



ARE WE MEANT TO COOPERATE?

UNDERSTANDING OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD



Can others harm us?

I, then, can neither be harmed by these people, nor become angry with one who is akin to me, nor can I hate him, for we have come into being to work together, like feet, hands, eyelids, or the two rows of teeth in our upper and lower jaws. To work against one another is therefore contrary to nature; and to be angry with another person and turn away from him is surely to work against him. - Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 2.1

You and me, we're relatives. We're all part of the human family. I am your brother. You are my brother or sister. We're made for cooperation.

"Constantly think of the universe as a single living being," says Marcus. We must recognize ourselves as a limb of a larger body and work together: "Since you yourself are one of the parts that serve to perfect a social system, let your every action contribute to the perfecting of social life. - Meditations 4.40; 9.23

Let's contribute our actions to the wellbeing of mankind. We stem from the same source and are limbs of the same whole. We are made for

cooperation. Seneca agrees by saying that Mother Nature gave birth to us as relatives. And she instilled in us a mutual love.

Our fellowship is very similar to an arch of stones, which would fall apart, if they did not reciprocally support each other. - Seneca, Moral Letters, 95.53

We're all interconnected

Each of us plays a major role in this arch of stones. We must support each other or the whole arch will fall apart. We're all interconnected and depending on one another.

As Marcus elegantly said,

What brings no benefit to the hive brings none to the bee. - Meditations 6.54

Yes, we must look after ourselves so that we're able to support one another. But let's keep in mind that if our actions don't contribute to the whole, then they don't contribute to our very own wellbeing. At least not in the long run.

Act in harmony with others

If each of us wants to live the good life, then each of us needs to be willing to act in harmony with the whole human family. This includes the parts of our human family we never meet or see. Humans of other nations, humans on the other side of the world.

As a limb of the whole body, we only hurt ourselves if we don't look after one another. And we act contrary to

nature. If we want to flourish as a whole body, then each part needs to act in consideration of the whole.

If we fail to recognize this interconnectedness, and if we fail to direct our actions to these social ends, then we tear our lives apart, says Marcus. This will create a separation and disharmony. And neither of us will be able to reach their true human potential.

Remember that we humans are created for one another. We're born to work together the way our hands and eyelids do. Our actions should serve mankind with harmony as the goal.

Stoicism is social

Stoicism is not only rational, it's also social.

Let's think not only of those close to us, but also of those far from us. They are as much part of the human family as our closest friends.

Next time, when you buy something, ask yourself, "Who made this?"

Let's be more mindful of the whole human family and let's contribute our every action to the perfecting of social life. Let's do good to others and treat them as brothers and sisters; with patience, kindness, forgiveness, and generosity. This is the only way.

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