

Three Great Stoics

*Zeno, Epictetus
& Marcus Aurelius*

Talk at the United Lodge of Theosophists

Sunday 16th February 2020

Zeno

born in Cyprus c. 334–262 BC

Hellenistic philosopher of Phoenician origin. Founder of the Stoic school, he taught in Athens from 300 BC.

Based on the moral ideas of the Cynics.

Laid great emphasis on **goodness** and **peace of mind** gained from **living a life of Virtue in accordance with Nature**.

Stoicism flourished as a major Greek school of philosophy until Roman times.

Zeno laid down a basis for Logic because the wise person must know how to avoid deception.



Epictetus

born in Turkey c. 55–135 AD

He was born a slave and lived in Rome until banished by Domitian.

He taught philosophy is *a way of life* and not simply theoretical.

To him all external events are beyond our control; we should accept calmly and dispassionately whatever happens, although individuals are responsible for their own actions which they should examine and control through self-discipline.



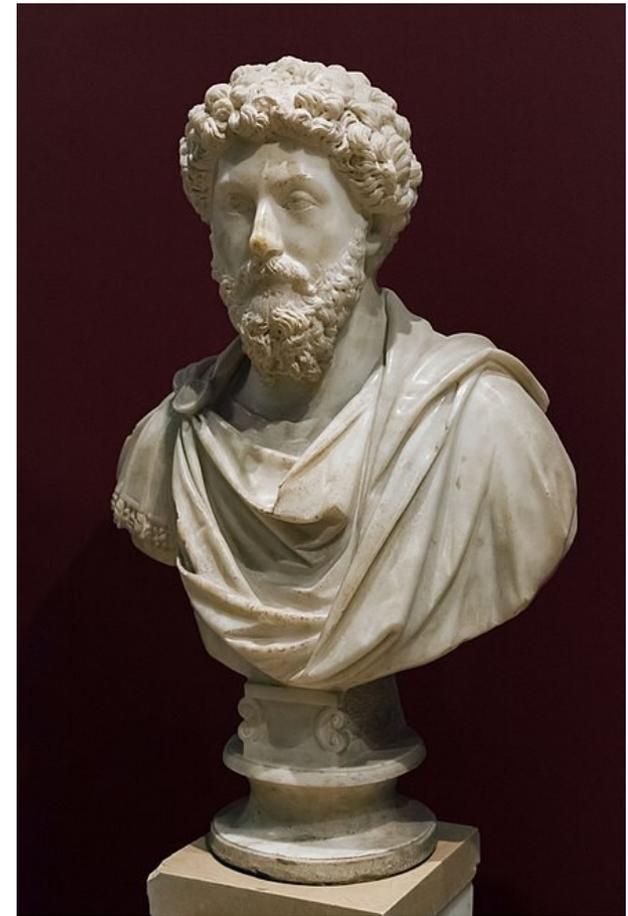
Marcus Aurelius

born in Rome 121-180 AD

Stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor (161-80), the last of the Five Good Emperors.

His "***Meditations***" have been highly praised by philosophers, monarchs, and politicians.

"Alone of the emperors he gave proof of his learning not by mere words or knowledge of philosophical doctrines but by his blameless character and temperate way of life" wrote the contemporary historian Herodian.



H.P.B. on Zeno & the Soul (1)

Aristotle believed that human souls are emanations of God, that are finally re-absorbed into Divinity.

Likewise Zeno, the founder of the Stoics, taught that there are

“two eternal qualities throughout nature: the one active, or male; the other passive, or female; that the former is pure, subtile ether, or Divine Spirit; the other entirely inert in itself till united with the active principle.”

That the Divine Spirit... is the sole efficient principle by which all nature is moved. Isis Unveiled by HPB, p12-13

[The Stoics, like the Hindu sages, not only believed in reincarnation but also in final absorption.]

H.P.B. on Zeno & the Soul (2)

Origen, the original Gnostics (whom HPB writes were the most refined, learned, and enlightened men), Socrates, & Pythagoras held, with the Hindus, that the Divinity (the Absolute):

“had infused into matter a portion of his own Divine Spirit, which animates and moves every particle.”

They taught that “men have two souls, of separate and quite different natures: the one perishable — the Astral Soul, or the inner, fluidic body — the other incorruptible and immortal — the Augoeides, or portion of the Divine Spirit.”

Isis Unveiled by HPB, p12

H.P.B. on Epictetus & the Mysteries

The earlier excellency of the Mysteries and their purpose “shows the greater mysteries divulging the secrets and *the mode of construction of the Universe*, this being the beginning, the end and the ultimate goal of human knowledge, for in them was shown to the initiated Nature and all things *as they are*.”

This is the Pythagorean *Gnosis*. Epictetus speaks of these instructions in the highest terms: “All that is ordained therein was established by our masters for the instruction of men and the correction of our customs.”

Plato asserts in the *Phaedo* the same: the object of the Mysteries was *to re-establish the soul in its primordial purity*, or *that state of perfection from which it had fallen*.

