

Stoicism and Existentialism

Compare and Contrast

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J1TkyajLcU>

Introducing the speakers

Dan: Welcome Massimo and Sky, Hello there and welcome to the Sofia audience, I'm Daniel Kauffman, your disembodied host, we're gonna do something a little different today, we're going to have Massimo speaking with Sky Cleary.

Massimo requires no introduction, but we will give him one anyway, he is the K.D. Irani Professor of Philosophy at the City College in the City University of New York, and his book; 'How to be a Stoic' will soon be coming out, will be available on May 9th from Basic Books.

I am happy also very much to introduce Sky Cleary, her recent book from 2015, Existentialism and Romantic Love, came out on McMillan Press and I understand you just said that it just came out in paperback?

Sky: Yes just last week.

Dan: So if you like Sartre, and love and sex, you should buy this, or any of those three. Sky you have a very interesting background, you have both the PhD and an MBA, what's that all about? Was that sort of regret? Or poverty? or did it go in the other order or what?

Sky: No well the MBA came first, so my background in finance and management consulting and I worked for a hedge fund for a few years and...

Massimo: So it is regret right?

Sky: Then I became enlightened, yeah, and then during my MBA I studied some philosophy, you know they had courses where I do my MBA, in Australia like existentialism and entrepreneurship and foundations of management thought which is very much a philosophy subject in managerial psychology, so I kind of got hooked on philosophy then and you know got into management consulting after my MBA, but then just kept being plagued by these questions and one of my professors encouraged me to do a PhD and so here I am.

Massimo: Right mmm it's very...

Dan: Sky teaches both at the City of Columbia and at the to the University of New York and she's the managing editor for the American Philosophical Association blog and interestingly enough she also served in the Australian Army Reserves which I probably would love to talk to you about in a whole other dialogue, and has a black belt in Taekwondo! Which is interesting partly a) because it's interesting and b) because apparently Massimo also has taken up the fighting arts, Massimo you said your kickboxing now and you said you did judo and kung fu, so can we have like a match later or...

Massimo: We should, we should have a conversation because a philosophy of the martial arts, that's a whole other...

Introducing the conversation

Dan: That'd be interesting. Okay today however we're going to do something less martial.

Massimo as everyone knows, has been not just interested in stoic philosophy, but has been exploring stoicism as a way of life, which is what it was of course for the ancient Greeks and there now is a pretty substantial community of people who are adopting the stoic philosophy as a way of life.

And Sky is interested in existentialism, not just as a philosophy, but also as a way of life and so we thought it would be or Massimo thought it would be a good idea, for maybe the two of them to talk about the ways in which stoicism and existentialism both as philosophies and as ways of life might be interestingly similar or different. So Massimo did you want to start out since this whole thing was your brainchild to begin with.

Massimo: Sure, so I thought that Sky and I could just begin by presenting a very short sort of capsule version of the two philosophies. I'll start with stoicism and Sky can do the existentialism, and then we'll just explore both the similarities, which I think, I'm sure there is a surprising number and some of the differences because after all, there are some significant differences there as well and then let basically our listeners you know sort of judge well, that resonates you know, that doesn't resonate with me.

Introducing the Philosophies

So I'll get it started with Stoicism, and so Stoicism has a couple of fundamental ideas, one is that the meaning of a meaningful life, a life worth living is a life of practicing virtue. And this is virtue in the ancient Greek Roman sense of the term, there are four fundamental virtues, these are:

- Practical wisdom, which is the ability to navigate complex situations in the best possible way.
- Courage, which is not just physical courage it doesn't have to do with taekwondo or kickboxing, but it has to do with moral courage, the courage to stand up for situations and for people.
- Then temperance, the ability to exercise self-control, not to go into excesses of sorts.
- And then finally justice which is understood as treating other people with fairness, the way in which you would like to be treated.

So for a Stoic, if you practice sincerely the four virtues, that is in and of itself, is both necessary and sufficient, to make your life worth living, now the word that is often used is happy, which of course is a bad translation of the Greek term eudemonia, obviously it's pretty obvious that you wouldn't necessarily be happy because you could be virtuous, but also poor, and sick and so on and so forth, so you wouldn't be happy in the normal sense of the term, but your life would be worth living according to the Stoics.

And in fact your life will be even more worth living than the life of let's say very healthy and very wealthy person who however does wicked things, who doesn't practice virtue, takes advantage of other people and so on and so forth.

So that's one of the fundamental tenets of Stoicism, the other one is the so called economy of control. This was best articulated by Epictetus, one of the late Roman Stoics, but its present from the beginning of the philosophy, from all the way back to Zeno, who was the founder of the philosophy in about 2000BCE. And the economy of control basically said that wisdom and in sort of a serene life come out of understanding and internalizing that certain things are under your control and other things are not under your control and that you should focus on where your agency can actually be effective, that is under things that under your control. So all external happenings are not under your control, you can influence them, some of them are obviously not in your control, like the weather, there's nothing I can do about the weather, but other things like you know to succeed in my job, for instance, my profession, that's technically not under my control, according to the stoics because it's not entirely under my control. I can influence it, I can work hard, I can build a good resume or whatever it is, but I may still not feel, not get the job or it may still not get a promotion or something like that, the things that I knew my control are essentially my values my decisions and my behaviours might my judgments about things.

So what that means is that a Stoic tries to go through life by internalizing his or her goals, so my goal is not going to be to get a promotion, because that's outside of my control, but its rather going to be to do the best job that I can, in order to put my force in myself for it in the best possible way to be competitive for a promotion, whether I get it or not is not up to me, but I am happy because I've done the best that I could.

Or in the case of a relationship you know, my goal cannot be to be loved by my partner, my goal has to be, to be a lovable person, because that's the thing that is really under my control, whether it turns out that in fact, that particular other person is going to love me or not, that is not up to me and so on and so forth.

So there's a lot more obviously to admit and probably some of it will come out during the discussion, but I think that the focus on virtue and the internalization of the economy of control are really the defining points of Stoicism.

Dan: Sky do you want to [inaudible]?

Sky: Sure and so existentialism is a lot less systematic than that and it's much harder to define because it's not an official school, more like stoicism is, but it's more of a descriptive term for a group of philosophers who talked about similar themes; of freedom, choice, responsibility, anxiety and authenticity. So they were reacting to the Enlightenment, when everything was about objectivity and scientific facts. And they said well what about the passionate, subjective experience? What about like concrete living? Rather than just abstract armchair theorizing.

So existentialism became particularly popular during World War two, because it acknowledged that human existence is horrifying and it's absurd. And they emphasized personal choice, so some of the key themes are that; we're thrown into the world, you know we don't choose how or where we arrive, but once we're here we need to choose how to live. Also one of the most famous maxims of existentialism is that existence precedes essence, so we exist first and then we're free to define who we are through the choices we make, so we're nothing to begin with, but we are what we make of ourselves, so for the existentialists, every action is a choice, we always have choices and as such, Sartre says "there's no exit from our freedom, we're condemned to be free."

And so for the existentialists we're responsible for who we are, however Simone de Beauvoir for example, also emphasized that situations put limitations on our freedom, for example; poverty, ignorance and oppression limit those kinds of choices that we can make, so we have a responsibility to choose our lives, but also to strive for authenticity, which is about choosing what we think is genuine and right for ourselves. It means that yes certainly we can admit external influences, that as long as we know that, recognize that it's our choice and our responsibility in the end.

