

Stoic Detachment; is this a myth?

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A rather common modern (though not ancient) criticism of Stoicism is that Stoicism promotes an attitude of ‘detachment’ from other people. This criticism has been made by Martha Nussbaum and Richard Sorabji, for instance. This criticism is rather puzzling in that Stoicism – by contrast with Epicureanism, for instance - encourages deep and sustained involvement in family and communal life, as well as in friendship. Scholarly claims of Stoic detachment are based, in large measure, on a single theme and indeed passage, in Epictetus (*Handbook* 3, a shortened version of *Discourses* 3.24.88), which includes the rather disturbing image of kissing your child while reminding yourself that he or she may die. In this talk, I locate this passage in the context of *Discourse* 24 as a whole and more broadly, of Stoic thinking about the combination of personal and social involvement and acceptance of the possibility of death (drawing on Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, for instance). I suggest that interpreting these Stoic ideas as expressing detachment from other people is misleading and that it may reflect a specifically modern sensibility.