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Examples of Philosophical Guidance from Epictetus

Epiktetos'tan Felsefi Rehberlik Örnekleri

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Abstract

There are three main pillars that guide services aimed at humans: psychology, sociology, and philosophy. However, almost all fields of knowledge and humanities that address human beings and society in general are among its sources. Philosophy, as one of the knowledge fields forming the basis of guidance services, can be regarded as a form of philosophical guidance service if it is conducted as a thought and action activity closely tied to real life. Based on this idea, philosophers began considering by the 1980s that they could offer "Philosophical Guidance" services. According to Lahav, one of the first advocates of this idea, philosophy's practical function in life today emerges as philosophical guidance. This is because the activity we call philosophical guidance is by no means separate from a philosophical life or philosophical culture. In this sense, the article will first provide a preliminary evaluation to closely examine the concepts of guidance and counseling in general. Subsequently, the philosophy of Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher of the Roman era, will be presented as an example of philosophical guidance. The deliberate choice to use the term "guidance" instead of "counseling" or "therapy" in the article is noteworthy. This is because, technically speaking, guidance, which involves merely providing information without imposing any solutions and without acting as a specialized consultant to resolve a problem, aligns more closely with the spirit of philosophy than counseling or therapy services.

Keywords: Epictetus, Philosophical Guidance, Practical Function Of Philosophy, Philosophical Culture, Counselling.

Öz

İnsana yönelik rehberlik hizmetlerinin üç önemli dayandığı vardır; psikoloji, sosyoloji ve felsefe. Ancak genel anlamda insanı ve toplumu konu alan hemen hemen bütün bilgi sahaları ve beşerî bilim alanları onun kaynaklarındandır. Rehberlik hizmetlerinin temelini oluşturan bilgi sahalarından biri olan felsefe gerçek hayattan kopmadan sürdürülen bir düşünce ve eylem etkinliği olarak yürütülüyor ise bir tür felsefi rehberlik hizmeti olarak görülebilir. Bu düşünceden hareket eden felsefeciler, 1980'li yıllara gelindiğinde, "Felsefi Rehberlik" hizmetini yürütebileceklerini düşünmeye başlamışlardı. Bu fikrin ilk savunucularından biri olan Lahav'a göre günümüzde felsefenin bu hayata dair işlevi felsefi rehberlik olarak karşımıza çıkmıştır. Çünkü felsefi rehberlik dediğimiz etkinlik felsefi hayat ve felsefi kültürün hiç de dışında değildi. Bu anlamda makalede önce, genel anlamda rehberlik ve danışmanlık kavramlarını yakından tanıtmaya imkân veren bir ön değerlendirme yapılacak sonra da Roma Dönemi Stoasına mensup Epiktetos'un felsefesi bir tür felsefi rehberlik örneği olarak sunulacaktır. Makalede "danışmanlık" ve "terapi" kavramları yerine "rehberlik" kavramının kullanılması bilinçli bir tercihtir çünkü teknik anlamda bir problemi çözmek için uzman danışman yerine sadece bilgi vermekle yetinen ve herhangi bir çözüm dayatmayan rehberlik, danışmanlık ve terapi hizmetlerine göre felsefenin ruhuna daha uygun bir adlandırma-
dır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Epiktetos, Felsefi Rehberlik, Felsefenin Pratik İşlevi, Felsefi Kültür, Danışmanlık.

1. Philosophical Guidance in Education

Unlike classical education, contemporary educational philosophy has identified “active learning” as a foundation, aiming to develop individuals in multiple dimensions rather than a single aspect and prioritizing learning over teaching as new goals of education. To achieve this purpose, modern schools have introduced various practices under the title of “Student Personality Services” to support education and teaching. Thus, alongside the educational and administrative dimensions aimed at maintaining order, schools have incorporated a third dimension: “Student Personality Services”. Within the scope of Student Personality Services, in addition to health services, social assistance, social and educational activities, and special education services, guidance services also began to be offered in the early 20th century in the United States. In Turkey, guidance services were introduced into schools during the 1950s.