And we can deny that we have choices, but that's what the existentialist would have called bad faith, and so, but also the existentialists suggested that it can be really scary to realize that we can't blame everything on biology or circumstance and so that's why the existentialist say that we are plagued with anxiety.

So one of the key questions is that if we're free as Dostoyevsky put it, if god is dead is everything permitted? Well the existentialists would say no, but that's where existentialism starts. You know there's nothing to depend on, we arrived in the world, we don't have a guidebook, life is ours to make sense of and it's up to us to choose its value.

But it's an, existentialism is often portrayed as a very individualistic philosophy, but they also acknowledge that we are born into webs of relationships, if we value freedom for ourselves then we value it for other people too. And they acknowledge that when we make a choice, we're affirming that it's a valuable thing to do, so we think it would be good if everyone did as we did, so if you marry, you're affirming the value of marriage, or the value of the institution of marriage and through our choices we create the kind of world that we want to live in.

Systematic Philosophies

Massimo: Alright great, so what I was thinking of doing, you know I had some notes here about possible topics for discussion, maybe. I divided them for my own sort of usage in sort of potential differences and potential similarities, maybe we can just start and alternate the two, so we don't want to go through all the differences first and all the similarities, also because we may not actually have time to go over everything.

So for instance, let's starting with the differences, so as you just said, that existentialism is often defined as an approach that rejects systemic philosophies, while Stoicism is probably the paramount example of a systematic philosophy, so maybe we can talk a little bit about that, so what does it mean to be or not to be a systematic philosopher, because when you started describing existentialism, you started saying well there are certain things that are firm about them in your, if you don't accept a certain number of notions or a certain crucial concept then you really shouldn't call yourself an existentialist. And I know that there is some disagreement on who is an existentialist and who is not but nonetheless it seems to me that perhaps it's not a complete coherent logical system, but it is nonetheless.

I mean when you do have a philosophy of some sort, it seems to me that you sort of automatically, you have a system in a certain sense or is that something that is a different way of looking at it?

Sky: Yeah I think why it's not considered to be systematic, is yes sure there are some certain principles underlying you know the foundation of existential philosophies, but there are so many different, I mean truly every different philosopher had a different philosophy and also they change their ideas on philosophy throughout their lives, for example we could probably only call Sartre an existentialist in "Being and nothingness" and in his early writings because then later he kind of explored Marxism.

So okay, well first of all you should be wary of anyone who calls themselves an existentialist, because that's anti existential, because it means we're being defined by a role or categorized and the existential philosophy says, well no we can't be reduced to one thing.

And so it reminds me of the film *The Life of Brian*, where Brian is up in front of the crowd and saying "you're all individuals!" And yes, which is very existential and the one person in the crowd says "I'm not!" Which is ironic because he is the only individual, and then Brian says "You've all got to work it out for yourself! And the crowd says "Yes we've all got to work it out for ourselves!" So they're like tell us more, which is like they're not working it out for themselves at all.

So yeah although there are these basic principles, how people live those? I mean the existentialist philosophers lived it differently and have different ideas about how we should live, but I mean they're all dealing with the same question which is how should we live? And not just how should we live? But what should we do? And are very excited about dealing with concrete problems of existence and everyday living, which is why existential philosophy has also inspired existential psychoanalysis, which is still a quite a big school.

But it is about everyday living and there's a story, did you hear the story that existentialism was started over an apricot cocktail? Cause yeah Satre and Simone de Beauvoir were sitting at a cafe with their friends Raymond Aaron, and Aaron had just been studying phenomenology and he came back and said to Satre and Beauvoir, you know if you were a phenomenologist, you could make a philosophy out of this apricot cocktail, and Jean-Paul Sartre was so excited and he said to himself at the time, finally there is philosophy because he could philosophize about concrete everyday things.

Role scripts

Massimo: Ok I do prefer my Martini's over apricot cocktails, but you know that's a question of taste. Okay so what you were saying brought to my mind a couple of things, I think we should talk about the psychotherapy actually later, hopefully because there are there some interesting similarities and differences with Stoicism. But you talk about rules right, so you're not, we're not defined by our role, so which means that even calling yourself an existentialist, it's like it's a weird thing, now Stoics also do typically don't call themselves Stoics, but that's not because they don't like the label in general, it's because think it's pretentious and so they refer to themselves as *pprokoptôn*, which in Greek means somebody's who is hopefully making progress, right, so it's a student basically.

But, the thing about roles is interesting, so there's an entire book that came out recently about dictators and it's called the dictators role in ethics, because if dictators actually do insist that we don't have roles and we are defined by our roles in an important sense, but we don't have just one roll and some of these roles we choose, and others are sort of part of I think what it might define, you can tell me if this is correct, what an existentialist would call it facticity.

That is they just 'come with,' you know you're born in a certain place, at a certain time, and a certain place, so there are certain things that are part of your background and then you don't choose, you can decide what do about them, or how to use them, but you know, you don't have a complete freedom of about the fact that in the circumstances of your existence.

So for dictators we all have different roles but it's not, we're not defined by one role, we are actually simultaneously different things, right so I am a father, I can be a companion that can be a teacher, I can be a friend, I can be all sorts of things. And for Vegetius what's important is how you play that role, now of course he doesn't use the word authenticity there, but I guess there is a similarity because he says you know you can play your role as badly, as being a bad actor essentially, you know he really does see life as a stage on which we play different parts and the part that we play not necessarily up to us, or it's certainly not all the details and all the aspects of that part.

But how we play it is, and so if I'm a father I can be a good father or a bad father, if I'm a teacher I can be a good teacher or a bad teacher, and so on and so forth and of course what makes a difference between a good and a bad interpretation of that role, in general is whether you follow the virtues or not, where you trying to be a virtuous father or teacher and so on and so forth. I don't see that necessarily as dramatically incompatible with an existential view of things do you?

Sky: Yeah no that sounds, there are some similarities there and I think the existentialists would probably say that actually choosing that role of what roles we play are up to us. Like they're not imposed on us from the outside but it's up to us to choose whether we become a father or what role we play in society so I'm not sure if the roles we play would be necessarily included in the facts or facticity effects of our existence but and I think Sartre gives the example of a waiter in *Being and Nothingness* who's playing the role perfectly but if they also realize that there is a part of it like you've been cannot be reduced to just a waiter because we're always part of a project or we're always transcending and watching ourselves into the future and we always have multiple projects and so just we can't be just defined by one thing or even mean if a waiter and a father I mean we can't just reduce our being to be described by that but I'm not sure I mean that doesn't mean to say that we can't take on actively choose and take on different roles in life but as long as we know that it's our choice and as well as our choice how to live them.

Massimo: Right, oh yeah so I think that there's similarities, I mean Epictetus of course would say that some of the roles are chosen, you know you decide what career to do, you decide whether to become

a father or mother or something, and the other ones are not. Because you remember that in this case he was a slave, started out his life as a slave and that certainly wasn't his choice right, that was something that was imposed on him and that it was not in his power to change. Until much later on when he was freed and then he you know in chose to become a teacher, but yeah it doesn't seem to mean much to mean to me they are fundamentally incompatible.

