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## Human Flourishing by Living in Harmony with Nature and Moral Integrity: Insights from Epictetus the Stoic

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### ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus, focusing on its relevance to achieving flourished life through living in harmony with nature and moral integrity. In a contemporary world dominated by external validations and material pursuits, individuals struggle to maintain ethical conduct and align their actions with authentic nature. Epictetus offers a practical framework for living a flourished life through emphasizing self-awareness, rational decision-making, and the cultivation of moral character. The study addresses key research questions: How does living in harmony with nature contribute to a morally upright life? What Stoic principles can individuals adopt to cultivate self-discipline and ethical conduct? How do Epictetus' views on women's moral agency challenge traditional gender roles? The objectives include exploring the application of Epictetus' teachings in modern life, identifying methods for self-discipline, and understanding his views on gender equality. Using content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation of Epictetus' two major books *Enchiridion* and *Discourses*, this research identifies practical methods for ethical living, such as self-restraint, rational reflection, and disciplined practice. The findings reveal that living in accordance with nature fosters inner tranquility and human flourishing, while Epictetus' recognition of women's moral agency provides a radical re-evaluation of their societal role. The study concludes that Stoic philosophy, as articulated by Epictetus, offers timeless guidance for navigating modern ethical challenges, promoting a life of virtue, authenticity, and alignment with the natural order. By internalizing these principles, individuals can profound fulfillment in this life.

### INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of a morally upright and fulfilling life has been a central concern in philosophical discourse for centuries, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. Among the various schools of thought, Stoicism, with five hundred years of continuous tradition, particularly as articulated by Epictetus in the Roman period, offers a compelling and practical framework for understanding how individuals can live in harmony with nature and achieve true well-being. Rooted in the belief that virtue is the highest good, Stoicism emphasizes the cultivation of moral character, self-discipline, and rational decision-making as essential components of a flourishing life (Johnson, 2014). This research delves into the Stoic principles espoused by Epictetus, exploring how his teachings provide a roadmap for individuals seeking to align their actions with their inherent nature and the universal order. Epictetus, a former slave turned philosopher, is one of the most influential figures in Stoic philosophy. His major works, the 'Enchiridion' (Handbook) and 'Discourses', offer profound insights for the practical application of Stoic principles in day-to-day life. Central to his philosophy is the idea that individuals should focus on what is within their control—their thoughts, actions, and responses—while accepting what lies beyond their control with equanimity. By doing so, individuals can achieve inner tranquility and live a life of moral integrity, regardless of external circumstances (Epictetus, 2007).

In an era dominated by external validations, material pursuits, and societal pressures, Epictetus' teachings remain remarkably relevant. His emphasis on self-awareness, ethical conduct, and the alignment of one's actions with nature provides a counterbalance to the distractions and temptations of modern life. Furthermore, his revolutionary recognition of women's moral agency challenges traditional gender roles and offers a sharp re-evaluation of their worth and role in society. This research, by examining Epictetus' teachings, seeks to shed light on how living in harmony with nature, and following moral integrity can support for a flourished life. The findings and discussions presented in this article highlight the importance of virtue, self-awareness, and rational decision-making as essential components of human flourishing. By engaging with Epictetus' Stoic principles, this study not only contributes to the academic discourse on ancient philosophy but also offers practical insights for individuals seeking to navigate the complexities of modern life. The exploration of these timeless teachings underscores their enduring relevance and potential to inspire a life of virtue, authenticity, and harmony with the natural order.

The world heavily influenced by external validation, material success, and shifting societal values, individuals struggle to preserve moral integrity and live in accordance with their authentic nature. Epictetus, the prominent Stoic philosopher, proposed that true fulfillment and

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flourishing arises by aligning one's thoughts, feelings, and actions with virtue and nature, emphasizing self-discipline, ethical conduct. However, in modern society, marked by distractions and external pressures, these Stoic principles may seem difficult to apply. Additionally, while Epictetus acknowledged the moral agency of women, a revolutionary view for his time, his ideas have yet to be fully explored in the context of modern gender equality debates. This research seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating how Epictetus' philosophy can guide individuals for maintaining moral integrity, practicing self-discipline, and living ethically.

