

Comparing the Stoics With The Epicureans

Post by "Cassius" of March 11, 2017 at 3:39 PM

[Jimmy Daltrey](#)

[March 8 at 7:59am](#)

Since we are discussing with Donald, I thought I would clear this up

I did encounter Stoicism first, so am more familiar with it than Epicurus, however I hope you have seen that I don't have a particular axe to grind. I'm still learning about Epicurus.

This keeps cropping up, a conflating of the Stoics with Platonists. They both claim heritage from Socrates but there are some stark dividing lines.

Stoics are not essentialists, nor do they believe in transcendent forms.

They are monists and materialists. All the Cosmos is matter, substance.

The only Good and Bad are only moral, resulting from human action.(I believe they share this with Aristotle)

A thing does not have an essence, a thing can be neither good or bad, it is inert. Indifferent.

A gun is a chunk of metal. It has no value, no essence.

A person can save lives with a gun, or kill innocents. That is where the morality lies.

It is the action, or more precisely the intent of the action that is good or bad.

Virtue, good and bad are physical, actions, thoughts (yes thoughts are material), words.

If you want to debate a Stoic, woo and spirits is a poor line of attack. There are no spirits.

The divine fire is not something that effects day to day life (Liebniz called energy divine force) and another person's providence not turn out well for you. Practicing, preparing for your life turning to shit is a big Stoic thing. (premeditatio malorum) so they are no Polly Anna's.

The gods are physical, and not to be relied upon.

You will find individual quotes that run against this, but the movement as a whole Stoicism is all about rationality, making rational decisions, rational actions, focusing on your own moral actions, and ignoring the rest.

The "magical thinking" if you like, comes from Socrates, in that a moral person is necessarily a happy person. I think that is naive. I am sure the evil sleep well. Some of them at least.

Also that the intent of your actions are more important than the outcome. Not sure at all about that.

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5 [Matt Jackson](#), [Jason Baker](#) and 3 others

Comments

[Alexander Rios](#) Profile picture for type unknown

[Alexander Rios](#) It seems strange to me that Stoics consider only human intentional actions as morally good and evil. Animals suffer. Animals enjoy. Humans are animals. Animals choose, animals avoid. We all navigate the same universe. Many animals exhibit social virtues and mental joys and pains. Heck, lots of evidence indicates that plants should not be excluded.

Lots of harm occurs by accident too. If in my lack of awareness I unintentionally harm someone, and they suffer a pain, and loss of time, work ... an evil event has coincided with them.

So we should agree that objects like guns, animals and people are not evil, but that only events are evil/painful/cause suffering.

I mean if modern Stoics accept materialism, and the Standard Model of Particle Physics tells us that all bodies are composed of elementary particles in motion through space and time, binding, colliding, and emitting and absorbing images, then Stoics should agree that only sequences of events (bindings, collisions, emissions and absorbtions) can be good/evil. When we casually say that a person, animal, plant, virus is evil, we must mean that we agree that it initiates/propagates events that are detected/sensed as pain and suffering.

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Jimmy Daltrey or type unknown

Jimmy Daltrey Alexander, our understanding of the nature of animals and our relationship to them is pitifully flawed.

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey Stoics are compatibilist, cause and effect all the way down, however humans can choose their reactions. An earthquake cannot be evil, it is just physics and a virus is simply acting in accordance with its nature. It has no ill intent. Big fish eat little fish. Stoicism and Epicureanism both proceed from observation of nature. The "good" is to be in accordance with one's nature, sharks kill little fish, dogs hunt in packs, birds fly, humans reason and act collectively. To each their own nature.

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Alexander Rios

Alexander Rios Many animals can choose their reactions too. Animals learn from consequences too, and many can adapt their behaviors based on what they have learned.

The person that senses pain from the consequences of the earthquake is gonna suffer. They experience ...[See More](#)

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey I am very interested in animal psychology and like you think they reason after a manner. An earthquake is to be regretted but not evil.. It was not caused with intent.

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Alexander Rios

Alexander Rios All events are natural. Even intentional ones.

When Stoics say evil, they demand pre-planned intentional harm. And so they are forced to say that not all pain is evil, despite the obvious suffering....[See More](#)

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) It is a major distinction. For the Stoics pain does not affect your ability to reason, which is the highest good, so pain is considered neither good nor evil. A toothache does not nullify my ability to make prudent decisions, or at least it should not, if i am in control of my faculties (which is the difficult bit)

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) I think that is a really bad example. Some snake bites directly attack your nervous system, and so your brain's ability to reason is severely compromised.

