

## Emotion, Jesus, and the Stoic Sage 情感、耶穌與斯多葛派的聖人

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**關鍵詞：**耶穌、斯多葛派、情感、華爾費德、愛比克泰德、馬可·奧里略、斯多葛派聖人

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## Abstract

Stoicism was a dominant philosophical viewpoint in the Greco-Roman world for five hundred years. It appealed to the ideal of the sage who living according to nature achieves a condition of apathy and cleverly strategizes ways to live a life that avoids suffering. Christianity, which superseded stoicism in cultural influence, also appealed to a moral exemplar in the person of Jesus. This paper is a comparison of the emotional repertoires of these moral exemplars—the Stoic sage and Jesus (7-2 BCE-A.D.30-36). Although there is much in Christianity that is compatible with Stoic attitudes there are nevertheless, remarkable differences as well. For example, there are emotions that the Stoic sage would condemn that are attributed to Jesus, cultivation of others that stoics and epicureans would think unwise and there is a contrasting attitude toward suffering.

## 摘要

斯多葛派的哲學觀點曾在希臘羅馬的版圖中佔有五百年的優勢。它訴諸於一種聖人理想：依循自然生活，而達到一種冷漠的狀態，並巧妙地制定出避免痛苦的生活方式。在文化影響上取代斯多葛派的基督宗教，也在耶穌的身上，尋求一個道德模範。本文比較這些道德模範——斯多葛派聖人和耶穌——的情感組成成分。儘管基督宗教有許多和斯多葛派一致的看法，然而兩者間也存在值得注意的差異。例如：有些斯多葛聖人所譴責的情感被認為是耶穌的特質，斯多葛派和享樂主義者認為成就他人是不智之舉，兩者對痛苦的看法也有顯著差別。

Stoicism is a school of Greco-Roman philosophy that had a major influence on the philosophical and religious thought of Western culture for about 500 years, from its founding by Zeno of Citium (C.334-C.262 BCE) in about 300 BCE to the *Meditations* of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 111-180).<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly little of what the Stoics wrote has survived, but the main outlines of their philosophy of life can be sufficiently reconstructed from aphoristic writings of the former slave, Epictetus (A.D. 55-135), in the *Enchiridion*<sup>2</sup> and the *Meditations*<sup>3</sup> of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. These works are still popular even today and have provided advice, instruction and consolation to individuals such as Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale (1923-2005) while held as a prisoner of war in Vietnam (Epictetus) and the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Marcus Aurelius). *Meditations* is listed among United States President William Clinton's 21 favorite books at the Clinton Presidential Library. Even today, "stoic" is commonly used to describe a calm demeanor in the face of pain or adversity.

The Stoic appealed to the ideal of the sage who, living according to nature, achieves a condition of apathy or indifference to things beyond one's control and cleverly strategizes ways to live a life that minimizes suffering. Christianity was the cultural influence that ultimately eclipsed Stoic dominance in Europe. It, too, appealed to a moral exemplar as a model for living in the person of Jesus. And even though there is much in Christianity that is compatible with Stoic attitudes, there are remarkable differences as well. For example, there are emotions that the Stoic sage would condemn that are attributed to Jesus (7-2 BCE-A.D. 30-36),

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1 See Eduard Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 13th edition. Revised by Wilhelm Nestle, trans. by L. R. Palmer (1931; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1980), pp. 209, 271-272.

2 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, trans. by George Long (Previously published 1913, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991). The *Enchiridion* (or handbook) is actually just the notes that a student took of Epictetus's lectures. Other translated works can be found at *The Discourses of Epictetus; with the Enchiridion and Fragments* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1888). A digital version is available at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007679529>.

3 Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *The Meditations*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983).

cultivation of others that stoics and epicureans would think unwise, and there is a contrasting attitude toward suffering.

