Chapter II

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SOME PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS

Epicureanism and Stoicism are two of some new philosophies in the period following the death of Aristotle. As we know that after Aristotle has completed his great speculative system, philosophy moves toward a new emphasis. These two main belief systems emphasize the art of living. The philosophers led people to think about themselves and how they as individuals in order to achieve the satisfactory personal life. (Stumpf, 1975: 105-106)

Those new directions have been identified with the civilization movement that happens in Greece. The post war condition has changed the ways of thinking of the individual citizens. They increasingly do not interest in speculative questions anymore, as appearing in the period of Aristotle. Individuals need such philosophy that giving them life direction in the changing condition.

After the death of Alexander the Great, Athens was in transition and instability condition. Therefore, philosophy of the times approached this problem in completely different ways. They were known as Hellenistic philosophy. Epicureanism and Stoicism were developing in the Hellenistic period. They dominated Hellenistic philosophy. Both philosophies provided a unique view into the lives and personal problems. They provided strong moral virtues deal with human life. Therefore, philosophy became more practical by concerning individuals than society.
Epicureanism and Stoicism are moral philosophy. Epicureans and Stoics view philosophy for the source of meaning of human existence. These both philosophers maintain that happiness is the goal. They seek to find ways in which individual person can achieve happiness successfully in this unfriendly world. Central to the concern of these movements is human self control. Epicureanism and Stoicism take towards attaining happiness by controlling and limiting one self in his life. As Stumpf writes in *Philosophy History & Problems*:

“With the Epicureans, the Stoics put their chief emphasis upon the practical concern of ethics, regarded self control as the center of ethics, viewed all of nature in materialistic terms and sought happiness as the end.” (1975:115)

Both philosophies focus on the attainment of happiness. Nevertheless, they have different paths in attaining happiness. The Stoics aim at happiness through wisdom, but Epicureans expect to find it in pleasure. Therefore, Epicureans turn into apathy, while stoics are in effort to control their reaction towards unavoidable events.

2.1 The Development and Concepts of Epicureanism

Epicureanism is a term that belongs to Epicurus’ philosophy. Epicurus is one of the major philosophers in the Hellenistic period, following the death of Aristotle. Epicurus is a teacher of several schools until he moves to Athens and fond his own school in 306 BCE. His teaching gives great lasting impact that continuously appearing in Athens and spreading to Rome. Epicureans’ communities flourish for centuries after his death.
Epicureanism is influenced by Democritus’ idea of nature. In other words Democritus’ idea of nature is the reason of Epicurus’ ideas. However, Epicurus is a practical philosopher. His philosophy deals with human life and as the control of life. Epicurus applies theory of Democritus in which how human should behave in this nature. As Stumpf writes in Philosophy History & Problems:

“The picture of the world as consisting of atoms, or bits of matter, which had been developed by Democritus, seemed to Epicurus a reasonable answer. If that is what the world consists of, thought Epicurus, what consequences follow from that for human behavior?” (1975: 107)

On ethics, Epicurus is a hedonist. The Epicurean theory has been dubbed as “philosophy of pleasure”. He relates the original hedonistic thought on pleasure to the Democritus’ theory. What made Epicurus turn to the pleasure principle was the ‘Science’ or physics he had inherited from Democritus. (Stumpf, 1975: 107) Therefore, the principle of pleasure is redefined later by Epicurus.

Epicureans claim that the point of all human behaviors is to maintain pleasure. For Epicureans, the principle of pleasure is the basis of human behavior. Everything human does is for the sake ultimately of gaining pleasure for himself. Every human act of choice and avoidance begin from pleasure. Pleasure is innate in every human.

Epicurus refines the principle of pleasure and makes clear distinction on pleasure as guidance of man to happiness. In Philosophy History & Problems by Stumpf, it is said that:

“it was because he could make these clear distinction that he concluded that ‘when…we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of the profligates and those that consist of sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and trouble in the mind.
For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produces a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out of motives of all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.” (1975:109)

Epicurus identifies pleasures as between those which are strong but have painful effects at last and those which are not very strong but last longer and give calm and peaceful feeling and mind. It leads him to recommend a virtuous that moderately ascetic life as the best means to securing pleasure for oneself. In general, Epicureanism advocates the pursuit of simple pleasures that conceive of as a sense of repose and calm. The ultimate pleasure that human seeks is tranquility. Pleasure means as freedom from pain and trouble.

