

## STOICISM

### Introduction

"Philosophy" is a term meaning the love (philos) of wisdom (sophia). Emerging in ancient Greece, it focuses on asking questions. The answers change from one system of philosophy to another, but the central questions endure, for they are the central questions of human existence.

What is the universe?

Is there a God or gods behind the universe? What is the nature of that divinity?

Who am I? What am I? (Soul, or just body? Mind, or just brain?)

Can I rely on my senses?

What makes me a good person?

What makes a good society?

What is justice?

What makes for happiness?

Stoicism, like other philosophies, asks these questions. It has its own range of answers.

What does your happiness depend on? Parents? Boy/girlfriend? Health? Wealth? Job? Car?

Epictetus 1. 1. 14. You fret over boat leaving. Like being stuck in traffic. You can't control that, but can control own attitude.

Stoicism was a practical philosophy. Oriented to active life. Very enduring. 300 B.C.-A.D. 200s as a distinct movement, survives in its effects. Upper class in Britain, Southern aristocracy read Marcus.

**Stoic summum bonum:** live in **conformity with nature** (κατὰ τὴν φύσιν), live in accord with reason, submit to your destiny willingly.

### GREAT STOICS

Greek: Zeno of Citium founder of stoicism. Met on the stoa, painted porch.  
Chrysippus

Romans: Romans already had devotion to duty & practical strain. They adopted stoicism enthusiastically.

Seneca. In exile under Claudius. Recalled to be Nero's right-hand man. As Nero lost it, Seneca lost favor. Ordered to commit suicide.

Epictetus.

Marcus Aurelius.

Jewish: Philo of Alexandria

Christian: John & Hebrews use similar vocabulary. John 1:1 esp. Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

Boethius *Consolation of Philosophy* (neo-platonist)

Monks: Used Epictetus' manual: only changed the names of the gods to God.

## OUTLINE OF STOICISM

### LOGIC

### PHYSICS

Reason (Λογος, *logos*) governs universe. A divine fire (πυρ). World periodically burns (Grube ix).

Rational soul a spark of the λογος. Akin to it, it can understand & conform to it.

This acceptance is our summum bonum--conformity of self to universal λογος. This brings happiness → health, life, wealth. etc originally were "indifferent." Neither good nor evil. Later occupied a middle position between completely indifferent things (like which quarter to use in soft drink machine) & central matter of attitude & harmony with universe.

To fight λογος is to be @ odds with universe & own nature (Grube xi).

**Panaetius** (1st cen. B.C.) rejects the universal conflagration. (Brehier, *Hist/Phil.* 130f).

**Sympathy**--idea that stars influence us (131).

**Divination**--Has become a **humanist**. Soul returns to heights @ death.

**Scaevola** sees 3 theologies

- 1). Poetic, which makes gods < great men
- 2). Philosophers, who put god above human reach.
- 3). Politicians, who preserve traditional cults.

### ETHICS

Stoic seeks to be in tune w/λογος. Nothing else matters.

∴ Means will do duty regardless of consequences. Centers ethics on duty, not consequences → unperturbed by failure. Like going to pick up package @ lost office for boss → OK if it's there or not (Grube xii-xiii).

∴ you can practice virtue in **any** circumstances → As a slave or as an emperor. The point is inner disposition (Grube xiii).

Πνευμα (pneuma) → breath of life. What we share w/ animals. As animals, we have in common w/ animals passions & perceptions. Must tend animal needs w/o allowing them to drag down the **reason** (Grube xiii).

To ηγεμονικον (hegemonikon). The ruling or directing mind. Controls the animal.

Stoics politically dangerous (Grube xiii) → Better to die than live as slaves. **Epictetus**--did I say I couldn't be beheaded?

Cicero → Humanity transforms animal instincts into civilized practices (Brehier 133).

"Human virtues are merely natural tendencies regulated by reason" (Brehier 133).

## EPICETETUS

Lived A.D. 50-120. (Oldfather, Loeb xii)

Epictetus was a slave with a passion for freedom (vii).

