep, describe the beauty of photoshopped images of models.
2. Then describe the physical beauty of the most beautiful people you know.
3. Then describe the inner beauty of the best people you know.
4. Now describe the ways that all three fall short of perfect and perpetual beauty, using the comparison to try to raise your heart and mind to the idea of beauty itself.
5. After repeating the exercise another night with another value (e.g. a love story, physical love, true love, and love itself), reflect on the experience. How did it affect you and your dreams?

Day 4: Mathematical Thinking

Text: Plato, *Meno*

1. Calculate the length of the hypotenuse of this triangle. Show your work. Hint: $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$!



2. Now think about those numbers (3, 4, 9, 12, etc.) and describe each one. Is it even or odd? Prime or not? What is its double? What is its triple? What is its half? And so on.

3. What are you thinking about when you think of these numbers? Can you point to anything in the universe that is the number 3 itself? Is it just an idea in your mind? Did you make it up? Can you decide what it's like? Didn't it exist before you thought of it? But where? How? What is it?

4. Compare these numbers to values (freedom, justice, beauty, love, etc.). How are they alike and different? Can you point to anything in the universe that is justice itself? Is it just an idea? Didn't it exist before anything just or anyone's thoughts about justice? But where? How? What is it?

Day 5: Exercise of Death

Text: Plato, *Phaedo* 57a–84b

1. Go look at your face in a mirror for five minutes without looking away. Make funny faces, stare into your own eyes, and note the features you like and dislike. Describe how different your body looks from how you think of yourself and how you feel on the inside. (If you really don't want to look in a mirror, look at a recent picture of yourself, or draw a picture of yourself.)
2. Imagine leaving your body and having an out-of-body experience (e.g. death, or near-death, or tripping, or uploading your consciousness, etc.). Describe what you imagine experiencing.
3. Practice some bodily asceticism for a few days (e.g. get up earlier, or exercise more, or don't snack, or leave 1/8 of your meals uneaten, etc.). Describe the experience and its effect on you.
4. Reflect on the above exercises. What was it like to try to dissociate yourself from your body? How did it affect your sense of self? How will it affect your sense of other people?

Day 6: Anticipating the Afterlife

Text: Plato, *Phaedo* 84c–108c & 113d–118a

1. Examine your conscience. What good and bad have you been doing? What right and wrong?
2. What will you do to try to improve and take better care of your own self?
3. Imagine dying, going to the underworld, being judged, and being taken to your proper place. Describe what happens to you. Be brutally honest! Are you purified by penalties? Suitably rewarded? Deemed incurable? Sent back to earth? Sent to a more beautiful dwelling place?
4. Next time you feel like doing something bad and wrong, or don't feel like doing something good and right, repeat to yourself that your soul is immortal and imagine the afterlife again. Now reflect on the experience. What was it like? Did it help you or not?

Ancient Philosophy Journal: The Aristotelian Way of Life

Day 1: Natural Wonder

Text: Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 1–2

1. Go outside and find a small natural object to observe (e.g. a leaf, a stick, a rock). Sit down and quiet yourself. Now describe the object in detail, saying aloud, “I notice....” Don’t filter anything out: if you see it, say it. As you run out of observations, challenge yourself by changing your perspective, using your other senses, noting what surprises you. Record your observations here.

2. Reconsider the object in all its detail, saying aloud everything that it reminds you of (e.g. past experiences, things you already know, what it resembles). Don’t filter anything out: if it comes to mind, say it. Record your memories here.

3. Now try to come up with questions about the object in all its detail, saying aloud, “I wonder what...,” “I wonder why...,” “I wonder how...,” and so on. Record your questions here, marking the ones you don’t know the answers to. How can you find the answers?

Day 2: Aristotelian Choice of Life

Text: Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics* I, 1–5 & 7–8

1. Start by listing all the things you desire (e.g. to do, to make, to get, to have, to know, to feel, to become, to be, etc.) in life. Nothing is too great or too small: if you want it, list it.