The aim of this paper will be to compare these two moral exemplars—Jesus and the Stoic sage—with respect to the differing emotional repertoires. The source of the comparison will be the Stoic philosophies found mostly in the *Enchiridion* and the *Meditations* on one hand and the emotions attributed to Jesus in the Gospels on the other. In considering this, I will be following the classic study by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921), "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord."<sup>4</sup> I hope to show that the emotions most frequently attributed to Jesus are incompatible with the ideal Stoic sage and that it leads to very different attitudes toward suffering.

### **Methodological Considerations: Agreement in Stoicism and Christianity on the Moral Assessment of Emotions and the Use of Moral Exemplars**

Some preliminaries. Both Christianity and stoicism believe that at least certain of our emotions are within our control. If this were not so, then to recommend or condemn them would not make sense. If we ought to feel, or not feel, *x*, we can, in some requisite sense, control our emotional life. Epicurus and Marcus contain direct admonitions such as: "Let not your laughter be much, nor on many occasions, nor excessive" (Epictetus, *Enchiridion* XXIII). But they also appeal to exemplars such as Socrates (C.369-499 BCE), Zeno of Citium or Heraclitus (C.535-C.475 BCE), an admired Presocratic philosopher, to make a point. For example, Epictetus says, death is not terrible, for if it were it would

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4 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord," in *Biblical and Theological Studies: A Commemoration of 100 Years of Princeton Seminary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), pp. 35-90. This work is also available on the internet at <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/emotionallife.html>.

have seemed so to Socrates (Epictetus, *Enchiridion* V); Or, when, meeting a powerful person you should ask what Socrates or Zeno would do (Epictetus, *Enchiridion* XXXIII).

In the case of Jesus, the case for approval of Jesus' emotional life is drawn from two considerations. The first is that Jesus is explicitly recommended as a moral exemplar in various places in the New Testament, (for example, Jesus himself at John 13:15 as well as Phil. 2:5, Cor. 11:1; I Peter 2:21 and I John 2:6) and the tradition of *Imitatio Christi* and as exemplified in spiritual classics such as Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), *The Imitation of Christ* and Charles Monroe Sheldon (1857-1946)'s 1897 classic *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* The second is that within orthodox Christianity Jesus is considered to be sinless and so any emotion attributed to him cannot be morally wrong. Both of these points are expressed in I Peter 2:21-23:

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.  
(NIV)

Warfield in his account of the emotions of Jesus restricts the attributions mainly to what we would call occurrent emotions. That is, ascriptions to emotions that are felt and accompanied by bodily sensations or gestures rather than just behaviors associated with emotions. In part, Warfield means to rule out emotions that might be inferred from behavior and looks to actual signs or attributions of an emotional state. Warfield is also rejecting what he calls the

apathetic theory. The idea behind this theory is that Jesus didn't really experience human emotions at all because it is presumed that this would have been incompatible with his divine nature. Warfield rejects this apathetic theory because it doesn't seem to be supported by Gospel narratives. And although the name, apathetic theory, suggests it may have something to do with stoicism, it doesn't. What motivates it is not admiration of the Stoic sage and the attempt to craft Jesus into that likeness. Rather, it is wrapped up in theological interpretations of the dual nature of Jesus that need not concern us.

## **The Emotions of Jesus: Two Basic Groups**

The emotions attributed to Jesus in the Gospel narratives are surprisingly few. The ones most frequently mentioned are of two related groups. The most frequent attribution of emotion to Jesus is compassion or pity and related emotions such as love and, consequently, grief. Bodily expressions of emotion such as weeping,<sup>5</sup> commiserating sighs<sup>6</sup> and groaning<sup>7</sup> are also attested. The second group is related to the moral sense of indignation, rage and sometimes just annoyance and peevishness. Jesus did not refrain from opprobrious language and even demonstrative actions such as overturning the tables of moneychangers in the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

Although some other emotions are attributed to Jesus such as joy<sup>9</sup> or astonishment<sup>10</sup> liability to the two major groups mentioned above is going to be

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5 John 11:35 Jesus wept; Luke 19:41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it. NIV.

