

# Tranquility from a stoics' point of view



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## How individuals can achieve tranquility from a stoics' point of view

Epictetus and other stoics believe that tranquility should be our utmost goal in this rational life. They claim that the key to happiness is solely based on rationality and tranquility. Stoics argue that to become tranquil, considerable effort must be made and prices must be paid. In this article, I would expatiate on indifference and letting go of the external as the road to tranquility as argued by Aurelius, Meditation and Epictetus respectively. Furthermore, “ Using my explanations of the concept of tranquility as discussed by Epictetus and by Marcus Aurelius, I would elaborate what Epictetus means when he says, “ Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well.” (Epictetus, Handbook, 56).

Epictetus argues that the world is rational as “ nothing bad by nature happens in the world” (Epictetus, Handbook, 61). He implies that we only suffer due to a lack of equanimity and inner peace which is attributed to tranquility. To attain tranquility, he believes that it is necessary to identify that which is external and internal. The term internal means whatever is our own doing such as our desires and aversion, and by external, he refers to what is beyond our control. Understanding this is important to attaining tranquility as Epictetus claims that for an individual to attain this state of mind, he must let go of the external and embrace “ things that are up to us by nature” (Epictetus, Handbook, 54). He further explains this using the example of how an individual can perceive a single situation as either good or bad based on his judgement. He specifically uses an example of when one’s siblings commit an offence and says that the first thing is to think

rationally while making any decision over it (Epictetus, Handbook, 63). The price of tranquility in this case is again “ the price not to be upset” (Epictetus, Handbook, 57). This entails that no matter what situation we might be, it is essential that we judge every action to favor us as this action is external hence any irrational judgement only causes suffering. Conclusively, Epictetus argues that tranquility can only be achieved by letting go of the external and embracing the internal. We can either accept what we can't change or be miserable.

Marcus Aurelius approaches tranquility through a path of indifference, he describes tranquility as a state of “ laying aside all carelessness and passionate aversion from the commands of reason” (Aurelius, Meditation, Book 2). In the introduction to his work ‘ Meditations’ book 2, Aurelius also explained the concept of indifference which readers and stoics can relate to it. He starts by saying “ I shall meet with the busy-body, the ungrateful, arrogant, deceitful, envious, unsocial” (Aurelius, Meditation, Book 2). He presents indifference in this case by assuming that it is proper for him to encounter these group of people whom he termed ‘ ignorant’. This approach of indifference appears to be a pessimistic form of negative visualization as the worst doesn't necessarily happen but is only speculated. Aurelius believes that having foresight that there is a likelihood of encountering irrational people in a rational world, helps us to maintain a perfect state of mind as we are a bit prepared for the worse. Marcus Aurelius' argument basically suggests a fair concept that to reach tranquility, one must show indifference by expecting less from humanity .

Epictetus constantly emphasized the rationality of life as he believes that to get the most out of life, we must also be rational. Also, he explains that humans being rational is the ability to distinguish the external from internal. Conversely his theory suggests that there is no greater need for us to control the external, but instead to live our life accordingly so that it conforms with the rational world. Hence his statement, “ Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do and your life would go well.” (Epictetus, Handbook, 56). This statement urges us to be indifferent towards life. Therefore, by applying this, there should be no preference to the outcome and proceed of events. For instance, if one is to be awoken in the morning, then to check the weather for the day and finds that the temperature is -40; then readily this person would assume it is too cold for him which would have an effect on their emotions. However, since the weather is uncontrollable, they only have the choice to accept the harsh weather conditions or to continue complaining. Choosing to be gloomy and uncomfortable is solely dependent on the person, likewise, choosing to accept the circumstances that will result in having a positive day. Therefore, Epictetus concludes that it will only bring forth suffering if a person chooses to be miserable by not accepting the reality as it is uncontrollable and the will power to overcome severe situation is solely the person's decision. He believes that rationality can only be achieved by living our life to suite the outcome of events that happens around us.

In closing, this expository piece examined theories and theorists' views on the internal and external and indifference as the path to achieve tranquility as argued by Epictetus and Aurelius respectively. Also, explanations were

given retrospectively to the relevance and meaning of Epictetus' quote which says, " Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do and your life would go well."

(Epictetus, Handbook, 56).

## Works Cited

- Aurelius, Marcus. " Meditation." *The Internet Classics Archive | On Airs, Waters, and Places by Hippocrates* , classics. mit. edu/Antoninus/meditations. html. Cited throughout as Aurelius, Meditation.
- Epictetus, *The Handbook of Epictetus* . (Translated by Nicholas white) Hackett, 1983. Cited throughout as Epictetus, Handbook.