

Critique of the Control Dichotomy as a Useful Strategy

Post by "Cassius" of February 21, 2026 at 1:57 PM

Going back to the recent question in which the Stoic article was cited, I want to add this:

[Quote from Matteng](#)

The main point is that when you desire no things outside of your control (like life, health ...) you encounter no „unhappiness“ or when you desire only Virtue you get „complete“ happiness.

Again, the entire discussion in the article gets off to a bad start by failing to be clear what is meant by happiness. But even within the general framework of "control" there are huge problems. OF COURSE I want life. OF COURSE I want health. And indeed those things are not guaranteed, and they are therefore not totally within my control. But unlike a Stoic I am not going to cry about it and revolt against Nature. Nature gives us life and health on the contingency that we act properly to secure it and keep it. It would be insane to discard life and health simply because I don't have total control over keeping it.

This entire logic game set forth in the article is exactly the same kind of nonsense that Lucian complains about in Hermotimus. OF COURSE if you exclude as a value anything that you don't have total control over, then you'll never fail in your values. "Expect the worst and you'll never be disappointed" is a logical consistency but it's also an unnatural and insane way to live life.

Stoicism is a reduction ad absurdem of certain trends in Socratic/Platonic thought that even Aristotle, who failed to reject the "prime mover" argument, could not accept. I wouldn't waste my time debating them unless and until one of them (who wouldn't be faithful to Stoicism if they did so) set forth a reasonable explanation of their terms of what life and happiness really entail. Divine fire and loving Fate and pursuing virtue in and for itself are pure nonsense. You're not going to reach a reasonable and acceptable set of conclusions when you start off with such a false foundation, no matter how logically consistent you might be at any single step along the way.