Free choice / Control

Now here's something that I put on the common list of similarities is a quote by Kierkegaard, who said that "a person's unhappiness never lies in his lack of control over external conditions, since this would only make him completely unhappy."

Now that does sound to me actually, remarkably stoic, because as I said earlier, the dichotomy of control says that you shouldn't be putting your happiness or you know the meaningfulness of your life into the external circumstances because external circumstances can change on a dime. That doesn't mean that they're not important, I mean often Stoics are sort of caricatured as saying 'oh y'know that they don't care about your education, health, wealth and so on and so forth,' of course they do, but they realize that you could be a wealthy person one day and then lose it all the following day, or that you can be very healthy one day and then you get sick you know the following day and so on and so forth. And so that if your happiness is tied to the external circumstances that you're bound to be an unhappy etcetera.

But now, I'm not too familiar with the context in which that quote by Kierkegaard would actually fit in general existentialism sort of idea and also Kierkegaard of course is a very early existentialist right? I mean he certainly didn't use the term at the time, but does that strike you as something that modern day existentialists would accept, what I quoted from Kierkegaard?

Sky: Yeah and I think Sartre would also agree with that. Yes so Kierkegaard was retrospectively labeled an existentialist, but yeah so it reminds me of what Sartre said, is "you're never so free as when you're in chains" and what matters is how you view the situation. And I also found a quote from Epictetus, "a podium in a prison is each a place, one high and the other low, but in either place, your freedom of choice can be maintained if you so wish."

Massimo: Right.

Sky: So very much these sorry beating maxims, not to get upset by the things around us, but by the views we take of them. So the goal is to kind of own our thoughts, control you know how we view things and Satre talks specifically about like a rocky crag or rocky mountain that's blocking our path and he says well it's only an obstacle if we see it as an obstacle. And should we take that into account, into our facticity and we change our path and choose not to view it as an obstacle, then it's no longer a problem. So, now Simone de Beauvoir on the other hand, would disagreed with that and she says, yeah well we have the freedom to think as we choose, but if we come across a craggy mountain or a locked door, I mean banging against that locked door, is certainly completely useless, but just changing our view of that situation isn't necessarily the answer either and her point was that if you can't act on your freedom, then it's meaningless it's a Pyrrhic victory. Her philosophy was very much about action, and she and Sartre used to argue about this and she would get sea-sickness and Sartre told her it was all in her head and she just had changed her thinking about it, and she's like no! I think that...

Dan: She should have thrown up on him.

Sky: Well...

Massimo: Actually there is a story of stoicism about sea-sickness which is kind of interesting because it sort of I think he actually strikes a compromise between those two positions that Satre and Beauvoir position. Because, so there's this story about a stoic philosopher who embarks on his on this voyage and then there is a storm, and the storm is very frightening and you can get sea-sick and in fact he gets also scared by the whole thing right and then when the storm is over and he recovers his composure and he goes about the ship as if nothing happened. And the captain makes fun of him, he says; "oh so

you're the stoic philosopher, you're supposed not to care about external circumstances, but I saw you you were sick and you were you know afraid during the storm." And the stoic responds; "yes but I am not now." That is, how to think about the experience is up to me, of course I'm scared when something happens that is scary, that's a human thing to do. I have no control over sea-sickness or I've no control over you know being scared, what I do have control over is how I react and how I think about it. "Do you see me dwelling on the experience now?" No, it's done and it's in the past, it's no longer under my control and so I move on, so there is actually a way to sort of balance those two things, meaning that it's certainly the case that if the door is closed and you want to get in, well you're not going to get in, unless you find a way to force the door right, but it is also the case that sometimes in life we find closed doors and instead of keep banging on it and waste a lot of energy and time over it, you know obsessing over the door, perhaps we turn around another corner and there's another door, there's a window, well there is another street and another place to go somewhere.

Psychotherapy

Now that that seems to be, you mentioned a couple of times already psychotherapy, so I think we should get there because you mentioned IBP, which for our listeners is a rational emotive behavioral therapy and then Viktor Frankl often comes up in discussions of both stoicism and existentialism. Frankl was the survivor of the Holocaust, and he wrote very influential books in the 1950s and 60s and established something called logotherapy, which is a type of rational emotive behavioral therapy, although the two are actually distinct.

Now, the thing that strikes me as interesting, is that both the Stoics and the existentialists claim Frankl, I've read existentialist authors who say that, logotherapy is a type of existentialist therapy. But I also know that Stoics consider Viktor Frankl one of the founders of the modern cognitive behavioral therapy that is informed very much by stoic techniques and stoic think-tanks.

So it seems to be kind of an overlap between the two philosophies, but outside of that, you have my understanding is that existentialist psychotherapy is very much into the Freudian and Jungian sort of tradition of doing psychotherapy.

While on the other hand, the stoic one is definitely very much in the tradition of a cognitive behavioral therapy, which is very different, it completely rejects the Freudian approach. So I wonder what you think about the relationship in general between sort of philosophy and psychotherapy I suppose and also specifically about existentialism and Viktor Frankl.

Sky: So it's in existential psychotherapy I mean especially the one that thought you talked about anything in nothingness the emphasis is on consciousness raising to understand what to become aware of what choices we have and become aware of you know how we can be free so it's overcoming the limitations of ignorance on and understanding the different options that we have so the emphasis on creating choices and freedom and coming to terms with things like anxiety and death and a lot of these issues that existential philosophy raises so and in terms of my view on whether that's a good idea or not so I guess I'm torn which I'm not an accidental psychotherapist and I haven't done any training there but if my question is that if we raise our consciousness to be aware of anxiety and deafening like that then that might not make us feel any better um and you know coming to terms with the existential absurdity of life I mean it can help in some cases and I acknowledge that that it might not help in all cases so that's my hesitation with you know pinus to therapy.

Dan: What what about the one thing what about Massimo's question about the fact that regarding the fact that existentialism seems to have at least two psychotherapeutic tracks that has pursued one that's more along the lines of this logical rational what declutter behavior rational irrational behavior therapy and then on the other hand it's very well known in historical connection with psychoanalysis.

Sky: Mhmm yeah, and I mean it is very much like I was talking about with you know the rocky crag that it was very sorry and philosophies very similar to that rebt principle of not being upset by the things around us but by the views we take of them and you know I think there's a lot of value in doing if existential psychotherapy is you know I think that's a valid option.

Dan: What about the relationship to depth psychology which is well to get psychology to psychoanalysis this is a totally different tradition I mean there's actually something called existential psychoanalysis, is that this not a tradition you're familiar with.

Sky: Yeah no I haven't done any study in that area.

