

Below is background information on the content. My current 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: December 17th, 2016.

Date of original content (Approximate): August, 2012.

Format: Reply to Facebook group post.

Subject (Approximate): News, current events, self-analysis, philanthropy,

Participants: 1-5 (Travis Hume, and other posters.)

Part (if Applicable): 1 of 1.

Synopsis: The content is a response to a post in the facebook group "Stoicism Group (Stoic Philosophy) in 2012. The original post asked the approach a Stoic takes to current events. My reply to the post centered on viewing current events as opportunities for insight on our current progress as practicing Stoics, and on the cause-and-effect pattern of events as driven by individual participants.

~ Start of Original Content ~

Our first priority should be to master ourselves, maintain the mastery, and continually, consciously improve upon it. Only then will we know if our actions are appropriately formed and guided.¹

Our second priority should be understanding the extent to which we have influence over the quality of life of others. We should seek to expand this influence by taking opportunities for public service. Nature-of-the-things-that-be willing, the scope to which we can reduce the suffering of others, and improve their quality of life, will increase likewise.²

¹ This post is my first public attempt to help others interpret events through Stoic philosophy, as I then understood it. Prior to committing to the post, I examined my motivations in replying. If I concluded that my motivation was anything other than improving my own understanding while helping others do the same, I would erase all material I had written thus far, and return to it after scrutinizing the underlying judgments (as far as I could discern them). This first segment is reflective of this sentiment: One of the highest priorities of a practicing Stoic is moment-to-moment self-evaluation. Only after being sure that we are philosophically consistent to the best of our knowledge and ability should we commit to an action (as time and circumstances permit).

² In Stoic philosophy, while the materials of action and the circumstances themselves are neither good or evil (i.e. indifferent,) our intent in acting upon them is not. As practicing Stoics, our particular motivations in approaching events makes or breaks progress. Motivations that are appropriate to have are those consistent with the combined consensus of all roles a respective Stoic currently holds. If the sentiment befits one's role as a social and rational animal, such as alleviating the suffering of others by expending material resources (e.g. volunteering for a local food pantry or donating to a charity), then it is appropriate and conducive to progress as a practicing Stoic. If the aim is to draw attention to oneself for praise or reputation, it is in conflict with the premise that external rewards are neither good nor evil in themselves, because they can happen to both virtuous and vicious persons. Regular attempts to benefit others, with the appropriate motivation to fulfill one's role as a social and rational animal to the best of one's ability, results in an enduring state of rational magnanimity independent of the result of the attempt; the state of "wishing," consisting of benevolent feelings fully appropriate to embrace.

Our third priority should be to use the news, in whatever form it comes, true or false, as opportunities to refine our rational abilities. The situations and the news are still of use to us, regardless of their composition, or whether or not we are able to influence them.³

If we adhere to our rational faculty, and follow nature, as Stoic ancestors have said, it is entirely possible that one day we will be placed in a position where we -can- influence them for the better.⁴

~ End of Original Content ~

³ In the Stoic account, human beings interpret events sequentially. A sensory account (an “impression”) near-simultaneously combines with an involuntary value judgment (“first movement of the soul”) to form a “proposition” – a conceptualization that we can understand and assent to, e.g. “My credit card is missing, and this is bad.” Assent is then granted (i.e. the “proposition” is believed to be a true and accurate) or withheld (indefinitely suspended). If assent is granted, the “first movement” is reinforced, intensifying the corresponding emotions and strengthening a habit of assenting to similar propositions. In other words, if a person assents to the proposition “my credit card is missing, and this is bad,” distress results. Withholding assent (suspending belief), is equivalent to asserting “I may not have all the information, and the situation may not be what it seems to be.” A principal goal of the practicing Stoic is to identify this process occurring within themselves, collect information on the situation in question, and re-evaluate the proposition with information in hand, and the deliberate exercise of Stoic principles. News provides opportunities to refine these skills.

⁴ The Stoic aims always for self-improvement, and for the betterment of other persons, independent of circumstances or material rewards. These efforts often result in improving the quality of life of other persons – the preferred outcome.