The Turkish word “*rehberlik*” (guidance) known to have been borrowed from Persian, means guidance, showing the way, and giving advice. Equivalent to the English word *guidance*, is used not to persuade or heal but to provide information and facilitate an individual’s ability to make choices and decisions by showing possible paths. In the context of education, “guidance” refers to an informational aid provided as a student personality service to help students recognize themselves, develop identity and personality, become aware of available opportunities in their surroundings, establish healthy social relationships, and adapt to their environment more easily. Accordingly, providing information during significant decision-making phases such as school, job, and partner selection—preparing individuals for professional and family life—and offering psychological assistance in coping with encountered problems are also part of the broader definition of “guidance”. Generally, “guidance” is defined as a systematic and continuous assistance provided by experts to help individuals recognize themselves and their environment, develop their latent potential, solve problems, and achieve self-realization. During

this process, individuals not only come to understand themselves better but are also informed about available opportunities in their surroundings, enabling them to make appropriate choices, develop their talents, and adapt more easily to their environment (Yeşilyaprak, 2003, p. 7).

The rapid changes in society and the resulting difficulties in adaptation, the strengthening of humanist approaches in philosophy that place great value on individuals, as well as democratic developments and freedom of thought, have increased the need for guidance services. For this reason, the emergence of guidance in the United States cannot be seen as a coincidence. Furthermore, scientific and philosophical studies aimed at addressing problems produced by the complex issues of modern life—such as alienation, intergenerational conflict, and cultural gaps—appear to have played a role in the birth and development of guidance services. As philosophical discussions in these processes increasingly found points of agreement, the development of guidance services has also progressed accordingly.

The fundamental idea that contributed to the emergence of guidance was the thesis that education should prepare individuals not only for society and a profession but also for life in all its aspects. Initially referred to as “guidance services,” these practices later came to be known as “guidance and psychological counseling services.” Today, in many countries, this service has been termed “psychological counseling,” as it is considered a field requiring expertise. In some institutions, therapy services, which are based on the curative principle of guidance, have even surpassed counseling services, leading to their implementation as a type of healthcare service. As a result, guidance services, originally focused on providing information, have been replaced by counseling defined as a technical activity and curative therapy. Thus, in contemporary schools, the terms “guidance” and “guidance teacher” have been replaced by “psychological counseling” and “psychological counselor.” Since philosophical knowledge does not aim at treatment in a technical sense or function as

a specialized activity but instead focuses on showing paths through the provision of information, it is more suitable to view it as a form of guidance rather than therapy or counseling. For this reason, the title of this study has been chosen as “philosophical guidance” rather than “philosophical counseling” or “philosophical therapy.”

Through guidance, an individual can discern the beneficial and harmful aspects of the paths presented to them, select the most suitable path, and implement it. For example, an individual who achieves self-realization through guidance knows who they are and who they can become in the future, possessing a realistic and consistent sense of self. Such a person is at peace with themselves and their environment, does not fear expressing their emotions or making independent decisions due to their self-confidence, and accepts the external world and other people as they are. Thanks to their positive approach to events, they establish good communication with others. This self-actualized individual also values people and sees them as equals, uses their time and resources efficiently, is focused more on the present and the future rather than the past, and is aware of the potential within themselves and their surroundings. They have good mental health, adapt easily, and possess a personality that is open to innovation, constructive, creative, and competent.

2. Philosophical Guidance

One of the central goals of guidance, namely the cultivation of self-actualized individuals, reflects the ideal envisioned in philosophy as the model of the wise person. The characteristics of "rational, systematic, consistent, holistic, and critical thinking" present in the definition of philosophy are precisely the attitudes and behaviors expected from a self-actualized individual. Philosophers are the pioneers who most closely embody the type of self-actualized individual. The first of these pioneers is undoubtedly Socrates. His practice of walking through the marketplace, asking people what is right, good, and beautiful, and engaging in discus-

sions with them is a form of guidance. These values are of great importance in terms of our life practices. A sentence from Plato's *Apology of Socrates* expresses his philosophical practice: "I have shown, not only in words but in deeds, that I care not a bit for death; the only thing I care about is not committing injustice or causing harm" (2008:20d, p. 43).