Massimo: Yeah so that striking it is interesting and wherever that the distinction between philosophy and psychotherapy right I mean or therapy general instead of in general so obviously philosophies are not therapies although they may have therapeutic sir component or effects and vice versa therapies

are not philosophies although they may be based or inspired by a philosophy so one of the things that happened last year at the stoic on conference which is this gathering and you were there sky as an existentialist lurking in the middle of storage and one thing that we had was a presentation on Roger most emotive behavioral therapy and its connections with stores and the the connection usually that if philosophy is supposed to give you this sort of overall framework for how to think about stuff right and that framework in the case of a practical philosophy especially like I consider both stores minute in extra centralism practical philosophies that is the kind of thing that is supposed to basically give you general guidance about you know priorities in life how to think about your life where how to make your decisions you know in a sensible way in a way that actually reflects your values your choices and so on and support if there be on the other hand is much more specific it's like oh I got fear of death how do I deal with that by my side wake up in sweating terror at the iodine either way we'll deal with that and you're right of course the advocacy of psychotic upset set up is in generally there's I mean the unmarked familiar with the CBT variety watch which actually has a significant amount of sort of evidence-based you know support but even so you know the advocate is certainly not ninety percent I mean some people get over their anxieties and some people don't get over there and daddies and but I wouldn't consider that a failure of the philosophy necessarily I would say yeah well the philosophy still gives you the general framework and it sounds reasonable or coherent or whatever it is whether that's going to help you you specific case or not that depends on a number of circumstances

Meaning / Suicide

Massimo: Right now the other another sort of different day I think comes to the treatment that the two philosophies give to the question of suicide so came who I understand actually rejected the label of sex essentially especially after a certain people healthy he had a falling out with Sarge but he said and I quote rezoning one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide so I'd like to hear a little bit about what what are you meant by that and if that's a serious philosophical problem do we have an existentialist answer to that problem because the soil do have an answer and I'm I'll get to that in a minute to that question and I suspect it's going to be very different from being centrally sponsored but we'll see maybe I'm gonna be surprised.

Sky: Mhm yes, well I think what's at the bottom of that is from in a potential view is well why should we not kill ourselves you know why should we r going to die anyway why should we not commit suicide now what is their silly forum what is the meaning of life and so do the essential question is what meaning do we give and infuse into our life now let's move our took a different approach change said no don't gamble on the future change your life today and her view was that yes we're going to die we don't know when so that means we need to make everyday meaningful and live fully so I think Camus is also famous i'm not sure where he said this but we shall I kill myself I'll have a cup of coffee like although I have a cup of coffee and I think it's about appreciating what is beautiful in life and what we should live for and what I'm at extension existential philosophy is it's about embracing life and living passionately what's stoics?

Massimo: So that strikes me as interesting because um back again there are actually some signal is there so there are two issues are entangled one is the issue of death of our mortality right in the other one is the issue of meaning or for lack of meaning which may lead to desperation to serve and suicide right so so anytime with the suicide so the story taken suicide is that it is ethically acceptable only under extreme circumstances this is what I picked it is referred to as the open door policy the open door policy is uh uses these analogies that look if the house gets really smoky there is a lot of smoke and aspire no letter and it's impossible to breathe then walk to the door the door is open you can get out and of course the house the smoking house is the a metaphor for a really really difficult life a really hard life that it's hard to actually cope with and says we all if that's the case for whatever reason then you have the possibility and your your freedom as Seneca put it is constantly in your wrist you can you can slit them and then you're done um but the converse of that is that epic series also says if you stay however in the house if you decide to stay then don't complain because it means that you actually found that there is enough meaning or there is enough reason for you to step because if the door is open you can walk out every time if you decide to stay that means that actually you find enough reasons to stay right and then you then you should take responsibility or for what it is that you're going to be doing for those reasons so that um that is the answer to the suicide question for the stories but the answer to the and that may be very different from the existentialist one on the other hand the answer to the question of you know mortality I think it's much or what to make of the question mortality is much more similar because the story an answer there senegal would agree we don't with the review we will we don't know where my god I you know the saiga says sometimes there's an entire I said he wrote on the shortness of life where he says you know people often say when somebody young dies they say oh he's gone before his time and they say he said what does that mean I mean nobody nobody knows what his time is right the universe decided that that was the time and what the hell I use why argue with the universe right this happen it is what it is so to say that the things happen before their time

or not makes no sense but precisely because we are in a situation where we don't know when life is going to end then Teneycke actually all the major Roman Stoics including Marcus Aurelius said very explicitly then you need to take to take advantage of every moment you should live every moment to the fullest you should focus on the hick at nunc in Latin the here and now precisely because you don't know how much longer you can I have and you know if you are engaging in activities there are wasteful of your time and energy and resources you do things you don't want to do it if you're doing things just because it's no proper the proper thing to do from a social perspective or something society perspective or something like that you're just wasting precious in its that could be the last day of your life and the question is you know how do you want to spend it in a faculty meeting probably not right so I net that I think there is actually significant amount of similarity between the two.

Philosophy as a way of living

Massimo: Okay so my next point was about Gabrielle Marcel, who was a Bentley you know I don't know much about him but it was a little as an existentialist at some point and then interestingly he rejected the label of existentialist, apparently that's a normal thing to do for a existentialists,

Sky: It is.

Massimo: But in favor, and this is what struck me as weird, in favor of the term neo-Socratic, and apparently that was in honor of Kierkegaard's essay; "On the concept of irony." Now I wouldn't be I wouldn't label the existing should I would sort of similar gave his century to Socrates or to neo Socrates's but you think there's something in there I mean what was the what is the existentialist a consort ancient philosophy ancient Greek philosophy in general? its purest neo Socratic presumably mean it means that you have some affinity for for whatever it is that socket is thought and taught or the way he lived so maybe is it because Socrates had an authentic life in some sense he was living an authentic life

Sky: Possibly i'm not really familiar with several Marcel um but I mean certainly I mean welcome to my eyes meet shut and he very much admired the ancient Greek way of living I think that he said we're men were warriors and women will for their recreation mystic it yeah I mean what made you laugh about the ancient Greek society was that it was very structured and orderly and everyone knew what their roles were and niche was very critical of marrying for love he's like no let's go back to ancient Greek model where you couldn't get divorced and so because I sort of saw romantic love is something that was all sexual love is something frivolous and fleeting and what you can't face an institution on an idiosyncrasy like romantic loves I know let's go back to like order and structure that the ancient Greeks had already yes so...

Dan: Although he was famously not a fan of the Apollonian strand of I mean I mean he was that he was he was a fan of the Dionysian strain of valve of Greek partying and I he certainly was not a fan of the Socratic rationalism although I guess the this is Craddock authenticity might have appealed right I mean the fact that the socrates rather drink would rather drink the poison then escaped from the prison I guess would have a certain existentialist appeal if you want to sort of think of it that way but but I always thought that he is his aversion to the Apollonian side of the or his belief that it was there wasn't that the Apollonian side dominated too much and dominates too much our recollection of ancient greek thought would have made him not a fan of the Socratic Socratic side which is certainly not a stoic approach yeah.

Massimo: Yeah.

Passion / Love

Sky: Yeah I mean Nietzsche was um I mean yeah he was currently criticized you know this over emphasis or insulting the Apollonian and the rationale at the expense of the passion if you said the passions are important too we need both it's like the left side of the brain and the right side of the brain and you need to balance reason and passion together.

