



Addis ABABA UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy

Masters Thesis

The Pursuit of the Good Life: A Contemporary Analysis
through the Eyes of Stoicism, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus

BY: DURETI JUNDI

Jun, 2025

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This is to certify that the thesis is prepared by Dureti Jundi entitled “The Pursuit of the Good Life: A Contemporary Analysis through the Eyes of Stoicism, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus” and submitted in a partial fulfillment of the requirements for Degree of Master of Philosophy. The work follows the rules and requirements set by the University. It also meets the University’s standards for being original and for having good quality in terms of content, research, and presentation.

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Abstract

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live a life filled with serenity or what it would look like to live a good life? Is it possible to live a good life in the modern world that is immersed in pursuing materialistic things? This thesis presents a contemporary evaluation of the pursuit of a good life the Stoic way and how people can pursue a good life through Stoicism; this thesis will center on the philosophy of major Stoic philosophers like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. This thesis aims to demonstrate that people can lead a fulfilling life, regardless of the challenges they may face, by applying Stoic teachings. This thesis will explore how individuals can pursue a meaningful life despite the problems of modern society.

This thesis will examine the Stoic path to a good life, which puts great emphasis on living a virtuous life and living by nature's rules. This thesis aspires to show how stoicism can help individuals live a good life; this thesis will show how Stoic philosophy can be essential for individuals who want to pursue a good life by cultivating a life that values wisdom, practice, virtue, resilience, acceptance, and being present. This thesis will offer a contemporary analysis of two of the most essential figures in the history of Stoicism.

By examining Stoic philosophy that fosters being resilient regardless of any challenges and accepting things and situations that can't be changed, and by emphasizing the essence of embodying Stoic teachings, this thesis will explore how individuals can overcome the challenges of modern society, like materialism and mass consumption. Regardless of the problematic nature of contemporary culture, individuals can pursue a good life by following Stoic principles that foster wisdom, resilience, and a life filled with peace of mind.

Keywords: Stoicism, Virtue, Resilience, Awareness, Acceptance, materialism

1.1 Introduction

Stoicism is a philosophical school of thought that emphasizes the significance of virtue, self-discipline, and acceptance of one's fate. When we look at the roots of stoicism, it leads us to ancient Greece and Rome, and stoicism was one of the most popular civic disciplines in the West, practiced by the rich, powerful, and struggling who wanted to live a good life (Holiday & Hanselman, 2016, p. 7). The question of pursuing a good life is not new to humanity; in fact, the question is how to pursue a good and meaningful life. How to live a purposeful life? It is a question that existed from the time of the Pre-Socratics. Philosophers like Heraclitus, with his view toward change and unity of opposites, emphasize an outlook on life that encompasses the flux of existence and the need for balance, which can be viewed as the pursuit of a good life by accepting and understanding change.

Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium; Zeno was born in the 330s BCE in the town of Citium in Cyprus. It is believed that the moment Zeno traveled to Athens in his early twenties, he visited a bookstore where he found a copy of Xenophon's *Memorabilia of Socrates*. While looking through this book, Zeno asked the bookseller if or where men like Socrates could be found; at just that moment, the Cynic Crates was walking past, and the bookseller said to Zeno, "Follow that man (Sellars, 2006, p. 4). This incident of Zeno shows us a glimpse of Stoic teachings, where they see obstacles as an opportunity for self-development. Zeno was a merchant who lost everything when he was faced with a shipwreck, and he lost everything he had. However, he found himself in a bookstore, and that moment became one of the turning points of Zeno's life. At that bookstore, he was struck by the wisdom of one of the greatest philosophers of all time, Socrates. He became interested in the teachings of Socrates and then became the father of Stoicism. This shows us the beauty of turning our challenges into a lesson and looking at adversity with calmness. When faced with challenges, instead of whining about what happened and making a big deal about the situation or being a victim, stoicism teaches individuals to face adversity with indifference and accept whatever has happened.

One of the major teachings of Stoic philosophy is that the Stoics believed virtue and the four core virtues of self-control, courage, justice, and wisdom would lead individuals into contentment. The Stoics believed that it is our perceptions of things rather than the things themselves that cause most of our trouble. Stoicism teaches that we can't control or rely on

anything outside what Epictetus called our “reasoned choice,” our ability to use our reason to choose how we categorize, respond, and reorient ourselves to external events (Holiday & Hanselman, 2016, p. 9). For the Stoics, virtue is the highest good, and we can’t control or rely on anything outside our control. We can reason and choose how we see and respond. Knowing the fact that we can change our lives by being self-disciplined and that nobody can save us but ourselves would save us from endless overthinking.

The only thing that qualifies as good is virtue, the only thing that strictly counts as the good; other things can essentially be beneficial on the one hand and essentially harmful on the other hand. For the Stoics, wisdom is always unconditionally beneficial to the wise person. The Stoics extend indifference to many things that people naturally care about, such as health and wealth, and they also extend indifference to things that people naturally dislike, such as illness and poverty (A. A. Long, 2018). For the Stoics, one can live a good life through virtue.

