

Socrates' 'Divine Something' considered against the rationale of Zeno's Metaphysics

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Stoicism may be called either a philosophy or a religion. It was a religion in its exalted passion; it was a philosophy inasmuch as it made no pretence to magical powers or supernatural knowledge. [Gilbert Murray a classical scholar and Professor of Greek at Oxford University. From his lecture 'The Stoic Philosophy' which was originally presented at the South Place Institute in London on 16th March 1915]

This supposed rejection by Stoicism of what Murray calls '*magical powers or supernatural knowledge*' is a popular idea in today's modern world. However when looking to the rationale of the Stoic metaphysics there is much that is today disparagingly called 'supernatural' that is to be seen as being 'natural' when considering the Stoic worldview.

Many people from all over the world, from all eras, have reported how they have benefited from 'divine guidance' in some form or other. As an example of such 'divine guidance', from Socrates we have:

"You have often times and in many places heard me give – that there comes to me a something divine and spiritual, which Meletus indeed, by way of a joke, has included in his indictment; and this is a voice which since childhood has frequently come to me, and which makes itself heard only to turn me back from what I am about to do, but never to impel me forward. [Socrates' Apology - 'Socrates, a source book compiled by John Ferguson,' Open University 1970, Plato page 61 section 31]

With Socrates being held up as such a key figure in Western philosophy and being the inspiration for what is often called the Socratic Method of critical thinking, it is difficult for many a 'modern' to accept this aspect of Socrates' life. Here is 'the great man' offering an insight into a very personal relationship with God – a situation that many would rather not admit to, to the extent that it is often suggested that Socrates did not really mean what he said.

But if Socrates did not mean what he said then he would have been going against all that he believed regards straight talking and honesty. The nature of his death would have been in vain if, in this area, he was stating matters to be other than as he genuinely believed them to be. Based on his reputation we have to accept that Socrates was stating matters truthfully when he talked of receiving guidance from his 'divine something' or 'daimonion'.

Now the Stoics of old looked into such matters and, believing that 'a spark of God' is part of our very being, they saw that individuals ought to be able to 'commune' with other aspects of the living Cosmos – aspects that are 'more than' just the 'spark' of 'the Consciousness'/God that permeates our own individualised body. We are talking of something that may be seen as being akin to the World Wide Web. We are talking of a 'Cosmos Wide Network of Consciousness' where one can garner 'information' from a greater

pool of consciousness than is possible just through our own normally recognised individual senses and experiences. We are in effect talking of what is sometimes called extrasensory perception. But being that we are talking of Stoicism, the 'Consciousness'/God is physical in nature in that the 'active principle' is as physical as the 'passive principle'. As such we are not talking of 'extrasensory' but, according to the Stoic rationale, we are talking of the sensory experience that is Reason/Rationality. To the followers of Stoicism 'the reasoning faculty' is a sixth physical sense on a par with touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell whereby through Reason/Rationality we can better experience 'the true reality' of the world about us.

The reasoning faculty is the sense that 'sees' the rationale of the 'information' that the other senses are providing us with.

The reasoning faculty; for this is the only one we have inherited which will take knowledge both of itself - what it is, and of what it is capable, and how valuable a gift it is to us - and likewise of all the other faculties. [Of the things which are under our control and not under our control' Book 'Epictetus, The Discourses as Reported by Arrian' as translated by W A Oldfather]

And in looking to Socrates and other such cases, the Stoic of old concluded that this sixth sense allows us to commune with the 'Reason' and 'Rationality' that permeates the Cosmos.

Following the Stoic rationale that stems from the Stoic view of the nature of the Cosmos, such access to a wider pool of 'information' is not to be seen as supernatural, but merely as a natural consequence of the nature of the Cosmos and how it is made manifest.

Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. ... He it is that gives noble and upright counsel.' [XLI. On the God Within Us - 'Seneca Epistulae Morales' Translation by Richard M Gummere.]

'One God immanent in all things,... and one Law, one Reason common to all intelligent creatures, and one Truth.' [VII.9. 'The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus' Translated by C R Haines.]

Looking to the Stoic metaphysics whereby the whole Cosmos is permeated by a single 'Consciousness', it is rational to see that as this 'Consciousness' also permeates us as individuals. So God, the 'active principle' of the Stoic prime matter, also provides a channel for a 'conscious' communication between us and all else within the Cosmos. How this works and what limits and filters our nature as animals puts on our ability to 'commune' with the rest of the Cosmos is open to question, but it is a question I have had a personal interest in.

Quite clearly we are not designed to be open to the whole spectrum of the 'Consciousness' that is God. The way we are designed we are clearly not able to cope with all the 'information' that is available within the Cosmos as a whole. But separate to our five physical senses there are aspects of this pool of 'information' that we are open to – mostly at a

subconscious level with such communication occasionally coming to the attention of our conscious state as 'telepathy', 'empathy', 'prescience' and answers to prayers etcetera.