Fear of death is one of the greatest fears that Epicureans try to combat. While we know that Epicurus is a hedonist that for him happiness consists in the enjoyment of life, and in particular, the enjoyment of certain kinds of pleasures. Conversely, unhappiness consists of misery, pain and ignorance. The state of being dead, however, is simply the absence of all sensations. Death itself is neither pleasurable nor painful. As Epicurus said in Philosophy History & Problems by Stumpf:

As for death, this need no bother anyone, because only a living person has sensation either of pain or pleasure. After death, there is no sensation, since the atoms that make up both the body and mind come apart, so there is no longer this particular body or mind but only a number of distinct atoms that return,” (1975: 108)

At the moment man dies, he experiences nothing. Death causes no pain for him. Therefore, man needs not fear of death because death person does not feel any pain. Death is nothing to man
Epicureans make a distinction between the way a person dies or the conditions surrounding a person’s death and death itself. The conditions leading up to death can indeed be miserable or painful, not death itself. Epicureans conclude that death does not make a man unhappy, but rather that the way he dies can be an impediment to happiness. It brings the idea about how man attitude towards death. Epicureans state that it’s foolish to allow the fear of death to causes you pain now, if when you are dead causes no pain.

Epicureans think that they have liberated man from fear to death. To be liberated from the fear of death sets the stage for a way of life completely under a person’s own control. A man can choose his own actions that the consequences as regards pleasure or pain. Since the ultimate pleasure that human seeks is peaceful mind, man must be free from pain and trouble by freeing himself from fear.

2.2 The Development and Concepts of Stoicism

The term of Stoicism belongs to a school of philosophy that was founded by Zeno of Citium. The term of stoic comes from the word Stoa where Zeno assembles his school. Stoicism is a set of philosophical ideals during the Hellenistic period and becomes the most popular philosophy. It has lasting impact along the Rome and Christian period. The stoics are Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius.

The Stoics had been influenced by Heraclitus and Socrates. Heraclitus’ concept of universal law had provided the basis for the Stoic idea of cosmopolitanism, that all men are equally citizens of the world. It had decisive
impact, particularly on the development of Christian philosophy in the next period.

On ethics, Stoics profoundly were influenced by Socrates who had faced death with courage and serenity. Young Zeno had been inspired by the ethical teaching of Socrates. This influence gave impact to overwhelming emphasis of stoic ethical philosophy. Stoics aimed at happiness through wisdom, the wisdom by which control their reaction and accept with dignified what had to be.

Stoics claim that happiness is founded in wisdom. Wisdom means to control human self and to accept with respect and patient toward what had to be. According to Stoics, life is in accordance with nature and it is totally controlled. Life is fated that human should do as they do happen. As Stoic Epictetus says that:

“Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go well.”We cannot, that is, control all events, but we can control our attitude toward what happens.”
(Stumpf, 1975:111)

Therefore, man cannot control their life, but he can control his attitudes toward life. He cannot avoid pain because pain is inevitable. Man must control pain by dealing with the pain itself. He has to prepare himself for its condition.

Unlike Epicureans, Stoics believe that both pain and pleasure are supposed to be equally unimportant. There are no degrees between them. It means that pain such as misery, sickness, even death is not bad thing. On the contrary, pleasure such as, riches, health, and life is not good. Pleasure is not better than pain. In other words, Happiness is not a product of choice; it is rather a quality of existence, which follows from agreeing to what has to be.

For Stoics, one ought not to seek pleasure. Happiness is only in wisdom and virtue. People must be virtuous, not for the sake of pleasure, but for the sake of
duty. The virtue means mastering our desire for sensory pleasure and conquering our fear of pain. Those are considered as action about controlling and limiting pain.

As Epicureans, The primal and underlying fear which the Stoics seek to conquer is fear of death. Since Stoics seek happiness through wisdom, fear of death becomes one of the human emotions that being controlled. Being fear of death is useless. Death is inevitable that man cannot avoid death but he can control his fear of death. Therefore, man must banish his fear of death. As Stumpf writes in *Philosophy History & Problems*:

“The Stoic Epictetus said that ‘I cannot escape death, but cannot I escape the dread of it.’… In a more general way, he wrote, ‘It is useless to fear future events, for they will happen in any case. But it is possible by an act of will to control our fear. We should not, therefore, fear events—in a real sense we have “nothing to fear but fear itself.” ’ (1975:111)

However, unlike Epicureans, Stoics argue that death is not a choice. Man does not choose to die in order to avoid pain and get pleasure. “Happiness is not a product of choice but it is rather a quality of existence, which follows from acquiescing or agreeing to what has to be.” (Stumpf, 1975: 114) Indeed, it is important for a person to die well, even if doing so requires committing suicide in order to avoid disgrace, or to put an end to unavoidable suffering to prolong life, but it exhibits a lack of moral courage. In other words, what wise man only has to do is to live with dignity and die with serenity and courage. If he can remain free from the fear and develop the apathy, he will achieve happiness.