The followings are the research questions which the research seek to find answer: How does living in harmony with nature contribute to a fulfilling and morally upright life in the modern context? What Stoic principles and practices can individuals follow to cultivate ethical conduct in daily life, and how do these contribute to flourishing? How do Epictetus' views on women's moral agency challenge traditional gender roles, and how his philosophy can inform contemporary discussions on gender equality? The objectives of the research are to: Explore how Epictetus' teachings on living in harmony with nature, moral integrity, and self-discipline can be applied in contemporary life, identify simple methods individuals can use to develop self-discipline and ethical conduct based on Stoic philosophy, Understand Epictetus' views on women's moral agency and how they can be related to modern discussions on gender equality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The research article 'An analytical study of the art of happiness (Eudaimonia) in Stoic school of Philosophy' (2023) by Unyo, Hoffman and Stamm critically examines the philosophical contributions of Stoic thinkers Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus. Through an analytical approach to their works, the study explores the principles and methodologies they proposed for attaining a fulfilling and meaningful life. A key focus of this research is the application of Stoic ethical frameworks in the pursuit of psychological well-being within the materialistic world. The study emphasizes the significance of aligning one's life with nature and adhering to moral discipline as essential pathways to achieving a well-ordered existence. The research article 'The idea of a good life: Lessons from Confucius, Aristotle, Zhuangzi, and the Stoics' (2023) by Wenzel explores the contemporary confusion surrounding the distinction between needs and wants, as well as between intrinsic and instrumental goods. The study argues that modern individuals often lack clarity about what constitutes a good life and how to live well. In response to this, the article examines how ancient philosophical frameworks can provide valuable guidance, specifically focuses on the philosophical perspectives of Confucius, Aristotle, and Stoic thinkers' views on ethical living and human flourishing. It contends that adherence to these philosophical principles can serve as a corrective to the blind faith placed in economic and technological

progress. Furthermore, it argues that such philosophical insights offer an alternative to the rigid, pre-programmed nature of contemporary life.

The research article 'The importance of teaching Stoicism in basic education' (2024) by Vaz explores relevance of Stoicism in modern life. It highlights the Stoic tradition and guiding principles, emphasizing their growing appeal as a preferred way of life in contemporary society. A central argument of the study is the necessity of integrating Stoic teachings into school curricula to provide students with a structured ethical framework. The research critiques the dominance of pleasure-driven and emotion-led lifestyles, advocating instead for a life guided by moral virtue and rational deliberation. The study also underscores the potential of Stoicism to cultivate resilience, self-discipline, and ethical decision-making in educational settings. The research article 'The potential of the human soul toward a life in harmony with nature and logos as per the Stoic psychology' (2021) by Kostara explores a significant analogy within Stoic philosophy, comparing its fundamental components to different elements of a garden. According to this analogy, the garden's fence represents logic, the trees symbolize physics, and the fruits correspond to ethics. This framework underscores the idea that while moral virtue (ethics) is the ultimate good, both logic and physics play indispensable roles in achieving it. The study further elaborates on how an integrated understanding of these three domains of Stoic philosophy can guide individuals toward living in harmony with nature. It argues that by cultivating a life aligned with one's rational and natural capacities, individuals can attain the highest form of well-being.

The research article 'Stoicism, a philosophical basis for ecology' (2021) by Alladakan examines the Stoic principle of living in harmony with nature as a foundational concept for environmental conservation and sustainable living. It explores why ecological protection and environmentally conscious lifestyles are essential, identifies the obstacles that hinder such efforts, and discusses strategies to overcome these challenges. A central argument of the study is that all natural processes are oriented toward the good of the whole. From this perspective, individuals should not perceive personal hardships as threats to their well-being but rather as part of a larger natural order. Consequently, acting against nature is philosophically unjustifiable. The article also provides an in-depth analysis of Seneca's philosophical contributions to environmental ethics, emphasizing how Stoic thought can inform contemporary ecological discussions. The research article 'Refugees, Stoicism and cosmic citizenship' (2020) by Stephens examines the Stoic principle that all human beings are citizens of the universe and should cultivate harmonious relationships with others, irrespective of geographical or social divisions. Based on this perspective, migration—whether voluntary or forced—should be considered a natural human experience rather than an anomaly. The study highlights that displacement, whether

due to exile, internal migration, or forced relocation, has historically been a common occurrence. In the Greco-Roman world, exile, confiscation of property, and imprisonment were frequently experienced, yet Stoic philosophers of the Roman period offered examples demonstrating how such adversities should not be viewed as barriers to happiness. The study emphasizes that losing property or being removed from one's home should not be seen as fundamental obstacles to a fulfilling life. Furthermore, it advocates for a compassionate and brotherly approach to receiving migrants, asserting that failing to do so contradicts human rationality, justice, and the natural order of the universe.