When we look at major Stoic philosophies, the Stoics are known most of the time for their belief that living according to nature is the right thing to do. The Stoics believed that aligning our actions with what nature demands is the right thing to do and the right way to live. Zeno of Citium emphasizes the importance of living by natural law; he advises individuals to live a life that fosters virtue and wisdom. Zeno believed that individuals should live in coherence with the natural order (Long, 2006, p. 23). Zeno emphasized the vitality of aligning our actions with reason and virtue so that we can live a virtuous life. The other vital principle of the Stoics is that they emphasize having moral integrity; they saw it as essential for individuals who aspire to have inner peace and live a meaningful life. The Stoics advise individuals to stand on what those individuals believe in, even though those individuals might get criticized; those individuals should choose to do the right thing no matter what other people say about them.

The other crucial teachings of Stoicism are lectured on by Epictetus, who is a prominent Stoic philosopher. Epictetus writes that "the things that are up to us are by nature free, unconstrained, and unimpeded; the things not up to us are weak, enslaved, hindered, and not our own" (Epictetus, 2008, p. 25). Epictetus believed that there are things that individuals have control over and have no control of. However, he argued that individuals have the freedom to choose how they want to act and be, but the things that are not in our control are things like the opinions of others and how people think or take certain actions. Epictetus advised individuals to disdain things that are not in their control.

Epictetus advises individuals to always focus on what they control, to let go of what they can't control, and to be detached from the things that are not in their control. For instance, like the rain, you can't dictate whether the rain rains today or not; that is not up to you. Just focus on the things that you can control. The other crucial principle that the Stoics advocate is the importance of self-discipline in pursuing a virtuous life by being disciplined and rejecting that which would not go with their beliefs. By having that discipline, the Stoics believe that one can live a well-balanced life.

The Stoic view of a well-balanced life can't be distorted by sudden shifts or external events. Stoicism offers a diversified viewpoint that offers principles that can lead individuals to live a virtuous life. The Stoics considered virtue to be the ultimate good for them. We should always work on ourselves and foster resilience and inner peace. For the Stoics, we can get true inner strength and happiness through the actions we take in times of trial. Becoming resilient in times of adversity is the way to a good life. The overall objective of this thesis is to examine and compare the Stoic teachings, their understanding of the highest good, and their practices that can help us pursue a good life. It will also show how Stoic philosophy is essential for the modern world, the Stoic way of life that practices virtue, resilience, and acceptance. I will also explore the notion of a good life in different worldviews and concepts.

The Stoics teach us to be grounded in ourselves, to do the right thing, and to do what's in our power to do. To say no when it's enough and not overindulge in things or foods. The Stoics believe that even though the world can operate in the external world, we can control how we perceive things and question the things we ponder if they are rational or if external situations or people influence them, or if the environment influences certain thoughts we live in. The Stoics believe that we should always examine our thoughts and the way we act, and they believe that our power lies in that, not in how the world wishes to operate. The Stoics teach us to have thick skin, not to be bothered by others or their opinions, and to do our best in everything.

Indifference is a great attitude to look at things, not associating them or seeing them as bad or good, but just looking at them objectively. I understand why the Stoics put virtue as the highest good, as virtue is the one thing that no one can take away from anyone—virtue for the sake of virtue. Virtue is enough in itself. Marcus Aurelius teaches us not to fear death but to fear not living our lives with fear. Why fear something that everyone faces? Until now, I have not seen

someone who is immortal. Everyone and everything that one lives with dies, and would fearing it make one not die? We will die, so let's live our lives and do what we can.

It's always how we perceive things. That would give them meaning, whether they're good or not, which means it is not on the thing in itself but on how to see it. We still have free will in the way we think, the way we act, or the way we perceive things. We have the free will to choose and accept the situation. Instead of blaming anyone or anything, we can choose to do what is right and do what we can in that external situation. When faced with what might seem unfortunate, we can turn that into something fortunate and become more resilient and calmer in our lives.

This thesis will also explore and show a contemporary analysis of two of the most essential figures in the history of stoicism, One is known as the greatest emperor of the Roman Empire, who led Rome for almost two decades, Marcus Aurelius, and the other is Epictetus, who is known to be one of the greatest Stoic philosophers, who was born a slave but turned out to be a major Stoic philosopher who gave lectures to many great minds. The fundamental idea of Stoicism is to live a life harmoniously and live a virtuous life. Stoic teachings can create a more favorable environment for modern society. As follows, this thesis will extensively assess the Stoic philosophy of the good life and will also touch upon its criticisms.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Most of us have questioned what it would look like to pursue a good life, to live a meaningful life. Stoic philosophy offers principles that one can use to live a good life. On the contrary, recently, Stoicism has been getting vast attention from numerous people, from young people to celebrities. It has been getting huge media coverage. It has also become a weapon of scammers who claim to be stoic but miss the main teachings of stoicism and offer a false image of stoic philosophy.

The reason that stoic philosophy has gotten the interest of many in modern society is that many individuals are craving a sense of meaning and a sense of direction in a world that is filled with doubt and the effects of social media. Stoicism seems to offer legitimate guidelines, and the teachings of stoicism seem to be beneficial. Stoic philosophy gives wisdom and guidance—principles that can help individuals have inner peace and be content in their lives. Stoicism has a special place in the contemporary world; the resurgence of stoicism echoes the search for

meaning in one's life and a thirst for virtue. This thesis aims to analyze and explore the Stoic path to the good life and explore the teachings of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus.

