

The universal
happiness available
to man according to
the encheiridion by
epictetu...



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throughout the ancient world, there are distinctions drawn between different groups and hierarchies of people due to this. The Jews were the chosen group of God and because of that, the gentiles were separate from them and since unable to follow the Old Law, could not be saved. Aristotle writes of the possibility of slaves in the *Politics* and talks of the various slaves that the Greeks hold. Even if Aristotle does not actually believe in Natural Slavery, he still presents the views of his contemporary culture and his contemporaries draw a distinction between themselves according to honor and status and between themselves and slaves, and barbarians. These various distinctions are due to either differences in physical nature, geographic location, or social rank. Both the Stoic and the Christian texts describe a dignity that is universal to mankind and makes every man equal, which consequently gives a foundation for happiness and due respect to each human being.

Through exploring the worldview of the Stoics and the Christians, the differences in what entails ultimate happiness become apparent. The Stoic worldview is composed central to man's reason, attributing all happiness in man's life to the proper relation to passions and rationality. As Epictetus says in the first part of the *Encheiridion*, Some things are up to us and some are not up to us. Our opinions are up to us, and our impulses, desires, aversions – in short, whatever is our own doing. Our bodies are not up to us, nor are our possessions, our reputations, or our public offices, or, that is, whatever is not our own doing. The things that are up to us are by nature free, unhindered, and unimpeded; the things that are not up to us are weak, enslaved, hindered, not our own. So remember, if you think that things

naturally enslaved are free or that things not your own are your own, you will be miserable, and upset, and will blame both gods and men. But if you think that only what is yours is yours, and that what is not your own is, just as it is, not your own, then no one will ever coerce you... (Epictetus, 430) This introduction to the text holds the quintessential Stoic argument within it, that one ought to be concerned with what it is they may control, that being how they relate to their passions and their reason. As he states, all of our reactions are in our control. There exists the external world which dictates fortune, position, etc. and then there is our response to that, as he says our “opinions...impulses, desires, aversions”. These reactions, either accepting, resilient, or what not, to how the external events occur are what define us. Thus if we give in to events and are in despair because of things out of our control, we will always be miserable. Anything in the external world could lead us to unhappiness, if we, humanity, were to be dependent on position or honor for happiness, then we might never be happy as there always exists more honor to be gained or positions higher to be held. The conferring of honor and position is given by others and just as easily as good words might be spoken of one, they are just as easily spoken about another or taken away. But the reaction to the words is something which may remain constant within you and never taken away which guarantees an internal peace.

Epictetus also notes that things such as bodies (and necessarily then athletic ability, outward appearance, and physical prowess) and monetary status are given by fortune, so since one can not control their physical distinctions, their happiness and position ought not be based off of it. This eliminates class distinction strife and any ethnic strife and exchanges it with a

distinction of merit and reason entirely in one's control. Epictetus continues to describe what this control looks like in one's daily life and prescribes how one ought to act in various situations. By examining these various circumstances, certain peculiarities or flaws with Stoicism are made clear. For example, when Epictetus describes going to the bathhouse he states

When you are about to undertake some action, remind yourself what sort of action it is. If you are going out for a bath, put before your mind what happens at baths- there are people who splash, people who jostle, people who are insulting, people who steal. And you will undertake the action more securely if from the start you say of it, " I want to take a bath and to keep my choices in accord with nature;" and likewise for each action For that way if something happens to interfere with your bathing you will ready to say " Oh, well, I wanted not only this but also to keep my choices in accord with nature, and I cannot do that if I am annoyed with things that happen."

(Epictetus, 431) This seems reasonable, as the main goal in each action, is not even the fulfilment of each proximate circumstance (bathing), but that each choice is in line with reason. Thus peace can be achieved through the proper mindset of choices and not the fulfilment of external circumstances. The poor decisions of others can not affect the peace of the Stoic because while their decisions may affect his bathing for instance, his reason in no way is controlled by them and so he can disregard them in his reaction.

