

Critique of the Control Dichotomy as a Useful Strategy

Post by “Pacatus” of March 10, 2026 at 12:36 PM

It seems to me that if the dichotomy of control (as in Epictetus) refers to whatever is completely within my control *versus* whatever is completely out of my control – then it is an idealistic abstraction, and not useful. (And I suspect that idealism is exactly how the Stoics saw it.)

For me, I think more in terms of likely effective agency – given the circumstances and my own abilities. That may be more “loosey-goosey,” but it’s also more pragmatic. What *can* I reasonably do in this situation? What can I reasonably *choose*? And what will be the likely outcome? (And the Epicurean trichotomy of desires comes right into play here.)

With regard to happiness, I equate it with pleasure (mental or physical, kinetic or katastematic). If I’m happy, I’m enjoying some pleasure. In that sense, I translate (for myself) *eudaimonia* as “happy well-being.” In that sense, I don’t find the word problematic, nor think of it solely as just an immediate “rush” of feeling (and I’m really not sure that most people do think of it only that way). But it is a term that needs to be unpacked (Emily Austin, it seems to me, does a good job of that).

To cast it all in a lighter, humorous frame, here is a cartoon I once posted elsewhere (especially the last two panels):