This thesis aspires to explore Stoic philosophy, their understanding of the highest good, and their practices that can help one pursue a good life; it will show how Stoic philosophy is essential for the modern world and the Stoic way of life that practices virtue, resilience, and acceptance. Explore the notion of a good life in different worldviews and concepts. This thesis will also explore and show a contemporary analysis of two of the most essential figures in the history of Stoicism and draw inspiration from Stoic philosophy. So the above will be the subject matter of this thesis.

Even though Stoicism has numerous followers, and many claim that it's an amazing philosophy, it also comes with criticism. We will explore the criticisms more in chapter four, but for now, let's take a look at one of the criticisms: One of the key issues that arise as a criticism of Stoic philosophy is that some thinkers believe that Stoicism would suppress one's emotions, and that would be bad for one's life. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche criticized stoicism for suppressing one's creativity and passions, claiming that it undermines the human will to power. Nevertheless, Stoicism's understanding may create a more favorable environment for modern society. This thesis will extensively assess the Stoic philosophy on the path to the good life and will also touch upon its criticisms.

THE MAIN THEME

To live a good life, one needs to know the things that matter and don't matter. To live a good life, having a sense of direction about where we want to be and where we don't want to be is also vital. Recognizing what matters and what doesn't will at least minimize hindrances, that come our way making it easier for one to pursue a good life. The pursuit of a good life through the eyes of Stoicism, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus would be the main figures of this thesis paper. Accordingly, a contemporary analysis and examination of the Stoic philosophy in the path of pursuing the good life, this thesis will explore different worldviews.

The Stoics teach us a very important lesson, which we can use to face our problems with ease and ethically live our lives. As a consequence, this thesis will explore and give emphasis to having a balanced outlook; it's essential for us to know the "Golden Mean," as Aristotle believed that we should have balance in our lives. It's important to understand what's within our power

and what's not, but knowing your power does not make you passive; rather, it gives you self-awareness, which is good for one's life. Knowing what's under your control will free you from fear, but knowing your limitations does not mean that you will give up on doing things you are supposed to do. Stoicism teaches us to strive and harmoniously live our lives with nature and with those in nature; stoicism also teaches us not to be a slave to things that are not in our control.

1.3 Research Problem

Although we are living in a world that moves fast and seems to be the most advanced, most people seem to be lost, depressed, and have no purpose. Stoic philosophy can be beneficial in resolving those problems. As a result, this thesis aspires to explore the pursuit of the good life in a Stoic way and also shows the benefits of Stoic perceptions that can help individuals pursue a good life. In doing that, this thesis will explore and show a contemporary analysis of two of the most essential figures in the history of Stoicism: one is known as the greatest emperor of the Roman Empire, who led Rome for almost two decades, Marcus Aurelius, and the other is Epictetus.

1.4 Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative kind of study that employs books, articles, literature, and other secondary materials that can be useful in carrying out the study.

- To get the main principles of Stoicism, I will use the textual analysis that would include primary texts by Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus.
- To get and understand what makes them have the same ideas and different thoughts, this thesis will use a comparative analysis between different Stoic views of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus on the pursuit of a good life. And also explore other worldviews that can give us different insights.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This thesis aspires to examine Stoic teachings and practices and give principles that help one live a meaningful life. It will also offer a contemporary analysis of major Stoic philosophers Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. This thesis will emphasize Stoic guidelines that can help one live a good life and explore other worldviews that can help us pursue a good life. It will also show how

beneficial it is for modern society to practice Stoic philosophy, like virtue, wisdom, self-discipline, resilience, acceptance, and the beauty of being present.

This thesis also aims to explore the limitations of stoicism. Some of the critics question the applicability of Stoicism. The practicability of applying ancient Stoic principles in today's diverse, complex society. The general objective of this thesis is to explore the pursuit of a good life through the teachings of Stoicism and offer a contemporary analysis of key figures of Stoicism, like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus.

This thesis aspires to explore and understand the Stoics' conception of a good life, what Stoicism can offer us, and its significance to the current world. When we look at the contemporary world, a generation that has been most hit by mental health issues, even though the modern world is considered to be the most progressive world, this paper will also explore whether the Stoics' practices are applicable and examine the limitations and criticisms of Stoicism.

1.6 Research Questions

This thesis will answer the following questions: What does it mean to live a good life to the Stoics, and how is it different from other worldviews of the good life and happiness? Also, what makes it different from the worldly conception of happiness? What are the main teachings of Stoicism and its key figures like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, and what are their conceptions of a good life? How can we pursue a good life? What are the ways, and how can we apply Stoic teachings and principles to our lives? How can we withstand the challenges of our current world and pursue a good life? In what ways can we use or apply Stoic teachings in our lives to be more aware, resilient, and have a strong mindset? How can the Stoic way to a good life be helpful to this contemporary world?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The contemporary world is filled with technology, and although those advancements have made life simpler, they have also brought major problems. We are living in a world that is most affected by anxiety, with most people losing a sense of purpose. This study is significant because it aims to explore and offer insights that are helpful in the pursuit of a meaningful life following Stoic philosophy that we all can practice and have a deeper understanding of the teaching of Stoicism; this thesis also aspires to contribute to the rising body of literature on Stoicism and its

significance in the current world. By delving into the Stoic way to the good life, this thesis aims to give guidance that can foster virtue and resilience.