A dull toothache may not affect your decision making abilities much, but a sharp toothache will....**[See More](#)**

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Jimmy Daltrey

Suppose a snake bites an Epicurean, instinctively, and not pre-planned. The Epicurean suffers pain. The Epicurean does not say that the snake is evil. The Epicurean says the bite causes me pain and suffering....**[See More](#)**

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Dewayne Korth type unknown

[Dewayne Korth](#) dispreferred indifferent

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Am assuming Dewayne has answered like a "true Stoic" would have. Thanks. I am clueless about Stoicism.

I understand "dispreferred". The snake's venom literally kills mammalian tissue. The Stoic's nervous system (soul) and body tissue is literally kil...**[See More](#)**

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[Jimmy Daltrey](#)

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) "Does he really believe that his life, health, happiness is not important?" That's it. Pretty hardcore. You of course would prefer to be healthy, happy and free of pain, but there are greater priorities. You throw yourself on the grenade if that is the right thing to do. I don't think Epicureanism has the notion of self sacrifice in the absence of future reward.

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[Alexander Rios](#)

[Alexander Rios](#) Epicureans sometimes choose a pain, in order to secure long term happiness. Epicureans also sometimes choose a pain to avoid a greater pain. Epicureans also sometimes enjoy a pleasure now, by use of imagination, of the consequences of soon choosing a p...[See More](#)

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[Alexander Rios](#)

[Alexander Rios](#) Jimmy, here is the bit from TEIOD.

"I must now address an error that many of you hold; an error that exposes the ignorance of your philosophy even more than your devotion to your false ideas, rather than to Nature. For you reason falsely when you contend that all causes must precede their effects. Because you think that all causes must come before the effects that result from them, you argue that pleasure cannot be the cause for living virtuously. But you are wrong, and Nature shows us that it is not true that all causes precede their effects. The truth is that some causes precede their effects, others coincide with their effects, and still others follow their effects. First, consider surgery, which is a cause that precedes its effect, the saving of a life. In this case, extreme pain must first be endured, but then pleasure quickly follows. Second, consider food, water, and love-making, as these are causes that coincide with their effects. We do not first eat food, or drink wine, or make love, and then, later, experience pleasure only afterward. Instead, the action brings about the resulting pleasure for us immediately, with no need to wait for the pleasure to arrive in the future. Third, consider the expectation of a brave man that he will win praise after his death, as this is an example of a cause which follows its effect. Such men experience pleasure now because they know there will be a favorable memory of them after they have gone. In such cases the pleasure occurs now, but the cause of the pleasure occurs later. Many men are ignorant of these facts, and they hold that virtue is a result to be desired on its own, and is caused by living in a certain way. These men do not understand that virtues are not results, but causes. Virtues are

causes which coincide with their effects, for virtues are born at the same time as the pleasure of happy living which they bring. [Those of you who do not understand the philosophy of Epicurus, or those who choose to misrepresent it, go completely astray when you fail to understand that pleasure is the end of life. For Epicurus did not hold back from teaching that if a lifestyle of debauchery were sufficient to bring about a happy life, we would have no reason to blame those who engage in debauchery.]"

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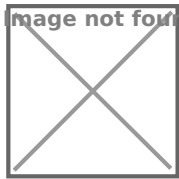
Cassius Amicus type unknown

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus Jimmy at least one prominent article at modernstoicism.com disagrees with your view of the importance of divine fire: "Without the Divine, There is No Stoicism" <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3...ya21P46Rej8IFZU>

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[Modern Stoicism](#)

Home of Stoicon and Stoic Week
MODERNSTOICISM.COM

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey Lol: <By Stoic teachings, 'God' is immanent for the Divine Fire manifests us through the quantum world moment by moment and so permeates our very being> Epictetus was silent on quantum mechanics. He sounds like Deepak Chopra. Who is he?

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Cassius Amicus

Cassius Amicus **Jimmy Daltrey** Probably we need to ask Donald that question

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey He sounds like a dualist to me. "God" is not manifested through

anything. "God" is everything. It's materialistic monism. No space for spooks.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

[Matt Jackson](#) or type unknown

[Matt Jackson](#) So my biggest concern with Stoicism comes from its terminology. I personally DID come from a Neoplatonist background so I have an understanding of pure platonic idealism. My concern that I wanted addressed is the nature of the Divine. Clearly we are not actually talking about anything "Divine." When it is brought up it is quickly dismissed by Stoics. But even pure materialism without a Divine Principle has implications on virtue. The basis of the Stoic cosmology is a "pantheism" that is fragmented among individual reasoning minds. That's all fine as long as it is interpreted as not actually being Divine, and is a materialistic process.

