

**Stockdale on Stoicism I:
The Stoic Warrior's Triad**

VADM James B. Stockdale, USN (Retired)

* *

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This report is approved for public release; distribution unlimited.

Foreword

With this publication, the Center for The Study of Professional Military Ethics inaugurates its “Occasional Paper” series, and we are genuinely proud to have Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale as the first author we publish. Indeed, we could have had no finer or more appropriate person with whom to launch this new Center program.

A 1947 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Vice Admiral Stockdale is a figure of enormous stature among midshipmen more than a half century later, as a living embodiment of the Navy’s core values—Honor, Courage, and Commitment. In late 1999, the Center hosted Admiral and Mrs. Stockdale for several days, including one major event—“Moral Courage: An Evening in Honor of Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale.” Early in 2001, the Naval Academy Alumni Association announced that Admiral Stockdale had been selected to receive the Association’s Distinguished Graduate Award. This prestigious award is given to a living graduate who has demonstrated a strong interest in supporting the Navy and the Naval Academy, has provided a lifetime of service to the nation, and has made significant contributions to the nation through public service.

A long-time student and teacher of philosophy, whose special focus is on the moral obligations of individuals, especially military officers, Admiral Stockdale asked last year if the Center would be interested in publishing some of his reflections on Stoicism and its influence on his life. We readily and enthusiastically agreed. The result will actually be our first *two* publications in this series, which we are calling *Stockdale on Stoicism I* and *Stockdale on Stoicism II*. The first, this publication, is a slightly edited version of two lectures Admiral Stockdale gave to the students at the U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School in Quantico, Virginia on April 18, 1995. As you read this man’s biography and his own words to those young Marine officers, you will no doubt conclude, as we have, that he is also the living embodiment of the Marine Corps motto, *Semper Fidelis*.



Albert C. Pierce

Director

Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics

Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, USN, (RET.)

Vice Admiral Stockdale served on active duty in the regular Navy for 37 years, most of those years as a fighter pilot aboard aircraft carriers. Shot down on his third combat tour over North Vietnam, he was the senior naval prisoner of war in Hanoi for seven and one-half years - tortured 15 times, in solitary confinement for over four years, in leg irons for two.

When physical disability from combat wounds brought about Stockdale's military retirement, he had the distinction of being the only three-star officer in the history of the U.S. Navy to wear both aviator wings and the Medal of Honor. Included in his 26 other combat decorations are two Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Distinguished Service Medals, four Silver Star medals, and two Purple Hearts.

As a civilian, Stockdale has been a college president (a year as President of The Citadel), a college teacher (a lecturer in the philosophy department of Stanford University), and a Senior Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford for 15 years, a position from which he is now Emeritus. His writings all converge on the central theme of how man can rise in dignity to prevail in the face of adversity.

Besides numerous articles, he co-authored the book, *In Love and War*, with his wife, Sybil (Harper and Row, 1984), now in its second revised and updated edition (Naval Institute Press, 1990). NBC produced a dramatized version of this book which appeared in 1987, starring James Wood and Jane Alexander. Admiral Stockdale has also written two books of essays: *A Vietnam Experience: Ten Years of Reflection* (Hoover Press, 1984), and *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Hoover Press, 1995). Both of the latter won the Freedom Foundation at Valley Forge's George Washington Honor Medal for books.

Upon his retirement from the Navy in 1979, the Secretary of the Navy established the Vice Admiral James Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership, which is presented annually to two commanding officers, one in the Atlantic Fleet and one in the Pacific Fleet. In 1989, Monmouth College in his native state of Illinois, from which he entered the Naval Academy, named its student union "Stockdale Center." The following year he was made a 1990 Laureate of the Abraham Lincoln Academy in Illinois in ceremonies at the University of Chicago. He is an Honorary Fellow in the Society of Experimental Test Pilots. In 1993 he was inducted into the Carrier Aviation Hall of Fame, and in 1995 was enshrined in the U.S. Naval Aviation Hall of Honor at the National Museum of Aviation in Pensacola, Florida.

Admiral Stockdale holds 11 honorary degrees.

The Stoic Warrior's Triad: Tranquility, Fearlessness and Freedom

A lecture to the student body of
The Marine Amphibious Warfare School,
Quantico, Virginia
Tuesday, 18 April 1995

I feel at home here. I've flown combat with Marines in their own air planes—VMF212 out of Kaneohe. I was Wing commander of the carrier *Oriskany* on its 1965 cruise. One of our Fighter Squadrons was transitioning from F8 Crusaders to F4s. The gap was filled by the Marine F8 squadron. The skipper was Lieutenant Colonel Chuck Ludden, the Executive Officer was Major Ed Ritty, former Blue Angel. And my wingman in the squadron was a First Lieutenant named Duane Wills (later a Lieutenant General and head of Marine Corps Aviation). I spent 7½ years in prison with my shipmate Marine Captain Harley Chapman, who was shot down two months after I was. So I'm in familiar territory, and damned glad to have spent 37 years in the Naval Service with the likes of guys like you.

Now, that said, I've got to choose my words well and get to the point if we are to get anything out of this morning. We're going to take some big steps right away. What kind of a racket *is* this military officership? Let's go right to the old master, Clausewitz. He said: "War is an act of violence to compel the enemy to do your will." *Your* will, not *his* will. We are in the business of breaking people's wills. That's all there is to war; once you have done that, the war is over.