This thesis explores the significance of Stoicism in addressing modern issues such as anxiety, depression, and a pervasive loss of purpose, particularly in a world increasingly influenced by technology and social media. By revitalizing interest in Stoicism, the research emphasizes its principles of virtue, acceptance, and mindfulness as essential counterpoints to the materialism prevalent in contemporary society.

One of the key contributions of this thesis is its framework for meaningful living. It offers a structured approach to integrating Stoic virtues—wisdom, courage, justice, and self-discipline—into daily life. This framework is designed to guide individuals toward more fulfilling and purposeful existences, demonstrating that these ancient teachings remain relevant in today's context.

The thesis also provides a critical analysis of Stoicism by acknowledging and addressing common criticisms associated with the philosophy. Concerns regarding emotional suppression and limited social engagement are examined, and counterarguments are presented to reinforce Stoicism's practical applicability and its potential for fostering personal growth.

Additionally, this thesis engages in comparative philosophy by juxtaposing Stoicism with other philosophical and religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Christianity. This comparison highlights shared values and distinctions, enriching the discourse on ethical living and personal fulfillment.

Another vital aspect of the research is its emphasis on the relevance of Stoicism to modern mental health challenges. By promoting internal control and acceptance, Stoicism is positioned as a valuable resource for those struggling with the pressures of contemporary life. The thesis advocates for a mindset shift that prioritizes these Stoic principles as effective strategies for enhancing well-being.

Furthermore, the research encourages self-reflection and rationality as essential tools for personal development. By cultivating a deeper understanding of one's thoughts and actions, individuals can navigate life's complexities with greater clarity and purpose. This thesis effectively demonstrates the enduring relevance of Stoicism in the modern world. By illustrating its

principles and applications, the study provides vital insights for individuals seeking to lead fulfilling lives amidst the complexities and challenges of contemporary existence.

This thesis aspires to show the essential Stoic teachings and offer principles that can make one live a good life the Stoic way. At the end of the thesis, it is expected that this thesis will give us an inclusive understanding of Stoicism and the way of living a good life using the teachings of the Stoics. also offer us guidance in a Stoic way for contemporary problems, like losing a sense of purpose, mental health problems, and the problem of having too much information.

1.8 Overview of Subsequent Chapters

The study will be organized under five chapters, which will explore the pursuit of a good life through the lens of different perspectives and the eyes of major Stoic philosophers. Chapter one introduces the study; gives the background of the study; states the problem, the objective of the paper, and the research questions; and also illustrates the research methodology used.

Chapter two is all about the literature review. Chapter two will overview key philosophical texts; I will also critically evaluate those texts. In the second part of this chapter, I will emphasize the teachings of Stoicism and how essential they are today and see the teachings of Stoicism in contemporary practices that inform offering therapy, teaching leadership, and self-help, and I will also explore what makes the path of Stoicism different from other worldview practices. The overview will review major texts in Stoic philosophy, and it will look at the significance of Stoicism. In the first part of this chapter, I will explore the Stoic conception of a good life and the guiding principle of Stoicism that can be beneficial for individuals who aspire to pursue a good life. This chapter will explore its applicability to the contemporary world and also look at other worldviews.

In Chapter Three: In this chapter, I will argue how Stoic teachings that put a big emphasis on virtue, mindfulness, acceptance, and the power of self-awareness are crucial for living a virtuous life. In this chapter, I will explore the beauty of self-reflection, being present, and living in harmony with nature, which is an essential part of pursuing a good life. Furthermore, in this chapter, we will see the pursuit of a good life in the Stoic way and how the Stoic philosophy is beneficial in pursuing a good life. I will delve into the major arguments of the Stoics and critically examine them. In the first part of this chapter, we will see the path to a good life for Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and how their philosophy is valuable.

Correspondingly, this chapter will explore Marcus Aurelius's and Epictetus's guidelines, concepts of a good life, and their core tenets on what individuals should do to live a better life through their philosophy. What shall we learn from their core teachings, which include virtue, resilience, and duty, and how can we apply their teachings? I will also explore what makes them different and vital philosophers and how Aurelius can be considered representative of the philosopher king. We will see the path to a good life for Epictetus. I will explore his life from slavery to becoming a philosopher and examine his core teachings and guidelines, exploring his main works and the discussion of the *Enchiridion* and *Discourses* (1995). Explore his concepts of what he considered to be what we can control and can't control, his view of freedom, and also how his teachings can help enhance personal autonomy.

Chapter Four: Criticism of Stoicism. In this chapter, I will explore the opposing views of Stoic philosophy. I will explore other perspectives and see if those views will coexist or fail. In this paper, I will emphasize the critiques of Stoicism, critiques of emotional suppression and detachment, and arguments against the applicability of Stoic principles in the contemporary world. I will discuss the responses to criticism and the defense of it. I will also analyze other philosophies and how other philosophical structures have attitudes toward similar kinds of issues.

Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks: In this chapter, I will restate my main arguments. I offer a critical analysis of Stoicism and emphasize Stoic philosophy in modern society. I will conclude and give concluding remarks and recommendations, and I will conduct a critical analysis of the teachings of the Stoics and the pursuit of a good life through the eyes of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and what they considered a good life to be. Through the eyes of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, I will try to explore the interaction between Stoicism and contemporary theories of well-being and its implications and In this paper I will try to scrutinize the applicability of Stoic principles and the challenges of the current world and also explore the criticism of Stoic philosophy as it was criticized for suppressing emotions and offer remarks.

