

Below is background information on the content.

My thoughts on the content will be reflected in footnotes at the bottom of each respective page. With the exceptions of annotations, page numbers, changes in font (for readability), name replacements or identifiers (protecting and indicating participants in discussion-based content), the original content is unedited.

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Date of commentary: January 28th, 2017.

Date of original content (Approximate): September, 2013.

Format: Group reply.

Subject (Approximate): Nature, judgments, addiction, control, empathy.

Participants: 3.

Part (if Applicable): 2 of 2.

Synopsis: The conversation begins in late 2013 in the “Stoicism Group (Stoic Philosophy)” social media group with an open question on what should be considered natural for persons, and whether what seems to be natural to a person is in fact natural by virtue of being considered so by the person in question. The conversation shifts focus to whether helping afflicted persons (such as persons with addictions, gamblers, and thieves) is plausible and appropriate for a practicing Stoic.

~ Start of Original Content ~

Reply to Poster #3 (Travis Hume):

The actions of others are not in our power, I agree. And this is reflected in Stoic beliefs. Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus do state, however, that if a person is harming themselves through their behaviors (contributing to vice), then we should try to help them overcome, as one human being to another, but only if we are certain we can help them, and only for the right reasons.

If we are unable to convince them why they are harming themselves, and what is the better way and why, or if our intentions are not appropriate (acting to admonish them, or rebuke them, or to be admired by appearing to want to help), the fault does not lie with them, but with us.

The reason: We may believe and act upon Stoic principles, but teaching them is another skill entirely. We need to act and speak with confidence of the principles, in addition to embodying them. Speaking well (and likewise teaching) comes with time, and practice. When we are prepared, the results will reflect themselves in the conviction of the person receiving our help, because we have presented the principles in a way they cannot reasonably refute. We thereby act in accordance with nature, by helping the person help themselves, and potentially drive them to help others with a similar intention.

If we are unable to help them (they do not accept the help for reasons known only to them), we should not take it to heart, because it is out of our control. We should see it instead for what it is: A well-intentioned attempt, as well as practice.¹

Reply to Poster #4 (Travis Hume):

I am a philosophy student, who happened across Stoicism three years ago, in a 20 minute segment of an intro to philosophy class. I have practiced it rigorously, since. I have made it a personal goal to become like Cato, Marcus Aurelius, and other Stoics, ie, a person that understands what right action is, and possesses the courage to act upon it, regardless of what happens to me.

I believe, have acted upon, experienced, and possess an example of everything that I write in this group. Otherwise, I omit it.

Question (Poster #3):

Can you please share where Epictetus states "if a person is harming themselves through their behaviors (contributing to vice), then we should try to help them"?

Reply (Travis Hume):

"The Discourses" by Epictetus, Book one, chapter 18, "That we should not be angry with those who fall into error."

"If what the philosophers say be true, that all men's actions proceed from one source, namely feeling, such that in the case of assent, it is the feeling that something is so, and of dissent, the feeling that it is not so, and, in the case of suspended judgment, the feeling that it is uncertain, so also in the case of impulse towards a thing, the feeling it is to my advantage, and that it is impossible to judge one thing advantageous and desire another, and to judge one thing appropriate and be impelled to another - if all this is in fact true, why should we still be angry at the multitude?"

Response: "But they are thieves and robbers."

"What do you mean by thieves and robbers? They have gone astray in matters of good and evil. Ought we, then, to be angry with them, or to pity them? Do but show them their error, and you will see how they will amend their faults; but if they do not see it, they have nothing higher than their personal opinion to rely on."

¹ In short, if we believe that we are able to help another person because said person's thought process is resulting in errors that are in actuality harming them, we should try to understand how said person's mindset came to be. Following this assessment, if we believe that we are confident in our skill in understanding Stoic philosophy, confident that we are authentic in our application of it, confident that said person is in a frame of mind of being receptive to advice, and confident in our ability to properly discuss how Stoicism relates to said persons situation without entrenching said person in their currently held stance, we should attempt to help said person. If in the end the person is unmoved, or is only briefly moved, then we have done all that we can, and should use the result as a learning experience.

"The Discourses" by Epictetus, Book one, chapter 28 "That we should not be angry with others; And what things are great, and what small, amongst men?"

"When any one assents to what is false, be assured that he does not willfully assent to it as false (for as Plato affirms, the soul is never voluntarily deprived of truth); but what is false appears to him to be true. Well then, have we, in actions, anything corresponding as true and false in the realm of perception?

Duty and what is contrary to duty, the advantageous and disadvantageous, what is appropriate and inappropriate, and the like.

A person, then, cannot think a thing advantageous to him, and not choose it.

What of Medea, who says "Yes, I understand what evils I propose, but what passion overwhelms my resolutions?"

For it is just this, the gratification of her anger and the taking of vengeance on her husband, that she regards as more advantageous than the saving of her children."

Response: "Yes, but she is deceived."

"Show to her clearly that she is deceived, and she will not do it; but as long as you have not shown it, what else has she to follow but what seems true to her?"

"The Discourses" by Epictetus, Book two, chapter 12 "On Disputation."

"A proper guide, when he finds his charge going astray, does not revile and ridicule him and then desert him, but leads him back to the right path.

So you for your part should show him the truth, and you will see that he follows. But as long as you fail to show the truth, do not ridicule him, but rather recognize your own incapacity."

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