



Applying Philosophy of Stoicism for Psychological Control in Recent Complex Society

Yu Nishikiori¹, Hiroshi Bando^{1,2ID*}, Masahiro Bando^{1,2}, Akiyo Yoshioka¹

¹*Integrative Medicine Japan (IMJ), Shikoku Island division, Tokushima, Japan*

²*Tokushima University and Medical Research, Tokushima, Japan*

Corresponding Author: **Hiroshi Bando** [ORCID ID](#)

Address: Tokushima University /Medical Research, Nakashowa 1-61, Tokushima 770-0943, Japan; Email:

pianomed@bronze.ocn.ne.jp

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Abstract

A supreme Japanese physician, Dr. Shigeaki Hinohara, has enlightened the importance of lifestyle habits for a creative life. It includes aspects similar to the historical philosophy of Stoicism for psychological control and appropriate direction. Its main characteristics have some components, which are dichotomy, self-control, reasoning, pursuit of virtue, gratitude, and inner freedom. The purpose is to achieve inner strength that is not influenced by circumstances. Epictetus offered people a practical framework for a flourishing life by continuing rational decision-making, self-awareness, and the cultivation of moral character. Applying Stoicism to our daily life will provide smooth and meaningful relationships with others.

Keywords

Stoicism, Epictetus, Virtue, Shigeaki Hinohara, Self-Control

Commentary

In Japan, noble words and teachings are present that serve as models for behavior: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty [1]. Related goals and abstract concepts also exist [2]. To get closer to them in real life, we need to take concrete action. In order for everyone to understand and put them into practice, it seems appropriate to combine Eastern analog concepts with Western digital practical actions. The authors have been involved for years in continuing clinical practice, related research, and managing research groups in the fields of psychosomatic medicine, primary care medicine, and integrative medicine. By integrating these experiences, it becomes possible to provide more effective advice to people broadly.

Our research group has been active in the fields of medicine, philosophy, and psychosomatic medicine. Dr. Shigeaki Hinohara served as director of St. Luke's International Hospital in Tokyo [3]. He continued to educate medical staff and the general public in health education until he was 105 years old [4]. As a noble and super doctor, he founded the New Elderly Association (NEA) [5]. He described the importance of lifestyle habits, stating that "Birds cannot change the way they fly, but humans can change the way they live." With free thoughts and hearts, it shows the importance of living a creative life [6].

As a well-known Stoic philosopher, Epictetus spoke of freedom as follows: he who lives according to his own

will is free. He is not compelled, hindered, dominated by force, or prevented from choosing [7]. In modern times, many people wish to live more freely. Because of work and family commitments, it is often difficult to live as we wish. As a result, we tend to think that “as long as we cannot change our environment, living freely is difficult.” When applying the philosophy of Stoicism, freedom can always be achieved by accurately controlling what is within our control [8]. By slightly shifting our perspective, our thoughts and interpretations can move in a more appropriate direction, which in turn can affect our words, actions, and behavior. Here, we outline goals for smoothly adhering to one's will by effectively implementing Stoic philosophy in our daily lives.

A specific philosophy was born in ancient Greece more than 2000 years ago: Stoicism [9]. This word has been known through the expression “stoic lifestyle.” It can teach us the fundamental ways of thinking as follows: i) to focus on what we can control, ii) not to be influenced by what we cannot control, and iii) not to be swayed by emotional responses. The purpose is to live a comfortable life by emphasizing self-control and reasoning. Stoicism encourages a person to align decisions and mindset with responsibility rather than wishing to change circumstances. Freedom means properly controlling what exists within our ability. It allows us to make adequate choices and develop supreme personal character. Even if we cannot change given circumstances, we have the freedom to change our behavior and actions.

Stoic philosophy seeks inner peace and virtue in our minds, rather than being swayed by transient emotions. By obtaining a stable mind and heart, we can control our inner self and prevent distraction from various external events. It is one of the wisdom traditions for living a better and more comfortable life. Its main characteristics can be presented as follows.

- i) **Dichotomy method for control:** we can recognize that our own thoughts and actions can be changed, but others' behavior and fate cannot.
- ii) **Self-control and reasoning:** our abilities can be cultivated to overcome impulses and desires through calm judgment.
- iii) **Pursuit of virtue:** actual practice of the four main

virtues—wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance (endurance and self-control) [10]. These four aspects can lead to the achievement of moral happiness.

iv) **Acceptance with gratitude for our fate:** we may accept whatever fate brings with grateful judgment. With a calm mind, we believe in our ability to overcome several challenges.

v) **Inner freedom of the mind:** the purpose is to achieve inner strength and freedom that are not influenced by external circumstances (**Fig-1**).



Fig-1: Main Basic Factors of Stoicism

Recently, the introduction of Stoicism has attracted attention in various fields, including business, sports, education, psychology, and medicine. It advocates that happiness can be obtained not through external circumstances but through our own virtue and reasoning [11]. Stoicism teaches that the best way to live comfortably is to follow universal reason (logos) and exercise our innate human rationality. In this way, we can live in accordance with nature.

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. A novel approach is to overcome our weaknesses, which can lead to greater confidence and development in the future. In other words, weaknesses hold great potential for future growth. First, calmly understand your weaknesses. Next, consider possible methods to improve them to a standard level and eventually raise them to a higher level. Epictetus taught the following: “Strive to improve your weaknesses,” and “Each person needs training according to their own goals” [12]. This does not mean forcing yourself to train a weakness you

dislike, but learning from the experience so that you no longer fear similar struggles in the future. Such experiences will surely bring happiness and well-being in the future.

In summary, Epictetus offered people a practical framework for flourishing in life through rational decision-making, self-awareness, and the cultivation of moral character [13].

Applying Stoicism in daily life can provide smooth and meaningful relationships with others. Furthermore, others will recognize and evaluate you as having a stable mental state, allowing you to live naturally with wellness and happiness. It is expected that this description may help guide future thinking and living.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and declare no conflicts of interest.

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