And what is the most important weapon in breaking people's wills? This may surprise you, but I am convinced that holding the moral high ground is more important than firepower. For Clausewitz, war was not an activity governed by scientific laws, but a clash of *wills*, of *moral forces*. He wrote: "It is not the loss in men, horses, or guns, but in order, courage, confidence, cohesion and plan which come into consideration whether the engagement can still be continued; it is principally the *moral forces* which decide here." *Moral forces! Conviction! Mind games!*

I had the wisdom of Clausewitz' stand on moral integrity demonstrated to me throughout a losing war as I sat on the sidelines in a Hanoi prison. To take a nation to war on the basis of any provocation that bears the smell of fraud is to risk losing national leadership's commitment when the going gets tough. When our soldiers' bodies start coming home in high numbers, and reverses in the field are discouraging, a guilty conscience in a top leader can become the Achilles heel of a whole country. Men of shame who know our road to war was not cricket, are seldom those we can count on to hold fast, stay the course.

As some of you know, I led all three air actions in the Tonkin Gulf affair in the first week of August 1964. Moral corners were cut in Washington in our top leaders' interpretation of the events of August 4th at sea in order to get the Tonkin Gulf Resolution through Congress in a hurry. I was not only the sole eyewitness to all events, and leader of the American forces to boot; I was cognizant of classified message traffic pertaining thereto. I knew for sure that our moral forces were squandered for short-range goals; others in the know at least suspected as much.

Mind games are important, and you have to play them honestly and seriously in this business. Clausewitz' battlefield enemy Napoleon not only agreed with his adversary, he made the same point of ethics in even more vivid terms. Napoleon said: "In war, the moral is to the physical as three is to one."

I'm going to concentrate on a *major* mind game today: Stoicism. Its seeds were planted in fourth century (B.C.) Athens, as a backlash against Plato's preoccupation with inuring everybody to the perfect society. Diogenes of Sinope, a friend of both Aristotle and Alexander the Great, (they all knew each other and all died within a two-year period), struck out on *his* campaign, not to conquer the East as did Alexander, not to stamp out ignorance as did Aristotle, but to do something about *man's* condition as a cowed citizen of a city state, without anything to believe in that could defuse the inner *fears and desires* which continually obsessed him. Man had to take command of his *inner self*, control himself. *The Stoic goal was not the good society, but the good man!*

And a lot of movements sprang up, mainly in the East, after the premature crumbling of Alexander the Great's empire in Asia after his early death; dozens of cults designed to improve men's *souls* organized themselves and headed West from Athens—among others Epicureans, of course the Stoics, and finally, almost bringing up the rear, the Christians.

To get my message today, you have only to have a general understanding of the message of one man: the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, *the* outstanding pagan moralist of the Roman Empire. I'll do my best to give you that understanding in a couple of 50-minute talks with a break in between. And for the remaining time, mainly through questions and answers, we'll discuss the worthiness of what I'll call Epictetus's "*Code of Conduct*" to be part of us as warriors. Code of Conduct? You thought Stoicism was a whole philosophy with a certain cosmology, a unique logic, a physics, a theory of knowledge, and all the rest? If so, you are right, it has all the accoutrements of a philosophy; it's just that Old Man Epictetus ignored everything about it except what it had to say about personal *conduct*, how the good *man* should *think*, and *behave*. "What do I care," Epictetus asked, "whether all existing things are composed of atoms, or of indivisibles, or of fire and earth? Is it not enough to learn the true nature of the *good and the evil*?"

The first principle of Stoicism is to live in harmony with nature—human nature and physical nature. My geneticist friend at Harvard, E. O. Wilson, tells me that the difference between men and animals is not reason, but human nature. Human nature is mostly genetically driven passions, passions designed to give us the capacity to survive and reproduce. It was David Hume who said, “Reason not only *is* but *ought to be* the slave of passions.” *Physical* nature, the other half, is the physical universe and all its interactions. To the Stoic, physical nature is God’s body. Have a look at yourself and see where you fit into the natural scheme of things. And play the part well.

Epictetus was impatient with unmanliness and loose living. He had a sarcasm that stripped affection bare. He had a fiery earnestness, which robbed his rude strokes of their cruelty. His message: “A man must think hard and live simply to do well.”

I met old Epictetus back in graduate school in 1962. It was my great luck; in fact, it was a fluke that put us together. My favorite (philosophy) professor gave me one of Epictetus’s books as a farewell present as I left to go back to sea. He had never mentioned him in class. Phil Rhineland just thought Epictetus and I would make a good pair, and he was certainly right. I had never heard of Epictetus; in fact, today his name recognition is in about the third tier of philosophers. But his mind is *first tier*.

Everything I know about Epictetus I’ve developed *myself* over the years. It’s been a one-on-one relationship. He’s been in combat with me, leg irons with me, spent month-long stretches in blindfolds with me, has been in the ropes with me, has taught me that my *true business* is maintaining control over my moral purpose, in fact that my moral purpose *is* who I am. He taught me that I am totally responsible for everything I do and say; and that it is *I* who decides on and controls my own destruction and own deliverance. Not even God will intercede if He sees me throwing my life away. He wants me to be autonomous. He put *me* in charge of *me*. “It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll. I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

Don’t be disturbed about my occasional references to the way the Stoics see God. He’s the closest thing to the Christian God there is, according to Paul Tillich, a renowned Protestant theologian. Epictetus had heard of Christians, but he never knew any, nor were the Christians and the Stoics in competition in his lifetime. It was not until the latter part of the second century A.D. that a coherent Christian creed was beginning to emerge. Before that, nobody could state a cause *for* Christianity that would be intelligible to the pagan intellectual. The Stoics practiced a monotheistic religion from which Christianity borrowed much—the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man were well-established Stoic concepts before Christ was born; the Holy Ghost was a Stoic idea before Christ was born.