Phrygia his homeland. Had a vivid conception of his god, almost New Testament in its intensity. (viii)

**Epaphroditus**, freedman & administrative secretary of Nero, his owner.

**Musonius Rufus** his teacher--greatest stoic teacher of the age.

Epictetus was unhealthy & lame. May have become lame from master's abuse (ix). Stayed single until old. Married then so he could adopt a child whose parents were going to expose it (x). Simple lifestyle. Never locked door. Only furniture a pallet, a mat, & a lamp (x).

MOVED from Rome to Nicopolis when Domitian banished philosophers in A.D. 89 or 92 (x). Roughly a college professor--oversaw students from arrival to departure (xiv).

**Flavius Arrian** our source of Epictetus. Was a student. Published his class notes. Two works: *Discourses & Enchiridion* (xii).

Slave background led him to want little, pay small attention to social obligations for advancing order & civilization. Limited effort to **moral nature** (xvi). Passion for freedom. No need for immortality (xvii).

Stoic virtue based on self-respect & self-reliance. Accused of pride. "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, & doggonit, who cares if anybody likes me?" "I am somebody."

### Epictetus' Doctrines

- 1). I'm responsible for my own good & evil. Only that which is under my power can be good or evil. Other things are neutral (fire, famine, taxes) (xx).
- 2). We make judgments. Assent & dissent is one form of moral act (xxi).
  - a. What is true
  - b. what is false
  - c. what's unknown
- 3). Desire/aversion regarding moral good & evil is another form of moral act (xxi). Each desire/aversion implies a judgment; these judgments rest on general judgments (δόγματα) regarding things of value (xxii). Nothing outside our moral purpose is good or evil. Is indifferent (ἀδιάφορα, adiafora).
- 4). Duty (τὸ καθήκον, kathekon) of man--intelligent action in social relations. Social duties esp. imp. to Epictetus. We have relations w/ & duties to parents, siblings, children, kinfolk, friends, fellow citizens, & humans in general. Don't be indignant w/ others--they're necessary to the universal plan (xxiii).

- 5). **Religion/physics/metaphysics.** Even apparent evils necessary to divine whole. Every event is part of the whole. Can be voluntary co-worker w/ god. Religion as reconciliation to the inevitable (xxiv). No consistent theology--mixes theism, pantheism, & polytheism. Search for happiness was leading to **alienation** from **science** (xxv). Despite theory of no real evil, there is always a potential for evil. Suicide one response. No life beyond this one--reabsorbed. (xxv).

**Manual (enchiridion)** adopted as Xn monastic guide (xxviii).

## MARCUS AURELIUS

A.D. 121-180. Wanted to be a scholar, got drafted into being emperor. Viewed his adoption into the line of succession as bad news. Grube's introduction my main source. "No longer free to live as a philosopher" (8.1). Diogenes & Socrates > Alexander & Caesar (8.3). A king's just a shepherd who lives off the flock--Plato, *Theatetus* 174d-e (10.23). He can best live as a philosopher in his present role of emperor (shows acceptance of lot) (11.7).

Adoptive selection of emperors.

Old Nerva	(96-98)	
Trajan	(98-117)	
Hadrian	(117-138)	
Antoninus Pius	(138-161)	(vii)

Hadrian had Antoninus adopt Marcus & Lucius Verus to avoid power vacuum.

Original name: Marcus Annaeus Verus. The old Hadrian called him **Verissimus**. Could not tell a lie (viii).

A.D. 139--18 years old. Learned he was in line of succession. Was sorry. A.D. 143 (21 years old) wrote Fronto, his rhetoric teacher, "When I am not with you, you read Cato, but I, when you are not with me, have to listen to the pleaders till 6:00 p.m." (ix).

A.D. 145. Turned from rhetoric to philosophy. Attracted to **practical** stoicism as a practical Roman. The logic & physics of stoicism had become neglected. **Ethics** were foremost.

A.D. 180. Died on military campaign in cold Sarmatia beyond the Danube (xiv).

**The Meditations** written as a journal. Not intended for publication. Circulated after he died.