

Free Will And The Stoics

Post by "Cassius" of June 26, 2019 at 8:22 AM

TH:

From my reading of Epictetus, he viewed us as having LIMITED Freewill.

The best example from his reading is from Discourses II. The example is going on a trip. one can select the captain, ship, crew, destination and date of departure. Beyond that, there is much outside of our control. For example, we could be calmed. Or we could encounter a ferocious storm and our ship founder. None of those are in our control. Chance enters at some point, no matter how hard we try, wish or demand. And there is nothing we can do to change the random character of the universe.

Since our control is limited, we are kind of like the dog on the leash. Do we control if there is war and hunger? Do we control drought and famine? To a certain degree, we as individuals can impact those things, but if the general tide is against us, we control little.

Rand believed we could change the world with our will. Perhaps if enough agreed with the goal we could influence all events. Certainly we see individuals in history who have made great changes by force of will. Those individuals are extremely rare and not the norm.

In short, I think we have limited, not absolute, Freewill.

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"In short, I think we have limited, not absolute, Freewill." I agree with that, presumably, but what does "absolute free will" mean to a regular person? Does anyone seriously assert that humans have the free will to jump off a canyon ledge and by willpower float to the ground unharmed? No - so "absolute" lends mostly confusion to the discussion.

It seems to me that the obvious position anyone can understand is the one Epicurus asserted, that "some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency."

The real problem that Stoicism and other supernatural-based views introduce is the issue of what is probably better called "fate" - the issue of whether everything was set in motion with foresight by some supernatural force. If you accept that premise on faith, rather than ignoring the eternal universe nothing from nothing / nothing to no nothing evidence, then you go into as spiral of trying to find out "god's" intention, and why he introduced suffering into the world, and

all that line of nonsense.

And that's why I think Epicurus prefaced the quote above with " Fate, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he scorns...."

If you come to the conclusion that Nature gives us the faculty of pleasure as our ultimate guidance, and you want to live the most pleasurable life possible, then you aren't going to spin around in anxious circles talking about angels and demons and supernatural gods setting up a "fate" to which we are predestined.

You don't just suspend judgment on the issue of "fate" - you SCORN the very idea of "Fate" as the nonsense that it is --- and Stoicism / all variants of theism lead in exactly the wrong direction on that point.