This mindset is then further developed when Epictetus speaks of grief and death. You are foolish if you want your children and your wife and your friends to live forever, since you are wanting things to be up to you that are not up to you, and things to be yours that are not yours... When you see

someone weeping in grief at the departure of his child or the loss of his property, take care not to be carried away... and even moan with him if the occasion arises; but be careful not to moan inwardly. (Epictetus, 432-33) This might seem peculiar as the desire for loved ones to not be harmed seems natural, but since the Stoic system is built around knowing what is in one's control (their reason) and out of their control (externals), this reaction would fit in their belief properly. The desire for loved ones to live forever seems to be perfectly natural, as it is naturally good for one to be alive and the destruction of a life is the not apart of the end of man, thus grieving over a loved one seems natural. But the Stoic philosophy does not seem to account for a good, only a way to stay at peace. If reason is good, then it be a wrong for one to die, as their reason is abolished. This seems to be a discrepancy in Stoic Thought. This discrepancy seems further demonstrated in the call by Epictetus to imitate sorrow with one's fellow man. For why would one pretend to grieve and moan with another if it is truly not bad. Instead it seems that if it is truly good to not grieve a loved one, then the Stoic would not lie to his fellow man. Perhaps, Stoicism provides a way to have peace, if peace is the elimination/reduction of stressful concern or strife. Though this elimination seems to occur through a reduction of the world, so that the externals almost hold no good, and the world is only as big as one's own reason. What good is enjoying externals if one must not care about them unless they are good to one's self and pain is ignored.

The Christian texts seem to provide a way in which there is peace and peace for everyman and the world, an order, while not sacrificing concern for externals. The Christian texts also hold a peace and good for each and every

man, similar to the philosophy of the Stoics, without the reduction of concern that the Stoics hold. The Christian can be happy living in a world of pain, is ordered in a world of disorder, and each man has value to him. The essential belief of the Christians seems to be held in a few tenets. Peter, one of the Apostles, states “ “ Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2. 38). This is developed later on with, “ Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” (Romans 13. 8). These commandments, to live in line with the new law, open to both Gentile and Jew, Slave and Master alike, and to love God by loving Man, essentially provides a new nature and a new hope for man. The incarnation of Christ gives a new order to the Cosmos so that peace is not found within oneself but in the omnipotent, omniscient, and also loving God that any man can access. Thus instead of ignoring externals and focusing simply on the controllable internal, the Christian finds solace in the fact that he can influence the externals through love and that all is within God’s hands.

There do seem to be some similarities, in terms of how the Christian is not of this world even if he is in it as the Stoic does not allow himself to be affected by outside things. This is evidenced by the Temptation of the Jesus and the following interaction where the devil proclaims “ If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”(Matthew 4. 3) and Christ replies “ It is written, ‘ Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”(Matthew 4. 4) . In this passage, we see Satan offering material good to the Christ and Christ proclaims that

for the good, material things are not what fully sustain man but also the spiritual is necessary for happiness. So the Christian worldview agrees with the Stoic worldview in so far as material circumstance is not the determining factor in happiness as well as the fact that there include some internal factor, where the Stoic factor is the reason, the Christian internal factor is one that receives God's word and which loves. This is further developed in the Temptation with the Third Temptation of Christ. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him. "(Matthew 4. 8-11) This temptation again provides a certain rejection of the material and external world, not because it is not within Christ's control but because it is not lasting and the highest point for the Christian is the Lord. This shows that the Christian and the Stoic differ in the reliances or foundations like so; the Stoic relies on his reason because it is the only thing that is his own and the Christian finds himself on something better. His source of happiness is something unchanging and above time. So both of them rely on something that is not fickle, either something their own or God. But the Stoic's reason also has its end and does not make sense of the world in the same way that the Lord does. Also more importantly, even though God is external, unlike reason which is an internal power, one becomes closer to God and even part of the body of Christ when one loves and follows the way. As Peter says, believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thus the foundation for happiness for Christians is not only transcendent but

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integrates and perfects their own nature. Thus, it is not a simple dependence on your soul and your soul alone but a communion of your soul with the Unchanging. Another difference between Christianity and Stoicism is that Christianity seems to be necessarily social whereas Stoicism allows for detachment from even family and says to remember that living beings pass as all other things do. As is evidenced by the fact that the reading concerned with Christian life is titled Acts, the Christian life is necessarily connected with the life of others and treating them as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is further supported by the fact that Christian text accounts for living within a society.

Stoic and Christian thought seem to be similar in that they both account for happiness in a way that is non discriminatory in a physical or external manner but rather it is concerned with the internal life and the way in which our soul acts. They both consider external things as less pertinent to one's life than the soul though they also diverge on this point. Stoicism is ultimately limited in that it allows for peace through reliance purely on reason but in that same act, it limits the world to oneself. Christianity is self-reliant from the actions of others for one's own happiness as Stoicism is, but that because it presumes an order for other's action and knows that there is a self-evidence to divine love.