A quick thumbnail sketch of Epictetus's life goes like this: He was born to a Greek-speaking slave woman in a little town in Asia Minor, up in the hills behind Ephesus about a hundred miles. At the time he was born, 50 A.D., that part of the world was a Roman colony with garrisoned troops. His mother's town, Hieopolos, was then and still is renowned for its natural hot springs and baths, and I think of it as probably an R and R spot for Roman troops. (I've visited there, of course.) Born to a slave, Epictetus was automatically a slave; he had a tough life. Crippled by a cruel master, he had a bad leg just like mine—left leg at the knee. When he was about 15, he was chained up and carried away in a slave caravan bound for Rome. He was bought at auction by a former slave, a "freedman" named Epaphroditus, secretary to the Emperor of Rome, the young (27-year-old) squirt Nero. Nero was bad and getting worse by the time young Epictetus moved into the Roman "White House." By the time Nero was 30, he had killed his half brother, his first wife, second wife, and mother. And he was letting the Empire run itself. The Roman Senate declared him a public enemy, and Epaphroditus was at Nero's side as the army was breaking down the door to arrest the Emperor. Nero tried to cut his own throat, muffed it, and Epaphroditus finished the job. Epaphroditus forever thereafter lived under a cloud, and Epictetus just took to the streets of Rome. A high-minded, intelligent, Greek-speaking, young man, he started attending philosophy lectures given in the public parks. And in those days in Rome, "philosophy" was synonymous with Stoicism.

The turning point in his life was his adoption by Musonius Rufus, the very best teacher of philosophy in first-century Rome. Though Epictetus was still technically a slave, Rufus, an Etruscan knight, took him as a student. Rufus was as fluent in Greek as he was in Latin, and he and Epictetus got on well. In one passage, Epictetus tells of his tutor's mastery of seminar instruction: "Rufus spoke in such a way that each of us, as we sat there, fancied someone had gone to him and told him of our faults; so effective was his grasp of what men actually do and think. So vividly did he set before each man's eyes his particular weakness."

Epictetus's tutelage ran on for at least 10 years, and then Rufus launched him on a career as a bonafide philosopher of Rome. Epictetus, like all philosophers in Rome, was exiled by Emperor Domitian in the year 89 A.D., and he picked out a little town of Nicopolis (where I've also been), on the Adriatic coast of Greece, as a place to found a school. My favorite authorities set the date of his death at 138 A.D., at age 88. I've come across nothing about his "retirement," so I think of him as starting his school in about 90 A. D. at age 40, and teaching there for another 40 or 50 years. This little book like the one I got from my professor in 1962 is called *The Enchiridion*, meaning in Greek "ready at hand." It is only selected excerpts from eight volumes of Epictetus's lectures and conversations given, we think, in the year 108 A.D. He was talking to basically rich, young men from formidable families, mostly from

Athens and Rome. It was the Socrates scene all over again, 500 years later—the same students, same age, mid-20s, the same type of dialogue.

Epictetus, a bachelor until his very late years when he took a wife his age to help him care for an infant he rescued from death by “exposure,” was a “natural,” extraordinarily gifted teacher. He was gregarious—never missed the Olympic games which were conducted only about 50 miles from his school. He talks about the Olympics of those years in *Enchiridion* [29]:

In every affair, consider what precedes and what follows, and then undertake it. Otherwise you will begin with spirit, indeed, careless of the consequences, and when these are developed, you will shamefully desist. I would conquer at the Olympic Games. But consider what precedes and what follows, and then, if it be for your advantage, engage in the affair. You must conform to rules, submit to a diet, refrain from dainties; exercise your body, whether you choose it or not, at a stated hour, in heat and cold; you must drink no cold water, and sometimes no wine. In a word, you must give yourself up to your trainer as to a physician. Then, in the combat, you may be thrown into a ditch, dislocate your arm, turn your ankle, swallow an abundance of dust, receive stripes [for negligence], and after all, lose the victory. When you have reckoned up all this, if your inclination still holds, set about the combat.

The religious possibilities of Stoicism were developed further by Epictetus than by any of his Stoic predecessors over the previous 400 years. But his manner of speaking was *not* that of a prissy moralist. He often phrased his pithy remarks in the athletic metaphor: “Difficulties are what show men’s character. Therefore when a difficult crisis meets you, remember that you are as the raw youth, with whom God-the-trainer is wrestling.” And in a prayer to God, he uses the military metaphor: “If Thou sendest me to a place where men have no means of living in accordance with nature, I shall depart this life, not in disobedience to Thee, but as though Thou were *sounding for me the recall*.” The Stoics accepted suicide, under certain conditions.

And he was funny. Funny, even as he played the part of shock psychologist! He asks and answers the question: What do you do for friends as you ascend the ladder of intellectual sophistication? Do you hang in with your old pals, or concentrate on intellectual peers? “If you do not drink with old friends as you used to drink with them, you cannot be loved by them as much. So choose whether you want to be a boozer and likeable to them, or sober and not likeable.” Then he makes it clear that in *his* mind, satisfaction and self-respect are best served by escalating friendships apace with your education. “But if that does not please you, turn about the whole of you, to the opposite; become one of the addicts to unnatural vice, one of the adulterers, and act in corresponding fashion. Yes, and jump up and shout your applause to the dancer!”

To the painfully shy and reticent student

As the good chorus singers do not render solos, but sing perfectly well with a number of other voices, so some men cannot walk around by themselves. Man, if you are anybody, both walk around by yourself, and talk to yourself, and don't hide yourself in the chorus. Let yourself be laughed at sometimes, look about you, shake yourself up, so as to at least find out who you actually are!

