



Jonas Salzgeber

Scrape off your own faults



Our minds are quick to judge

We label people on the basis of very little information. We're prejudiced. Oh, he's a teacher. Oh, she's a woman. Oh, look at those shoes he's wearing.

We judge others constantly. We find flaws in others as if it's a game.

It's not really that we always want to judge them. It happens automatically, these judgments pop up almost magically in our minds.

However, we must take responsibility for our judgments. Because we can choose to go with them or not. So even if the mind tells you this man is a bad father for not watching his kids, you can choose to accept this notion or not.

Someone bathes in haste; don't say he bathes badly, but in haste. Someone drinks a lot of wine; don't say he drinks badly, but a lot. Until you know their reasons, how do you know that their actions are vicious? This will save you from perceiving one thing clearly, but then assenting to something different." – Epictetus, Enchiridion 45

Pause and look before judging

You have the power to pause and look at the situation objectively. What do you know about this man? What's the situation exactly? Refuse to accept all that's other than objective. Stick to the

facts and describe the situation in a neutral way. Without adding any value to it. Remember, you are only free if you can look at external events with indifference. And immediately adding value to an event is all but indifferent.

Separate values from judgments

We must distinguish between the facts and our added value judgments. What's are the facts here? What did I see exactly? What do I know about the situation? Which are my own added value judgments? Can I remove them?

The key to be able to do that is to postpone our reaction. With awareness in the situation, we can observe the default judgment and actively decide whether to follow along or not. Maybe, we can just let go of that judgment. No need to engage in it any deeper. Observe and let go. Observe and let go. Observe and let go... And maybe, we can keep in mind what we're really after:

Let philosophy scrape off your own faults, rather than be a way to rail against the faults of others. – Seneca, Moral Letters, 103.4a-b

Seneca reminds us here of what philosophy is for: we want to scrape off our own faults. The focus is inward. To make yourself better and

to leave other people to that task for themselves. Everybody must go their own way. Your faults are in your control. Other people's faults are not. You scrape off your faults, and let other people scrape off theirs for themselves.

We must not forget why we engage in philosophy in the first place: to become better able to express our best, to express what we actually want to express. To be who we want to be. To not only be aware of what we want to stand for, but to be able to express that in every moment. Moment to moment to moment. Philosophy is not a tool to correct others. Leave other people to their faults. Nothing in Stoicism empowers us to judge them—only to accept and love them as they are. Let's focus inward. There's enough to correct in ourselves.

Now pause for a moment and imagine the world if we all abstained from hasty judgments and rather focused on scraping off our own faults.

What do you see?

Jonas Salzgeber of jonas@njlifebacks.com is an author. At the core of his actionable philosophy lies the goal of leading a happy life even—and especially—in the face of adversity. He is the author of [The Little Book of Stoicism](#).