



STOICISM

THE SPARTAN WAY OF LIFE

“If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.”

—*Marcus Aurelius*

Stoicism (“indifference to pleasure or pain” — Webster)

Founded in Athens around 301 BC, Stoicism is a philosophy that provides a complete and alternative worldview, which in many ways is very different from our modern Western perspective, and yet in others much more familiar than Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism.

Stoicism is what’s known today as a “virtue ethic”. We’re told, for instance, by the doxographer Diogenes Laertius, that the Stoics described their supreme goal as living “honorably” because the perfection of our character requires wisdom, justice, courage, and self-discipline. These four cardinal virtues provide a template for what we might reasonably call the Stoic “code of honor” or rule of life.

*“It’s not what happens to you
but how you react to it that matters.”*

—*Epictetus*,

Some things are under our control, while others are not under our control. Under our control are conception, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing.



We don't procrastinate because we lack self-control, but because we're in the grip of an unpleasant emotion, and don't know how to handle it. This is called emotion regulation—the ability to respond to negative emotion in a way that is mentally healthy, and socially acceptable. Instead of having the fortitude to wade through the unpleasant emotion, we reach for the nearest comfort instead—social media, television, drugs, or whatever is easiest. Without the ability to regulate our emotions, we can become depressed, anxious, develop eating disorders, and abuse substances¹. We might also have fewer and shallower personal relationships.

This Stoic principle, commonly known as the *Dichotomy of Control*, makes a sharp binary distinction about those things in our power and those which aren't. Stoicism, due to its deceptively simple, yet complex and holistic approach is uniquely equipped to provide us with a new way to generate meaning in a rational way. It teaches us how to become better people by improving our character, dealing with negative emotions and encouraging social engagement on a local and global level.

DICHOTOMY OF CONTROL

*"The chief task in life is simply this:
to identify and separate matters
so that I can say clearly to myself
which are externals not under my control,
and which have to do with the choices I actually control."
—Epictetus, The Discourses*



WHAT WOULD A STOIC DO?

The first question the Stoic would ask is:

Is what is happening around me under my control?

For an example let's look at the Coronavirus Pandemic.

A Stoic looks at fear and knows that there are only three possibilities:

1. Never contracting the disease;
2. Contracting the disease but recovering; and
3. Contracting the disease and perhaps dying.

The Stoic hopes for the first possibility and takes the necessary precautions. If that doesn't work there is the second possibility — getting the disease and recovering. We have done this many times in our lives. But there is also an outside chance that the outcome is the third possibility. Stoic courage prepares us even for this possibility.

Remind yourself what is in your power and what is not. I should die; should I die groaning too? ... what keeps me from going with a smile on my face?

— Epictetus, Discourses 1.1.22 (Chuck Chakrapani, Stoic Foundations, Ch. 1)

Passages for this document taken from the following posts:

1. <https://medium.com/stoicism-philosophy-as-a-way-of-life/the-spartan-philosophy-of-life-f0731afdb039>
2. <https://medium.com/mind-cafe/stoicism-you-are-what-you-think-3219b544bc31>
3. <https://medium.com/stoicism-philosophy-as-a-way-of-life/stoicism-and-the-mandalorian-d59ea7ec1094>
4. <https://medium.com/antidotes-for-chimps/stoicism-a-masterclass-in-emotion-regulation-622546bd25d5>