6 Mark 7:34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). NIV.

7 Mark 8:12 He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it."

8 The "cleansing of the temple episode is mentioned in John (John 2:13-16) and all the Synoptic narratives (Mark 11:15-19, 11:27-33, Matthew 21:12-17, 21:23-27 and Luke 19:45-48, 20:1-8).

9 Luke 10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and

sufficient to show that Jesus was not a Stoic sage. What I will argue below is that the Stoic and the Christian attitudes differ toward the cultivation of some emotions that would lead to differing attitudes toward suffering. A thorough discussion of the Stoic theory of emotions is not required to see that in their exhortatory writings Stoics often condemn certain emotions that are in conflict with those expressed by Jesus.

### **A. Group One Emotions: Anger / Annoyance / Strong Judgmental Language**

Here are a few examples of Jesus becoming incensed or annoyed in ways that the Stoics think is foolish.

#### *Healing on the Sabbath*

Jesus is angered over the insensibility of certain Jewish leaders who would place ritual purity over human suffering when he heals a man's withered hand on the Sabbath day when no work should be done.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Annoyance with disciples*

Jesus was annoyed with his disciples when they, probably with good intentions, tried to stop parents who were bringing babies for Jesus to touch.<sup>12</sup>

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- revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure." NIV.
- 10 Matthew 8:10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith; Luke 7:9 is a parallel passage; and Mark 6:6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. NIV.
- 11 Mark 3:1-5 Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. NIV.
- 12 Mark 10:14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children

The Stoic advice from Marcus Aurelius on such matters is clear:

If thou art pained by any external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs thee, but thy own judgement about it. And it is in thy power to wipe out this judgement now. But if anything in thy own disposition gives thee pain, who hinders thee from correcting thy opinion? And even if thou art pained because thou art not doing some particular thing which seems to thee to be right, why dost thou not rather act than complain?—But some insuperable obstacle is in the way?—Do not be grieved then, for the cause of its not being done depends not on thee.—But it is not worth while to live if this cannot be done.—Take thy departure then from life contentedly, just as he dies who is in full activity, and well pleased too with the things which are obstacles.<sup>13</sup>

When a man has presented the appearance of having done wrong, say, How then do I know if this is a wrongful act? And even if he has done wrong, how do I know that he has not condemned himself? and so this is like tearing his own face. Consider that he, who would not have the bad man do wrong, is like the man who would not have the fig-tree to bear juice in the figs and infants to cry and the horse to neigh, and whatever else must of necessity be. For what must a man do who has such a character? If then thou art irritable, cure this man's disposition.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly Epictetus would have some advice for handling disciples:

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come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." NIV.

13 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book 8:47. This is from the George Long translation. Available on the internet at <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.8.eight.html>.

14 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book 12:16. This is from the George Long translation. Available on the internet at <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.12.twelve.html>.



12. If you intend to improve, throw away such thoughts as these: if I neglect my affairs, I shall not have the means of living: unless I chastise my slave, he will be bad. For it is better to die of hunger and so be released from grief and fear than to live in abundance with perturbation; and it is better for your slave to be bad than for you to be unhappy. Begin then from little things. Is the oil spilled? Is a little wine stolen? Say on the occasion, at such price is sold freedom from perturbation; at such price is sold tranquility, but nothing is got for nothing. And when you call your slave, consider that it is possible that he does not hear; and if he does hear, that he will do nothing which you wish. But matters are not so well with him, but altogether well with you, that it should be in his power for you to be not disturbed.<sup>15</sup>

As for the judgmental language that Jesus used, the Stoics use some of it themselves to recommend their own way of life and criticize others, but Jesus may be thought of as excessive and his words extreme and perhaps not complementary.<sup>16</sup> Epictetus recommends trying to use purely descriptive language.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, XII. This is from the George Long translation. Also available on the internet at <http://www.ptypes.com/enchiridion.html>.