In his work *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's discussion on the development and flourishing/liberation of essence is another expression of self-realization. Although self-realization applies to all beings in Aristotle's philosophy, it is much more striking in the case of humans. Therefore, it appears that self-realization has been incorporated into education through philosophy. According to him, happiness, which is the highest goal of human life, is defined as "being in a good state" and its continuity (2019:1095). Thus, philosophical activities that ensure humans remain in a good state are a product of philosophical guidance, as they represent the definition of happiness. In other words, the process expressed through the concepts of change and development in philosophy, when considered for humans, can be understood as the revelation and development of potentials through education.

Contemporary education theorists such as Rogers and Maslow, in line with Aristotle's tradition, have argued that every individual is born with latent potentials and a tendency to develop them. Humanists, who believe that it is more appropriate in guidance to encourage individuals to solve their problems themselves by strengthening their self-perception, rather than directly helping them solve their problems, also assert that every human being is inherently good and worthy of respect. They claim that when humans are left free, they will always choose the good and realize their full potential.

As we move towards the present day, concerns about the inefficiency of Analytical Philosophy and its detachment from practical life have been growing, and parallel to this, serious reactions against this philosophy began to emerge towards the end of the 20th century (Tozlu,

2016, I, p. 68). Philosophical guidance or counseling emerged in the 1980s, perhaps due to the influence of ideologies, as a product of approaches advocating that solutions to human problems should be provided through philosophy. In this way, philosophy sought to transform from a theoretical and speculative discussion into a form of thinking and action that engages with life. In fact, this shift was first signaled by Marx, who proposed a political action philosophy, meaning “philosophers have always tried to understand the world, but now we must work to change it.” Although the proponents of philosophical guidance did not have an ideological focus, they were influenced by the effects of another philosophical movement, pragmatism, which was prominent in their time. Consequently, instead of asking the question “what is philosophy?”, the question of “what is the use of philosophy to us?” or “what is philosophy good for?” began to take precedence. The first generation of philosophers advocating for philosophical counseling believed that at the beginning of philosophy, in ancient times, the aim of philosophy was to engage with life, but over time, this goal had been abandoned. Indeed, some philosophers tied this ancient purpose of philosophy to its mission to search for the meaning and purpose of life, while others argued that there is no other field of knowledge that can help people overcome the problems of meaning, except philosophy. Millennia ago, Stoic philosopher Seneca expressed in his later writings, compiled as *Moral Letters*, that we need the consolation of philosophy to overcome life's difficulties and struggles, and he claimed that without wisdom, our minds are sick (Seneca, Letter 15). His approach can also be interpreted as a form of philosophical guidance.

There is confusion regarding philosophers' attitudes toward practical life reality, as a philosopher's political action may introduce ambiguity from a philosophical standpoint. In other words, not every philosopher or thinker who turns toward practical life or adopts an ideological stance in the world of action should be considered as providing philosophical guidance services. Philips addresses this issue in his article *Philosophy: Is It in the Struggle for Life?* After analyzing and evaluating this

point, he notes that if an analytic philosopher were to engage with a specific normative issue, such as the claim that certain social groups are being unjustly treated, the philosophical method of analysis could only contribute modestly to solving the problem. However, if the philosopher advocates for promoting equality, this turns them into activists. While this action can undoubtedly be seen as admirable, it cannot be regarded as genuine philosophy because it transforms the philosopher into a reactionary who plays a role beyond their profession. In short, according to Philips, any writing composed with a reformist spirit will either not be considered philosophy or will be criticized as poor philosophy when assessed with technical criteria. This is because, in Philips' view, failing to maintain the fine line between activism and guidance services creates a significant obstacle. The conclusion drawn by Tozlu from this argument is as follows: Sometimes, thinkers who are not professional philosophers—such as scientists or religious figures—can produce philosophical works that serve philosophy, while at other times, the works or attitudes of philosophers themselves may not be philosophical (Tozlu, 2016, I:68,69).

