

Is Stoicism a kind of asceticism?

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In Japanese terminology, Stoicism is treated as a synonym of asceticism. But it is hardly obvious whether Stoicism can be characterized as asceticism. It would depend on how asceticism is defined. It may be defined as the way of life of an ascetic. An ascetic refrains from pleasure and endures pain, either because that way of living enables him to attain his end, or because it is the end itself. I argue that Stoicism is not a kind of asceticism in either case of the ascetic's reasoning.

First of all, the Stoics do not aim at ascetic's way of life in itself. This is obvious because there is no sign of asceticism in any of their formulae of the end. On the contrary, there is even a hedonistic tendency in the formula of Chrysippus, which is criticized by Poseidonius.

Since the Stoics aimed at *apatheia*, which one may consider as an ascetic state of mind, Stoicism may look as asceticism. However, *apatheia* is not refraining from pleasure, but being free from pleasure or pain. That is possible, from the Stoic viewpoint, because a conflict between *logos* and *pathos* is not that of different parts of soul, but just discord between different functions of the unitary governing mind (*hegemonikon*).

Stoicism is not asceticism in the sense of means to attain the end. For the Stoics had no definite formula of the means, which would mean that the way to the end is not so easy to formulate. If it were an ascetic action such as refraining from pleasures, it would have been quite easy to formulate.

Moreover, the Stoic ideal man, ie the sage, must have perfect wisdom. It would not be attained, unless he has an intellectual understanding instead of ascetic action. This would mean that asceticism is not the way to the Stoic end.