Existing research articles have examined Stoic philosophers and other ancient philosophical traditions in a general sense, highlighting how they provide guidance for a good life in the contemporary context, mostly focusing the secondary resources. However, no study has conducted a comprehensive analysis of Epictetus' two major works to explore how a life aligned with nature and grounded in virtue serves as a foundation for achieving a fulfilled and meaningful existence. This study addresses this research gap by offering a thorough examination of Epictetus' philosophy, making it both unique and significant in advancing scholarly discussions on Stoic ethics and its practical implications for human well-being.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research utilized a content analysis methodology to systematically examine the key works of Epictetus, particularly the *Enchiridion* and *Discourses*. The research also takes secondary sources, which writing is based on Epictetus' philosophy. The primary focus is on identifying the recurring themes, concepts, and principles that Epictetus presents regarding moral integrity, self-discipline, ethical conduct, and gender equality. Through this analysis, the study extracts significant philosophical ideas and analyze how they are woven throughout the texts. In addition to the content analysis, Hermeneutic interpretation is employed to provide a deeper understanding of the meaning behind these philosophical teachings. Hermeneutics, as an interpretative method, allow for the exploration of the underlying messages in Epictetus' texts, examining how his Stoic principles relate to modern ethical challenges, such as maintaining moral integrity in a materialistic society. This interpretive approach focus on how the texts can be understood in both their historical context and their contemporary relevance. By combining content analysis with Hermeneutic interpretation, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Epictetus' Stoic philosophy, revealing how his teachings can be applied to issues of personal development, ethical conduct, and gender equality in the modern world.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Two Kinds of Natural Orders

Upon deeper reflection, a life in harmony with nature can be approached through two distinct dimensions:

- The first entails living in accordance with one's inherent nature, capabilities, and intrinsic qualities.

- The second involves aligning one's existence with the universal order.

The first dimension is closely tied to an individual's personal discipline and ethical conduct. Within this framework, it is imperative to act in alignment with one's innate characteristics. Deviating from one's true nature to satisfy others or gain external approval signifies a loss of life's true purpose. External judgments and opinions should not be given undue weight. Instead, individuals must uphold and live by their own values, as it is these values and the actions derived from them that define who a person truly is, rather than externally imposed perceptions or judgments (Handbook 23). This perspective underscores the importance of self-awareness and authenticity in shaping one's identity and conduct.

Furthermore, it is posited that a life of self-discipline and virtue, harmonized with the external world, is the path to true success. To progress in life, one must find contentment in appearing foolish or ignorant to those who lack wisdom, rather than striving to project an image of omniscience or superiority. If others regard you as significant, do not place undue faith in their assessment of your abilities (Handbook 13). Additionally, once an individual has attained their natural place in life, as dictated by their inherent nature, there is no need to seek validation or recognition from others. The pursuit of external approval, particularly from those driven by superficial or misguided values, is unnecessary (Discourses 1.12).

These guiding principles emphasize the importance of internal alignment with one's nature and the universal order, rather than seeking external validation or conforming to societal expectations. Such teachings are to be internalized with profound consistency and adhered to as a means of achieving a life of virtue, harmony, and fulfillment. They advocate for a disciplined, self-aware existence that prioritizes authenticity and alignment with the natural order, free from the distractions of external judgments or the pursuit of superficial acclaim. A life in harmony with nature necessitates cultivating the ability to approach all events, from the most mundane occurrences to the profound loss of a loved one, with rationality and equanimity. It is essential to train oneself to accept these events as natural and ordinary, recognizing that what happens in the course of life should be met with the same composure regardless of whether they affect others or oneself. For instance, when someone else's servant breaks a water jug, one might readily dismiss it as an inevitable occurrence. However, the same individual should be equally prepared to respond with the same calm detachment when their own servant commits a similar act (Johnson, 2014). This principle of equanimity must also be extended to matters of greater significance. For example, when another person's son or spouse passes away, one might philosophically remark that it was their fate. Yet, when faced with the same tragedy in their own life, the same individual may lament and cry out as though all suffering has befallen them alone. Such an inconsistent

and biased approach is contrary to the principles of a harmonious life and must be avoided. The events of nature must be approached with impartiality and equal acceptance (Handbook 26).