Now neither these eight volumes of Epictetus "lectures," hallway talk, and private conversations, *nor* their "executive summary," *The Enchiridion*, were compiled by Epictetus. He couldn't have cared less about being in print. They were taken down in some kind of frantic shorthand by a 23-year-old student, a remarkable man, Flavius Arrianus, usually known as just Arrian. He was an aristocratic Greek born in a Black Sea province of Asia Minor. You can't help but imagine what it took for him to improvise this shorthand and follow the old man around and take down all that material. After getting a load of Epictetus and his "living" speech, he must have said something like: "Wow, we've got to get this guy down on papyrus!" In his dedication of his final manuscript to a friend, he writes: "Whatever I heard him say, I used to write down, word for word, as best I could, endeavouring to preserve it as a memorial, for my own future use, of his way of thinking and the frankness of his speech. Let those who read these words be assured of this: that when Epictetus *spoke* them, the hearer could not help but feel exactly what Epictetus *wanted* him to feel."

That is the mark of a good teacher!

Arrian was a writer throughout his life. His last and largest book was his definitive text on Alexander the Great's expedition to the east: *The Anabasis of Alexander*. Some time after his death, four of his eight volumes of Epictetus disappeared. During the Middle Ages the four remaining were bound under the title Epictetus's *Discourses*. As I said, *The Enchiridion* was tidbits from all eight volumes, so you'll find things in *The Enchiridion* that are not in *Discourses*.

History gives us snapshots of Arrian's other activities in his illustrious career. After leaving Epictetus's school, and a term as a successful Roman army officer, we find him lecturing in Athens in about 120 A.D., and there meeting Roman Emperor Hadrian, who was about to start a five-year tour of the Empire following his investiture in 117 A.D. Epictetus figured into two fallouts of Arrian's presence in Athens in the years following. Hadrian, in 130 A.D., appointed Arrian consul for a year, followed by six years as governor of the large province of Cappadocia in Asia Minor. Arrian introduced Epictetus to Emperor Hadrian and they became lifetime friends. Secondly, when Arrian vacated his lectureship in Athens for politics, he was relieved by a Q. Janius

Rusticus, who later became the tutor to the young Marcus Aurelius. Later, in his book *Meditations*, a book on Stoicism, Emperor Marcus Aurelius acknowledged his debt to Epictetus for the wisdom he gained from studying his eight volumes as a youth. (Rusticus had some copies Arrian left him and gave one to his student, young Aurelius.)

So this slave boy who became a schoolmaster, gained fame as a respected scholar in the highest circles of the only superpower of the ancient world. And those were important years in world history. They are the years the English historian Edward Gibbon was talking about in the famous statement in his book, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: “If a man were called upon to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation name that which elapsed from the accession of Nerva to the death of Marcus Aurelius.” That comes to a period of 84 years, from 96 A.D. to 180 A.D. “Their united reigns are possibly the only period in history in which the happiness of a great people was the sole object of government.”

The eminent old philosopher Will Durant, in the volume named “Caesar and Christ” in his *History of Civilization* series, calls the five emperors spanning the era that Gibbon admired, “the philosopher kings.” All were Stoics or had strong Stoic sympathies: Nerva pardoned exiled Stoics of the Domitian reign. Trajan had a Stoic tutor in his quarters. Hadrian was Epictetus’s close friend. Antonius Pius, a “product of the Stoic school,” insisted that in Roman law courts, Stoic legal principles be followed, i.e. that (1) in all cases of doubt, judgments be resolved in favor of the accused, and (2) a man should be held innocent until proven guilty. And the last of the philosopher kings, Marcus Aurelius, probably the finest of all Roman Emperors, secretly wrote his Stoic *Meditations* by candlelight in his tent perched on one or another of the mountainsides of Germany, where for the last 12 years of his life he was in the field as Commanding General of the Roman armies, continually engaged in defending the northern frontiers of the Empire against tribal attacks.

The Roman Stoic was more a man of action than contemplation, but listen to the paragraph of old soldier Aurelius on how to die: “Pass this little space of time—your lifetime—comfortably, with nature, and end thy journey in contentment, like the ripe olive that falls, praising the earth that gave birth to it, and thanking the tree that made it grow.”

On the question of afterlife, Marcus Aurelius took up and emphasized the teaching of Epictetus. They alone, among Stoics, were very careful in what they said about death. There was no proof of afterlife, and rather than possibly mislead people, they refrained from the more ample language of their predecessors. Matthew Arnold described Marcus Aurelius as “perhaps, the most beautiful figure in history.”

The five Stoic philosopher kings were the sort of men you would want to have as Marine Corps Commandants. A few notes from my history books: The second of the five, Trajan, was Commanding General of the Roman army in Cologne when he was notified that Emperor Galba had died, and that *his* number was up. He was Emperor for 19 years, and throughout, habitually wore his army uniform. Tall and robust, he was wont to march on foot with his troops and ford, with full kit, the hundreds of rivers they crossed.

Let me tell you about that five-year trip his successor, Emperor/General Hadrian, took after meeting Arrian in Athens. Accompanied by experts, architects, builders, and engineers, he had left Rome in 121 A.D. to inspect defenses in Germany. He lived the life of his soldiers, eating their fare, never using a vehicle, walking with full military equipment 20 miles at a time. The Roman army was never in better condition than in his reign. He traveled the Rhine to its mouth, sailed to Britain, ordered the building of a wall from Solway Firth to the mouth of the Tyne “to divide the barbarians [Scots] from the Romans [in England]”—“Hadrian’s Wall.” Back to Gaul, then to Spain, then down into Northwest Africa where he led some garrisoned Roman Legions against Moors who had been raiding the Roman towns of Mauretania. That finished, he boarded one of his Mediterranean warships and went to Ephesus, went up and inspected the ports of the Black Sea, back down to Rhodes, and still curious at 50, stopped in Sicily and climbed Mt. Etna to see the sunrise from a perch 11,000 feet above *his* Mediterranean Sea.

