

Critique of the Control Dichotomy as a Useful Strategy

Post by "Cassius" of February 21, 2026 at 7:07 PM

[Matteng](#) that is why I am finding the material we are covering on the podcast now so valuable. I too was attracted to Stoicism (many years ago now) and for a long time I favored it. But as I look back now I see that I should have immediately tried to question what exactly they thought their goal to be. The word "happiness" is interpreted in too many ways to accept it at face value as a goal without an understanding of what the person using the word means. Same goes for Epicurean philosophy, and Lucian makes that point too - that this problem applies to all schools. Socrates is wrong - it IS possible to be clear, and to clearly communicate something positive that you have confidence is true. But just like people use different languages, even within the same language different people use different words in different ways. Epicurus is right that it is essential to be clear, and the only way to do that in conceptual matters is to cite numbers of examples and to explain the entire concept in understandable words.

But to get back to the current material on the podcasts, this is why Stoicism was not accepted - not just by the Epicureans - but also by the majority of the Academy. Both Aristotle and the regular heirs of Plato understood that there is more subtlety involved in the word "Virtue" than just things that are under one's own control. The Stoics talk today as if they ruled the roost in the ancient world, but we can read Cicero and see plainly that both Aristotle and the New Academy saw the problems with Stoicism. I am no fan of Carneades, but he seems to have directed at least as much, and probably more, of his fire at the Stoics than at the Epicureans. Aristotle has significant similarities with Epicurus as to certain views of pleasure, and even Socrates and Plato can be found to say occasional good things about pleasure. The distinguishing mark of Stoicism seems to be that they elevated the worship of Logic and Reason to an extreme that even Socrates and Aristotle and maybe even Plato himself would not have agreed with.

I perceive that everyone does not hold that Hermodotus dialog in the same esteem that I do, but if you haven't read the whole thing I highly recommend it. In my view it does an excellent job of making this point - that logical consistency is a dangerous trap if you start off at the beginning with premises that are not properly evaluated.

Even the introduction to the Epicurus Reader starts off with something similar, presuming that "Everyone wants to be happy." In a way that is true, and I say things like that myself sometime, but we're here to be clear about philosophy and how to pursue it, and in serious discussion the meaning of the word "happy" is NOT something to be taken for granted.