### **Ethics Should be in Embodied, Not Just Expressed**

Training oneself to live in harmony with nature within an ethical framework provides the foundation for a life that is complete, optimal, and fulfilling. Living in accordance with nature enables an individual to align with their inherent potential, thereby fostering a way of life that is both authentic and conducive to personal well-being. Both of these assertions emphasize that the cultivation of moral character stands as the highest and most fundamental pursuit in all human endeavors. In this regard, moral integrity is not only beneficial in itself but also serves as the most genuine form of assistance one can offer to others. This idea is reinforced by Epictetus' statement: "Do not seek to help others by offering them external goods; rather, cultivate virtue through your own actions, setting an example for others to follow" (Enchiridion 24). Epictetus extensively elaborates about the practical methods that must be followed to lead a morally upright life in harmony with nature. Since a person's actions define them more than their words, he emphasizes that one should not merely provide explanations about their ethics but rather demonstrate it through their conduct. This principle is, in fact, the hallmark of true learning. It is an individual's ethical actions, rather than the moral theories they expound in lectures, that reveal the extent of their understanding. Otherwise, such theoretical knowledge remains unassimilated, akin to undigested food that is expelled from the body.

Just as sheep do not prove how much they have eaten by regurgitating their food but rather by producing milk and wool, so too must individuals internalize their learning and reflect it in their behavior, rather than merely verbalizing what they have studied. It is this ethical conduct that leads individuals toward true excellence (Enchiridion 46). Indeed, such moral practice is itself the very expression of human flourishing. Epictetus' use of this analogy conveys the fundamental Stoic principle that no one is obligated to prove their worth or identity to others in any circumstance. Instead, individuals should remain steadfast in consistently engaging in actions that align with their inherent nature and capabilities. This approach not only fosters a sense of inner tranquility but also enables individuals to concentrate their abilities toward achieving their goals. Such a way of life constitutes true well-being. If one does not engage in self-promotional behavior, there may be instances where they are overlooked or deemed unqualified by others. However, this does not, in reality, diminish their actual worth. According to Stoic philosophy, reputation lies beyond one's control, and recognizing this truth is essential. Given this understanding, it would be irrational for one to experience distress over something outside their sphere of influence. What remains within one's power is

the ability to continue their endeavors in a composed and undisturbed manner, ensuring the pursuit of excellence regardless of external perceptions.

### **Success is Life Require Moral Integrity and Harmony with Nature**

Next, it is emphasized that a life grounded in moral integrity serves as the fundamental prerequisite for achieving one's goals. The notion that objectives should be established only after gaining a comprehensive understanding of the matter at hand, and that strict adherence to disciplined practices is essential, constitutes the core ethical principle here. Accordingly, any endeavor must be undertaken only after attaining complete knowledge of its requirements. For this reason, Epictetus advises: "First, grasp the initial aspects of a subject and then proceed to understand its subsequent components separately. Only after achieving clarity should, you fully engage with it. Otherwise, if you embark on a pursuit with enthusiasm but later encounter difficulties, you will abandon it entirely, withdrawing in humiliation."

He further illustrates this principle through the example of an athlete preparing for the Olympic Games: "Do you aspire to win at the Olympics? That is a noble ambition. However, before entering the competition, carefully consider all that it entails. Observe the interconnected demands of the endeavor and only proceed after attaining a clear understanding. You must conduct yourself with discipline, adhere to a strict diet, abstain from indulgent foods, undergo rigorous training, endure physical hardships, and commit to a strict regimen for a set duration. You must endure both heat and cold. You cannot drink wine at will. Just as a patient entrusts themselves entirely to a physician for healing, you must fully submit yourself to your trainer for guidance." (Enchiridion 29).

