

Questions Stimulated by Cynics

Platonists and Cynics say that only acts of injustice can injure the soul.
What "injures" the person according to X'y?

Is Allen correct when he comments (p.62) that Jesus's pronouncement (Matt. 10:28) presupposes Plato's understanding of soul and body?

Cynicism arose in an era that saw loss of philosophical confidence in Plato's world of Forms.
Can people today continue to speak of "absolutes" in light of their repudiation of Plato's philosophy?
Do the "absolutes" that people have in mind today ever include beauty? I.e., are their "absolutes" inherently attractive or compelling?

Self-sufficiency is the foundation of Cynicism as a way of life.
Is there any convergence between this notion and a Christian understanding of discipleship?

The cynics' "back to nature" approach included much that is "natural" but not usually socially acceptable: e.g., relieving oneself in public.
To what extent is "back to nature" a trustworthy guide today? What are its limits? How are these to be determined? Are such limits anything more than social convention?

The cynics spoke much of the need for training (*askesis*), which training induced indifference to sensation and emotion (*apatheia*).
What are the (dis)similarities between the cynic notion and the "training" advocated, e.g., in the pastoral epistles?
What is the role of "indifference" in Christian discipleship?

The cynics maintained that life should be freed from encumbrances.
How would you relate their conviction to that of Hebrews 10:34? ("...you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.")

The cynics impressed some early church fathers in that the former stressed simplicity born of renunciation rather than deprivation.
What is the difference?
What is the significance of Christian renunciation? of deprivation? (at least according to the RC trad'n)
Has the creation been made for our enjoyment?
What are the limits of our "enjoyment"?
What did the early church understand to be *the* good?
Is the church's "borrowing" what it did from the cynics an instance of "despoiling" ("plundering", AV) the Egyptians? (Exodus 3:22)

Cynicism was ultimately parasitic: the simple life style ceased to be virtuous once conditions *forced* everyone to be "simple."
Is Christian existence parasitic?

Questions Stimulated by Stoics

Is chance occurrence the same as providence? (The stoics said it was.)
Does a Christian understanding of providence allow for or preclude radical accidentality?

Stoics claimed to be cosmopolitan. ("The world is my city.")
Is the church cosmopolitan *in fact*?

The stoics were the first to speak of "humanity"; i.e., all humans are rendered such by a human nature.
Is there a "human nature"?
Why do existentialist philosophers deny a human nature but speak of a human condition or human predicament?

The stoics maintained that natural law can be known by reason. Plato maintained that reason could know the form of the Good, but only that reason which was itself "good"; i.e., there is an ethical qualification for the highest knowledge.
Were the stoics right or wrong? Plato?
For Christians, what is the qualification for the highest knowledge?

For stoics reason is the nature of human beings.
What is it for Christians?
If it isn't reason, how is reason related to it?

Epictetus

E. said that what we suffer is essential to the proper functioning of the cosmos as a whole.
Is this a legitimization of evil?
What does Jesus do when he comes upon sufferers?

E.: how we respond to what befalls us in the course of a necessary cosmic-occurrence pertains to our character-development.
Plainly how we respond isn't an instance of necessary cosmic-occurrence. Then what is it? If it isn't, then is E.'s cosmos actually "cosmic minus the human"?

E.: we should be grateful that we can see the universe as an ordered whole.
How do Christians understand, and what are we to do about, what we regard as *disorder*?

E.: the purpose of our reason is to discern orderliness and conform ourselves to it.
What is the purpose of reason according to the gospel?

E.: when we suffer we can either resist unwisely or submit to it wisely.
Is there a place for resistance according to Christian faith?

E.: our whole duty, and the fulfillment of our nature, is reason's ready and joyful assent to the rule of reason.
What is the Christian's duty and fulfillment of his/her nature?

Allen says (p.68) that the bible praises creation "enough" to allow a stoic view of providence to be absorbed into the Christian understanding.
How might we comment on his assertion?
Is Allen's understanding of a Christian doctrine or providence adequate?