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Reflective Exercise

Coming into my first Philosophy lecture a little over four weeks ago I’m sure I would have difficulty answering a question regarding the nature of happiness. Among plenty of stammerings and half-baked ideas, I would’ve most likely answered with a false confidence along the lines of one's ability to live comfortably and according to one’s principles. I’d probably focus on the individualistic idea of happiness that allows someone to be fully in control of their own life. That the root of happiness lies deeply in a calm and quiet lifestyle, that is full of the removal of any activities or people that don’t contribute to my happiness. However, with my limited thinking on the keys to happiness, I’m sure I would contradict myself quite quickly. To some extent the idea of overcoming challenges both chosen and unchosen is itself deeply rewarding and part of necessary character growth. Self-directed happiness completely ignores the importance that others have on one's happiness. Without much thought, I probably would have debated myself in corners full of logical fallacies and disproven ideas. But overall you would’ve heard me describe a calm life, with little surprises and little challenges to my haven.

Of the classical philosophical conceptions of happiness, I saw connections with my original views in each of them. However, I found Stoicism as the most interesting and impactful on my views. Stoicism being the first Philosophy that is focused on reason and a self-attuned life indifferent to joy. That a good life can be obtained through proper judgment and human nature. That improper judgment is a route away from a good life. As a result, it is proper to have a rational outlook toward indifference. That we cannot let wild and ill-conceived actions come to light, especially anger at the moment which could hurt our virtue or standards. Stoics also have a comprehensive view of nature. That nature is a unified whole that connects and binds everything and everyone, it is also fixed by eternal laws that it adheres to strongly. Lastly, nature is sacred and a necessity, and the determining reason behind all things. Together Stoics realize that the interconnected systems of nature determine and act as sort of blueprints for everyday life acting as a guide. Just with every other Philosophy Stoicism is not without its problems. Such as with the idea of nature being a rationally ordered system, that in such a system how can we freely choose our actions? As well as animals in nature more often than not acting irrationally despite living in a perfectly rational and immutable system? Aside from its views of nature Stoicism also lacks a sensitivity that constantly checking one's emotions is unnatural and unhealthy when dealing with emotions such as grief. Despite these faults, Stoicism finds good answers for the many other faults that different philosophies fall into. Unlike Epicureanism and somewhat my pre-class views, people do not walk around indulging their every impulse to seek either pleasure or comfort. They most often act as reasonable and kind people simply accomplishing their tasks for that moment. Stotics also provide a solution towards Aristotle that a collection of good has no greater purpose in life. Where Stotics show that we are connected with nature and act in accordance with it. Stoicism jumped out to me the most as I have never heard anything like it, and it answers a primary philosophical concern of mine, that people aren’t constantly in search of immediate gratification. That a calm and rational mind most often prevails in today’s world.

Altogether this class has certainly offered me new perspectives to consider in life. My previous assumptions of a calm and quiet lifestyle, don’t hold a candle in comparison to the well-developed ideas of these great Greek philosophers. My philosophy is now in much broader terms due to each of the discussed philosophies. As each philosophy broke down my conceptions in some way but much more importantly built upon them in others. From Epicurus, a good life is a life of tranquility where the anxious fear of death should be avoided or even celebrated as a part of life. From Stotics a reasonable and rational mind sheltering any hot-head and poorly judged notations saving a great deal of pain. And finally, Aristotle, that we act towards the aim of some good. It seems my previous views towards happiness have been completely overturned in no particular direction except that I should be much less confident in my answer to the nature of happiness. It is important not to be stubborn, especially in fields I have not placed much thought into previously and even now that I have been thinking and reading about it only shows how much I can truly learn from others.