16 Jesus called the ruler Herod Antipas, "that fox" (Luke 13:32); he called his disciple Peter "Satan" (Mark 8:33); he used the term "hypocrites" frequently (Matthew 17:7, 23 passim; Matthew 12:34 calls the current generation a "brood of vipers," etc.

17 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, XLV. Does a man bathe quickly (early)? Do not say that he bathes badly, but that he bathes quickly. Does a man drink much wine? Do not say that he does this badly, but say that he drinks much. For before you shall have determined the opinion, how do you know whether he is acting wrong? Thus it will not happen to you to comprehend some appearances which are capable of being comprehended, but to assent to others. Also available on the internet at <http://www.ptypes.com/enchiridion.html>.

**B. Group Two Emotions: Compassion / Pity / Love / Grief**

The second group of emotional liabilities had to do with ascriptions of compassion/pity/love and the like. These are the most numerous of the ascriptions of feeling to Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

Once again Jesus would have failed to be a Stoic sage. The Roman Stoic Seneca (C.4 BCE-A.D. 65) says this about pity:

At this point it is pertinent to ask what pity is. For many commend it as a virtue, and calls a pitiful man good. But this too is a mental defect.

I know among the ill-informed, the Stoic school is unpopular on the ground that it is excessively harsh and not at all likely to give good counsel to princes and kings; the criticism is made that it does not permit a Wise Man to be pitiful, does not permit him to pardon [...].

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18 For example: Matt 20:34 Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. NIV

Mark 1:41 Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" NIV

Luke 7:13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." NIV

Matt 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. NIV

Matt 14:14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. NIV

Matt 15:32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." NIV

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. NIV

Mark 8:2-3 "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." NIV

Pity is the sorrow of the mind brought about by the sight of the distress or sadness caused by ills of others which it believes come undeservedly. But no sorrow befalls the wise man.<sup>19</sup>

The distance between Jesus and the Stoic sage is enlarged when one considers the grief that love and compassion can cause. The most notable episode in the Gospels is the grief Jesus experienced at the death of Lazarus (John 11:1-44). The account in John mentions that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. The sisters sent word to Jesus that the one he loved was sick. When a weeping Mary and an entourage of mourners came to meet Jesus as he entered the village, he weeps. The Jews in attendance even remarked at the love he must have felt for Lazarus.

The Stoics had a way of dealing with grief. Part of the technique was to tamp down on strong feelings for the object of your love.

In everything which pleases the soul, or supplies a want, or is loved, remember to add this to the (description, notion); what is the nature of each thing, beginning from the smallest? If you love an earthen vessel, say it is an earthen vessel which you love; for when it has been broken, you will not be disturbed. If you are kissing your child or wife, say that it is a human being whom you are kissing, for when the wife or child dies, you will not be disturbed.<sup>20</sup>

In dealing with grief in themselves or others, they seem to recognize that being indifferent is difficult. Epictetus says that a few crocodile tears shed for social conventions are okay, but don't get carried away:

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19 Seneca, from J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Volume 3 (Lepzig: Stutgardiae In aedibus B. G. Tuebneri, 1903), p. 110 (fragment 452). Jason L. Saunders (ed.) and (trans.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy After Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 128.

20 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, III. Also available on the internet at <http://www.ptypes.com/enchiridion.html>.

When you see a person weeping in sorrow either when a child goes abroad or when he is dead, or when the man has lost his property, take care that the appearance does not hurry you away with it, as if he were suffering in external things. But straightway make a distinction in your own mind, and be in readiness to say, it is not that which has happened that afflicts this man, for it does not afflict another, but it is the opinion about this thing which afflicts the man. So far as words then do not be unwilling to show him sympathy, and even if it happens so, to lament with him. But take care that you do not lament internally also.<sup>21</sup>

Marcus Aurelius similarly discourages sympathetic feelings:

Do not be entirely swept along by the thought of another's grief. Help him as far as you can and as the case deserves, even if he is overwhelmed by the loss of indifferent things. Do not, however, imagine that he is suffering a real injury for to develop that habit is a vice.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, XVI. Also available on the internet at <http://www.ptypes.com/enchiridion.html>