CHAPTER 2: THE STOIC PATH TO THE GOOD LIFE AND THE HIGHEST GOOD

Having a clear vision of how we want to pursue our lives is essential. To pursue a good life, we need to know what matters and what doesn't in connection with it. Knowing what truly matters would give individuals a clear awareness of how they want to lead their lives, which is a fundamental step in the pursuit of a good life. We need to have a sense of direction about where we want to be and where we don't want to be. Knowing those things will give us clarity of the life we want to pursue, which is very essential. Having clarity of our power and our limitations can ultimately lead us to pursue a good life. Understanding what is in our control would make it easier for us to do what we are supposed to do with all the capacity and actual power we have, regardless of whatever comes our way.

Stoicism teaches individuals that knowing what's in their control and what is not in their control would free them from a stressful life. Whenever we encounter a challenge, if it is not in our power to resolve it, we shall accept the challenges we face with grace. Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Seneca. These thinkers were considered to be the most influential and prominent figures of Stoicism. Many thinkers of the contemporary world have interpreted stoicism in various ways to show how relevant Stoicism teachings are for the pursuit of a good life.

Before delving into the teachings of Stoicism, let us clarify the roots of the word Stoicism. The etymology of the word stoicism is derived from the Greek word "stoa." For many, the word "stoa" is the same as wisdom. In Greek, stoa" is a place, a porch, or a covered entrance where Zeno first taught his students; "stoa" was the place where thinkers, seekers, and poets met to indulge wisdom. The stoa was a portal that produced many influential thinkers; individuals in Greek cities met at the stoa to indulge themselves in discussion and dispute with other individuals for the pursuit of wisdom. For the Stoics, virtue is the highest good, and in general, there are four core virtues, namely self-control, courage, justice, and wisdom, which are essential for achieving inner peace and joy. Zeno of Citium, who is considered to be the father of Stoicism, has taught many individuals to be indifferent to external circumstances (Long & Sedley, 1987, p. 145). His teachings emphasized the importance of having inner strength and self-control. Stoicism shows us that being rational, disciplined, and living harmoniously with nature is an essential remedy in the pursuit of a good life.

2.1 Overview

To master something, you must do the things that help you master it. You should not just act as if you were an expert; rather, you must become the expert. Epictetus, who is considered to be one of the most prominent Stoic philosophers, believed you should not preach and become the opposite of what you claim to preach. If you claim to believe in doing something, then do it instead of just talking about it. You should become the embodiment of what you are preaching. Stoicism is an ancient philosophical school of thought that stresses the vitality of having self-discipline and accepting things that cannot be changed. Stoicism teaches individuals to accept and to be content with whatever it is that life throws at them.

The Stoics believed that we should only focus on things that are in our control. According to Irvine (2009), Stoicism teaches individuals to foster internal resilience. The Stoics viewed virtue as the highest good; they believed that the only good that exists is virtue; other things are indifferent, and external things and material things are indifferent. The Stoics emphasize the importance of living life by reason and living by nature; individuals should develop morally strong behavior rather than seeking validation from external things.

When we take a look at the things that make the Stoics remarkable thinkers, like Marcus Aurelius, who was the emperor of Rome, the things that make Epictetus truly a great thinker are the fact that his upbringing is different from most Stoic philosophers; he was born a slave, and even his name in Greek means “acquired” (A. A. Long 2018, p. 1). Regardless of being a slave, Epictetus is considered to be one of the most influential Stoic thinkers of all time, who influenced many thinkers. It is even believed that he was influential to Marcus Aurelius, who was born in 121 C.E. and died in 180 C.E. Marcus Aurelius was a prominent Stoic philosopher who ruled the Roman Empire for many years (A. A. Long, 2002, p. 2).

What makes Epictetus a vital Stoic philosopher is the fact that he accepted whatever had happened to him with grace and resilience, setting a role and an image of what inner strength looks like. Epictetus taught people that true freedom is in our minds, not in circumstances, but in the way we respond to those challenges. These are what matter most. When people know what they are in control of, then they are free. From the worry of things that are not in their control, Epictetus, who is considered a true Stoic philosopher, gave lectures and inspired many great thinkers in history, including the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. The Stoics believed that

being detached from external situations would free individuals from seeking validation from external situations.

What makes Marcus Aurelius a remarkable and essential thinker is the fact that it has been said by many that the idea of a philosopher king by Plato is too idealistic, but the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius is deemed by many thinkers to be the philosopher king (A. A. Long 2018, p. 1). The fact that Aurelius is considered by many as the philosopher king makes him an extraordinary emperor who has inspired many thinkers and is still inspiring many more. He is the epitome of what it looks like to have the power to do whatever one wants but to choose to do the right thing all the time. He is the embodiment of a man with a great moral compass, and he is an archetype of a truly great emperor and also a great Stoic philosopher.

Marcus Aurelius was not only the emperor of Rome but also an author who wrote a book known as *Meditations*; he wrote it for himself, and it is considered to be an exceptionally great book by many thinkers. The book illustrates stoicism, his philosophy, integrity, and also what a great thinker and leader he was. Most of the Stoic philosophers aspired to live a virtuous life, a life that is filled with wisdom. For the Stoics, as long as one puts virtue first, she/he is all good. The Stoics believed that Stoicism could certainly help people live a better life.

