

Of the post-Aristotelian schools, Stoicism, which was founded by Zeno (334-262 B.C.), maintained that philosophy & study of nature serve to promote a particular way of life; nature was rational & purposeful, and such a life, then was not to be aimed at pleasure [Epicureanism], but virtue. They sought happiness through wisdom, a wisdom which to control what lay within human power & to accept with dignified resignation what had to be. Stoics were profoundly influenced by Socrates who faced death with serenity & courage. To have super control over the emotions in the face of death provided them an authentic exemplar to follow.

F. Fate & Providence:

1. Providence meant that events occur the way they do because all things & persons are under control of the Logos, or God.

2. The order of the whole works is based on the unity of all its all parts, & what unifies the whole structure of matter is the fiery substances that permeates everything.

43. This material fire that spread to all things, providing them with vitality had the attribute of rationality, and since this was the highest form of being, it was inevitable that the Stoics should understand this rational force to be God.

3. Thus, Nothing “rattles” in the universe, for nothing is loose.

4. It is this type of material universe, one that is totally controlled, that the Stoics fashioned their moral philosophy.

G. Free Will:

1. Determinism raises a problem for the Stoics in accounting for our free will.

2. Whereas Epicureanism made room for free will by introducing a certain amount of indeterminism with the “Swerve”, the Stoics distinguished between what they call (a) perfect & (b) proximate causes.

3. Human actions are caused by certain internal conditions (perfect causes) & by various external causes (proximate causes). In these internal conditions one can find human free will.

*For example:
Chrysippus illustrates these two conditions with a rolling drum.
A rolling drum is caused both by the fact that someone gave it a push (proximate cause), and by the fact that it is round (perfect cause).*

H. Virtue: Know the Rational Order & Live in Accord with It:

1. Virtue is the perfecting of human nature; the perfecting of human reason:

(a) Perfecting the human reason means knowing “the good” & acting in accord with it.

(b) We must know the rational order and act in accord with it (c). Thus, the virtuous person is the one who knows the rational order & lives in accord with it.

2. How can we fail to live in accord with nature in a deterministic world?

(a) Realize that life can fail according nature- which is necessary in order to successfully accord with nature. (b) Why? for virtue is what is in accord with nature; virtue can't exist without vice.

1. One can fail to be virtuous by seeking those things which fail to accord with nature.

2. One will not succeed in achieving these things because everything that happens is in accord with nature, at least from the universal perspective.

3. But it is the intention of the actions that matters, not result.

4. Therefore, one might act so as to promote one's health, believing it to be in accord with nature from one's individual perspective, but not recognize (through ignorance) that it is contrary to nature from the universal perspective. One fails, then to be virtuous.

5. But they believe we can approach the virtue of the Stoic sage with his mindset: When things which one seeks from the individual perspective, such as one's health, fails to come about, accept them stoically. Accept that the “disease” that you sought to avoid is an unavoidable consequence of the “good” from the universal perspective and embrace it willingly. According to them, this is the Stoic way of life.