Through this vivid analogy, Epictetus underscores the necessity of preparation, discipline, and perseverance in the pursuit of excellence. Only through diligent preparation and adherence to the necessary disciplines can one enter the arena of competition. Conversely, if an individual merely wishes to continue engaging in their habitual comforts, they will be left with no choice but to retreat, much like a child turning away in reluctance. Various competitions exist—some involving wrestling, others requiring combat with weapons, such as gladiatorial contests. Each has its own set of rules and conditions, which must be strictly followed. Specialized training is essential for each distinct endeavor, and no one can expect to participate in multiple competitions and emerge victorious in all. Similarly, in life, individuals must determine their purpose and act accordingly, rather than indiscriminately pursuing everything they see, much like a restless ape attempting to grasp at whatever appears desirable. Thus, one must cultivate an understanding of the natural order, recognizing that each phenomenon possesses its own distinct nature. Individuals must discern their own capabilities and talents, critically

assessing whether they possess the aptitude to achieve what they desire. If one attempts to engage in endeavors beyond their inherent abilities, they fail to appreciate both the task itself and their own limitations (Enchiridion 29, Enchiridion 37). As Epictetus asserts: “In doing so, they disregard the true value of their efforts, failing to recognize that time and resources expended on pursuits beyond their competence could have been more meaningfully invested in endeavors where they had the potential for success.” (Discourses 3.15).

### **Hardship in Life Not Mean to Go Away from Moral Integrity, and Harmony with Nature**

Here, Epictetus underscores the importance of self-awareness, rational decision-making, and the necessity of directing one’s efforts toward pursuits aligned with one’s natural strengths and abilities.

Obstacles imposed by others are an inevitable aspect of human endeavors. In such circumstances, individuals may experience confusion and a deviation from their natural course of action. However, Epictetus asserts that regardless of the adversities one encounters—whether they arise incidentally or are deliberately placed in one’s path—one must never waver from one’s moral principles. Accordingly, if any obstacle hinders an individual’s pursuit, Epictetus advises adopting the perspective: “I am not merely striving to complete this particular action; rather, my foremost objective is to uphold my moral conduct and remain in harmony with nature. Therefore, no obstacle or unforeseen event can truly disturb me.” This principle ensures that, under no circumstances, does one stray from the ethical values that should govern life. By recognizing that the ultimate aim of life is to live virtuously and by aligning one’s actions with nature, one can maintain inner tranquility and experience a fulfilling existence, even when events do not unfold as planned (Enchiridion 4). Furthermore, Epictetus emphasizes that physical illness or bodily impairments do not serve as legitimate excuses for deviating from ethical conduct (Enchiridion 9). This perspective underscores the fundamental Stoic tenet that virtue, rather than external conditions, defines a meaningful life.

### **Women should be Moral Agents**

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that Epictetus presents a uniquely original idea that no philosopher before him had explicitly articulated. In an era when women were seldom associated with moral and ethical considerations, he asserts that their true worth is fundamentally rooted in their moral character. According to Epictetus, after the age of fourteen, women begin to be perceived differently by men. Consequently, many women, believing that their sole role is to share a bed with men, devote themselves entirely to adorning their appearance. Their self-worth becomes inextricably tied to their physical beauty, leading them to invest all their efforts in maintaining and enhancing it. Given this societal reality, Epictetus argues that it is essential to educate

women on the true basis of their dignity—that they are valued not for their physical attractiveness, but for their modesty, self-respect, and moral integrity (Enchiridion 40). This perspective stands as a profoundly revolutionary assertion, transcending the constraints of its historical period. Epictetus’ recognition of women’s moral agency challenges prevailing social norms and offers a radical re-evaluation of their role and worth in society.

### **Moral Adherence in Day-to-Day Life**

Section 33 of the Enchiridion provides a comprehensive set of guidelines on the practice of self-discipline. Epictetus emphasizes that individuals must cultivate personal virtues and habits, ensuring their consistent adherence in all circumstances—whether in solitude or in the company of others. Foremost among these principles is the exercise of restraint in speech. One must always speak with deliberation, maintaining a reserved and composed demeanor. Conversations should be concise and only concern matters of necessity, ensuring that words contribute meaningfully to the well-being of others. Self-congratulatory or boastful language should be avoided at all costs. Similarly, laughter must be moderate and restrained, as excessive, loud, or unruly expressions of amusement are not indicative of a disciplined character but rather of vulgarity. Furthermore, one must be discerning in the choice of companions for leisure activities, as the conduct of ordinary individuals may become a source of disturbance for those devoted to a philosophical life. Every action should be undertaken not for the sake of mere display but with a genuine sense of purpose and necessity. In matters of sexual conduct, purity, and adherence to moral and legal principles are essential. A life characterized by moderation in consumption and measured, temperate living serves as the foundation for inner tranquility and the attainment of a flourishing existence (Enchiridion 33, Enchiridion 39). These precepts collectively provide a framework for leading a disciplined and ethically sound life.

