

Vice article on Stoicism (mentions Epicurus)

Post by "Cassius" of July 25, 2021 at 6:52 AM

Great find and thank you Don. Another occasion to examine the recurring issue!

Here are some initial comments:

Alongside broad general interest, Stoicism has an outsized allure in certain cultural spheres. Jack Dorsey, the CEO of Square and Twitter, has been called the "Silicon Valley Stoic" for his 5 a.m. wake-up time and ice baths. Elizabeth Holmes, the founder of Theranos, has called *Meditations* her favorite book. Billionaires like Warren Buffet, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Cuban have been described as Stoics, and there's an entrepreneurship-focused lobbying firm, the Cicero Institute, named after the Stoic Roman philosopher. Classicist Donna Zuckerberg—Mark's sister—has pointed out the rise of a small, but troubling, group of far-right men who gravitate towards Stoicism to validate misogynistic and racist beliefs. A question currently dogging Modern Stoicism is a disconcerting one: Are billionaire and incel Stoics missing the mark? Or, are there elements of Stoicism that inherently justify their conduct and beliefs?

I can quite believe that Elizabeth Holmes was using Stoicism to justify her fraudulent behavior at [Theranos](#)!

99.27.21

The Obstacle Is the Way, Holiday's book based on *Meditations*, has been translated into 19 languages, and he's written an impressive number of Stoicism tomes since, along with leading workshops and helping run the Daily Stoic website, newsletter, and Instagram page, which has one million followers. "Stoicism is a philosophy designed for the masses, and if it has to be simplified a bit to reach the masses, so be it," Holiday told the Times in 2016.

I question whether it was "designed for the masses" but I don't doubt the "machiavellian" attitude of Stoics in dumbing it down for popularity's sake. That certainly was not Epicurus' viewpoint on his own philosophy.

I participated in Holiday's recent Stoicism 101 program, which included a daily email and several office hour Zoom sessions, where people asked questions about applying Stoicism to their modern lives.

Sounds like a method we could usefully learn from.

Some of the tips were so general, though, that I hesitate to call them Stoicism, even if I can find parts of the Stoic texts that reference them. Things like "wake up early," "go for a walk," "journal," "eat well," "read," and "get active" are good pieces of advice, but surely not specifically Stoic behaviors.

This is definitely an observation we hear made over and over and I believe to be true.

Ada Palmer, an historian at the University of Chicago, argues that Stoicism is popular in places like Silicon Valley particularly because it doesn't require a person not to be a CEO of a successful company to be a Stoic. "The Romans loved Stoicism because it was a philosophy that was compatible with political life," Palmer said.

That may be true for some "light" stoics, but according to the info in David Sedley's "the ethics of Brutus and Cassius" it was by no means true of them all and was in fact used to justify doing nothing in the face of emperical tyranny.

Will Johncock, the author of *Stoic Philosophy and Social Theory*, agreed, and said that the individual self-control that people think they're going to achieve from Stoicism is not the most important part of philosophy. "If you're going to discuss Stoicism in these highly self defining terms, you're going to misrepresent the philosophy and you're going to send someone down a path which is arguably more isolating, mentally and more alienating than they've been feeling before," he said.

Very true!

He pointed me to an Epictetus passage: "A person never acts in their own interest or thinks of themselves alone, but, like a hand or foot that had sense and realized its place in the natural order, all its actions and desires aim at nothing except contributing to the common good." Marcus Aurelius, for his part, agreed, writing, "It has long been shown that we are born for community -each creature is made in the interest of another."

I suppose this is true as one conclusion of virtue extremism. It should also serve to show how different Stoicism is from what Epicurus taught.

There's much more in the article worthy of comment. Again - thanks Don!