

# Cicero's Criticism of Stoicism in "On Ends"

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In Stoicism there are many dangerous parallels to Christianity and other monotheistic religions, one of which is the condemnation of all who have not achieved perfection or salvation as they define it. In the following excerpt we see Cicero condemning this core doctrine of Stoicism by addressing Cato, the arch-Stoic:

"But proceed further; for we now come to the doctrine, of which you [Cato] gave such a masterly summary, that all men's folly, injustice and other vices are alike and all sins are equal; and that those who by nature and training have made considerable progress towards virtue, unless they have actually attained to it, are utterly miserable, and there is nothing whatever to choose between their existence and that of the wickedest of mankind, so that the great and famous Plato, supposing he was not a Wise Man, lived a no better and no happier life than any unprincipled scoundrel.

And this, if you please, is your revised and corrected version of the old philosophy, a version that could not possibly be produced in public life, in the law-courts, in the senate! For who could tolerate such a way of speaking in one who claimed to be an authority on wise and moral conduct? Who would allow him to alter the names of things, and while really holding the same opinions as everyone else, to impose different names on things to which he attaches the same meanings as other people, just altering the terms while leaving the ideas themselves untouched? Could an advocate wind up his defense of a client by declaring that exile and confiscation of property are not evils? that they are 'to be rejected,' but not 'to be shunned'? that it is not a judge's duty to show mercy? Or supposing him to be addressing a meeting of the people; Hannibal is at the gates and has flung a javelin over the city walls; could he say that captivity, enslavement, death, loss of country are no evils? Could the senate, decreeing a triumph to Africanus, use the formula, 'whereas by reason of his valour,' or 'good fortune,' if no one but the Wise Man can truly be said to possess either valour or good fortune?

What sort of philosophy then is this, which speaks the ordinary language in public, but in its treatises employs an idiom of its own? and that though the doctrines which the Stoics express in their own peculiar terms contain no actual novelty the ideas remain the same, though clothed in another dress. Why, what difference does it make whether you call wealth, power, health 'goods,' or 'things preferred,' when he who calls them goods assigns no more value to them than you who style exactly the same things 'preferred'?

This is why so eminent and high-minded an authority as Panaetius, a worthy member of the famous circle of Scipio and Laelius, in his epistle to Quintus Tubero on the endurance of pain, has nowhere made what ought to have been his most effective point, if it could be shown to be true, namely that pain is not an evil; instead he defines its nature and properties, estimates the degree of its divergence from nature, and lastly prescribes the method by which it is to be

endured.

So that by his vote, seeing that he was a Stoic, your terminological fatuities seem to me to stand condemned."