It is evident that Epictetus provides a detailed explanation regarding the ways in which impulses and desires can disrupt moral conduct and how they ought to be managed. He asserts that individuals must exercise self-restraint when confronted with desires and external temptations in day-to-day life. This requires a deliberate and cautious approach to the alluring attractions of pleasure. Rather than succumbing easily to pleasurable experiences, one must pause, reflect, and act with discernment. To facilitate this disciplined approach, Epictetus presents a guiding principle that encourages individuals to contemplate two distinct temporal aspects of pleasurable experiences.

- Initially, pleasure appears gratifying and easily attainable. However, its continuation often results in regret for past indulgences and a sense of self-imposed sacrifice.

- He therefore advises that one should reflect on the long-term benefits of self-restraint and recognize the rewards that arise from exercising discipline. Additionally, he highlights the importance of considering

the advantages of acting with firm resolve rather than yielding to emotions and transient urges (Enchiridion 34). Furthermore, Epictetus underscores the necessity of maintaining vigilance in one's personal development and self-discipline. One must always be mindful and cautious of their own thoughts, actions, and desires. He warns that individuals can pose a significant threat to their own well-being if they fail to regulate their impulses. Certain emotions and urges may serve as obstacles to a flourishing life, necessitating an intensified awareness and scrutiny of all aspects of one's conduct. It is crucial to navigate life with unwavering attention to personal values, principles, and goals, ensuring that nothing different with these ideals is permitted (Enchiridion 48). These guidelines hold profound philosophical significance and are essential for severe adherence.

### Strategies for Moral Behavior

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that Epictetus proposes various methodologies for cultivating ethical and socially appropriate behaviors.

- He emphasizes that every action and habit gains strength through consistent practice. Accordingly, he advises individuals to persistently engage in activities that foster personal growth and to consciously avoid behaviors they wish to eliminate, redirecting their focus toward more constructive pursuits. This principle applies equally to mental habits and emotional responses. Therefore, one must identify the traits they wish to discard and act in a manner that prevents their manifestation, gradually increasing the intervals between occurrences of such undesirable behaviors. For instance, if a person refrains from a particular action for thirty consecutive days, it can be considered a significant achievement. In this context, someone who avoids expressing anger for thirty days is likely to develop a calmer and more composed mindset.

- Another recommended strategy is to surround oneself with individuals of high moral character and to diligently follow their guidance. This practice creates opportunities to distance oneself from negative traits and fosters an environment conducive to personal improvement. When harmful thoughts arise, they should be subjected to rational scrutiny, evaluating their validity and appropriateness. Simultaneously, one must actively cultivate healthy and constructive thoughts, replacing negative patterns with positive ones. Practices such as self-examination and reflection are invaluable in this process, enabling individuals to remain vigilant about their actions and to recalibrate their behavior accordingly. These practices provide opportunities to eliminate ingrained negative tendencies and to nurture virtuous qualities (Seddon, 2005).

The ultimate outcomes of such disciplined efforts are a tranquil mind and a peaceful life (Discourses 2.18), which epitomize the essence of a well-lived life. By consistently applying these principles, individuals can achieve inner harmony and align their actions with ethical and social ideals, thereby attaining a state of true fulfillment and

well-being. This approach underscores the transformative power of self-awareness, rational reflection, and deliberate practice in shaping a life of virtue and tranquility.

### Divine Strategy for being Moral

A fundamental strategy for maintaining moral integrity is the recognition that human beings are the children of God. Epictetus asserts that if individuals acknowledge their divine origin and understand that God is universally shared among all, they will neither harbor feelings of inferiority and worthlessness nor engage in dishonorable conduct. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that individuals accept and conduct themselves as the offspring of God, possessing a divine nature. This recognition serves as a decisive factor in leading an elevated and virtuous life, while its rejection results in a descent into a base and animalistic existence. Particularly, when individuals acknowledge their connection to the divine, they can effectively dispel unworthy and self-deprecating thoughts. Conversely, the denial of this divine connection leads to moral decay, transforming individuals into skeptics, traitors, or those lacking ethical discipline. Thus, in every aspect of life, one must remain conscious of their divine lineage and strive to embody virtuous qualities. Equally, one must remain vigilant in avoiding any descent into moral corruption (Discourses 1.3).