Massimo: Yeah so that actually brings me to talk about a little bit about the passion so you wrote a book about love from a nexus centuries perspective and maybe maybe you can give us a sort of a little so many of it of that in a minute but one of the things as you know that is often thought about stories as men I do think is that understanding is that stoicism is about surprising the passions impressing the emotions and he said I'm using those two terms passions and emotions for a specific reason because the stories what a lot of modern talk confuses the true that we refer to as an emotional person is passionate and vice versa but for the stories actually used those terms in a technical sense and they distinguish between the passions and emotions and they they thought that the passions are destructive emotions so things like fear and hatred and anger especially those are destructive and yet those they do they did cancel to suppress to control to eliminate the possible you know Seneca wrote an entire book on on anger and which is sore this management you know the earliest d on anger management that we have in the Western tradition but they also started themselves of their philosophy as a philosophy of love just kind of surprising if you know so usually not so this person is usually not associated with that word but that's because they thought that love in the broadest possible sentencing of the Greeks had a different several different understandings of the word love unlike the modern English language one of the things that I find frustrating about in modern English language is that you know in English it use the word love for everything you know I love my daughter a lot my companion I love my friends I love my pizza like you know wait a minute those are very different things you should be using different words with those and the you integrate did with different words but the story says that you should actually cultivate the point is required to cultivate the positive emotions because you do want to develop in love in the broadest possible sense including the sort of a love for humanity itself in there were among the first to use the concept of cosmopolitanism for instance that you should you should really consider they refer to each other as brothers and sisters the humanity at large is a brotherhood and sisterhood for our people but so what about existentialism in love so since you're you wrote the book about it maybe we should talk about that for a minute.

Sky: Sure um yeah well I'll just give a brief overview of my book I do that a lot of the frustrations and disappointments in romantic relationships come from misplaced expectations and unrealistic ideal about what we should do in relationships what roles we should take on what's Hollywood telling us what our family's telling us and this sort of thing so and I argue that in order to be free to create authentically meaningful relationships we need to free ourselves from these destructive expectations and ideals and also free ourselves from being slaves to our passions and I actually came has very consistent with the stoic view in fact there's a Marcus Aurelius quote where he says don't be pulled like a puppet by every impulse and the essentialists would absolutely agree with that especially Kira God who talked about the aesthetics fear being like the lowest sphere of existence and it's where it's a very childlike spirit impulsive it's where where slaves to our passions he talked about Mozart's Don Giovanni being like the ultimate representative of that fear because he's always like just chasing the next woman he's a slave to his lusty desires so to God recommended leaping to a higher ethical sphere, more rational sphere and then ultimately to another religious sphere but I mean include Assad even though he advocated leaping

to his high irrational fear he he also said let's not forget like the beauty and the you know the amazing things that come along with the ecstatic sphere because being in love is wonderful and sex is great and there's an epictetus quote where he says freedom isn't secured by filling up on your heart's desire but by removing your desire so the edge attention is like no don't remove desires noting it desires are a beautiful and important part of life so that they should be balanced in concert with reason so yes free it let's free ourselves remain slaves to our passions but not free ourselves from our passions entirely and nature says how wise it is at times to be a little tipsy we're having a little of both is really important.

Massimo: Well that actually reminds me so that the interesting quantity pulled up from the big hitters but it reminds me of a contrast between the potatoes in Seneca so you right if this says exactly that in fed several several occasions but but it to be fair I picked it was also arguably the most cynic like of the Stoics you know so the cynics were the extreme version of the stoics there were the the the people that were living in minimalist life and your no property no relations no nothing no it's like it's it's all about future and that's it there were beggars basically there lived in the streets and there are very colorful characters but if it didn't actually write an entire chapter in the discourses in praise of cynicism and essentially says you know if you can't be a cynic at least be a story like your second choice Santa has a very different kind of character and actually says something very much along the lines of what you just mentioned there's a wonderful passage in Seneca where he said look sometimes you want to just go out and enjoy a fresh air and you drink some wine sometimes even drink a little too much one because you know why not once and why this is what Life offers and you need you need to embrace it so long as the wine or the pleasure or something and that doesn't control you so long as you own the pleasure and not the other way around and of course so long as you remember that pleasure in life is a preferred indifferent to use the story terminology meaning that it's something that if you have it or you don't have it you know you prefer it it's preferred but it's a different meaning that it makes no difference whatsoever to your ability to preserve virtual and that you will never trade it with aperture you don't compromise your moral character in order to get pleasure unlike Don Giovanni who clearly really got that at every turn in any paper the ultimate price for it at the end of the Opera right so in that sense I think that sometimes I think it's fair to say write that in existentialism what counts as an existential is preceptor existentialist idea does depend a lot on the individual philosopher right is one thing niches and other things sorry the third thing that really is another one is tron and support I mean the same can be said for storage but to a much lesser degree that is stories also did disagree on in terms of emphasis and in terms of you know on a number of deep they also impose ido news is one of the lesser-known Stoics because the comparatively less the boy wrote that actually survived today there's only fragments but it was one of the stories of the middle store the transitional period between when the stories moved them from a dense to ram and apparently it was a rebel I mean easily studying as you know disagreeing with with a destroyed about sort of some important manners and certainly in terms of emphasis but you would expect that within every philosophy right so it's like you don't you don't I mean philosophies are not religious prescriptions then I it's not like that just because if it fails wrote something or sorry too broad something then we have to take it as an article of faith but you disagree with it.

Sky: Yeah absolutely, but I just going back to Epicurus said was something that I came across city he said that I really liked and that was he said avoid having sex before marriage but don't like slut-shaming people who do right by then again you have marcus aurelius back to the wine example again who says innocence just treat fine wine as if it's what moldy grape juice and sex is just you know friction between private parts with a discharge I mean it is is point was you know don't close too much value on sexual relationships I understand that I know Ryan holiday in his book kind of says old that was a joke but in a bill Irvine is what kind of takes it a bit more seriously and proposed that sex is destructive and lust as a distraction but I mean I think this is one of the main areas an extension list would disagree because yes it's not about being slaves to our desires but desire and sexual desires certainly plays a key role in understanding ourselves and it's one way that we try and connect with other people and yes it can be a distraction but it's also a fundamental and valuable part of existence

that we should embrace and celebrate I mean some might say that Saturn de Beauvoir embracement celebrated it like too much I'm not making that judgment but yeah so.

Massimo: No that's a good point, so I have to say I didn't agree on, I have a couple of comments about that that quote from my Epicurus is and sort of brought it up a little bit because that's one of the areas sex in particular is is one of the areas where the story seriously disagreed that means on really really big like probably is d thing that they discrete the most about among themselves so now I don't think the ryan holidays right when he says that he dismisses backward by marketers are saying it was joking first of all marketers is not known as a joking kind of character if he's not sense of humor was better limited shall we say that said you're writing you mentioned yourself that you know what Marcus was trying to do there was people wanting itself because remember he wasn't running for other people right he was running but writing to insult this was meditations was his own personal journal right and remember that market did have sex and number of times he had children so it's not like it was complete stranger to the practice um but I think what he was trying to do was to apply it a story technique which is when you become too fond of something that is in external something that is outside of your control then one good way of doing in business epictetus does that a lot a lot is to bring it back to a factual description of what's going on right because the factual description sort of reminds you that after all you're getting upset or you're getting worked out work out about things that are really not that important so that exercise that he thought the Marcus does so describing sex is just a little friction followed by an explosion and unreleased I think it's meant in that not meant as a joke but it's also not meant as saying you should not do it or you should do it only in Berlin certain very specific sir or something I should it's the Nexus ties to remind himself that perhaps I mean I'm just speculating here but maybe he wrote that after a bottle you know an orgy that he had it and I have to go to the field and he's like damn I shouldn't have done that sort of stuff but we went back and rugby me sire but the product point is that and they wrote an essay maybe then we can link to it from the site once the conversation comes out I really about this really fundamental difference in which the early stories and the latest or its most of the Greek stories versus the Roman stories so of sex it's very consistent the Roman Stoics all of them mark asserted Epictetus Mazzoni ruthless who was Marcus outside addicted as a teacher and Seneca they all say that you should have sex only with in a committed relationship or marriage basically at the time and if at several of them say only for procreation right so that's a fairly strict view of sex and and the reason for that is because it basically it's a passion that distracts you from what is really important in life now he goes back to the greek Stoics particularly Zeno the founder s tourism and precipitous who was the third ahead of the store put the different story you should have sex in the streets with whatever you like whatever you like and it is in any way you like it vino wrote in the Republic which was this description of the ideal stoic society that men and women would have open companionships they could exchange fat partners and will that men and women would go out dressed in the same way and then women should be taught philosophy because their mental faculty are the same as men so I think what that reflects is therefore my conclusion from that is that there is actually nothing inherent in stoic philosophy that tells you anything specific about sex the only thing that really comes out of story philosophy about sex is that it is something that is a preferred and different that you should do it if you know if you feel like it and whom you feel like it so long as it doesn't get in the way of practicing Richard so if you're doing a way that hurts other people if you're doing the way that the basis other people or something like that then you shouldn't do it but other than that I don't see anything from my understanding estoy posits that will actually tell you to do it one way or the other.