But like I said, if that is the final answer we are going with, that there is no "Divinity" by which virtue is contemplated on a higher level, then we must examine the nature of the individual reasoning minds that have no real continuity among each other. God makes things holy in religion, the One and Nous in Neoplatonism makes Virtue...virtuous. So then it would follow that individual reasoning minds are where virtue is conceived in Stoicism. There's no higher contemplating entity.

So we must address the problem of relativism of the individual reasoning minds, since virtue is not a "stand alone" divinely inspired concept.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) I can say I really appreciate your candid willingness to cross philosophical borders, its really pleasant..

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) There is no fragmentation no discontinuity. There is one mind in which we all share. Think Borg.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Unless your brain is somehow made of a different set of substances than everyone else's. Silicone perhaps.

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[Matt Jackson](#) It's just that this cosmology is so hard to pin down. The ancient writings clearly point to a "fragmented" God figure. But modern Stoics clearly deny any divine interpretation. Objectively it's very confusing.

"Epictetus imagines Zeus talking to him: ...[See More](#)

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Even the Borg, was made of individuals. A collective. Each had their own brain, sensors, faculties and body. It was possible for each to become disconnected, and reconnected, and resynchronization took a finite amount of time/energy. The whole "mind" was distributed in the individuals and communication was not instantaneous. Knowledge acquired by one individual had to be transported/communicated to the collective.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) It's Pantheism [Matt Jackson](#)

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[Hiram Crespo](#) the only way we avoid falling into superstition through this rabbit hole of pantheism is by understanding that any "collective mind" is not brought about by magic or telepathy, but through a complex system of communication. Nature isn't like the movie ...[See More](#)

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Hiram Crespo

[Hiram Crespo](#) I really don't know how else to reconcile what I'm reading with the study of nature. I do not believe that it's likely that [Epicurean Gods](#), if they exist,

communicate with us.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) [Richard Dawkins calls Pantheism "sexed up atheism" 1f602.png](#) [type unknown](#)

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Jason Baker [or type unknown](#)

[Jason Baker](#) [Jimmy Daltrey](#) [So basically, it's marketing bullshit? 1f603.png](#) [type unknown](#)

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) [Have you read Spinoza?](#)

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) [I don't really dig determinist philosophers. I find their arguments unconvincing.](#)

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) [I get the idea of pantheism, mostly as a poetic device to show nature as divine. From a practical standpoint it's unprovable since it's just ...nature. It should ultimately be called pan-naturalism.](#)

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) [In the Hindu tradition Sankyha is the closest thing to this idea of a non-theistic universal consciousness. The purusha \(mind\) acts upon matter in a sort of impotent way. It's like mind or consciousness exists independently of matter, but it has no power of its own.](#)

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) [But for it to be true we need to hammer out the mind-body dualism and hard consciousness problems.](#)

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Anything with a theism or Deism attached to it that doesn't actually have to do with a Divine Principle is often confusing.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) For most of these "theistic" ideas to work there actually needs to be some sort of "active" Divine Mind that is separate from individual minds. Individual minds CAN take part in the greater whole as it is in the Neoplatonic Nous or the Vedantic Brahman or Bhagavan, but there needs to be true autonomy. It needs to be a separate entity ultimately.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) There is no mind body dualism in either Stoic or Epicurean traditions. Mind is physical in both, as are the gods.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Right, so in that case the utmost mechanistic and natural explanations for things win the day. Abstract ideals mean nothing since everything is reduced to sensory stimuli reacting to matter. So for me personally a philosophy of strict naturalism that focuses only on physical process is key. Epicurean philosophy fills that role for me personally.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) The way the [Epicurean gods](#) work is that, though they are physical, they might as well just be dreams since they are passive beings that don't do anything to mortals. They may as well not exist since they don't disrupt our happiness. They being in a state of bliss are poetic role models for the Epicurean.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Stoicism is no different, strictly naturalist. No supernatural, just that nature is rationally structured and everything in nature is structured according to the same rules. I think of a unified space time.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) The Epicurean explanation of how the gods are perceivable, dreams also, is fascinating. Like we live in a cloud of physical projections of images perceived directly by the mind, not the senses.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Well in a practical sense they effect us as dreams do, really in no actual way. But if they do exist they are the equivalent of purple unicorns in the Andromeda galaxy. They may exist, truly exist, but they have no effect on my life or pursuit of pleasure.