Nevertheless, philosophical guidance is closely related to a person's thoughts about life and their pursuit of happiness. This connection first emerges in Ancient Philosophy through Socrates and the Sophists, and later appears in the Hellenistic-Roman philosophical traditions, especially within the schools of the Epicureans, Stoics, and Skeptics. The reason why these three Hellenistic schools stand out more than others during this period is due to their insistence on viewing philosophy not as a collection of abstract concepts but as a way of life a form of guidance that directly addresses the problems and dilemmas of daily life. For these schools, the expectation from philosophy was not to construct rigid theories about life, but to teach ways of living that would relieve suffering and lead to happiness (Hadot, 2012, p. 145-152).

What makes a guidance service philosophical is undoubtedly its

engagement in rational and critical thinking. In the guidance process, both the counselor and the client engage in the activity of making philosophy together. Plato's dialogues, which convey Socrates' teachings, are full of beautiful examples of this. Even though the counselor (philosopher) is usually more knowledgeable and experienced in philosophical activities, the essence of guidance requires that the client also be active. Otherwise, we are simply talking about imposing ideas, which naturally goes against both the essence of guidance and philosophy itself. Therefore, doing philosophy in the form of dialogues also means providing philosophical guidance, and concepts like critical thinking, worldview, wisdom, and virtue form the content of philosophical guidance. Most of these concepts already express the definition of philosophy and the unavoidable necessity of practicing philosophy. In this sense, providing philosophical guidance is equivalent to practicing philosophy in the classical sense. For instance, if an academic philosopher answers students' or other clients' questions and focuses on practical issues, it does not turn them into ordinary counselors or personal development experts. Instead, it means that philosophy is serving practical life and focusing on the philosophical questions that people ask or might ask. Just as Socrates walked around the marketplaces discussing concepts like the good, the right, and the beautiful, this too is a form of practical philosophy. Similarly, although the method employed by Plato in his Socratic dialogues is grounded in theory, it is also a form of philosophical guidance (Skirbekk & Gilje, 2017, p. 63).

However, if philosophical guidance is conducted by a philosopher sitting in one place, for example, opening a counseling center and waiting for individuals to come and ask questions, and if it is completely disconnected from the theoretical realm, it can be defined as a narrow form of guidance activity but cannot be seen as true philosophical guidance. This is contrary to the spirit of philosophy and, so to speak, trivializes philosophy. From a Socratic perspective, philosophical guidance naturally addresses the anxieties, problems, and existential questions that arise in

the course of one's life, as well as the meaning of life as a whole. It can be seen as a philosophical guidance process directed by dialectical reasoning. This is not merely a casual conversation; it harbors a consistent, systematic, and holistic way of thinking. In this method, where the individual engages in dialogue with others, the aim is to seek truth, knowledge, insight, wisdom, virtue, and happiness, all within a reasoning and justified thinking process in a friendly environment. Therefore, the question-and-answer method followed in this process can be seen both as a form of conversation and a form of debate. Even when the discussion becomes heated, the environment remains one of mutual respect, ensuring that the discussion stays within philosophical boundaries. As it said, the thinking techniques and unique features of philosophy bring the activity into a philosophical form.

In this way, philosophical inquiry can assist a person in leading a more fulfilling, productive, meaningful, and happy life. Anyone who continues this method by writing as if responding to someone or by asking themselves a question on behalf of listeners or interlocutors is, inevitably, engaging in philosophical guidance. According to Walsh, philosophical guidance, from the perspective of the client, involves engaging in dialogue with someone who has philosophical knowledge, while from the perspective of the counselor, it entails offering wise guidance with a sense of moral responsibility. This guidance service works to make life meaningful through a life philosophy where the theoretical is placed in the background (2005, p. 497-99).