And then the big difference between the Greeks and the Romans but you simply because the Roman Stoics lived it up in a time where it was a lot of traditions a lot of the Roman emperors were were privileged beginning with the very first one Octavian Augustus was very famous for being that are very very strict about customs and about propriety and things like that well on the other hand the Greeks were very open like that whatever feels good let's do it. So I think that that's a major area where the stoic itself just had very very different very divergent ideas and in that sense surprisingly the existential is actually more consistent I guess on that topic, right?

Sky: Yeah I also struggled to find much on love in the stoic philosophy, I mean the essentials have a lot to say about it that you know sir john paul sartre the goal of life is to know ourselves and who would be a better person to help us understand ourselves and a lover because we connect with them on a much deeper level and sensual level and which we don't necessarily do with other people and he talked about how you know with the motive of why he was able to kind of have some kind of communication with her without even opening his mouth because they'd had intimate relationships you know there's some kind of understanding that we can get through other people so but I mean I but I know you've written a little bit about love in your new book

Massimo: Yeah so I think you're right, the Stoics definitely don't talk much about love and actually when they use the word they meant they mean more broadly I said we're saying there's a mob of mankind or humankind in general not not just loves to see people.

Friendship

Massimo: I think that role of weapon however they do recognize what you're talking about our personnel helps you to grow and helps you to figure out things and so on and support except that that person is not the lover is the friend there is a lot of emphasis in stories and my understanding is not so much actually in existentialist but you can correct me if I'm wrong about friendship Seneca writes a lot about the importance of a friend a friend is like estado actually were obviously were not when it's not a story but I thought of that a friend a true friend a real friend is in mirrors through the mirror through your soul is the kind of person that can add the ability to tell you if you're doing something wrong and to help you grow.

Seneca actually devote several letters to Lucilius two instruments ilyas about friendship and this one in particular where he says you know be very careful who you admit into your friendship and be very strict by your criteria but once you do open completely yourself up to that person that person now is is a second self is somebody that actually you should you can trust and make and you can help you grow so I suspected that a reasonable way of looking at it is that yet the stories did not have a lot of emphasis on love as in terms of personal relationship after a relationship with another person a different sites or today obviously of whatever sex but they did have a sort of as a counterbalance to that they had a lot of emphasis on friendship. What about existentialists? Because I usually read about love but not as much about Prince exactly but misunderstanding or is it or is it reflect the reality?

Sky: Well they do talk a little bit about, I mean probably Sartre less so, but I mean Nietzsche was very much very big in friendship and he admired know the Greek ideal of friendship and he talked about how great friends inspire each other he says you know there are longing and an arrow towards the over man so great friends inspire each other and challenge each other and these like great friends should not be simple too sympathetic you know to be a great friend you also have to be an enemy in order to challenge the other person so and I think boudoir pics up on that a little bit too and she she was taught friendship was very important and in fact she thought you know a great love relationship ought to be based on friendship like those were the best kind because they friends allow one another freedom whereas lovers tend to want to close each other in and possess one another, but she kind of said you know freedom just like a foundation of a friendship would give each other a lot more respect.

Massimo: Right, that was one of the reasons I think the stoics were a little bit wary of you know helpful relationship between couples because there is that possession that tendencies one to possess or to control the other person and of course that would violate the dichotomy of control now the person is not under your control another person's feelings and behaviors and decisions are not under your control and you're happy if you happiness depend on that then you're making a mistake right and of course you can't really be in a relationship and not wanting the other person to do certain things your happiness does depend to it so certain degree.

Now of course one could object that the same is true for friendships that you know you also want your friends to lie sleeping on stone and support but the story has interesting take their first of all they agreed that would have agreed with Nietzsche what would you just said about Nietzsche that is sometimes your friend is actually your antagonist it's actually somebody who pushes you and and which is a different relationship from a relations from a couple of relationship. but the other thing that they would say is Seneca explicitly says that the soy stage that is the deal your deal story right can do without the assistance of anyone you can know if is is sufficient unto himself or herself but doesn't prefer to be that way and the reason they say that is because of course they lived in it in a time where you could easily lose a friend to exile or to death you know sun death, we keep forgetting that you know

the Emperor Marcus Aurelius who has that or children but in lost many of them most of them before they reached adulthood right the only only four daughters I think in one son survived and this is this is Yepper, this is the guy that has you know the best life possible the access to the best medicine and so on at the board so you can imagine for most other people so the mortality rate was very high and when you live in that kind of environment it's not surprising that you tend to develop a philosophy or substance efficiency but even within that positive substitution see the sights were very clear that your life is certainly going to be enriched by a good friend bye-bye the existence of good human relations that you shouldn't shy away so long as you keep considering them sort of something that is independent from the pursuit of virtue that you should be able to pursue hbu sure to have a meaningful life regardless so anything that happens you you were saying earlier something about some of the existential is that we saying that regardless of circumstances you should be able to serve to find meaning in life well the famous image there is the stage on the rack the idea is that even on the rack the stage is happy not happy in the sense that he prefers to be on the rack nobody prefers to be tortured but in the sense that he can still maintain his moral integrity which makes his life or his death as it turns out you know something worth while, yeah, go ahead.

