

Stoics Study Notes

Who Were the Stoics?

This was a philosophical movement that lasted for about 500 years, including the declining years of the Greek empire and the rise of the Roman empire.

The stoics included a wide variety of people, from Roman emperors (e.g., Marcus Aurelius) to slaves (e.g., Epictetus).

View of the World:

Materialist: Everything that exists is made up of particles of matter. This includes human beings.

The universe is not random; instead it is patterned. The “organizing force” of the universe is rationality.

Eudaimonia:

To attain eudaimonia (that is, to live well) one must fit into the pattern of the universe.

We have no control over what happens in the world. The only things we can control are our own responses to that world.

Our goal should be to remain untroubled by anything that happens to us. Eudaimonia consists in achieving (and maintaining) **tranquility**.

Intrinsic & Extrinsic Value:

The stoics propose a new way of testing whether something has intrinsic or extrinsic value: Something has intrinsic value if it benefits everyone who comes into contact with it; it has extrinsic value if it benefits some people, harms others, and leaves some unaffected.

Using this standard, they conclude that only tranquility is intrinsically valuable. That is why it is at the center of their view of eudaimonia.