This perspective underscores the importance of maintaining a balanced and rational outlook, free from personal bias or emotional excess, when confronting the inevitable occurrences of life. By doing so, one aligns themselves with the natural order, embracing both the trivial and the profound with equal grace and understanding. This approach not only fosters inner peace but also reflects a deeper philosophical commitment to living in accordance with nature's inherent principles. Furthermore, Epictetus posits that the nature of true goodness, cultivated through ethical conduct, is identical to the nature of the divine. He asserts that wisdom, intelligence, and right reason constitute the true essence of God. Consequently, the nature of goodness must also embody these qualities. This implies that human beings must possess the capacity to clearly and effectively manage the impressions received through the senses, the ability to distinguish rational matters from irrational ones, and the faculty to make sound judgments. As the primary creations of God, human beings, akin to children, inherently contain these divine qualities within themselves. However, they often act without awareness of this divine potential, which represents a profoundly lamentable state of existence. In truth, human beings ought to direct their efforts toward cultivating these honorable and elevated divine attributes, which are intrinsic to their nature.

This alignment with the divine not only defines one's identity but also elevates the individual to their highest potential, transcending the limitations of material or social constructs. When examined through the lens of this guiding principle, it becomes evident that fulfilling the duties inherent to being human is no simple task. As

rational beings, humans are fundamentally distinct from wild animals and domesticated creatures. To preserve their humanity, individuals must refrain from behaving in ways akin to such animals. Acting on base impulses or unchecked desires, and allowing oneself to be governed by them, not only undermines rationality but also erodes the true essence of human nature. Therefore, it is imperative for human beings to engage in actions that are both ethical and aligned with their inherent nature. Such conduct not only strengthens and preserves their humanity but also serves as a safeguard against moral and existential decline and lead to genuine progression (Scaltsas & Mason, 2007).

This genuine progression toward moral excellence is inherently linked to the pursuit of happiness, inner harmony, and peace of mind. True progress, as Epictetus emphasizes, is achieved through a conscious effort to understand one's own volition, refine it, cultivate reliability, preserve self-respect, and maintain freedom from external influences. This philosophical advancement not only enables one to manage negative emotions such as grief and lamentation but also fosters the ability to face challenges with serenity and acceptance (Discourses 1.4). Upon examining life with such a profound understanding, it becomes evident that the fundamental principle of existence lies in harmonizing with nature and living authentically in accordance with one's true self. Individuals who, driven by the pursuit of social status, exhibit superficial knowledge yet conduct themselves with cunning intelligence are, in fact, exceedingly perilous. Their intentions are not noble, nor are they themselves noble. Ignorance stands as the primary cause of erroneous actions, and thus, the first step toward a righteous life is to eschew such ignorance. It is sufficient for one to act in alignment with their inherent capabilities and virtues. In this context, there is no need to pay undue attention to the frivolous remarks or provocations of others. It is imperative for an individual to understand their own nature and operate within the boundaries defined by it (Sellars, 2003).

### **Futile Exercise vs Actual Practice**

Merely debating what is right or wrong is an exercise in futility unless these principles are actively applied in daily life. Abstract arguments and theoretical discussions, devoid of practical application, are ultimately meaningless. Human beliefs must be grounded in true and fundamental principles, and daily life must be lived in accordance with these principles. It is only when an individual acts in harmony with their nature and in alignment with their capabilities that they can truly excel (Discourses 2.9). This underscores the importance of integrating philosophical insights into everyday practice, ensuring that one's actions reflect both ethical integrity and a deep understanding of their inherent nature. In doing so, individuals not only uphold their humanity but also achieve their highest potential, transcending the limitations imposed by irrationality and external influences.

Identifying and fulfilling actions that are both appropriate and ethically acceptable for a human being is of paramount importance. Human beings possess the unique capacity to act based on autonomous decisions as well as the ability to emulate the conduct of others. As citizens of the universe, humans are inherently capable of internalizing and aligning their actions with its natural order. As individuals, it is essential for them to harmonize their personal desires with the greater good, acting selflessly and with a sense of universal responsibility. They must prioritize the welfare of society over personal gain, ensuring that their actions contribute to the collective well-being. Every individual, regardless of their station in life, bears specific duties and responsibilities. It is imperative to avoid behaviors driven by destructive emotions such as lust, anger, and fear, as these undermine both personal integrity and social harmony.