Engagement with justice

Skye: Another thought if I go ahead okay we just um further to that I guess the mind of a while would have a problem with I mean culture might agree but plentiful while was particularly attuned to say women's oppression I know epictetus says that keep in mind it isn't the one who has it in see you and takes a swipe that harmed you but rather the harm comes from your own belief about the abuse so I think that works when we're talking about you know not like just people being mean to one another or something but when you're talking about systematic oppression that can potentially be used as an excuse for victim-blaming, like it's and it can potentially be used in an excuse to justify your abuse and oppression so amber why would they will know all oppression creates a state of war and we can't really live if we're in Chains we can't really live unless we have an open future in which we can be agents in our own lives and if there are injustices in the world then we shouldn't know go quietly about our lives you know it's about rebellion and engagement in life and don't don't keep calm and carry on but I mean her point was also that it's not something that we that people as individuals can overcome, that kind of systematic oppression, but that's why she argued that we need to know form solidarities to challenge say well she was talking the second sex about women's oppression specifically triad

Dan: One thing on that just to Martha mobs are death to really give Massimo hard to challenge are you think that wasn't hard enough yeah I'd sort it out I want to add to him as a pressure i'm going to add genocide on top of it um actually you know one of the other big why not one of the strongest elements of primo Levy's survival and Auschwitz is precisely that the victims are not know are not noble leader in other words the one of the ideas I mean one of the things he chronicles is the way that the Jews treated each other in the cameras which was pretty abominably I mean they stole from each other and they clawed at each other and they and the idea sort of that you know um you can treat people in such a way that you robbed them of their humanity and then they will act like animals and they will become animals and that's what's in a sense so tragic about about this sort of treatment of people and so I guess I do think that there's something deeply artificial about the stoic attitude and that is trust me I can take away your humanity to the point where I've taken away your virtue too because you will be reduced to an animal when I do it what is the response to that and I Skye's point makes a similar point maybe unless dramatic terms

Massimo: Oh I think those are excellent question and they are difficult I do think that there are answers there but let me let me go about it in a couple of different ways so the standard stoic answer there is look at what the stories were doing and you will get an idea that they were actually definitely not controls of circumstances they wouldn't say oh well you know this is the way it is I'm just going to lay down and take it you know Epictetus was a slave that that was eventually freed and turned a teacher and was clearly trying to make a difference for students Marcus Aurelius was an emperor he was constantly trying to do the right thing of course they destroy from opponent you know from Roman point of view but it is interesting for instance that he declined to persecute Christians which were already a quote important nuisance at that point in Roman Empire he only thought defensive words didn't expand to try to expand the Empire because he tried to do it very consciously trying to do the right thing at a societal level at a big club

Xena as I said mentioned earlier actually wrote an entire book about how we should change society and make it more equal make it make in other words there were no slaves and no disparity between men and women in Xena's sort of Historic Society so there is that

one of the typical stoic responses to that kind of criticism is that you know let's not forget that one of the fundamental bridges is justice and and so it is it is in fact crucial it's embedded in the stoic

philosophy that you should work for a better world as I mentioned earlier cosmopolitan it was a big picture big part of the story picture and so that all of humanity should be treated with fairness and with justice so I think that all of those actually are responses that some extent blunt that kind of criticism

but I think I sir and by the way then I specifically for your example of you know what happened in the Holocaust you mentioned prima lady who is one of my favorite sluggers but also Viktor Frankl we mentioned earlier with survival delicate and I got out of a tiki actually credits so the stoic approach essentially to be able to getting out of it and to be coming out of it as a better person as a more new developed person both morally and otherwise but I take the point that especially you know the way in which guy was saying is that yes if you just read Epictetus certain passages in effect it is it does sound like you should you just lay down and take it because that's that's the way it is right in that tent is very similar to the Christian you know and offer the other cheek it's like well you should you should forget rather than then react

but I do think that I expedia means is very specifically within the context of the dichotomy of control there is when he was a sled you know there's this famous story that he when he was a sled yet to masters the second master is the one that brought him later in life into to the court of nero and then eventually freed him and was good a good master serves good price on somebody who treated you Slade well but the first master was not he was the son of a bitch print and allegedly it's the one that broke a bit serious leg and he was laying for life as a result right and so the story there the Lord we will know what this happen or not but it but it does make a point the story is that the master was beating epictheaters and particularly interesting on putting pressure on the leg and the depicted us looked at it and he said you know to keep going the leg will break and sure enough to look the like bit break and if you could look at it and I told you so and this is often taken as an example of sort of extreme resilience to the circumstances right

But I didn't what he meant by that is like it was not under his control it's not only could even if you object to obviously as you should slavery as an institution if you are a slave and you are in shame and the other person has complete control over what happens to you physically there is not much sense in doing anything other than you know we're looking at how you are you take the circumstance you approach the circumstance in decades if it did is what what if it did it did was to take it wa somewhat essentially a very dry sense of humor right by telling his matter what I told you so I told you we were breaking my leg even though it wasn't that a painful thing that was happening to him

So I take the point yes want me to be careful because if one takes some of the stories thing through literally then they can definitely lead to passivity and especially in terms of sort of systemic oppression like the one that sky was talking about but I think that is actually a number of resources both destroyed philosophy and grim for examples of actual stories leaving their life you know in a certain way to say that that is definitely you know it's not a component of the philosophy you can you can take it either way you can say well I don't have any control of the circumstances so it's all it's all up to my attitude in this particular case but that doesn't mean you don't have a broader view of where things should go and and that things are not unjust or not the way they should be in so they should be changed

Dan: Let me just follow up one last thing Massimo and this does apply to both the existentialist and the or at least one version of it and so skyway and also I wasn't so much pushing on the idea of moral passivity I was pushing on the idea of self sufficiency of flourishing all right and my point I thought that one of the puts that comes out of Leavey is someone else can take your humanity away from you and reduce you to an animal now it's very nice that Epictetus reacted to his leg being broken in this way but I have a difficult difficult time and maybe this is what sky meant by victim blaming I have a difficult time saying about a person who is in a concentration camp who has been so reduced to animality that they find themselves stealing from someone else's children so that their children won't starve, I have difficulty saying that they have failed in some way and it seems to me that the stoic has to say something like that and that's what I'm objecting to I'm objecting to the idea of the other self sufficiency of flourishing is when I'm was objecting to using this example.

Massimo: Yeah no that's a good that's a good point so the stoics do have a way out of that particular problem which is none of us is a sage, the only person that would not lose his humanity under extreme circumstances is the sage is the perfect stoic is that is the if the alighted he is what the Buddhists would call the enlightened person my body has a similar situation by the way and what it means actually blamed for it similarly for you know teaching about non-attachment and teaching about the ep's distancing oneself from circumstances but only the enlightened person in the case of Buddhism and only the sage in the case of stoicism can actually really do that everybody else can strive a weber in that direction and I would turn it around of you I think in some sense then to the mind and say that right, every actual human being at some point can be broken you know there's this it's hard to imagine that there are circumstances or human beings that under those circumstances will not break, but if you practice stoicism, if you really internalize the economy of control if you really generalize the importance of virtuous I think that the idea is that that will actually push that point that breaking point as far as it is humanly possible, that is you will actually maintain a lot of you integrity a lot of your humanity under very difficult circumstances.

But no that's right nobody can maintain under regardless of the circumstances you know well human now the the Romans that are saying about this or one on one of the stoic role model was killed a younger right and Kennedy younger was the archenemy of Cuba Caesar by the way he was an example of somebody trying to change society right he was actually started a revolution to stop what he considered as Judy Caesars tyranny right, now eventually a law and he committed suicide he took the open door as a victorious would say but for much for all of these life it was known as a person of utmost integrity okay with the under very difficult circumstances maintain integrity was an exemplar to everybody else and the Roman infact was so much an example but the Romans develop these saying there was like well not everybody can be a cater for you know well I'm not a caterer meaning is the standard was put so high the bar was so high there was actual people most real people would feel it. But that is why cater was admired because even though he himself was soluble and we know from his biography that he actually did fall short of sort of the stage in a number of circumstances he very consciously tried to maintain his integrity and his humanity under very difficult circumstances I think that is actually and then give a good thing to do I mean it's a good thing to put to strive toward granting the fact that we are all human beings and therefore at some point we will fall.

