Stoicism

Stoicism was founded by Zeno in c. 300 BC/BCE in Athens.

It was still flourishing centuries later…

A key stoic philosopher was the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (c. 175 AD/CE)

Features of Stoicism:

1) The Stoic Universe:

We live in an ordered, rational universe—one that was structured, and designed…

…by "God."

(Note that "God" sometimes meant different things to different groups of Stoics.)

Nothing is random…even apparent coincidence. All is pre-planned or "fated."

Only limited free will is part of the stoic conception of things.

2) How to Live in a Fated Universe:

a) The Problem of Evil:

If the universe is benevolently designed, how can we explain the existence of evil?

Some Stoic answers:

--good can’t exist without evil

--evil can be an opportunity for personal growth

b) Freedom:

"Interior freedom" is possible…when individuals alter their judgments about events and their attitudes toward them.

Realizing events are expressions of God's will and purpose can lead to a posture of "courageous acceptance."

c) <u>The Purpose of Life</u>:

(i) Live life according to nature… with a will that accords with Divine Reason

(ii) Practice emotional detachment; remember that you *are* able to control your attitudes and emotions.

(i) and (ii) together lead to a state of spiritual peace and well-being….

”stoic apathy” or “Eudamonia.”

This is possible without material abundance or even good health.

d) Emotions in Life:

--some say stoics reject all emotions, where possible

--others say they reject only "excessive passions" (e.g. those that lead to "mental disturbances"

e.g. **fear**…Stoics would say that, in a fated universe, where all is for the best, there is nothing to fear)

e.g. **pity**…Stoics would say that this is based on the “false” belief that something bad has happened to someone (…all is fated and for the best…)

e) Temperance (moderation):

--Stoics say that this is more likely to lead to happiness than never-ending desire gratification

Finally….

The book sees parallels between Stoicism and the well-known "Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy" of Dr. Albert Ellis…

For example…if you fail an exam, you'll probably do a "cognitive appraisal"…and filter that experience through a belief.

“I’m stupid” is a common but almost always irrational belief…

…and it will lead to irrational consequences: emotional upset, low self-esteem, etc.

If <u>instead</u> you filter things through a <u>rational</u> belief…e.g. "I didn't study properly"…

…then you are led to…

…emotional control, and renewed determination to do better.