2.2 Stoicism as art that transforms life

Stoicism is an art that transforms life. According to William B. Irvine, the main aim of the most ancient philosophers was to help ordinary people live a better life. This means it is possible that we can present stoicism as a philosophy that helps individuals transform their lives. Philosophy as an art of living: they did not just look at philosophy as a conceptual field, but more than that, they claimed that philosophy can offer us practical instructions and guidelines that can transform and improve our lives for the better.

The Stoics aspired to develop a way of life. Stoics wanted a philosophy that they could embody and develop skills and virtues that could make them become a better version of themselves in any situation in their career or personal life. Many Stoic philosophers, including Epictetus, saw Stoicism as an art that is concerned with transforming one's way of life. For him, philosophy does not depend on the way people talk but on the way they act. What matters is their action, their reaction to certain situations, and their behaviors (Sellars, 2006, p. 32). The way Epictetus lived his life, the way his actions illustrated his philosophy, and the way he talked about his

philosophy made him a true Stoic; how Epictetus embodied his philosophy shows us that Stoic teachings are practicable. The Stoics' aspiration is to transform one's own way of life.

The method of transformation was focused on becoming as much as possible like their image of the idealized individual, who is described in a variety of sources as someone trustworthy, someone who knows what to focus on and what not to focus on, and someone who is not led by impulse makes the idealized individual more powerful than everyone else, richer, stronger, freer, and happier (Sellars, 2006, p. 36). The only one who is capable of bringing change to himself is the individual who wants that change, not anyone else.

Knowing those things will make one not be disturbed by external conditions, and that matters most for self-elevation, which builds a better character of the self. What matters most is who we are when no one is looking and knowing what's truly within our power. This is to say, whatever is in our power is our character, action, and reaction, or the way we respond to adversity. We have a choice to make, and we shall choose what we have power over. That is the power over ourselves, that is, our thoughts, wants, desires, and reactions. Epictetus controlled his actions and his reactions. He believed that if we learn to be content with our own selves and know where our true power lies, then we can maintain our serenity. True freedom and happiness, for Epictetus, come from within us, not from others or external situations. Accordingly, for Epictetus, understanding that this would be great for us to live a good life.

Marcus Aurelius gives a great way to look at the things that might make one sad or angry. He writes, You will find that none of the people you are upset about have done anything that could do damage to your mind. Yes, boorish people do boorish things. What's strange or unheard of about that (Hays, 2002, p. 220)? If you have ever found yourself disappointed in someone's actions, in what the other person did, in how the other person did something, or in something the other person said, instead of blaming or complaining, what you should do is analyze yourself and your expectations of that person or that situation. If someone betrayed you or hurt you, don't be surprised because they did what they considered to be natural for them; it shouldn't surprise you; you should've known better. In *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius wrote his convictions. He believed in the importance of living a virtuous life and maintaining our peace of mind and inner peace, regardless of any challenge or external circumstance. Aurelius believed that we can have control over our minds, thoughts, and actions, and we shall always be eager to foster virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and self-discipline.

The most important thing that we all should know by heart is that we can only find peace or happiness from within; no one can harm our minds, though we might feel that their actions or words might hurt us, but if we don't give them that power, then they can't; if we don't let them, they can't, and that power lies in our hands. We are the ones who can control our minds, although others can try to brainwash us, but we can decide how we want to handle it or react to it, and if others control how we feel or think, that means we are being slaves to them. Our mind is the only thing that we can control, so giving that power to someone else is giving away the most essential part of ourselves. So by having clarity about what matters and what doesn't matter and knowing our limitations and power, we can live a peaceful life free from constant distress.

2.3 The Stoic Conception of a Good Life

Before delving into the Stoics' conception of a good life, it would be better to examine what the Stoics considered to be good. The Stoics have different perspectives on good from what most modern society considers good. For the Stoics, virtue is the highest good. For the Stoics, to pursue a meaningful life, we shall live a life that fosters virtue and follow the core pillars of Stoicism and wisdom, which is one of the pillars. For the Stoics, wisdom is essential and is believed to make people aware of what matters, what does not, and what is that which is in our control. The Stoics believed that through virtue we can live a fulfilling life, and through wisdom, we can understand the nature of the universe and how it works; they believed that true wisdom will give us an understanding of how the world and the natural order work. The other core pillar of Stoicism is courage. For the Stoics, having the courage to face adversity, having inner calmness no matter what, and still being resilient when facing challenges is essential.

The Stoics consider that having the courage to stand on their beliefs even in the hardest times means having integrity, and facing challenges despite the encountered fear and pain is equivalent to standing strong and remaining true to their values. Additionally, the Stoics considered justice to be vital for one's life. As justice would balance out the imbalance, the Stoics believed in virtuously living with nature and with people and in being kind and objective with others. The Stoics believed in the interconnectedness of things and the importance of living by the laws of nature. The other core pillar of Stoicism is self-discipline. The Stoics put great emphasis on self-control, which involves avoiding unnecessary desires. The Stoics considered self-discipline

essential for the creation of inner peace and serenity, and it can help people focus on what is necessary and encourage them to lead a life that is filled with serenity.

