

Mental pleasure/pain more intense and longer lasting than physical pleasure/pain

Post by "Cassius" of December 11, 2023 at 11:33 AM

[Quote from frank1sy](#)

In other words, the things in our power are mental abilities and capacities.

While I would agree with that generally there's also a limit to that: Diogenes Laertius X-117: "But before considering it let us explain what he and his followers think about the wise man. ... He will be more deeply moved by feelings, but this will not prove an obstacle to wisdom. A man cannot become wise with every kind of physical constitution, nor in every nation."

[Quote from frank1sy](#)

But, taking my cue from the Stoics, the way to lessen mental pain is to realize that this is an area in which we have considerable power, and to focus on our mental capacities and abilities, rather than external events or circumstances, is the best way to approach mental pain

I'd agree that certainly the way to deal with mental pain is to focus on the cause of the mental pain and to work as hard as possible to fix the conditions that led to it. The problems with the Stoics is that they seem to focus on simply by force of will convincing yourself that the pain is not significant, or is a matter of indifference, and that approach can conflict with working to change the condition that caused it. In the case of two of the most significant pains of life, fear of the gods and fear of death, Stoic physics is an absolute barrier to arriving at what Epicureans consider the truth to be -- that neither are a cause for fear or concern in the first place.

What this reminds me of is the constant interplay between Stoics and Epicureans as to virtue. Epicureans do not deprecate the virtues, such as prudence and wisdom and all the rest. Epicureans simply see the virtues as tools to an end and not an end in themselves.

In the example your giving about focusing on what is within control vs outside control I see the same issue. Yes it's obvious to everyone that some external events are beyond our control, but it should be equally obvious that some ARE within our control, and the first step of proper action would be to make that distinction and act on the ones that can be acted on, not fixate on the fact that those within our total control (our minds) are all that is important.

As in many of these comparisons you can seem to end up in a similar place at time, but the Stoic worldview if followed consistently would never get you to a pleasurable life, because no

matter how the modern stoics work to water it down, true Stoicism holds pleasure in contempt and values nothing but "virtue" as the proper end.

I think a lot of people tend to look for the commonalities and then stop because they don't want to go further, as they sense the ultimate issue. Just like we're discussing in the podcast right now, the question of pleasure vs virtue underlies everything else:

[Quote from Cicero in On Ends Book 2](#)

So setting aside the systems of all the rest, there remains a contest not between me and Torquatus, but between virtue and pleasure: a contest of which Chrysippus, a man both shrewd and careful, does not think lightly, for he considers that the entire decision about the supreme good is involved in the opposition between these things.