Many people today with a scientific leaning tend to ridicule such ideas in that the experiences we are talking of here are individualistic, experiential in the moment and are not normally repeatable and so they cannot be subjected to scientific examination through the 'scientific method'. The fact that science cannot get to grips with such sixth sense events is not surprising in that science has still not got to grips with what 'Consciousness' is, so science is unlikely to be able to come to grips with aspects of how Consciousness/God 'operates', especially when it comes to the individual's experiences of being in communication with 'Something' that has access to a wider spectrum of the Consciousness that permeates the Cosmos than is normal for the individual human when it comes to daily life.

But despite such ridicule, people all around the world still today believe in such matters. In fact, when asked, all but the determined atheist will admit to some experience in their lives that could be explained by an understanding of the Stoic rationale that is led by the Stoic metaphysics. Telepathic moments, the feelings of the presence of loved ones who have died, the comfort that comes with feelings of being 'hugged' by 'Another' and the feelings of being guided by some 'higher being' – all of these and more are common experiences of humankind. For those for whom such experiences are infrequent, it is easy for them to brush such aside as some 'glitch' in their thought processes. But taken as a whole the statistics relating to the occurrences of sixth sense experiences across the world gives credence to the reality of such experiences.

However, looking back to one aspect of the quote from Socrates, he states that his 'divine something' *'makes itself heard only to turn me back from what I am about to do, but never to impel me forward.'* We do have to be careful that any acceptance of such sixth sense 'information' as being appropriate is in keeping with the Stoic aim to live as a person of good character.

While we may get guidance as Socrates did from a 'divine something', by the nature of the universality of the Consciousness it is possible that we may get 'input of information' that seems to be guiding us to acts that are contrary to *'those things which the common law of mankind is in the habit of forbidding'*. Such negative 'input' will be the result of the internal workings of an unsound mind or the result of empathic fallout from the minds of others who are of unsound mind.

Such 'information' from unsound minds tends to try to impel a person towards some antisocial action of other. Whereas 'sixth sense information' from a 'divine something' tends to guide against unsound action or it may offer access to a wider pool of 'information' to better help the individual to try to determine their own course of action for themselves.

Stoic rationale tells us that we are possessed of a freewill, gifted to us by God. So it is unlikely, from the Stoic point of view, that any divine 'inner voices' or the like would drive us towards action that would be contrary to our freewill where, as Stoics, we have chosen to

try to manifest our actions in a manner whereby others will see them as being 'in accord with Nature' while also being the actions of a person of good character.

As with many things in life, Stoicism throws up apparent contradictions. And this subject matter is no different. Stoic metaphysics offers us the concept of everything being manifestations of 'a singular state of being', yet at the same time we also recognise individualities within that Oneness. So we are both one with the Whole and at the same time we are separated by the nature of our being individual members of a species of animal. Because of our nature we experience ourselves as having an individual identity whereby we experience our 'self' as being separate from everything else and as such everything else is seen at some level as being 'external' to our 'self'.

While much about living the Stoic life requires us to recognise that we are manifested out of the body of God and so are one with all around us, our nature and some of the Stoic training looks to aspects of existence as 'externals'. So while 'God is within us' in that we are manifested out of the passive and active principles of the prime matter that is the body of God, so also we experience God as being 'something else' whereby, for instance, Socrates experiences the 'voice' of his 'divine something' as 'coming to him'. He recognises this 'voice' as being something other than the outpourings of his own mind. He recognises the 'voice' as being from 'Something' with a greater 'knowledge' of events as they are unfolding than he does and so Socrates also recognises that the 'voice' is able to manifest a greater wisdom than Socrates can in that Socrates has less knowledge to work with.

In Stoicism God is 'the all and the everything' and so God, as the Cosmos, has access to all knowledge/information. We as individual animals are limited in our access to 'information' and so have to do our best with what 'information' we have available to us through the limitations of our senses. But every now and then, through our sixth sense, as individuals we are presented with guidance from 'Something' that is greater than our own individual nature – 'Something' that is able to help and guide us in that It has access to more of the spectrum of 'information' than we do.

Our minds may see such 'Somethings' as being Daemons (aspects of God), Angels, the spirits of dead ancestors or something else seen as 'divine somethings'. Stoicism avoids such debate about the nature of what it is that will at times 'guide' us to making wiser choices. We see all as being 'of God'. A bit like a Company that has many divisions and many workers in the many divisions. When we are contacted by or try to contact the Company it is not our concern which division or which individual deals with our communications for they are all part of the one organisation. We communicate with the Company and how the Company communicates with us is up to it. So also is the Stoic view of any communion with God.

Epictetus, in keeping with the Stoic rationale, guides us to make our will one with the will of God. Stoicism tells us that generally we can know what it is best to try to determine in life by looking to what God is manifesting all around us. That is, by looking to the bigger picture of all that is around us we can learn how we can best fit into the play of life. Which is why,

to aligning our individual will with the will of God, the Stoic guidance is 'to live in accord with Nature'. But that being said, history tells us that on occasions 'Something' will step in and help guide us towards the better.