Furthermore, as stated by Gregory Hays (2002), Stoic philosophy was inspired by the Athenian thinker Socrates in the Hellenistic period philosophical sects that endorsed rational belief systems that an individual could accept as a whole; those belief systems were designed to explain the world in its totality. The Stoics believed that those branches could give us a holistic understanding of the universe. The Stoics sought to offer a holistic view of how the universe works, the nature of the world, mortality, what makes a good life a good life, and how one can live a purposeful life. That holistic belief system contains three essential branches.

The Stoics believed that to live a virtuous life, we need those three branches, and those branches are considered to be the three kinds of virtue, which include, in the first place, physics; this one focuses on studying the nature of the world, on understanding nature and everything in nature and being in it, and also the interconnectedness of nature; this one focuses on understanding how nature operates and how the rational order of the world and how everything in nature has a purpose. By studying physics, one can accept things that can't be changed and live in harmony with nature.

The second highest virtue, as the Stoics believed it to be, is ethics; this one focuses on living a good life following nature's order and gives a better understanding of what one can do or is supposed to do and what one can or cannot control. By understanding those things, one can fulfill nature's purpose by living a virtuous, moral life that treats others well. The third essential element is logic. This one will make us think clearly and make us make effective arguments without errors. Logic is vital for getting wisdom that can make individuals not only think right but also act right. The Stoics believed that those branches can make one live a virtuous life by being rational and by understanding how the world works, focusing on what one can change or control.

A. The Highest Good for the Stoics

We have already seen that the highest good for the Stoics is virtue. The Stoics considered the ultimate good to be virtue. They believed that other things sometimes can count as beneficial and harmful at other times. However, virtue is always and unconditionally beneficial to the wise person. Other than virtue, everything else falls into the category of indifferent things that are

neither essentially good nor essentially bad or harmful. For the Stoics, happiness is not dependent on circumstances (Sellars, 2006, p. 32).

The Stoics considered virtue to be essential and the only good. Other things like possessions, pleasure, wealth, fame, and reputation that modern society considers to be good are **indifferent** to the Stoics. In other words, those things that are considered to be good nowadays are not as important as they were for the Stoics in the pursuit of a good life. For the Stoics, material things are not an essential component for the pursuit of a good life, as virtues are. Virtue is enough in itself. The Stoics considered virtue as the ultimate good towards which we should always work on ourselves, foster resilience, and have inner peace. People can get true happiness, for the Stoics, through the actions they take in times of trial, and becoming resilient in times of adversity is the way to a good life.

Epictetus advises individuals to be indifferent to social status. The Stoics value their freedom, and they are unwilling to do anything that will give others power over them. The Stoics believed that if they seek social status, it means that they are giving other people power over themselves, which they don't intend to do; Epictetus advises us not to seek social status. Epictetus writes that if we make it our goal to please others, we will no longer be free to please ourselves. The Stoics consider virtue to be the only good that is inherently good. The Stoics believed that by building moral integrity and by placing virtue as the foundation of one's life, individuals can pursue a good life. The Stoics believed that we can only get inner joy from virtue, and by making actions that embody moral alignment with virtue, we can get the state of Eudaimonia, or flourishing, that is detached from external events (Inwood, 2003, p. 112).

Stoic philosophers believed that wisdom can help individuals live their lives to the fullest by making decisions based on reason, not on impulse. Wisdom helps us to be rational and know what's in our power and what is not in our power. Epictetus emphasizes the importance of virtue and why we should always pursue virtue. Virtue is the way that "holds out the promise to create happiness and serenity (Irvine, 2008, p. 39). If we live a life that gives great emphasis to virtue, it would be filled with tranquility that would ultimately be a good life. Accordingly, living a life that fosters virtue would be one step closer to a purposeful life.

Virtue is a core principle that consists of the four major attributes, including wisdom, which causes one to make rational convictions. Wisdom causes individuals to distinguish the good from

the bad and the valuable from the invaluable; it is through wisdom that one can become a rational individual who is not only good for oneself but also good for the good of the universe. Wisdom is responsible for making distinctions between what truly matters in our lives and what truly does not. Wisdom makes one look at the world objectively. It's through wisdom that one can apply reason in life and make better choices in life. We can perceive without being angry or reacting in a non-virtuous way. We shouldn't give others the power to trigger us or destroy our inner world. We are the ones who can completely control that. Why give that power to others? If we can't even master or control the one thing we can completely control, what would that make us? It makes us the puppets of others and the slaves of our own emotions, and can anything good come out of that? So you got angry; what have you acquired out of it?

For the Stoics, other than wisdom, everything else falls into the category of indifferent things that are neither essentially good nor essentially bad nor harmful. For the Stoics, inner contentment is not dependent on external events, there irrespective of any situations. The Stoics are not affected, whether they are living in adversity or not. Stoicism is considered too essential by many thinkers, including R. E. Allen, who emphasizes the teachings and practices of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. He considers their teachings of duty and the importance of virtue as the highest good. He believed that personal virtue is a communal responsibility, and there should always be ethical engagement with ethical issues that resonate within modern contexts, such as environmental ethics and social equity.

The life of Nelson Mandela, who was the president of South Africa and an anti-apartheid revolutionist, can illustrate the Stoic principles that emphasize the importance of virtue and acceptance. Although Mandela was not a Stoic, his life can give us a glimpse of the teachings of Stoicism. Particularly, the way he faced challenges is the best example of Stoic behavior. Mandela spent 27 years in prison; even in that hard time of his life, he kept his head up even though he accepted the situation that he was in. That long, stiff, and hard challenge did not break him; instead, it made him more resilient, courageous, and virtuous. This shows the precious value of acceptance or resilience. In this particular situation, acceptance is not a surrender or passivity, but rather knowing the situation one is in and understanding what is in one's power to change or un-change that situation.

