

Comparing Epicurus With Stoicism via Stoacon 2023 (Cleanthes' Hymn To Zeus et al.)

Post by “Cassius” of December 5, 2023 at 6:15 PM

This program was pointed out to me today and it's worth a link. It's apparently seven hours long and there's no way I am going to watch much of it, but I already see a very useful aspect of it.

If you'll check out the link starting at 7:23 you will see a five minute long dramatic reading of Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus. Seems to me that watching this is really good for helping it sink in how utterly anchored Stoicism is in a theistic world-view. In the Stoic framework Zeus gives orders to nature in every bit as sweeping way as any Abrahamic religion ever dreamed of. In my view it's only in this kind of framework that Stoicism makes any kind of sense at all -- and if you once reject the theistic base, the rest falls away quickly too.

Listening to this reading helps dramatize that a world-view of nature that rejects such ideas is at the core of Epicurus' philosophy. Pleasure as the goal is where you end up when you realize that "Zeus" doesn't have other plans, but you first have to deal with the mindset expressed here. Casual readers of Stoicism need to see this and understand what really divides the schools.

<https://youtu.be/IK5Xo47zqzk?si=Y05DmMXPLrH38N2H&t=443>

Post by “TauPhi” of December 5, 2023 at 7:22 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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I'm the last person on Earth willing to defend Stoicism but I don't think watching anything for five minutes is really good for anything. It's not fair to any school of philosophy to make quick judgements like that. After all, if someone wants to spend 5 minutes on Epicureanism and reaches for the most famous text on it, they get this:

Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men,

Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars

Makest to teem the many-voyaged main

And fruitful lands- for all of living things

Through thee alone are evermore conceived [...]

My point is, it should take time and effort to get to the point of accepting something or rejecting it. Stoicism is not evil. It's just another school of thought. For us here, it's deeply flawed school of thought but it doesn't take anything from the fact it's most interesting to spend some time studying Stoicism. It has to have some merit to it. If it fell away quickly, it would have been forgotten long time ago.

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2023 at 7:46 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

It has to have some merit to it. If it fell away quickly, it would have been forgotten long time ago.

Your points are well taken. I'd just add as an aside that...

Remember that Stoicism and Neo-Platonism were palatable enough to early Christians that they could be co-opted into their religion. Merit isn't always what sustains something. Sometimes it's who you know.

Post by “TauPhi” of December 5, 2023 at 10:03 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

Merit isn't always what sustains something. Sometimes it's who you know.

There is a good reason why The Holy Church of Sticking Pencils into Eyeballs doesn't exist. I'm sure at one point in human (and pencils) history someone tried to get salvation by such a creative usage of their pencils. That idea has no merit. An idea has to have some merit in order to get widespread and passed on. Connections help but even if you knew everyone in this world (and all the other possible worlds where pencils were invented) you wouldn't be able to become a Pencil Prophet. It's always merit (even if we personally don't agree with it). Who you know sometimes helps.

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2023 at 11:17 PM

I will freely admit I was being slightly provocative. Stoics aren't evil nor is their philosophy wholly without merit. Even Seneca, a Stoic's Stoic, makes some good points; and Marcus Aurelius appears to have been an honorable man worthy of respect. Do I think the Stoics are misguided or, in the case of many modern Stoics, fooling themselves? Yes, of course I do, or I'd be over there.

However...

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

There is a good reason why The Holy Church of Sticking Pencils into Eyeballs doesn't exist...An idea has to have some merit in order to get widespread and passed on.

Unfortunately, cultures and religions are full of meritless practices or movements not far removed from the Holy Church of SPiE, admittedly from my personal perspective. Medieval flagellant monks. Female genital mutilation. The Jonestown massacre. The Heaven's Gate mass suicide cult. The SPiE Holy Church doesn't (necessarily) last long in any one incarnation maybe, but it certainly keeps cropping up again and again.

Would I include Stoicism within the Holy Church of SPiE tradition? No, emphatically no. No question or equivocation. Do I agree with Dr. Austin "[that many Modern Stoics are already Epicureans, at least by the standards of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius](#)"? Yes, indeed!

Post by “Don” of December 6, 2023 at 12:09 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3574-comparing-epicurus-with-stoicism-via-stoacon-2023-cleanthes-hymn-to-zeus-et-al/>

To refer back to [Cassius](#) 's original post, here is a translation of Cleanthes' hymn:

[Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus - Hellenion](#)

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 6, 2023 at 7:05 AM

Regarding the Stoics, we can look to the Wall of Oinoanda:

Quote

Fr. 32

...

If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Let us therefore now state that this is true, making it our starting-point.