2. Now organize all the things you desire into a map, showing which things you desire for the sake of something else, and which things you desire for their own sake.

3. Consider the things you desire for their own sake. How do you justify these deepest desires of your heart? And what, if anything, could truly satisfy them?

4. Will following the map of your desires lead to a happy life of virtue? Will it enable you to grow in wisdom and understanding? If not, do you care? Do you need to make any adjustments to your desires or your chosen means to fulfill them?

Day 3: Categorization

Text: Aristotle, *Categories* 1–5

1. List all the different relationships you have (e.g. to family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, co-workers, bosses, salespeople, political leaders, religious leaders, role models, etc.).

2. Group all your relationships into a small number of kinds, representing the kinds on a single tree. What is the purpose of each kind of relationship? What does it contribute to your life?

3. Which kinds of relationship are most important to you, and why? Which ones do you spend the most time and energy on? Are you happy with that allocation of your time and energy?

4. Highlight your relationships with three colors: (1) merely useful (i.e. for your mutual benefit), (2) merely fun (i.e. for your mutual pleasure), and (3) virtuous (i.e. for your mutual good and growth in virtue). How do you like what you find? Do you need to change or adjust anything?

Day 4: Cosmological Reasoning

Text: Aristotle, *Physics* VIII, 1 & 6

1. Think of an animal you know, e.g. your dog. Why does your dog exist? Where did your dog come from? Describe the origins of that dog, or make up a likely story (hint: its ancestors!).

2. Think of all those dogs, and of all the dogs that have ever existed. Why do dogs exist? Where did their species come from? Describe the origins of that species, or make up a likely story.

3. Think of those species, and of all species that have ever existed. Why do any living things exist? Where did they come from? Describe the origins of life, or make up a likely story.

4. Think of the elements that came to life, and of all elements that have ever existed. Why do any elements exist? Describe the origins of the periodic table, or make up a likely story.

5. Think of all matter and energy, space, and time. Why does the universe exist? Why are there *any* universes at all rather than nothing whatsoever? What would a cause of the universe, or of any universes, have to be like? Could it be material, spatial, or temporal? Would it be powerful?

Day 5: Embodiment

Text: Aristotle, *De Anima* I, 1; II, 1–3, 5–6, & 12

1. Get in a resting position and do a body scan. Begin by focusing on your breathing for a few minutes. Then very slowly shift the focus of your attention through your whole body, step by step, from the tip of your toes to the top of your head. Record your experience, noting what you could or couldn't feel, what was relaxed or tense, painful or pleasant, and so on.

2. Recall a vivid experience (e.g. your most embarrassing one), and dwell on it for five minutes. As you do so, pay close attention to any changes you feel in your body (e.g. in temperature, pulse, breath, stomach, fidgetiness, itchiness, etc.). Record how this remembering made you feel.

3. Recall another vivid experience (e.g. your most joyful, exciting, sad, or enraging), and dwell on it for five minutes in the same way. Record how this remembering made you feel.

4. Reflect on the above exercises. What was it like to try to associate yourself with your body? How did it affect your sense of self? How will it affect your sense of other people?

Day 6: Acts of the Mind

Text: Aristotle, *De Anima* III, 1–8

1. Draw three triangles: one equilateral, one isosceles, and one scalene. Look at them for a few minutes and record the experience. What are you aware of as you look at them?

2. Close your eyes and recall the triangles you were just looking at. Dwell on the images in your mind for a few minutes and record the experience. What are you aware of as you recall them?

3. Close your eyes and think of triangles in general. Think of what they all have in common, and what the word “triangle” means. Record the experience. What are you aware of as you think?

4. Compare the above experiences. How are they similar and different? Does your seeing involve images like your imagining? Does your imagining involve words like your thinking? Can all of your thoughts have come from your seeing and imagining? Do your thoughts affect what you see and imagine?

Ancient Philosophy Journal: The Epicurean Way of Life

Day 1: Epicurean Choice of Life

Text: Hadot, "The Hellenistic Schools"

1. Describe your typical day. What do you do? With whom do you do it? What are you trying to make or get, or preserve or protect, or increase or improve, or influence or impact? Think both short-term (months) and long-term (decades), both big (degree, job) and small (laundry, errands).