In short, philosophical guidance helps students or clients become more rational and reasonable in their decision-making, beliefs, values, and emotions. Philosophers, regardless of their philosophical tradition, are deemed to provide genuine philosophical guidance when they adopt dialogue as a method. This approach fosters thoughtful exploration, critical reasoning, and deeper understanding, emphasizing the universal

value of reflective discourse over doctrinal boundaries. One of the representatives of this method and philosophical guidance approach in the history of philosophy is Epictetus, a member of the school known as Late Stoicism or Roman Stoicism. Now, let's explore the principles of philosophical guidance he contributed, through the examples he offered to the people of his time.

3. Examples of Guidance from Epictetus

Epictetus, who was born in 55-135 AD in Hierapolis (modern-day Pamukkale) in Western Anatolia, is not known by his real name. The name "Epictetus" in Greek means "purchased slave" or "servant". Historical records indicate that, at a very young age, Epictetus was taken to Rome as a slave. He was assigned to serve Epaphroditus, a freed slave who worked for the Roman Emperor Nero and was known as a wealthy but coarse and rough individual. Epaphroditus, despite being a freedman, still maintained authority over Epictetus (Epictetus, 1989:9). The injury that left Epictetus crippled is said to have occurred when his master, Epaphroditus, used tongs to bend a wire for a garden gate, during which Epictetus warned him, saying "You will break my leg, master," but his master paid no attention and continued the action, eventually causing the break. Despite the pain, Epictetus calmly responded with only a mild reproach: "I told you; you would break it. Now you have!" He showed no further reaction, maintaining his stoic composure (Epictetus, 1989, p. 10).

After the incident in which he was injured, Epictetus continued his life as an ill and disabled individual (Reese, 1995:146). However, he never rebelled against his fate or the gods. Instead, he maintained a positive outlook on life and events. Epictetus's moral philosophy is rooted in this positive perspective and acceptance. While his extreme fatalism and submission might be linked to his background as a child of a slave family, a closer examination of his life and philosophy reveals a courageous and resolute character. He developed a philosophy of life and principles of

exemplary guidance that aligned with his own experiences. The central principle of his philosophy is the idea of human independence and freedom. According to Epictetus, at times, we trade our freedom and happiness for things beyond our control. People may become slaves to fame, reputation, and status, often humbling themselves in exchange. This path, he argued, leads to misery and is a road to unhappiness. Thus, Epictetus asserted that true freedom is nothing other than living according to our own choices and preferences (2013, p. 128).

In his later years, Epictetus had the opportunity to study and teach in Rome. However, during the reign of Emperor Domitian (90-94 AD), who expelled all philosophers from Italy, Epictetus moved to Nicopolis in Greece, where he continued to live and teach his moral philosophy until his death (Honderic, 1995, p. 238). Like many philosophers he admired—such as Socrates, Diogenes, and Zeno of Cyprus—Epictetus left no written works behind. Without the notes taken by his student and follower Arrian, which were later compiled into the books *Discourses* and *Enchiridion*, much of Epictetus's philosophy might have been lost to us. Epictetus firmly believed in divine justice and was content in the knowledge that he was loved by God. It is said that he passed away with this conviction in his heart. His epitaph, which he reportedly wrote himself, reads: "I am a man who knew nothing but slavery, disability, poverty, and misery, but still a beloved of the gods" (1989, p. 16). Following his death, his humble hut stood as a testament to his ascetic life, with nothing but a simple table, a tattered rug, and a wooden bed remaining. These few possessions symbolized his profound commitment to philosophical ideals, representing a life devoid of material excess and focused solely on the pursuit of wisdom.

Nietzsche associates the condition of the weak human, which began with Socrates and continued with Plato and took its final form especially in Western European culture with the concept of "decadence". This always expresses a situation that aims to protect the weakest type of

human and prevent them from facing reality by justifying their weakness. (Türkan, 2021, p. 1547) With this thesis, he can be seen as criticizing Epictetus. However, on the contrary, Epictetus represents a strong internal resistance to this decay, at least as an individual.