Dan: Sky did you want to weigh in manner that at all?

Sky: Yeah, just to say that I mean it's certainly commendable Angeles are acknowledged you know these facts of our existence and they used to argue about it for example a harem go massages said well that kind of existence could be lived in several different ways but the word point was that well no that's not the point she doesn't have any practical freedom and therefore her existence is basically like annihilated you know she's reduced to a thing and because she can't create her and future she doesn't have the freedom to choose and so ber wise plans that we need to rebel against that and the way you know essentialism is often associated with rebellian and revolt and working together to change the conditions of our lives and we have a moral responsibility to be engaged in creating the conditions.

But you know in una but also acknowledge that there is often a cost to that so we need to decide well at what cost do we want to stand up and rebel and that she acknowledged that you know the masses can be for the tyranny of the masses is certainly a problem.

Massimo: Yeah the flip side of that coin serves the discussion where you were describing between sergeant is that there's a flip side to that coin right so on the one hand you way say yeah you don't want to accept the status quo if the status quo implies the absurdity oppression of people women or imagine me on lots of people that lived and lift still today on your dictatorship sortir knees or something like that right but the flip side of that coin is that if you say that only people who rebel are actually free and authentic and all that sort of stuff that runs of meaning the life of millions and millions and millions of people that lived under certain circumstances and so what the story would say it's like well the big picture is yes we won a better society we want to you know a sigh of cause my violent society of justice and fairness for everybody but at the same time there are for instance people that live the

entire life under the Soviet Union or under is in East Germany and they managed to find a way to have meaning in their life anyway even though there were under very difficult circumstances right and in fact one of the things that gives meaning to your life is precisely how you get through those circumstances right, how do you do you lose your humanity do you become an animal's it become a beast or do you still maintain a certain integrity in trying to do your best to ameliorate the situation given that the the big picture you cannot change the big picture but you can definitely make a difference individually for other people that are around you so there's a trade-off I think they are between those two traditions.

Sky: Mm-hmm yeah you know there's a big question about you talk about was it the uncontrollable external like you like choosing where you draw that line between what you want to rebel against and what you're going to decide is you know side your control and I find that line very blurry.

Massimo: Yeah that's right that the source would say that that is one of the four virtuous practical wisdom I think of wisdom tells you you know where you thought you should go to the line and and yet there is no Universal answer the one of the nice things about virtue ethics I think it's precisely doesn't give you a specific answer about specific situations because every situation is different and it's up to you to figure out where it is that you get it's reasonable to draw the line in that specific case.

Summary

Dan: Massimo do you think it sums just to close out that last point I really like the answer you gave to my my challenge and maybe this is a consequence of maybe reading ancient philosophy with to modern and I in the sense that they are intended to be lived philosophies and so we shouldn't interpret the claim of the self sufficiency of virtue in to pure away, right it's an idealization, but no lived person ever is going to accomplish that ideal and that's it it's like a platonic form.

Massimo: Right yeah in that sense it is it is an ideal that's right I mean let's not forget that the stories were big in the role models right they said that you should plan it the way you learn virtue is by picking on picking people that you want to emulate whose behavior you want to emulate right and some of those people could be your friend's son can be famous people that you happen to know about you know Kato again being the obvious example but some of them were fictional right so this is was a historic role model for instance i'm reading a wonderful book about how different philosophies have changed it has adopted different aspects of the alesi legend to they are for their own purposes it turns out that the plate on it had one pecan notices and the stocks at another one in the cynics and another one and so on and support each one saw a different thing what is the point of using a fictional character as a role model well the point is that precisely because it's fictional it's an ideal right and you know that you're not going to be Odysseus because there is this was never existed right but at the same time that role model can embody what you are striving for and it can serve as a reference point as almost as if you were navigating with a star you know you never reach the star but you're using the start to navigate the best as you can.

Dan: There are similar roles Sky in existentialism for role models? Or for using fiction, I mean certainly all the what was many of the well-known existentialist wrote fiction it's right there a similar notion that there is to be found in fiction or arts kind of useful idealizations?

Sky: Hmm what I'm struggling to find out and there are lots of examples and that they use the infection certainly and the days of the other is a really important no play it plays that role in a way for example sculpture talks about time but yes he talks about like in being and nothing is looking through a keyhole you spying on someone and if you're alone you don't judge yourself you're not reflecting on yourself but as soon as you hear a noise behind you you kind of panic and think oh my goodness you who's watching me am I doing something wrong and the what matters here is your relationship to that person who has just found you do you care about that person do you know them if you have nothing to do with that person then maybe you'll just go on looking through the keyhole but if it's someone that you really admire and that you care about or you're in love with then that makes a difference because you're you're suddenly thinking well how are they judging me and how does not have my actions clay out and you in terms of that relationship so it's like that gave the other that's always tearing down an effort that I think plays a bigger role than saying idealized.

Massimo: Well that's interesting because Seneca said something very similar he said you should always go around as if some when your close friends we're watching over you and you know and ask yourself well is it something that my friends are up something in my role model whatever would approve an impressive modern sense this is what we call the conscience right it's like you are you have these idealized version even of yourself right that you are aspiring to be and then when you do not feel like you got to that to that level then you feel bad you say oh damn I should have should have done better because you know I feel myself and I mean we do use that phrase you know I failed myself and so externalizing this thing like like saying imagine that there is somebody looking over you I think actually is psychologically very useful in fact there is very good evidence that when people you know

psychological is from psycho psychological research that when people are told that there is a God that is looking over and they actually tend to behave better because they're conscious of the fact that there will be it regardless or not of whether their specific religion is or whatever it is but when they're reminded of that they actually seem to be a more ethically because you know somebody's watching over and it's an interesting idea.

Dan: So the way I for one more topic, well you tell me if we're at an hour minutes it is time on it Eastern so you tell me whether you guys want to go and do anything else or whether you want to leave it to a future discussion and I just I

Sky: Can I make a final point and just as there was something else I came across when Epicurus says first tell yourself what kind of person you want to be then do what you have to do I only that's very similar to essential authenticity, you know they say existence precedes essence that we first and then create ourselves is the kind of person we want to be and we are creative people, so I just thought that was a really interesting yeah I think that's a good way to that and it I guess because this is a digital level of agreement between the two, yes that's right you have to be I mean the story's just likely at the existentialists were very much into taking responsibility for what you're doing, probably they were different you know I understand that for instance a lot of the essential especially started to reject the idea of determinism for instance while the the story definitely the permanent philosophically speaking there were compatible is in terms of free will they were accepted that there's a universal causality you know cause and effect an action of which human beings are part but nonetheless, you're still responsible for your own choices because your internal choice is part of the causal web of the universe and so in that sense I think there's good level of similarity days yeah you you are who you are what can be kind of actions you the person you are shows through by the kind of actions you made by the kind of judgments you make by the kind of things you actually do or try to do with if you fail yeah.

Dan: So that's a good way to end then I guess okay well for people in the audience who want to learn more about these philosophies as lived as philosophies of living check out Sky's existentialism in romantic love and Massimo's soon to come out "how to be a stoic" and I look forward to talking with you both again.

Massimo: Yeah, it was a pleasure.

Sky: Yeah, thank you Dan, thank you Massimo.



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