2. Imagine today were your last day to live. What would you do and not do? (Note: This is not the "bucket list" of things you'd like to do before you die; it's what you would do, where you are, with what you have, and who you know, if today were actually the last day you had to live.)

3. Compare your typical day with your imaginary last day. How are they similar and different? How much does each one have to do with possessions, reputation or recognition, position or power? How much from your typical day seems superfluous to you in light of your last day?

4. How do you feel about the comparison? Do you need to make any adjustments to your life? What could you do to make your typical day more like your imaginary last day? Would you even want to do that? Why or why not?

Day 2: Epicurean Meditation

Text: Lucretius, *Nature of the Universe*, I & II

1. Reflect on the past week. Write down some of the main good and bad things that happened to you, and try to explain why they happened in purely natural terms (i.e. matter in motion).
2. Think of all the time after your death, and describe what you think might happen in the world. Think of yourself in purely natural terms (i.e. matter in motion), and thus as not existing for all that time after your death. Does that thought lessen your anxiety about death? Why or why not?
3. Think of all the time before your birth, and describe what happened in one of your favorite historical periods. Think of yourself in purely natural terms, and thus as not existing for all that time. Does that thought cause you any anxiety? Is it sensible to feel anxiety about not existing after your death, if you don't feel anxiety about not existing before your birth? Why or why not?
4. Reflect on this exercise. How does it make you feel to think of everything, yourself included, as merely matter in motion? Is it easier to accept what happens? Do you feel better about a world without any supernatural influences? Does the thought of no afterlife give you peace of mind?

Day 4: Discipline of Desire

Text: Lucretius, *Nature of the Universe*, V

1. Return to Day 2 of your Aristotelianism journal. Divide all your desires into three categories: (a) natural and necessary (i.e. basic needs, whose satisfaction eliminates pain); (b) natural but unnecessary (i.e. things that only give variety in pleasures like tasty foods); (c) neither natural nor necessary (e.g. desires for wealth, recognition, position, influence, etc.).

2. Now list all the things you already have and enjoy that are (b) natural but unnecessary or (c) neither natural nor necessary. Nothing is too small: everyone has some money, reputation, etc.

3. Describe your life before you had some of the things listed. Are you any happier now? Do you desire less now than you did then, or more? Do you think you'll be satisfied if you get more of what you say you desire now? Or would you be happier limiting some desires? Why or why not?

4. Spend a day denying some natural but unnecessary desires for food. For example, drink plain water, avoid processed and prepared foods, don't use condiments (e.g. salsa, cream), and eat fruit instead of sweets. Eat slowly, savoring each bite. Describe what you did and its effect on you.

Ancient Philosophy Journal: The Stoic Way of Life

Day 1: Cosmic Vision

Text: Hadot, "The Hellenistic Schools"

1. List some objects (e.g. traffic lights) and events (e.g. traffic) in your daily life that arouse your passions (e.g. anger, fear, sadness, desire, joy, etc.), and describe how each one makes you feel.
2. Now describe each of those objects and events in terms as neutral as possible without any value judgments. What kind of thing is it? What is it made up of? How is it put together?
3. Describe the larger causal processes of which those objects and events are a part. Where did they come from? Where are they going? How will they dissolve and transform into other things?
4. Describe your interactions with those objects and events as neutrally as possible from high above, zooming out to your city, state, country, continent, and the whole world seen from above.
5. Reflect on this exercise. How did it make you feel? How might it affect the way you interact with those objects and events? Did it help to separate your feelings from the things themselves? Did it help to see yourself from above? Why or why not?

Day 2: Premeditation of Evils

Text: Epictetus, *Handbook*

1. In the morning, list some of the main things you plan to accomplish this day, this week, this month, and this year.

2. Describe what could go wrong with those plans. What bad things could happen? What difficulties could you face? What obstacles could arise? What misfortunes could befall you?