“The Roots of Ritualism etc” by HPB’s Articles 3:222

Some Axioms of Psychology

- (a) Certain emotions *are* self-destructive (anger, envy, jealousy).
- (b) The opposite are the positive attitudes (friendliness, compassion, sympathy, wishing others well, and *equanimity*).
- (c) Self-destructive emotions make one anxious, sad or unwell.
- (d) Positive emotions bring lasting happiness & all other goods.

Some Axioms of Philosophy

- (a) Truth is the correct knowledge of Man and Nature as a whole.
- (b) Judgement is the ability to discern Truth from error (even the best disguised ones, which are the most alluring but counterfeit.)
- (c) Proper *discernment* increases as our consciousness is raised.

Axioms illustrated in the SD

The closer the approach to one's *Prototype* "in Heaven," the better for the mortal whose personality was chosen, by his own personal deity (the seventh principle), as its terrestrial abode.

For, with every effort of will toward purification and unity with that "Self-god," one of the lower rays breaks and the spiritual entity of man is drawn higher and ever higher to the ray that supersedes the first, until, from ray to ray, the inner man is drawn into the one and highest beam of that Parent-SUN.

...the closer the union between the mortal reflection MAN and his celestial PROTOTYPE, the less dangerous the external conditions and subsequent reincarnations—which neither Buddhas nor Christs can escape.

Marcus Aurelius' "*Meditations*" (1)

“Strength comes from the realisation you have power over your mind, not necessarily over outside events.”

This is a good summary of Marcus Aurelius' thoughts; we will listen to some of them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hu0xDtK3g3Q> (these are well recommended to be heard)

Chapter titles:

1. When you Encounter Unkindness - 1:10
2. Everything Depends on How You Interpret it - 3:00
3. Your Mind Should Sit Superior to Your Body and its Sensations - 4:27
4. Stay Mindful and Take Deliberate Actions - 6:00
5. Don't Retreat from the World - 7:02
6. Your Opinion of Yourself Matters More Than the Opinion of a Stranger - 8:20
7. Be Open to Correction - 9:39
8. Cherish the Freedom and Liberty of Everyone - 10:17
9. Have Some Self Respect - 11:43
10. Avoid Complaining - 12:35

Marcus Aurelius' "*Meditations*" (2)

chapters cont'd:

11. The Obstacle is the Way - 12:57
12. Adversity is Part of Nature - 14:29
13. It's Through Adversity That We Get Stronger - 15:46
14. Everything has happened before - 16:25
15. Stay Practical and Deal with What's in Front of You - 17:57
16. Focus on Doing What is Right and be Prepared to Face Resistance - 19:32
17. Do Your Duty and Despise Cowardice - 21:13
18. Life is Short and Death Comes to us All, That Means the Time for Action is Now
- 22:10
19. Practice Getting Back on Track - 24:33
20. Look Beneath to See Things for What They Truly Are - 26:05
21. Recognize Material Wealth is Neither a Good nor an Evil - 27:24
22. Express Gratitude - 28:54

Modern Stoic influences

The Enlightenment & Modern Mind

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)

Enlightenment & the Modern Mind

Extracts from “*My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is*” by Sir Edward Dyer,
an early Enlightenment poem on the beauty of a strong and pure mind.

No princely port, nor wealthy store,
No force to win a victory,
No wily wit to salve a sore, (salve; to heal)
No shape to win a loving eye;
To none of these I yield as thrall, (thrall; influence)
For why? my mind despise them all.

I see that plenty surfeit oft, (surfeit; excess)
And hasty climbers soonest fall;
I see that such as are aloft
Mishap doth threaten most of all. (mishap; accident)
These get with toil and keep with fear;
Such cares my mind can never bear.

I laugh not at another's loss,
Nor grudge not at another's gain;
No worldly waves my mind can toss;
I brook that is another's bane. (“I tolerate what would distress another”)
I fear no foe, nor fawn on friend,
I loathe not life, nor dread mine end.

My wealth is health and perfect ease,
And conscience clear my chief defence;
I never seek by bribes to please,
Nor by desert to give offence.
Thus do I live, thus will I die, –
Would all did so as well as I!

Edward Dyer (1543-1607), English poet of a small number of lyrics of great dexterity and sweetness.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1967) It is said that he was an alchemist and disciple of Jon Dee, the occultist mentioned approvingly by H.P.Blavatsky and the trans-Himalayan Mahatmas.

REBT on “Amor Fati”

...in many ways, REBT is a modern version of Stoicism. The Stoics taught that one could flourish in life when they lived according to nature. To do this means to live a life where you pursue the four virtues of **Courage, Justice, Moderation, and Proper Reasoning** (Practical Wisdom).

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Stoicism also advocated that we live happily with our fate expressed in the phrase Amor Fati, to learn to love one’s fate. “Amor Fati” does not mean one does not acknowledge their dissatisfaction with a set of circumstances. Loving one’s fate also does not necessarily mean to give up in resignation and avoid making those changes that are possible in the situation one finds themselves confronting. [...the Stoics] would encourage us to change what we can and to live happily with what we cannot eliminate from our lives and thereby achieve Amor Fati.