* * * * *

The time interval between my finishing graduate school and becoming a prisoner was almost exactly three years, September 1962 to September 1965. That was a very eventful period in my life. I started a war (led the first-ever American bombing raid on North Vietnam), led good men in about 150 aerial combat missions in flak, and throughout three 7-month cruises to Vietnam I had not only the *Enchiridion*, but the *Discourses* on my bedside table on each of the three aircraft carriers I flew from. And I read them.

On the 9th of September 1965, I flew right into a flak trap, at tree-top level, 500 knots, in a little A-4 airplane—cockpit walls not even three feet apart—which I couldn’t steer after it was on fire, control system shot out. After ejection I had about 30 seconds to make my last statement in freedom before I landed on the main street of that little village right ahead. And so help me, I whispered to myself: “Five years down there at least. I’m leaving the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus.”

I want to step off the chronology escalator for just a minute and explain what memories of the *Enchiridion* and *Discourses* I did have “ready at hand” when I ejected from that plane. What I had in hand was the understanding that the Stoic, particularly the disciple of Epictetus who developed this

accounting, always keeps separate files in his mind for: (a) those things which are “up to him” and (b) those things which are “not up to him;” or another way of saying it, (a) those things which are “within his power” and (b) those things which are “beyond his power;” or still another way of saying it: (a) those things which are within the grasp of “his will, his free will,” and (b) those things which are beyond it. Among the relatively few things that are “up to me, within my power,” within my will, are my opinions, my aims, my aversions, my own grief, my own joy, my moral purpose or will, my attitude toward what is going on, my own good, and my own evil. Please note: All these things, as are all things of real importance to the Stoic, are matters that apply *principally* to your “*inner self*,” where you *live*.

Now I’m talking like a preacher here for a bit. Please understand that I’m not trying to *sell* anything; it’s just the most efficient way to explain it. Stoicism is one of those things that, when described analytically, sounds horrible to some modern people. Stoic scholars agree that to describe it effectively, the teacher must “become, for the time being at least,” a Stoic.

For instance, to give you a better feel for why “your own good and your own evil” are on the list, I want to quote Alexander Solzhenitsyn from his book *Gulag Archipelago*, when he talks about that point in prison when he gets his act together, realizes his residual powers, and starts what I know as “ascending,” riding the updrafts of occasional euphoria as you realize you are getting to know yourself and the world for the first time.

It was only when I lay there on the rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of *good*. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not between states nor between social classes nor between political parties, but right through every human heart, through all human hearts. And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me, bless you, prison, for having been a part of my life.

I *understand* that. He learned, as I and many others have learned, that good and evil are not just abstractions that you kick around and give lectures about, and attribute to this person and that. The only good or evil that mean anything are right in your own heart: within your will, within your power, where it’s up to you. What the Stoics say is: “You take care of that, and you’ll have your hands full.”

What is not up to you? Beyond your power? Not subject to your will in the last instance? For starters, let’s take “your station in life.” As I glide down toward that little town on my short parachute ride, I’m just about to learn how negligible *is* my control over my station in life. It’s not at all up to me. Of course I’m going right now from being the Wing Commander, in charge of a thousand people (pilots, crewmen, maintenance men), responsible

for nearly a hundred airplanes, and beneficiary of goodness knows all sorts of symbolic status and goodwill, to being an object of contempt. “Criminal,” I’ll be known as. But that’s not *half* the revelation that is the realization of your own *fragility*, that you can be reduced by the natural elements, or men, to a helpless, sobbing wreck—unable to control even your own bowels—in a matter of minutes. And more than that even, you’re going to face fragilities you never before let yourself believe could be true. Like after mere minutes, in a flurry of action while being knocked down and then sat up to be bound with tourniquet-tight ropes, with care, by a professional, hands cuffed behind, jack-knifed forward, head pushed down between your ankles held secure in lugs attached to a heavy iron bar, that with the onrush of anxiety, knowing your upper-body blood circulation has been stopped, and feeling the ever-growing pain and the ever-closing-in of claustrophobia as the man standing on your back gives your head one last shove down with his heel and you start to gasp and vomit, that you can be made to blurt out answers, probably correct answers, to questions about anything they know you know. I’m not going to pull you through that explanation again. I’ll just call it “taking the ropes.”

No, “station in life” can be changed from that of a dignified and competent gentleman of culture to that of a panic-stricken, sobbing, self-loathing wreck, maybe a *permanent* wreck if you have no *will*, in less than an hour. So what? So after you work a lifetime to get yourself all set up, and then delude yourself into thinking that you have some kind of ownership claim on your station in life, you’re riding for a fall. You’re asking for disappointment. To avoid that, stop kidding yourself, just do the best you can on a common-sense basis to make your station in life what you want it to be, but never get *hooked* on it. Make sure in your heart of hearts, in your inner self, that you treat your station in life with *indifference*. Not with contempt, only with indifference.