22 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, (BK V:36.), p. 48. Seneca has similar advice. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "I am grieved to hear that your friend Flaccus is dead, but I would not have you sorrow more than is fitting. That you should not mourn at all I shall hardly dare to insist; and yet I know that it is the better way. But what man will ever be so blessed with that ideal steadfastness of soul, unless he has already risen far above the reach of Fortune? Even such a man will be stung by an event like this, but it will be only a sting. We, however, may be forgiven for bursting into tears, if only our tears have not flowed to excess, and if we have lost a friend, nor let them overflow. We may weep, but we must not wail." *Moral Epistles*, trans. by Richard M. Gummere. The Loeb Classical Library. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917), Epistle LXIII, pp. 429-437. Also available on the internet at [http://www.stoics.com/seneca\\_epistles\\_book\\_1.html#%E2%80%98LXIII1](http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_1.html#%E2%80%98LXIII1). Seneca underscores how difficult it is to be a Stoic when he admits in this letter that he wasn't able to follow his own advice when his friend died, although he condemns himself for it.

## Christian and Stoic Attitudes Toward Suffering

In addition to the many places where compassion and love are attributed to Jesus, there are many others where Jesus commands love in its fullest measure. The most famous of these injunctions is Jesus' command that his disciples love each other as he has loved them. He sandwiches this admonition between a declaration that there is no greater love than surrendering one's life for a friend and that they are his friends (John 15: 13-17). This is foolishness from the Stoic perspective, if not a cultivation of vice. Individuals who follow Jesus in this are set up for a lot more misery and suffering than would be the case on Stoic principles. This makes it all the more ironic that Stoicism, which tries to provide a psychic buffer against all sorts of disturbances against the tranquility of the mind, should be superseded by a philosophy that embraces suffering. Indeed, the main thrust of following in the footsteps of Jesus is to see redeeming qualities in suffering and sacrificing for others. The suffering involved is not the pain one might endure in the hope of purging sin. Rather it seems to be precisely an openness to experience pain. Paradoxical as that may seem it is an idea represented in poetry. For example, the famous stanza from Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)'s *In Memoriam A. H. H.*:

I hold it true, whate'er befall;  
I feel it, when I sorrow most;  
'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.

One final remark: it was partially the aim of B. B. Warfield to show that Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel narratives has a set of emotions that make him very human. However, there is oddness about some of them. Jesus seems to display a kind of anger on several occasions when healing people. That he is disturbed about something is clear, but commentators vary on what it is.

Warfield's theory is that in confronting death, disease, and disbelief he is at war with a world that is out of joint. Unlike the Stoic sage who is committed to acceptance of these things beyond our control, Jesus is angry over them. Jesus is not the only one who ever thought that there is something wrong with the world, hence the many myths about paradise lost, the fall and such. But such a pronounced attitude, if Warfield is correct, is another marked contrast to the Stoic attitude of acceptance.

## Conclusion

This paper has tried to emphasize the different attitudes of two the moral exemplars of two great cultural influences on Western Culture—the Stoic sage and Jesus. I have argued that the emotions most attributed to Jesus are ones that the Stoic sage would disapprove. In one case it is the anger, moral indignation, annoyance and harsh language that he displays that indicates that he is being influenced too much with things that he should treat with indifference. The emotions most often attributed to Jesus (compassion/pity/love) are also problematic on Stoic principles for similar reasons. These emotional liabilities set up an individual for greater suffering as exemplified by grief and other sympathetic emotions. However, it is on this point that the Stoics and the Christian draw different conclusions. Whereas the Stoic has many strategies for avoiding the psychological suffering that attends deep love for another, Christianity invites it. A further and final contrast is noted in the attitude of Jesus, who seems, unlike the Stoic, unwilling to accept things like death and disease as beyond our control and in accord with nature.♦

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