3. What opportunities will you have to do good if those plans go wrong in those ways? What virtues will you need in order to respond well to those difficulties, obstacles, and misfortunes? How could you grow from them?

4. What can you do today to prepare to respond well if those bad things happen? How can you exercise those virtues in the small things you have to do today? Then do it!

5. In the evening, reflect on this exercise. What happened today? What did you do? How did the morning's reflection affect what you did and how you did it? Did it help you? Why or why not?

Day 3: Gratitude

Text: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1–4

1. List your good qualities and your good habits of thought, feeling, and action. Who did you receive each of them from? Make a conscious act of gratitude to each person (“Thank you...”).
2. List the main life lessons you have learned so far. Who taught each of them to you? Make a conscious act of gratitude to each person (“Thank you...”).
3. List good things (relationships, necessities, opportunities, etc.) you have had in your life. Who gave each of them to you? Make a conscious act of gratitude to each person (“Thank you...”).
4. Contact one or two of the people above and thank them. Briefly describe the experience.
5. Reflect on this exercise. What was it like? How did it make you feel? Did you realize anything about yourself? Did you realize anything about any of the other people above?

Day 4: Roles and Role Models

Text: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5–8

1. In the morning, wake early and prepare for the day. What roles do you have to play today? What do you need to think, feel, and do to play each role well? How do you plan to do so?

2. Reconsider your role models and the wisest people you know. How would they play the roles you have to play today? How can you change your plans to be more like them? Then do it!

3. In the evening, reflect on the day. What did you do well? How did you feel and why? What do you wish you had done? What lessons can you learn from the day? What will you do tomorrow?

4. Repeat this exercise for a few days, and then reflect on the experience. What was it like? How did these days compare to your ordinary days? Was it hard to remember your plans or to imitate your role models? Did the exercise help you? Why or why not?

Ancient Philosophy Journal: The Skeptic Way of Life

Day 1: Contrary Impressions

Text: Hadot, "The Hellenistic Schools"

1. Describe how different the same things can look to you in different circumstances (while sleepy or rested, above or below water, near or far, sober or not, in dark or light, etc.).
2. Describe how different the same things can sound to you in different circumstances (with ears clear or clogged, moving or stationary, in quiet or noise, near or far, above or below water, etc.). Record yourself talking and play it back. How different do you sound from outside your head?
3. Describe how different the same things can taste to you in different circumstances (while hungry or full, healthy or sick, congested or not, before or after brushing your teeth, before or after cleansing your pallet with a drink, with or without salt, etc.).
4. Describe things you like the sight, sound, or taste of, but that you know others strongly dislike. What are they like, and what do you like about them? What do others dislike about them?
5. Now reflect on this exercise. Do your contrary impressions of all these things make you doubt what they are really like? Can you bring yourself to suspend judgment entirely, or at least lower your confidence, about what such things are really like? Why or why not?

Day 2: Contrary Beliefs

Text: Sextus Empiricus, *Selections*, 44–78

1. Choose a controversial issue you care about that has recently been discussed in the news. Describe the issue, your position on it, the way you feel about it, and why you feel that way.
2. Use the [AllSides Media Bias Chart](#) to find an article on the issue from a news website on the opposite side of the political spectrum—as far left or right of you as possible—and summarize it.
3. What emotions did the article make you feel, and why? How did it affect your position on the issue, and why? Did it make you qualify your position, or feel more or less certain about it?
4. Now imagine being the author of the article. Describe the author's likely intellectual ability, education, background knowledge, access to data, time spent thinking about the issue, cognitive state (sober, drunk, rested, sleepy, etc.) and circumstances (quiet, distracting, etc.) while writing.
5. Compare yourself to the author. How does your intellectual ability, etc. compare? Are you so much more able, educated, knowledgeable, etc. that you are much more likely to be right on the issue? Should the fact that people equally or more able, educated, knowledgeable, etc. disagree with you make you lower your confidence in your own position on the issue? Why or why not?