Long describes Epictetus as an analyst of the strengths and weaknesses of the soul, and as a spokesperson for human dignity, autonomy, and integrity (2002, p. 1). In Epictetus's philosophy, reason and ethics are paramount, as he believes that human beings are mortal creatures distinguished from other animals by their ability to act according to reason. As he puts it: "Man is a mortal animal with reason, and it is only through reason that he is separated from the animals. When man strays from reason and acts irrationally, man disappears, and an animal emerges. If man does not act according to reason, he distances himself from the values that make him human and loses his human essence" (1989, p. 82). For Epictetus, reason is a reward that enables a person to use their knowledge, thoughts, and the gifts presented to them in the most accurate way. Through reason, we come to understand that some things in life are within our control, while others are not. In the *Discourses*, he explains that we are able to distinguish between what is ours and what belongs to others. According to him, what is within our control includes our experiences, thoughts, desires, hates, tendencies—essentially everything that stems from our will. What is beyond our control, on the other hand, includes fame, status, and wealth—things that are outside of our will and can only be provided by others, regardless of how hard we try. Therefore, we cannot claim ownership over these things in the same way we can with our personal decisions and actions. True freedom, for Epictetus, lies in what we choose and how we act according to our own will, as these are the areas in which we can truly exercise autonomy (2013, p.16).

In summary, Epictetus's philosophical guidance primarily involves determining whether the issue at hand relates to something within our

control, something we can change. Based on this understanding, our actions are planned, and the principles necessary for leading a moral life are established. If the situation or event we face is within our control and subject to our will, responsibility lies with us. If it depends on others or occurs as a twist of fate beyond our control, it does not concern us. Our task is to meet the outcome of the event with dignity, to continue expressing gratitude for the blessings God has given, and to avoid rebelling against fate, no matter what we encounter. The following words, which could come from the mouth of a devout person, are attributed to Epictetus: “Have I ever rebelled against your commands?... Have I ever complained to you? Have I ever criticized your divine wisdom?... Have you ever seen me sorrowful in my condition?” (1989, p. 16). While his extreme fatalism and submission may be linked to his background as a child of a slave family, a broader evaluation of his life and philosophy reveals a courageous and strong-willed character. However, one persistent critique of his philosophy is the perceived inconsistency between his fatalism and his emphasis on personal will. Critics often point to this contradiction as a flaw in his thought.

After Socrates, if one were to search for a second philosopher whose life was adorned with examples of philosophical guidance, Epictetus would undoubtedly be the choice. Like Socrates, Epictetus, in line with the general character of Hellenistic philosophy, paid little attention to theoretical work and viewed philosophy as a practical moral philosophy, one aimed at serving life. A striking statement in this regard is: “Socrates reached perfection by making everything and every event serve his elevation and by following only reason. As for you: though you are not yet Socrates, if you wish to become Socrates, you must live like a man” (1989:46). Epictetus did not present these words merely as rhetoric; instead, he developed a life philosophy and specific principles of philosophical guidance, carefully following Socrates’ example. For Epictetus, phi-

losophy was something that existed in life itself; merely knowing philosophy was insufficient; one had to apply it to life. However, these applications could not be arbitrary; they needed to follow specific rules. Epictetus emphasized the importance of applying the rules of philosophy, and in his view, the most crucial part of philosophy was the section that explained the application of these rules. The second part involved reasoning that demonstrated the application, and the third part provided the evidence for these proofs, showing what constitutes a proof (1989:46). Having developed a practical philosophy of life and happiness, Epictetus naturally prioritized the practical aspect of philosophy.

Epictetus, in line with his practical moral philosophy, suggests that instead of using beautiful and elaborate sentences in the presence of the ignorant, one should focus on acting in accordance with what is being said, placing the discourse in the background. For example, by saying, “At a feast, instead of listing how to eat, simply eat as it should be done,” he demonstrates that he draws inspiration from Socrates in this regard. If we view philosophical guidance as a style of doing philosophy, then the most notable examples of this style are Socrates and his student Plato. While Socrates provided philosophical guidance not through writing but through living, Plato, in contrast, wrote his works in the form of dialogues. These dialogues, though fictional, reflect a process of logical and critical learning directed at real life, a form of life questioning. Although Epictetus's philosophical guidance diverges from Plato in content, it more realistically portrays the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues, emphasizing practical life and actions. In this regard, his philosophy is more deserving of the title “philosophical guidance”. The metaphor Epictetus uses to express his preference for the practical application of philosophy perfectly summarizes his views on this matter:

For just as sheep do not go to their shepherds to show how much they have eaten, but after digesting the food they produce milk and wool, do not just recite beautiful sayings to the ignorant. If you have truly internalized them, show them through your actions (1989 p.

