Meeting Primer: What's in My Control?

An optional read-ahead and quick reference, about 10 minutes

The Stoic Fellowship Meeting Guide · Everyday Problems

Guiding Question: Why do we spend so much energy on things we can't change?

At the Meeting

- **Today's reading: Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 1**. We'll read it aloud together.
- **The practice:** Mine / Not Mine, in three steps.
  1. **Name the parts.** What is this worry made of?
  2. **Divide.** Which parts are up to me, and which are not?
  3. **Act on mine.** What belongs to me, and what will I do?

What's in My Control?

A job interview is coming up. You replay what the interviewers might think, wonder whether your experience is enough, and imagine who else applied. Hours go into questions you can't answer.

Epictetus opens his handbook with a distinction that the rest of Stoic practice depends on: some things are up to us and some are not. Up to us are our own judgments, intentions, desires, and aversions. Not up to us are our bodies, possessions, reputations, other people's choices, and whether our efforts get the result we hoped for.

We call this the Fundamental Rule; it's also known as the Fundamental Divide. You may hear it called the "dichotomy of control," but many Stoic writers today avoid that phrase, because *control* can mislead. The question isn't how much influence you have. It's which part belongs to your own choice. What isn't up to you can still deserve care and effort. You can prepare well for the interview; you can't decide what the panel concludes.

For ancient texts, use any translation you like.

Optional Reading (about 8 minutes)

1. **Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 1** (2 minutes) This is the passage we'll read aloud. Which items on each list surprise you?
2. **Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 8** (1 minute) Epictetus advises wanting events to happen as they do. Is that resignation, or something else?

3. **Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.1.1–17** (3 minutes) Of all our faculties, only one can examine itself and the others. Which one, and why does Epictetus say it's the one thing fully ours?
4. **Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.5.1–9** (2 minutes) "Materials are indifferent, but the use we make of them is not." How does a game player treat the ball?

Think About

We'll divide a shared case aloud. You can use a made-up example.

- **Name the parts.** Pick a worry from your week. What is it made of: events, other people, your own choices?
- **Divide.** Which parts are up to you, and which are not? Where is it hard to tell?
- **Act on mine.** What judgment or action belongs to you, and what would you actually do?

Key Terms

For reference during the meeting. No need to memorize these.

Up to us (*eph' hēmin*). What belongs to our own choice: how we judge, what we desire and avoid, and what we intend.

Faculty of choice (*prohairesis*). Our capacity to judge, assent, desire, and intend. Epictetus treats it as the one thing fully ours.

The Fundamental Rule. Recognizing what is up to you and what is not. Also called the Fundamental Divide. The popular name "dichotomy of control" is one many Stoic writers now avoid.

Reserve clause. Pursuing a goal fully while allowing that circumstances may prevent it: "I'll do this, if nothing prevents me."