And so on to a long list of things which some unreflective people assume they’re assured of controlling to the last instance—your reputation, for example. Do what you will, it’s at least as fickle as your station in life. *Others* decide what your reputation is. Try to make it as good as possible, but *again*, don’t get *hooked* on it. In your heart, when you get out the key and open up that old roll-top desk where you really keep your stuff, don’t let “reputation” get mixed up with what’s within your *moral purpose*, what’s within the power of your *will*, in other words, what’s up to *you*. Make sure it’s in the bottom drawer, filed under “matters of indifference.” And so too with your *health*, your *wealth*, your *pleasure*, your *pain*, your *fame*, your *disrepute*, your *life*, and your *death*. They are all *externals*, all outside your control in the last instance, all outside the power of where you really live. And where you really live is confined to the regime of your moral purpose, confined to matters that can be projected by your acts of will—like desires, aims, aversions, judgments, attitudes, and of course, your good and your evil. For a Stoic, the moral purpose, the will, is the only repository of things of absolute value. Whether they are projected wisely or foolishly, for good or for evil, is up to

you. When his will is set on the right course, a man becomes good; when it's on a foul course, he becomes evil. With the right course comes good luck and happiness, and with the foul course, bad luck and misery.

To a Stoic, bad luck is your fault; you've become *addicted to externals*. Epictetus: "What are tragedies, but the portrayal in tragic verse of the sufferings of men who have admired things external?" Not even God will intercede in your decisions. Epictetus:

God gives you attributes, like magnanimity, courage, and endurance, to enable you to bear whatever happens. These are given free of all restraint, compulsion, or hindrance; He has put the whole matter under your control without reserving even for Himself any power to prevent or hinder.

As I have said, your deliverance and your destruction are 100 percent *up to you*.

I know the difficulties of gulping all this down right away. You keep thinking of practical problems. Everybody has to play the game of life. You can't just walk around saying: "I don't care about my health, or wealth, or my reputation, or whether I'm sent to prison or not." Epictetus was a great teacher because he could draw a word picture that cleared up the way to look at what he was talking about.

In this case, Epictetus said everybody should play the game of life—that the best play it with "skill, form, speed and grace." But like most games, you play it with a ball. Your team devotes all its energies to getting the ball across the line. But after the game, what do you do with the ball? Nobody much cares. It's not worth anything. The competition, the game, was the thing. You play the game with care, making sure you are never making the external a part of yourself, but merely lavishing your skill in regard to it. The ball was just "used" to make the game possible, so just roll it under the porch and forget it, let it wait for the next game. Most important of all, just don't *covet* it, don't *seek* it, don't *set your heart* on it. It is this latter route that makes externals dangerous, makes them the route to slavery. First you covet or abhor "things," and then along comes he who can confer or remove them. I quote *Enchiridion (The Little Book)* 14: "A man's master is he who is able to confer or remove whatever that man seeks or shuns. Whoever then would be free, let him wish nothing, let him decline nothing, which depends on others, else he must necessarily become a slave." *Discourses* 1/121: "Who is your master? He who has authority over any of the things upon which you have set your heart." These last quotations constitute the real core of what a person needs in order to understand the POW situation.

So I took those core thoughts into prison. I also remembered a lot of attitude-shaping remarks from the *Enchiridion* on how not to kid yourself into

thinking that you can somehow stand aloof, be an “observer of the passing scene,” aloof from the prisoner underground organization. *Enchiridion* 17:

Remember that you are an actor in a drama of such sort as the Author chooses: if short, then in a short one; if long, then in a long one. If it be His pleasure that you should enact a poor man, or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen, see that you act it well. For this is your business, to act well the given part. But to choose it belongs to Another.

The capital A's on Author and Another are Stoic code markings for “another name for God.” Our minds are part of the Divine Mind of God; it is like a flame, and individual consciousnesses are sparks in it. Conversely, we are fragments of God; each one of us has within us a part of Him. We're part of God and he's part of us.

Another attitude-shaping remark: When in tight straits, you should stifle what's in you of that Student Body President personality, of give-and-take, openness, being responsive, offering counter-options rather than outright refusal to go along. We called people who acted like student body presidents “players” in prison, and tried to prevent them from digging their own graves. *Enchiridion* 28: “If a person had delivered up your body to some passer-by, you would certainly be angry. And do you feel no shame in delivering up your own mind to any reviler?”

All that, over those three years (between graduate school and being shot down), I had put away for the future. Right now, and I'm back on chronology, it's very *quiet* in a parachute, and I can hear the rifle shots down below and can match them up with bullet rips occurring in the parachute canopy above me. Then I can hear the noontime shouting and see the fists waving in the town as my chute hooks a tree but deposits me on a main street in good shape. With two quick-release fastener flips, I'm free of the chute, and immediately gang-tackled by the 10 or 15 town roughnecks I had seen in my peripheral vision, pounding up the street from my right. It felt to me like the quarterback sack of the century. I don't want to make a big thing of this, nor indicate that I was surprised at my reception, but by the time the tackling and pummeling and twisting and wrenching were over, and it lasted for three or more minutes before the guy in the pith helmet got there to blow his whistle, I had a very badly broken leg that I felt sure would be with me for life. And that hunch turned out to be right. And I'll have to say that I felt only minor relief when I hazily recalled crippled Epictetus's admonition in *Enchiridion* 9: “Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to the *will*; and say this to yourself with regard to everything that happens. For you will find it to be an impediment to something else, but not truly to *yourself*.”

As an insider, I knew that whole setup on POWs: that the North Vietnamese already held about 30 prisoners in that early September 1965, probably up in Hanoi; that I was the only Wing Commander, Navy or Air Force, to survive an ejection; and that I would be their senior, their Commanding Officer, and would remain so, very likely, throughout this war, which I felt sure would last at least five years. And here I was starting off crippled and flat on my back.

Well, Epictetus turned out to be right. After a crude operation just to get my knee locked and splayed leg under me, I was on crutches within a couple of months. And the crooked leg, healing itself, was strong enough to hold me up without crutches in a few more. I took command (clandestinely, of course) of the by-then 75 pilots—due to grow to 466 over the 7½ years—determined “to play well the given part.”