43).

Admiral James Stockdale, who was captured during the Vietnam War, states that he managed to maintain his mental health during the psychological torture he endured from 1965 to 1967 by applying the principles of Epictetus, which he had learned earlier while studying at Stanford University. He and his wife, Sybil, explained their experience in a novel called *In Law and War*. Additionally, experts in Greek philosophy such as A. A. Long have viewed Epictetus' moral philosophy as a form of therapeutic approach, particularly emphasizing its potential for helping individuals use their minds correctly. In this regard, his philosophy has been interpreted as a form of mental medicine or preventive mental health education. Indeed, in 1959, Albert Ellis developed a therapeutic method called *Rational Emotive Therapy*, which was later expanded by Aaron Beck in 1970 under the name *Rational Behavior Therapy*. These two therapies, which share a common foundation, were combined in 1992 into a single psychotherapy system known as *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy*.¹

These practices have shown that the philosophical guidance established by Epictetus helps us solve the problems we encounter. When we make it a habit to ask ourselves whether the solution to a problem or the fulfillment of a need depends on us or others, we can say that this will protect us from many anxieties, fears, and sorrows. Since every individual knows their own abilities and limitations better, they are more capable of making accurate decisions when evaluating situations compared to external observers. If the solution depends on someone else, then the individual must decide what to do. They should think about whether they need to grovel or compromise on their moral values, or whether they need to wait patiently for the result and then make a calm and wise decision accordingly. Epictetus, when he says, "Before deciding on a sea voyage, I

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy

choose the ship and the captain, but if a storm arises on the way, it is not my concern; it is the responsibility of the ship and the crew. In such a case, shouting and screaming will be of no use” (1989, p. 77), pointing directly to this principle of philosophical guidance.

For Epictetus, whether life is long or short, it should be seen as nothing more than a play. In this life, we are merely actors. Whatever role the director assigns to us, we should play it to the best of our ability, and when the director calls us off the stage, we must leave quietly, which demonstrates his deep belief in a universe and fate governed by a Supreme Power. The cornerstone of his guidance is his steadfast faith, anchored in the belief in an omnipotent and supremely just God. Although it is said that, like other Stoic philosophers, his belief in God is akin to the concept of Nature, he often addresses a personal god, praying to it. After Seneca, Epictetus also thoroughly addresses the issue of death and grief, reaching profound conclusions with concise expressions. This is because the event of death and the fear of death are the most significant sources of fear and sorrow for us. However, according to him, it is not death itself that is terrifying, but our thoughts about death. Generally, it is not the events or material things that upset people, but the meaning that they assign to them. Epictetus argues that death is not a catastrophe, and if it were, it would have appeared as such to Socrates as well. He suggests that the real catastrophe lies in the negative meanings we attribute to death. Therefore, when we are unhappy or in pain, we should not blame anyone. The only culprit is the way we assign meaning.²

According to Epictetus, one of the reasons for sorrow and unhappi-

²For details on Epictetus’ thoughts on death, see also Esra Çağrı Mutlu, *Epiktetos’ta Ölüm Üzerine (Epictetus on Death)* Gaziantep University Social Sciences Institute Journals, vol.: 17, Issue: 4 (1262 -1269); Mehmet Önal, “*Death and Beyond in Epiktetos*” (*Epiktetos’ta Ölüm ve Sonrası*), *Özne*, Sayı: 29, (107-116).

ness is our excessive attachment to the world, material possessions, status, and position. Through the reality of death, Epictetus illustrates the finitude of life and a philosophical principle of guidance, using a ship journey metaphor to convey that material goods are not permanent, and that death marks the end of life:

If, on a sea journey, the ship stops at a port and sends you ashore to get some water, you may collect things like seashells or mushrooms you find on the way. However, your mind should always be on the ship. You should frequently turn your head towards the ship to see if the captain is calling you. If the captain calls, you should quickly drop everything you have and return to the ship, to avoid being dragged back like an animal with its legs tied. The same situation applies to life's journey: if you come across a woman or a child, you may adopt them, just like the seashell or mushroom. But when the captain calls, you must leave everything behind and go without looking back. Even if you are old, you should not stray too far from the ship for fear of not being able to catch up (1989, p. 20,21).

