

It us. however,
despite the
indisputable need



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It has often been said that the ability for humans to exhibit and perceive emotions is a part of the human condition. The capability of demonstrating emotional responses is not exclusive to humans but is shared all across the animal kingdom. Its purpose, seemingly obvious at first, may not be as apparent as one thinks. Emotions are vital for everyday living because it helps us to carry out many of our daily activities such as communication and responding accordingly to the events and issues around us. However, despite the indisputable need for emotions, like many other essentials in our lives, it may become hard to manage or understand the extent to which it crosses a boundary of being beneficial, to becoming a burden. If you've ever been in a situation of someone bawling over the death of their pet goldfish or on the contrary having no emotion at all? These are all scenarios that manifest the ancient philosophy of Stoicism. In light of some of the recent events in our world, I decided to explore whether Stoicism and some of its greatest thinkers might offer some ideas we can use to live a good and smart life.

The fundamentals of ancient Stoic philosophy are often misinterpreted, however through a fair analysis and practice of this philosophy I believe individuals will gain insight into leading a life composed of stability and equanimity, both of which will influence a happier and healthier life. First a little history. Individuals who were considered the greatest minds of their century and three of the most famous leaders of the philosophy include Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Seneca.

Though, the roots of this philosophy begin with a man named Zeno of Citium. He was a prominent Greek physician in the Roman Empire and at one point “

suffered the loss of all of his work and books”(Daily Stoic). This tragedy one would assume caused an excessively distressing and emotional response.

Nonetheless, his response was quite unexpected and revealed the beginning of the Stoic philosophy. He said “ the fact that, after the loss of the totality of my pharmaceutical remedies, the totality of my books, as well as these recipes of reputable remedies, as well as the various editions I wrote on them, in addition to so many other works, each one of which exhibits that love of work that was mine my entire life; the fact that I felt no pain shows first the nobility of my behavior and my greatness of soul” (Daily Stoic). With a strong emphasis on virtue, justice, duty and reason, the Stoics believe that a life of self-control and moderation is a path that leads to a good life.

Many times in our life we will encounter situations that make us uncomfortable or distressed. These issues are inevitable and something each individual of the human race will experience, and for thousands of years across centuries everyone from politicians to philosophers have attempted to find a logical practice that will help individuals cope with such issues.

I strongly believe that we have found the answer for this obstacle by following one of the fundamental teachings of Stoicism. The Stoics valued, among few other things, self-control and the practice of temperance. This idea encourages individuals to develop a rational way of thinking and believing that we have the power to control our judgments and emotions. When individuals do not keep these two behaviors in their own control and learn to manage them it borders on the line of irrationality and in the long run is not behavior that will promote a happier life. As a result, Stoic philosophers

have said “ the power of rational judgment is the only true power that we possess in life” (Raynor).

The ability comes from our rational nature: our power to think critically about our experiences and to change our perspective on them. All other powers that we possess – can be derived from external and materialistic desires including money, roles in society and possessions can be taken or lost in an instant. The Stoics argued even if these materialistic items were taken away we still have the innate power to maintain a rational mind.

. This intrinsic power is an essential feature of our human nature. However, despite these benefits there have been minor criticisms of the temperance that Stoic philosophy advises. Take for example, a situation that many of us have encountered or will in the future. You’re driving on the road and a driver completely oblivious to your vehicle cuts you off and then proceeds to roll down the window and yell out some derogatory language. In this traffic incident a Stoic approach dictates that we should question the situation and would conclude that rationally it is not a situation worth getting upset about because realistically nothing can be within our abilities. Nonetheless, others would argue that they do not deserve to be the victim of such abuse.

The ill-mannered actions of the other driver would be deemed unjust and deserving of punishment. Additionally, by not responding to this accident and informing the driver of their wrong-doings, we may be condoning their actions and ultimately an endless cycle of injustice. Nevertheless, a Stoic would respond that if you were truly in search of happiness and in a pursuit of developing yourself control the right thing to do will be to accept the incident

for what it is and not let it manifest in your mind for a second longer because ultimately you are the one that will face the anger and effects of the negative emotions. “Control your state of mind and you can be happy on the rack, the Stoics used to say. It is a grim teaching, but effective” (Raynor).