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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) ? The concept of physical representations of things floating into your head from outside doesn't strike you as worthy of comment? For the Epicureans the gods were very real, the proof being, in their own words, everybody has them. That they are indifferent is another matter.

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) [Epicurean gods](#) are never sensed. Humans imagine them. A generated presentation. Thanks to memory of prior sensations, combined with compositing, and perhaps some cosmic radiation.

These presentations are not reliable.

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Epicureans know that real gods exist, because it is easy to say that some species exists which is maximally happy and maximally incorruptible.

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) Lucretius' talk about the gods is not reliable. He was not an advanced student. Agreed? Plus his poem was under revision. Not completed.

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Matt Jackson

Matt Jackson The Gods are what we imagine them to be. They hypothetically exist to whatever extent we want to entertain the idea of what they "may be."

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Matt Jackson

Matt Jackson If we are going the Sci-fi fantasy route I might imagine them as the elves in the Lord of the rings trilogy. Immortal and blessed beings that are anthropomorphic.

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Alexander Rios

Alexander Rios Epicurus says we should imagine them as happy and incorruptible, and not add other character traits.

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Matt Jackson

Matt Jackson They are completely inconsequential to our happiness. They do not interfere with us. It's as if they don't exist.

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Matt Jackson

Matt Jackson (And for many it is practical to simply not believe they do)

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Matt Jackson

Matt Jackson Since for most God equates to the Platonic Demiurge or the Abrahamic or Dharmic Gods of Religion. The [Epicurean Gods](#) are very different.

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Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey I'm sorry, but for the Epicureans the gods were real physical beings, perceptions of which were sensed directly by the soul.

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Alexander Rios

Alexander Rios soul is the nervous system

brain and peripheral

mind and spirit

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Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) gods never sensed by sense organs

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [22 hrs](#)

Alexander Rios

[Alexander Rios](#) am driving... later.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) Perceptions of the gods are taken from our impressions of the natural world. But in the case of the Epicureans they did truly believe the gods were real physical beings. There's no argument there, but what is different about them is that they are passi...[See More](#)

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) There is no real divinity in Epicurean philosophy. Not in the same Platonic and religious sense we are used to. The gods are to Epicurus real physical immortal perfectly happy beings. They don't bother humans, so they end up as a hypothetical footnote in the philosophy.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) They are literally immortal physical "aliens" that live throughout the cosmos in total bliss.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) I'll drop this here in lieu of a better place. Looks like James Warren has previously and thoroughly taken apart modern stoicism, but I don't have access

to his article to know for sure -
<https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%...EOKAZYshb0LrZnY>

A related quote from the article linked pretty much sums up the situation:
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Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) Irvine undertakes quite a heavy rewrite of some basic stuff which a lot of people don't like.. It's a bit like the followers of Brian's left shoe vs the followers of Brian's right shoe.

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Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Haris Dimitriadis type unknown

[Haris Dimitriadis](#) The core difference between the two philosophies is that while the Epicurean considers happiness as an emotional state the stoics, as well as all other philosophies, as a conceptual state. To the first matters how one feels whereas to others how one thinks. It is as simple as that.

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) Haris I think there is a lot of truth in what you just wrote, but I am wondering if the core differences can be stated adequately without reference to "pleasure" (?)

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Haris Dimitriadis

[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Cassius,

Pleasure is a positive emotion. It is dealt with by positive psychology. Pain is also an emotion, but on the other side of the emotional spectrum. In both cases we are talking about feelings. Happiness to the Epicureans is feeling good.

The Stoics, as well as all the rest philosophies are not interested in happiness, as we

understand it, but in well being, or eudaimonia, which is a conceptual state. But these two states, happiness and well being are two independent functions of the mind. One may be successful, moral, rational, etc but unhappy and vice versa.

That's why we may say that happiness, as a feeling, is a choice. One has to make a fundamental choice. Whether he values most how he feels or whether he is successful-wealthy, prestigious, etc.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) It's good to see you here [Haris!](#)  [Life as a background or type unknown](#)

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[Haris Dimitriadis](#) [Life as a background or type unknown](#)

[Haris Dimitriadis](#) I have always been following your posts. For the time being though I am very much involved with the finalization of the details of the book. My apologies.

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Matt Jackson

[Matt Jackson](#) I totally understand, it's always a pleasure to see your comments and perspective. I hope all is well.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) [Haris](#), is that second paragraph a characterization of the Stoic position or a general picture? Also, I was with you on feelings until I read the third paragraph. It's my understanding that feelings are automatic like sense-perception or preconceptions. Could you clarify?

