

Critique of the Control Dichotomy as a Useful Strategy

Post by "Cassius" of February 23, 2026 at 9:29 AM

To those reading along I would amplify what Daniel has said about 1000 times. He's approaching the subject as it is generally approached nowadays - sort of clinically. Yes indeed if you define 1 as "courage" and 2 as "justice" and "complete happiness" as "courage + justice" then you are completely happy if you have 1 and 2. You could likewise define 1 as oranges and 2 as bananas and complete happiness as "orange + bananas" and if you have 1 + 2 you have complete happiness. And if you're stupid enough to do that you'll never miss, because 1 + 2 are defined as equaling 3.

But isn't it clear that this is nonsensical? It SHOULD be clear, but when you start the chain with "everyone wants happiness" and you don't make CLEAR what you mean by happiness then you can draw every sucker into the world into your trap, and that is exactly what Stoicism does.

There are many good people who get taken in by Stoicism, and I am all in favor of treating them diplomatically, because most of us ourselves were one in thrall of their slights of hand - just as many today are taken in by religion.

Stoicism in the hands of the innocent is a tragedy, but in the hands of those who should know better, it's one of the worst crimes in the history of the world. Pythagoras and Socrates and Plato and others in their line set all this in motion, and the Stoics simply abstracted it further to an absurd extreme. Their line deserves the full blame for what has happened as a result.

Epicurus points the way out of that trap, and his answer is by going back to the beginning of their denunciation of the senses. When you use them properly to look at nature and see that NATURE is supreme (not prime movers, divine fire, or universal intelligence) then you see the way out of the trap is really very simple.

Don't go down this false path in the first place, and if you're already trapped in it retrace your steps as quickly as you can. Nature through the senses, anticipations, and feelings can lead you out of this trap, but looking to "Nature" alone isn't good enough. The Stoics and Aristotle alike both claim to look to Nature. It's only when you reject the idea that you or your chosen idol are over Nature and smarter than Nature that you are in tune with what Epicurus was teaching.

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