The first step to taking self-control the Stoic way is to affirm one's power of rational judgment. To maintain tranquility and a balanced state of mind we need to nurture our inner strength and power. Another reason I strongly suggest the discipline of Stoicism is in the interest of learning to cope with the minor and major inconveniences that life may present us with. This may range from a break-up to the loss of your house in a flood and the sole idea these issues or tragedies will have in common is how you respond to them.

Stoic philosophy advises individuals to not be troubled by realms that are out of their control but solely focus on things that stem internally and can be managed by oneself. In our daily lives we face conundrums that are presented to us through fate and it is in our best interest to face these issues in a way that will be of least harm and consequences for ourselves, and to do this we must follow the wise words of Epictetus. He proclaims “that our most important choice in life is to decide whether to concern ourselves with the external or internal”.

The suggestion here is that matters that are external including actions of others is not something we should concern ourselves with. An important way to practice this idea is through asking the question: do I have control over this? If you do, stop worrying and get to work. If you don't have control, the reality is worrying won't make it better. Furthermore, going back to the

firstpoint, it might be a good idea to ask yourself what your belief is that'scausing all this worry, is there a rational reasoning for it? (Pigliucci) Thisjustifies that sadness, anger and worrying are irrational responses and possiblyare not the most effective way to overcome an obstacle.

Nonetheless, I wouldargue that by recognizing there are many things we cannot control, we actuallygain a greater feeling of control over our lives, as we come to terms with faterather than bashing our heads against it.

Conversely, somesuggest this idea implies passively abiding by fate with no expression of theirown input. If one is " accepting" and learns to compromise with events then we loseour sense of free will and choice. If one accepts that everything that happensto them is a matter of fate, how are we able to tolerate all of the injusticethat occurs in the world? An example of such is women gaining the right tovote.

By complying that women were just not worthy enough or any of the otherirrational reasons behind not giving them the power to vote we would never havegained this right. Without a firm stance on what needed to be done and notallowing beliefs to be as they always have been, we would not inspire changeand improvement in our world. Thesecontrary ideas portray an interesting perspective on the role of fate in ourlives. The implication being that there is some sort of perfect balance thatmust be sought, similar to Aristotle's idea of the golden mean. It would befoolish to think that you could control everything in life, yet having no senseof control would impede on your personal development.

This seems to relate tothe dichotomy of humanist ideals vs. anti-humanist ideals, as the formerrevolves around the idea of us having the power to

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manipulate our environments so as to allow us to develop, while the latter preaches the idea that there is not a whole lot we can do. Finally, to truly reinstate why I believe Stoicism provide good advice on how to live I allude to a mental exercise that experts recommended in the practice of this philosophy. This exercise goes by the name of “negative visualization” (Daily Stoic) and has its roots from the phenomenon of Hedonic Adaptation.

This concept refers to the means that we constantly get used to the things we have and then begin to take them for granted.. Stoics base this negative visualization technique off of a quote by Marcus Aurelius: “Do not indulge in dreams of having what you have not, but reckon up the chief of the blessings you do possess, and then thankfully remember how you would crave for them if they were not yours.

“Negative visualization does not rely on negative emotions; in fact, it is intended to help prevent them. Negative visualization means imagining unwanted outcomes and how we would deal with them in a virtuous way, so that we are not caught off guard if they do happen. Ryan Holiday the bestselling author of *The Obstacle is the Way* portrays the purpose of this exercise quite eloquently: “if it comes as a constant surprise each and every time something unexpected occurs, you’re not only going to be miserable whenever you attempt something big, you’re going to have a much harder time accepting it and moving on to attempts two, three, and four.

The only guarantee, ever, is that things could go wrong” (Holiday). The only thing we can use to mitigate this is anticipation, because the only variable we control completely is ourselves. It also reminds us of what we do have so we

are grateful for it, not out of fear of its loss as such, but simply through understanding that we may not have it in the future. To sum up I hope you have gained insight into why I strongly believe that the sooner we start practicing healthy thinking, during both times of ease and times of challenge, the better equipped we can find ourselves to handle difficult events of varying degrees. What I recommend is the embrace of the variety of non-debilitating human emotions, both pleasant and less pleasant.

Additionally, to realize that it is not circumstances that will create what we feel, but the perspective we choose to take about those circumstances that will do so. The more we practice mindfulness, thinking about our thinking, and choosing to think in healthy ways which create healthy and non-debilitating emotions, the easier it can be to remain steady, stable and alert during times of concern. For these reasons, I stand by my argument that Stoicism provides good advice on how to live.