We are not alone

In the late 1980's a driver was on a long trip when he came to a town he had not visited before. It was about lunchtime so he decided to park up and get some food. He wandered into the town centre and saw the abbey ruins. He felt compelled to go in and look around.

He was a little confused as to why at this time he should feel so compelled to look round a ruin rather than the many churches in the town, especially when he should have been getting his food and continuing with his journey. At first he couldn't see what the ruins had to offer him, albeit that he felt that he was being guided. Then he saw a man at the top of the ruins sat in quiet meditation. He found himself approaching him, apologising for interrupting him and explaining that he felt a little foolish and hoped the man would understand. He said that he felt sure that he had been guided to talk to the man and he believed that the man had the answers he had been seeking. He explained his predicament.

Some months earlier he had started to read about and accept the Christian faith and, with so many denominations, was trying to work out which path to take. He had visited various Christian establishments and felt like an outsider as he saw that most of them did not reflect the simplicity of faith that he had been reading about and had felt drawn to.

The driver's heart dropped a little when the man explained that he, the man, was not a Christian. However the man then went on to draw the driver's attention to the chapter in the Bible about not needing to stand up in the temple as part of the throng in order to be seen to be praying, it being better to pray when no one else was about. The man pointed out that if the driver needed a building he could enter any church when it was empty and pray, if he needed an altar any 'un-hewn' rock in a field would do, and that the Christian scriptures did not require a person to approach God through a priest. The man suggested that the driver did not 'need' to find a 'church', but rather should follow his own path according to his own readings and beliefs and only share the path with others when it felt right to.

The driver thanked the man and left.

While it was obvious to the man that the driver felt more at ease regards his lone path, he realised that the driver was also left to ponder, just as the man was, just what had compelled the driver to enter the ruins and to approach the man as he did.

On the same day, about ten minutes before the driver set sight on the town where he was to stop, I was sat at my desk in my home when I got an irresistible feeling of being 'asked' to go out. I lived just off the High Street, and felt compelled to walk down it. I had the uncanny feeling that I was about to meet a friend, yet I got all the way down to the bottom of the hill

without bumping into anyone I knew. At the bottom of the hill I was, what I can only describe as, still being 'led' and as a result I found myself by the abbey ruins. I went in. Not quite sure what had been going on or why I was there, I wandered up to the top of the ruins and decided to make the most of a sunny day and sat down to have a quite meditation.

About five to ten minutes later the driver approached me, and it just so happened, having studied Christianity, that I had the answers he was looking for.

Now I know this happened because I was there. I therefore have first-hand knowledge that 'Something' intervened and arranged for me to meet with the driver so he could get the answers he had been praying for, while at the same time demonstrating to both him and me that It is 'out there' and that It does take an interest in our individual paths through life. I had been 'invited' to the meeting at the abbey even before the driver knew he was going to enter the abbey grounds.

'Another' had intervened and made sure that we met.

On another occasion the roles were reversed. One night I had asked the Cosmos for some guidance over an issue and the very next day I was given the answer.

I was sat in a café when someone asked if they could share my table. They then engaged me in conversation, or more correctly they went off into a monologue that I was expected to sit and listen to. I was not interested in the subject of his talk and started to think about making my excuses and leave, however I got a distinct feeling that I should hear him out.

I'm glad I did. Right in the middle of what he was saying he uttered one sentence that was the answer to my plea for guidance from the night before. It was no coincidence. What he had been talking about in no way related to this one sentence. In fact he did not even appear to be aware that he had spoken the sentence.

If I had been recording the conversation I would have been able to cut out the sentence, splice the recording back together without it and there would have been no break in the flow of what he had been talking about. What was said before the sentence flowed exactly into what was said after. Nothing had happened around us to have prompted him to say what he did. The sentence should not have been there. Yet it was.

I am sure that if I had suddenly got an inspirational thought in my head that answered what I wanted guidance over I might not have seen it as anything special. However I was being given the answer through a third party, a third party who knew nothing of what I had asked the night before. I was being given my answer but I was also being given it in a manner that demonstrated that 'it was not all in my head'. I was being shown yet again that 'Another' had to be involved.

So while all the philosophical debate in the world may be unable to provide 'proof' for or against any form of theism or any other 'ism', I now know for a fact, through first-hand experience, that there is a 'conscious state of being' that takes an interest in our lives.

'Another' had again intervened in a manner that made Its presence all too obvious.

Stoic metaphysics offers a framework of ideas that offer an understanding of how such occurrences can fit into an overall view of the nature of existence. Socrates' experience of his 'divine something' together with the experience of millions of others over the years demonstrates that the vastness of the God that permeates the whole Cosmos does not prevent that God from directly or indirectly taking an interest in us as individuals.

To repeat the Stoic take on this:

'We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven... as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you... The Holy Spirit indwells within us. One who marks our good deeds and our bad deeds, and is our guardian. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. ... He it is that gives noble and upright counsel.' [XLI. On the God Within Us - 'Seneca Epistulae Morales' Translation by Richard M Gummere.]