

STOICISM. Stoicism is a Greek philosophy founded by Zeno (300 BCE). It views the world as pervaded by rationality. Stoics are critical of taboos and superstitions; they believe God equals reason or the law of nature. In Stoicism the chain of cosmic events is pre-ordained in every detail. However, the idea of 'fate' does not pre-empt our responsibilities for our actions - we remain liable for them, because we are their causes. Stoicism has just a few central teachings: It reminds us of how unpredictable the world can be; that our moment of life is brief; how to be steadfast, strong and in control of ourselves rather than succumb to destructive emotions. For Stoics adherence to virtues is all-important, as is one's sense of duty.

A distinctive feature of Stoicism is its cosmopolitanism. In Discourses, Epictetus (AD 100) comments on man's relationship with the world: "Each human being is primarily a citizen of his own commonwealth, but he is also a member of the great city of men."

This sentiment echoes that of Socrates, who said, "I am not an Athenian nor a Greek, but a citizen of the world."

Stoics like Seneca hold that external differences, i.e. rank and wealth, are of no importance. All people are manifestations of the one universal spirit and should live in brotherly love. Thus, Stoics advocate equality of all human beings and the brotherhood of humanity.

More stoic aphorisms: 'Freedom is secured not by the fulfilling of desires, but by detachment from desire.'

'Work at what is before you with no distraction, expect nothing, be satisfied to live in harmony with the natural progression of things - and you will live happily.' 'If you are distressed by something, it is not this thing which disturbs you, but your own judgment about it.'

And my favourite: 'How ridiculous and how strange, to be surprised at anything that may happen in life.'

Another favorite is: 'What counts in life are not our circumstances - but how we deal with our circumstances.'

Seneca said: "Cling tooth and nail to the following rule: don't give in to adversity, don't trust prosperity; do take note of fortune's habit of behaving just as she pleases."

Marcus Aurelius, a stoic and a Roman Emperor (121 - 180), wrote Meditations. One advice in his book is not to be upset by the misdeeds of others and to correct them if possible ... but if they would not change their ways, to accept them.

In reacting to such people, we must never allow our own principles to be violated; we should not be surprised by the wickedness of others, and avoid wishing men are not as they are, because then we are wishing for the impossible.

Marcus left us an indelible rhetorical device: The story has it that in Roman times an emperor who conducted a successful campaign of pillorying & conquering would lead - on his chariot - a triumphant procession through the streets of Rome. Marcus then had a slave whisper in his ear: "Memento Mori" (Remember you are mortal).

sto-i-cism

patience and endurance shown in the face of adversity

sto-i-cal

self-control, resilience and detachment allow Stoics to become clear, level-headed and unbiased thinkers

Sto-ic

a member of the Greek school of philosophy that asserts happiness can be achieved by accepting life's ups and downs as the product of unalterable destiny

see also BALANCE