* * * *

I’ll drop the prison chronology right there, and concentrate on bringing to light as many more interesting wrinkles of Epictetus and his Stoicism as time will allow.

I would like to say straight off that I have read through and studied the *Discourses*, at least 10 times, to say nothing of my many excursions into the *Enchiridion*, and I have never found a single inconsistency in Epictetus’s code of tenets. It is a put-together package, free of contradictions. The old boy may or may not appeal to you, but if he turns you off, don’t blame it on incoherence; Epictetus has no problem with logic.

I think more needs to be said about good and evil. After all, *the Stoic is indifferent to everything but good and evil*. In Stoic thought, our good and our evil come from the same locus. “Vice and virtue reside in the will alone.” “The essence of good and evil lies in an attitude of the will.” Solzhenitsyn locates it in the heart, and Epictetus would buy that, or *will*, or *moral purpose*, or *character*, or *soul*, he’s not a nitpicker about things like that. What he bears down on is that your good and your evil are the essence of *you*. You *are* moral purpose. You *are* rational will. You are not hair, you are not skin, you are moral purpose—get that beautiful, and you will be beautiful.

That was revealed to Solzhenitsyn when he felt within himself the first stirrings of good. And in that chapter, the old Russian elaborated other truths about good and evil. Not only does the line separating them *not* pass between political or cultural or ethnic groupings, but right through every human heart, through *all* human hearts, he adds that for any individual over the years, this separation line within the heart shifts, oscillates somewhat. That even in hearts *overwhelmed* by evil, one small bridgehead to *good* is retained. And even in the *best* of all hearts, there remains an *un-uprooted* small corner of evil. There is some good and some evil in all of us, and that’s Stoic doctrine.

In that same chapter, Solzhenitsyn comments: “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

I just want you to know that I connect with that. In a crucible like a torture prison, you reflect, you silently study what makes those about you tick. Once I had taken the measure of my torture guard, watched his eyes as he worked, watched him move, *felt* him move as he stood on my slumped-over back and cinched up the ropes pulling my shoulders together, I came to know that there was good in him. That was ironic because when he first came in with the new commissar when torture was instigated after I got there, I had nicknamed him “Pigeye” because of the total vacancy of the stare of the one eye he presented as he peeked through cell door peepholes. He was my age, balding and wiry, quick, lithe and strong, like an athletic trainer. He was totally emotionless, thus his emotionless eyes. He had almost no English-language capability, just motions and grunts. Under orders, he put me through the ropes 15 times over the years, and rebroke my bad leg once, I feel sure inadvertently. It was a court martial scene and he was having to give me the ropes before a board of North Vietnamese officers. The officers sat at a long table before Pigeye and me, and behind us was a semi-circle of soldiers bearing rifles with fixed bayonets at a kind of “dangle” position, the bayonet pointing at the cement floor ahead of them. This was in the “knobby” torture room of “New Guy Village” at Hoa Lo prison in August 1967—so-called because the walls had been crudely speckled with blobs of cement the size of an ice cream scoop in a “soundproofing” attempt. I could tell Pigeye was nervous because of these officers whom I had never seen before, and I don’t think he had, and he pressed me flat over my bad leg instead of the good one he had always put the tension on before. The healing knee cartilage gave way with a loud “pop,” and the officers looked at each other and then got up and left. I couldn’t get off that floor and onto my feet for nearly two months.

In all those years, we probably had no more than 24 hours, one-on-one together. But neither of us ever broke the code of an unvaryingly strict “line of duty” relationship. He never tricked me, always played it straight, and I begged no mercy. I admired that in him, and I could tell he did in me. And when people say: “He was a torturer, didn’t you *hate* him?” I say, like Solzhenitsyn, to the astonishment of those about me, “No, he was a good soldier, never overstepped his line of duty.”

By that time, I had learned that *fear* and *guilt* are the real pincers that break men’s wills. I would chant under my breath as I was marched to interrogation, knowing that I must refuse to comply, and take the ropes: “Your eyes must show no fear; they must show no guilt.” The North Vietnamese had learned never to take a prisoner “downtown”—to the payoff for what our

whole treatment regime was about—public propaganda exploitation—unless he was truly intimidated, unless they were *sure* he felt *fear*. Their threats had no meaning unless you felt *fear*. They had suffered the political damage of several, including myself, who had acted up, spoken up, and blurted out the truth to the hand-picked audience of foreigners at the press conference. Book IV of *Discourses*: “When a man who has set his will neither on dying nor upon living at any cost, comes into the presence of the tyrant, what is there to prevent him from being without fear? Nothing.”

Fear is an *emotion*, and controlling your emotions can be *empowering*.

I think I have mentioned all the things that the Stoics thought were truly “in our power,” within the realm of our moral purpose, under the control of our free will, save one category. It requires a little different thinking, so I’ve saved it for last. I have introduced it already, in part. The Stoics believed that all human *emotions* are acts of will. You’re happy because you want to be happy, you’re drained or sad when you want to be sad, and fear is *not* something that danger forces on you. When you find yourself afraid, it’s time to realize that you decided, wanted, willed that you fear. As I said above, without your having fear, nobody can meaningfully threaten you. In *Discourses*, there is a dialogue something like this, and it was like old home week to me:

When questioned, I had to give him our escape plans; he threatened me with death; I was compelled, I had no choice. . . .That’s not right; you had a choice and you made it. It may have been justified, I won’t judge that for now. But be honest with yourself. Don’t say you had to do *anything* just because you are threatened with death. You simply decided it was better to comply. It was *your will* that compelled you. *Refuse to want to fear and you start acquiring a constancy of character that makes it impossible for another to do you wrong.* Threats have no effect unless you *fear*.