He continues his philosophical guidance on this matter as well. He teaches that it is incorrect to say “I have lost it” when something is taken from us, and instead, while things are in our possession, we should use them as if they belong to someone else. This approach protects individuals from boasting about wealth, attachment to status, and naturally, from pride and arrogance. He repeatedly emphasizes that the real force leading people into error, immorality, and injustice is their trust in worldly possessions, power, and fame, and he seeks to build his guidance on awareness of this issue. His statement may seem a bit extreme from today's perspective, but it is important for conveying his message: “Has your child died? You have returned him. Has your wife died? You have returned her. Has your field been taken from you? Here is a new return. But don't say, ‘It was taken by a bad man.’ What does it matter that the hand that gave it to you takes it back through the hand of so-and-so or

such-and-such?” (1989:22). Another statement by Epictetus on this matter is: “If you see someone mourning because their child is abroad or they have lost their property, do not let your imagination run wild. Never believe that they are truly unfortunate because of these external things” (1989, p. 24).

Epictetus’s guiding activities, although they may vary depending on the situation and circumstances, are not merely individual examples aimed at solving immediate problems. On the contrary, they are principles that can be applied to similar situations. What makes his thoughts on practical life and moral maxims philosophical is precisely the fact that they are based on these principles (Bor, 2023, p. 63-66).

Conclusion

Epictetus has constructed a life philosophy that is clearly practical and aligned with human nature and the realities of life. The guidance he proposes, or philosophical guidance, is based on a philosophy that follows reason and nature. From this perspective, we can summarize his life philosophy and understanding of guidance as follows: Philosophy should focus on fulfilling the desires of the mind rather than prioritizing bodily pleasures. It is only through philosophy that we can accept that what is within our control depends on us, while what is beyond our control develops outside of our will. In this way, individuals can use their will more effectively, walk more easily on the path to freedom, and develop more accurate thoughts. According to him, the most significant mistake that misleads us, leads us toward evil, or drags us into rebellion, is that we evaluate events not based on reason and the nature of things, but according to our desires and wishes. In fact, this issue would be discussed again in the phenomenological perspective, that is in the context of the concept of "intentional consciousness". (Türkan, 2024, p. 182)

From another perspective, Epictetus’ entire philosophy is essentially a set of answers to the question “How can I be happy?” answers enriched

with examples from his own life and experiences. Ultimately, everything that affects us, whether good or bad, depends solely on our judgments and the correct or incorrect reactions we give to events. Despite the passage of over 2000 years and all the changes that have occurred, the continued influence of Epictetus' philosophy as a living example of philosophical guidance can be explained by his deep understanding of human reality. After all, without truly understanding human nature, it is impossible to offer guidance in any field. One of the most criticized aspects of Epictetus' principles is his excessive fatalism and the concept of endurance. The uncertainty regarding how his philosophy of will aligns with his fatalism in each distinct situation makes this criticism legitimate. Additionally, one of the main challenges in understanding his philosophy and consequently his guidance lies in the fact that his works are based on notes taken by his student Arrian. This results in a lack of philosophical coherence, as the teachings are presented in fragmented pieces. This weakens the integrity of his philosophical guidance and occasionally creates inconsistencies in his moral philosophy and philosophical counseling. However, when considered as a whole, his life clearly shows that his philosophy is a consistent example of philosophical guidance, and it is evident that he shaped his philosophy through direct personal experience. From his example, it can naturally be inferred that creating a philosophy centered around human nature is, in a sense, a form of providing philosophical guidance.

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