Understanding one's role, fulfilling responsibilities, and cultivating virtuous qualities are essential for achieving inner tranquility and living in harmony with both society and the cosmos. Acting with a focus on the greater good beyond personal interests, and maintaining a clear understanding of the profound impact of one's actions, are equally critical in this regard (Discourses 2.10). This is because human beings are reflections of divine energy, each being a child of God. As embodiments of higher power, humans are in no way inferior; rather, each individual is created with a unique and purposeful role. Recognizing this and acting in accordance with one's true nature is the essence of living authentically. By doing so, individuals can attain the highest state of existence (Discourses 2.24). This perspective emphasizes the dignity and potential inherent in every human being, urging them to rise above base impulses and align their actions with their divine nature. It calls for a life of virtue, responsibility, and self-awareness, where individuals contribute to the universal order while achieving personal fulfillment. Through such alignment, humans not only realize their true potential but also elevate themselves to a state of profound harmony with the cosmos.

### **Moral Integrity is Continuous Process**

An ethical life is a continuous process of growth and development. A life guided by virtue elevates the individual, and at this elevated state, ethical principles must be adhered to with even greater rigor than before. In this context, a pertinent question arises: how should one navigate their relationships with old acquaintances and friendships? When seeking answers from Epictetus's teachings, it becomes clear that one must remain vigilant in situations where there is a risk of compromising one's moral integrity by aligning with former companions. Such compromises can lead to self-destruction. If an individual aspires to live a life of higher virtue in the present and future, they must consciously distance themselves from past habits and ways of life that no longer align with their current ethical standards (Johnson, 2014).

Sacrificing one's authentic self to please old friends or maintain outdated relationships invariably leads to self-destruction and must be avoided. Therefore, an individual faces a critical choice: either engage in actions that are incongruent with their current moral standing to appease old relationships or prioritize their self-respect and self-discipline, even if it means those relationships may suffer. These two paths represent divergent outcomes—one leading to ruin and the other to constructive growth. The ultimate decision must be made by the individual, guided by rational deliberation and a deep understanding of their values (Discourses 4.2). This approach serves as a profound motivational technique, emphasizing clarity in situational analysis and granting the individual the autonomy to decide how to act.

In essence, the individual is empowered to discern the nature of their circumstances and exercise their freedom to choose a path that aligns with their ethical principles. This empowerment underscores the importance of self-awareness, rational judgment, and the courage to uphold one's integrity, even at the cost of altering or relinquishing past relationships. By doing so, individuals not only preserve their moral compass but also pave the way for personal growth and a life of genuine fulfillment. This guidance from Epictetus highlights the delicate balance between maintaining relationships and staying true to one's evolving ethical standards, ultimately advocating for a life rooted in virtue and self-respect. Finally, it is noteworthy that "while the Stoic philosophers have taken Socrates as a role model for their ethical guidance, Epictetus states in the Handbook (51), 'Socrates lived a unique life by prioritizing nothing over his intellectual ability, and although it is clear that you are not Socrates, it is necessary to live as one who strives to be live like Socrates.' This statement should be understood as an expression of how humans should live a virtuous life."

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of Epictetus' Stoic philosophy reveals a profound and timeless framework for living a morally upright and fulfilling life in harmony with nature. Through the principles of moral integrity, self-discipline, and ethical conduct, individuals can align their actions with their inherent nature and the universal order, achieving inner tranquility and human flourishing. The study underscores the importance of cultivating virtue, self-awareness, and rational decision-making as essential components of a well-lived life. Epictetus' emphasis on practical methods for ethical living, such as self-restraint, rational reflection, and disciplined practice, provides valuable guidance for individuals seeking to navigate the complexities of modern life. His revolutionary assertion of women's moral agency challenges traditional societal norms and offers a radical re-evaluation of their role and worth in society, contributing to contemporary

discussions on gender equality and ethical discourse.

The findings of this research highlight the relevance of Stoic philosophy in addressing contemporary issues, such as the pursuit of external validations, the challenges of maintaining moral integrity, and the importance of self-discipline. By internalizing and applying the teachings of Epictetus, individuals can achieve a state of true well-being, characterized by inner peace, ethical conduct, and alignment with the natural order. The Stoic approach to living in harmony with nature, as articulated by Epictetus, offers a compelling pathway to moral excellence and human flourishing. By embracing these principles, individuals can transcend the limitations imposed by external circumstances and societal expectations, leading a life of virtue, authenticity, and profound fulfillment.

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