Epictetus says: “Will you then realize that this *epitome* of all the ills that befall man, of his ignoble spirit, of his cowardice, is *not death*, but rather his *fear of death*?”

As I said, learning to take charge of your emotions is *empowering*. When you get there, *Enchiridion* 30 applies: “No one can harm you without your permission.” And by “harm” Epictetus means, as Stoics always mean, harming your inner self, your self-respect, and your obligation to be faithful. He can break your arm or your leg, but not to worry. They’ll heal.

What are some of the guidelines to identifying the good and the evil in Stoic thought?

Well, first, Stoicism goes back to the idea that nature is God's body, and that it doesn't do to try to improve on it. In fact, God and Nature are two aspects of the same thing. God's Soul is the Mind of the universe, and Nature is his body. Just as the Mind is the active, and Nature is the passive, so our minds are active and our bodies passive. Mind over matter; it all happens in your head, so don't worry about your body. The perfect man models himself on this operation of the universe. Nothing is ever lost. All remains in the care of Providence. Just as the universe, in which the Mind of God is imminent and indwelling and moves in a manner self-sufficient and self-ruling, *so the good man is independent, autonomous, a law unto himself, and a follower of the eternal guidance of duty and conscience.*

This is called the coherence of Stoicism, and Cicero used this as the basis of his founding of Natural Law and International Law. "True law is right reason in agreement with nature."

The Stoics were good citizens. In politics the Stoic would love his country and hold himself ready to die at any time to avert *its* disgrace or *his own*. But a man's conscience was to be higher than *any* law. A man has a right to be responsible, self-ruling, autonomous.

So on good and evil, where does that leave us? Nothing that is natural can be evil. Death cannot be evil. Disease cannot be evil. Natural disasters cannot be evil. Nothing *inevitable* can be evil. The universe as a whole is perfect, and everything in it has a place in the overall design. Inevitability is produced by the workings of this mechanism. Events do not happen by chance, they arrive by appointment. There is a cause for everything, and "chance" is simply a name for undiscovered causes.

Neither good nor evil can be abstractions. Epictetus said: "Where do I look for the good and the evil? *Within me*, in that which is my own." But for that which is another's *never* employ the words "good" or "evil," or anything of the sort. Goods and evils can *never* be things others *do to you*, or *for you*.

Why not make health or life be good? Because *man deserves the good*, and it's better that he not "deserve" anything he does not control; otherwise, he will go after what is not his, and this is the start of crime, wars, you name it.

Another thing. You do not control God. You must not refer to Him as "good" or "evil." Why not? If you pin these mundane terms on Him, reciting "God is good," people may become tempted, when things God controls run counter to what they're trying to do—weather being unfavorable for farmers or the wind being from the wrong direction for sailors—to start calling Him evil, too. And that's impious. Remember, says Epictetus: "Piety must be preserved. Unless piety and self-interest be conjoined, piety cannot be maintained in any man."

Now [let me close with] some other things that follow from the assumptions of Stoicism that you might not have thought of. The Stoics say that the invincible man is he who cannot be dismayed by any happening outside of his span of control, outside his will, his moral purpose. Does this sound irresponsible to you? Here you have a man who pays no attention as the world blows up around him, so long as he had no part in causing it.

The answer to that depends on whether or not you believe in collective guilt. The Stoics do not. Here is what *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* says about collective guilt:

If guilt, in the proper sense, turns on deliberate wrongdoing, it seems that no one can be guilty for the act of another person—there can be no shared or collective or universal guilt. Guilt is incurred by the free choice of the individual. . . . But many have questioned this. Among them are some sociologists who misrepresent in this way the dependence of the individual on society. But the main location of the idea of collective guilt is religion—many forms of doctrines of original sin and universal sin regard guilt as a pervasive state of mankind as a whole.

Speaking for myself, I think of collective guilt as a manipulative tool. It reminds me of the communist “criticism/self-criticism” technique. Many of the precepts of the Stoics depend on an abhorrence of the concept of collective guilt.

The Stoics believe that every man bears the exclusive responsibility *himself* for his own good and his own evil—and that leads to their further conclusion that *it is impossible to imagine a moral order in which one person does the wrong, and another, the innocent, suffers*. Now add all that to Epictetus’s firm belief that we are all born with an *innate* conception of good and evil, and what is noble and what is shameful, what is becoming and unbecoming, what is fitting and inappropriate, what is right to do and what is wrong, and further, remembering that all Stoic talk refers to the inner man, what is going on “way down in here.” It follows that the perpetrator of evil pays the full price for his misdeed in suffering the injury of knowing that he has destroyed the good man with him. Man has “moral sense,” and he reaps the benefits and pays the price for this inheritance.

This self-knowledge that you have betrayed yourself, destroyed yourself, is the very worst harm that can befall a Stoic. Epictetus says:

- “No one comes to his fall because of another’s deed.”
- “No one is evil without loss or damage.”
- “No man can do wrong with impunity.”

I call this whole personal guilt package that Epictetus relied upon, “the reliability of the retribution of the guilty conscience.” As I sometimes say, “There can be no such thing as a ‘victim;’ you can only be a ‘victim’ of yourself.” Remember:

- Controlling your emotions can be empowering.
- Your inner self is what you make it.
- Refuse to want to fear, and you start acquiring a constancy of character that makes it impossible for another to do you wrong.

Somebody asked Epictetus: “What is the fruit of all these doctrines?” He answered with three sharp words: “Tranquility, Fearlessness, and Freedom.”

Thank you.