

Munger the Stoic

Kevin Yuanshun Yao
kevinyaowork@gmail.com

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¹ It would be Munger's 100th birthday.

Charlie Munger, like his hero Ben Franklin, is a polymath: investor, philosopher, scientist, psychologist, philanthropist, architect, system thinker, human nature observer, human mistake collector, unafraid truth speaker, moral culture defender, and above all, teacher of what doesn't work and what works to the human civilization.

Charlie is of course a polymath – he knows a single idea doesn't work in the real world; you need “multiple mental models” to avoid becoming the man who holds a hammer and sees everything as a nail.

Charlie might seem many-sided because he has too many great ideas. But I think what he characterizes the most is Stoicism.

Charlie obviously shows his Stoicism when he talks about “soldiering through” in life. But what he embodies in Stoicism isn't “just” staying fortitude in hardships, but much broader: Keep emotions under control; never complain – accept what you can't control and focus on what you can control; never envy – get no more than what you deserve; never resent – have a realistically low expectation on human nature; detest gambling instincts, be patient, and plan for the long term; uncompromisingly independent-minded; passionately pursue rationality; endlessly improve the mind by learning, learning, and learning; hold high and clear moral principles; don't be afraid of speaking truth, scolding wickedness/stupidity, or suspending judgments when out of circle of competence; lower expectations, reduce material needs, accept things will perish, and appreciate what you already have; try your best to do your duty and to be useful.

Why does Charlie self-cultivate those characters? Because they're *what works* in the real world. Those are nothing but just old-fashioned virtues, as Charlie often says, “If it's trite, it's right.”

Charlie, however, being humbler than he's conventionally perceived, knows those principles aren't for everyone. He recognizes he can only teach people with the right temperaments, as he quoted the character in *Pilgrim's Progress* whose name describes Charlie himself, Valiant-for-Truth: “My sword I leave to him who can wield it.”