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Cassius Amicus

[Cassius Amicus](#) [Haris](#) I am interested in your answer to Jason's question but here is my comment: I agree with paragraph one, and I see paragraph two as applicable not only to the Stoics but to anyone in general who sees the goal of life as "being a good person" or an...[See More](#)

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Haris Dimitriadis

[Haris Dimitriadis](#) Sorry, but it was late and fell asleep.

Cassius, you are describing better than me what i mean. My answer to Jason's question is that, feelings are created in two ways. The first is through the automatic like senses function of the mind and the second is through thoughts. The later are created at a second stage, when the initial automatic emotional reaction of the body is realized by the conscious mind. Free Will and logic are then activated and they give their own interpretation to the physical emotional reactions. These thoughts in turn set off a second round of emotional reactions, which may be of greater or lesser intensity then the original, depending on the quality of our thoughts. It is said that these thoughts are the cause of panic attacks and unhappiness in modern societies. Fortunately we are able to get hold of our thoughts and by developing an optimistic attitude to life, as for example the Epicurean philosophy suggests, we can greatly influence the quality of our thoughts and life.

Perceptions is the means to influence the quality of our life. If one chooses to follow perceptions that value most wealth, morality, etc then he is choosing the path to well being, as the non epicurean philosophies suggest. If instead he follows perceptions that value most feelings he is pursuing happiness as Epicurus suggests.

So happiness is a choice, in the sense that we are capable in choosing the meaning of our life and adopting the perceptions that support it throughout our life.

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) That's very similar to an article on psychology I read recently [Haris](#). The psychologist described emotions (he included analogues for pleasure and pain in emotions) and feelings as two separate experiences. Emotions in his model are the automatic reaction to stimuli and feelings are what results when we process our emotions, rationally or otherwise. He claimed that we can train ourselves to respond to our emotions in a way that leads to more satisfaction if our current response is unsatisfactory, which seemed pretty self-evident to me but apparently is controversial in academia.

I don't recall that he had a methodology for doing so, but I immediately thought of the parallels to Epicurean philosophy.

Thanks for the response!

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Haris Dimitriadis

Haris Dimitriadis Hi Jason,

We will have soon the chance to expand on this and especially on the way that the philosophical epicurean counselling acts in improving the quality of life.

Like · Reply · 2 · Yesterday at 12:04pm

Jason Baker

Jason Baker I look forward to that **Haris**. It's a perennial question that I have difficulty answering without relying on modern scholarship that doesn't explicitly reference Epicurus.

Like · Reply · 2 · Yesterday at 12:08pm

Cassius Amicus

Write a reply...

Jimmy Daltrey image not found or type unknown

Jimmy Daltrey Happiness is a poor translation of Eudaimonia. Wellbeing would be closer.

Like · Reply · March 9 at 4:51pm

Jason Baker

Jason Baker Well-being is just as poorly defined in lay discussions. Do we mean comfortable, healthy, happy or all three? It's all about the context.

Unlike · Reply · 1 · Yesterday at 12:11pm

Jimmy Daltrey

Jimmy Daltrey Well being, being well, to be in accordance with one's nature. To be at ease, unperturbed, unhindered.

Like · Reply · Yesterday at 12:26pm

Jason Baker

Jason Baker That's a novel definition! I use the common definition; a state characterized by health, happiness and prosperity.

Like · Reply · 1 · Yesterday at 12:34pm

Jimmy Daltrey

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) We are translating from ancient Greek. How would you put Eudaemonia into English? It means literally "good demon"

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Jason Baker

[Jason Baker](#) We're talking about the definition of the preferred English translation. You said well-being is a better definition than happiness. I gave the definition (which includes happiness) for the purposes of discussion, you provided another definition that isn't in common currency, I clarified again. If we're going to redefine an English word to mean something other than what it usually means in order to make a translation clear, why not use a different word or series of words to more accurately reflect our intention? I thought Stoics were all about intention, Jimmy? 1f603.png



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[Jimmy Daltrey](#)

[Jimmy Daltrey](#) *I would rather we stuck with the original Greek terms. Happy, etymologically means "lucky", as in plain dumb luck. Happy coincidence. Fortunate, by chance. Hapless being the opposite. Children are happy when you give them balloons, which am sure is not what the ancient philosophers were driving at.. Should we try sticking with the Greek terms?*

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