

"WHAT THOU AVOIDEST SUFFERING THYSELF SEEK NOT TO IMPOSE ON OTHERS."

— EPICTETUS (55-135)

STOICISM — An Overview

Inception: Zeno of Citium (334 BC – 262 BC) Zeno was the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, which he taught in Athens from about 300 BC.

Adherents: [EBI Estimate]

Primary Value Proposition: Submission to God

The Word of (about and/or attributed to) God:

- All alike are sons of God
- God is identified with an eternal reason or intelligent designing fire which structures matter in accordance with Its plan.
- The designing fire is likened to a sperm which contains the principles or stories of all the things which will subsequently develop.
- God is immanent throughout the whole of creation and directs its development down to the smallest detail.

Core Beliefs: Borrowing from the Cynics, the foundation of Stoicism is that good lies in the state of the soul itself; in wisdom and self-control. Stoic ethics stressed the rule: "Follow where reason leads." The Stoics provided a unified account of the world, consisting of formal logic, non-dualistic physics and naturalistic ethics. Of these, they emphasized ethics as the main focus of human knowledge, though their logical theories were to be of more interest for many later philosophers.

Stoicism teaches the development of self-control and fortitude as a means of overcoming destructive emotions; the philosophy holds that becoming a clear and unbiased thinker allows one to understand the universal reason (logos). A primary aspect of Stoicism involves improving the individual's ethical and moral well-being: "Virtue consists in a will which is in agreement with Nature." This principle also applies to the realm of interpersonal relationships; "to be free from anger, envy, and jealousy," and to accept even slaves as "equals of other men, because all alike are sons of God."

The Stoic ethic espouses a deterministic perspective; in regards to those who lack Stoic virtue, Cleanthes once opined that the wicked man is "like a dog tied to a cart, and compelled to go wherever it goes." A Stoic of virtue, by contrast, would amend his will to suit the world and remain, in the words of Epictetus, "sick and yet happy, in peril and yet happy, dying and yet happy, in exile and happy, in disgrace and happy," thus positing a "completely autonomous" individual will, and at the same time a universe that is "a rigidly deterministic single whole."

Stoicism became the foremost popular philosophy among the educated elite in the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire, to the point where, in the words of Gilbert Murray (1866-1957), a classical scholar of the language and culture of ancient Greece, "nearly all the successors of Alexander professed themselves Stoics."