

Epicurean philosophy vs. Stoicism in public popularity

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Setting aside Hegel's own peculiar terminology (world-spirit, Notion, etc- I'm not here to promote or defend Hegel's philosophy) I find Hegel's summary of Stoicism, in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, to give a pretty good insight into its allurements and its ultimate flaw, ie its sterility.

...whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentiality of thought. Self-will is the freedom which entrenches itself in some particularity and is still in bondage, while Stoicism is the freedom which always comes directly out of bondage and returns into the pure universality of thought. As a universal form of the World~Spirit Stoicism could only appear on the scene in a time of universal fear and bondage but also a time of universal culture which had raised itself to the level of thought.

The freedom of self-consciousness is indifferent to natural existence and has therefore let this equally go free: the reflection is a twofold one. Freedom in thought has only pure thought as its truth, a truth lacking the fullness of life. Hence freedom in thought, too, is only the Notion of freedom, not the living reality of freedom itself. For the essence of that freedom is at first only thinking in general, the form as such [of thought] , which has turned away from the independence of things and returned into itself. But since individuality in its activity should show itself to be alive, or in its thinking should grasp the living world as a system of thought, there would have to be present in thought itself a content for that individuality, in the one case a content of what is good, and in the other of what is true, in order that what is an object for consciousness should contain no other ingredient whatever except the Notion which is the essence. But here the Notion as an abstraction cuts itself off from the multiplicity of things, and thus has no content in its own self but one that is given to it. Consciousness does indeed destroy the content as an alien immediacy [Sein] when it thinks it; but the Notion is a determinate Notion, and this determinateness of the Notion is the alien element which it has within it. Stoicism, therefore, was perplexed when it was asked for what was called a 'criterion of truth as such', i.e. strictly speaking, for a content of thought itself. To the question, What is good and true, it again gave for answer the contentless thought: The True and the Good shall consist in reasonableness. But this self-identity of thought is again only the pure form in which nothing is determined. The True and the Good, wisdom and virtue, the general terms beyond which Stoicism cannot get, are therefore in a general way no doubt uplifting, but since they

cannot in fact produce any expansion of the content, they soon become tedious.

I also think Hegel's note on the historical context of Stoicism is relevant to explaining its relative popularity today- a time of universal fear and bondage. A general feeling of isolation, alienation, and powerlessness can be addressed a number of ways; what Stoicism offers is a kind of deliberately induced dissociation. And as others have noted, the Stoic asceticism does seem well-attuned to the present social orthodoxy, where work, family, fitness, "the grind" etc are exalted at the expense of pleasure.

The Epicureans offered, among other things, a community. They were not monks withdrawn from society but they did offer a certain breathing space free of society's pressures. The practical difficulties of establishing and maintaining such a community today are no doubt enormous. I understand that Philodemus wrote some guidelines for running a Garden, I'll have to see what he has to say.