Resilience for Mandela is the way he focused on his purpose during the hard times he was in and the way he accepted the harsh situation he was condemned to. His unswerving outlook and

beliefs in the significance of the equality of people and the way he mastered his emotions in the harsh circumstances he encountered can be a great illustration of the Stoic teachings. The way he forgave those who did him wrong and those who put him in prison after he was released shows the Stoic teaching of letting go. Mandela's life shows us the beauty of resilience and acceptance, the beauty of living a life that puts great emphasis on virtue, and the way he turned his challenges into wisdom.

By self-reflection and by practicing the Stoic principles, we can learn the lessons that life throws at us with ease and become more resilient, or else we have to go through the same thing over and over again until we finally learn. Every great person has to face adversity and conquer it. It is adversity that makes you resilient. Whatever happened has happened. Can you change what has happened in the past? And if they do exist, what are they going to do about them? Would you be the person you are today without those challenges? What would life look like without any adversity? These are the questions we need to answer.

B. The Nature of the Universe

One of the most fundamental ideologies of Stoicism is the view toward the nature of the universe; the Stoics believed that the universe is structured in a rational and articulate way. The Stoics believed that Logos operates both in individuals and in the universe as a whole (Hays, 2002, p. 18). The Stoics considered living in accordance with nature to be the right thing; for them, the Logos can't be wrong. The world functions by the laws of causes and effects.

For the Stoics, the universe is rational and well-ordered; they saw the cosmos as complete and run by what they called the divine reason, or the logos, and the logos lives in all things, and it is the source of order and harmony in the cosmos. For the Stoics, the cosmos is a single existence, and a supernatural being, or the logos, is the one that brings life; it is a life-giving source (Long, 2002, p. 45). The Stoics enjoyed whatever good things or not-good things that happened to them. They prepared themselves to give up the things in question. Life moves fast, and at any moment in our lives, anything good or bad can happen. To live a life free from unnecessary worry, we should let go of things that are not in our power. When we do something, we should do it to the best of our capacity and then let it go.

Stoics saw the logos operating in everything in the universe; the Stoics saw the logos operating rationally. The Stoics believed that although humans can't control external situations, they could

choose and control how they think and act, which means that humans have free will or intelligence that is harmonious with the logos or the cause and effect of the universe's nature. The Stoics saw external events as being controlled by the Logos, while the way we respond or look at those situations is totally up to us. Although logos are in control of our external situations, the Stoics believed that we can make the right decision based on the way we see the world and act in certain situations, and our true freedom lies in that. By letting the world play out as it plays out, by being detached from what is not in our control, and also by enriching virtuous practices in our lives, we can certainly live a good life.

Epictetus shows us that one can be externally free and internally a slave, controlled by psychological masters in the form of disabling desires, passions, and cravings. On the contrary, one could be externally hindered or even in literal bondage but internally free from frustration and disharmony, so free in fact that you found yourself in charge of your well-being, lacking little or nothing that you could not provide for yourself (A. A. Long 2018, p. 2). Epictetus teaches us that individuals can be internally free regardless of what happens externally, and that is true freedom. We have the freedom to control our thoughts, and we can change destructive thoughts or emotions that would take away our inner peace. We have control over what we want to avoid doing, and those can be destructive habits that can hinder the quality of life we want to live.

Furthermore, by understanding the nature of the world, Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, advised individuals to turn to the thing in question with their whole soul and rejoice in the prize they have found (Irvine, 2008, p. 58). Aurelius inspires us to pursue the thing with our full capacity. To be joyful about what we get out of it and the importance of being committed to whatever it is that we are doing, he teaches the importance of finding joy and fulfillment in our pursuits, not in rewards. Life plays out as it plays out, so by doing what we are supposed to do. Now, not tomorrow, and let it play out as it plays out. Sowe should treat every moment as precious, regardless of outcomes, and that will help us live in peace. Stoic principles can be beneficial. Stoicism teaches us the beauty of being present and truly taking the present moment as a present or as a gift. We should take each moment as a gift and appreciate the beauty of challenges; take every moment as a present.

C. Living in Harmony with Nature

Living our lives in accordance with nature and doing what we are supposed to do will eventually lead us to a meaningful life. The Stoics believed that the universe is governed by a divine rational order. This means everything happens in a rational structure, or everything that happens in nature happens in its own order and purpose. The Stoics believed that the awareness of our place in the world is crucial because it can help us live in accordance with nature. That is to say, we can pursue a life filled with making intentional decisions of our own and making actions that can make us live harmoniously with the rationality of the universe.

We can pursue a good life through virtue and reason, by living in harmony with nature, and by being compassionate toward other things that exist in nature. The Stoics emphasized the essence of living in harmony with nature. For the Stoics, human beings and the universe encompass the same rational nature. Human nature and nature itself are the same because both are guided by reason, the *logos*. The Stoics trust that everything that takes place is for the overall good. Just as every organ in our body naturally seeks that which is beneficial to it, humans, in the same manner, along with all living organisms and environments.

For the Stoics, reason plays a fundamental role in our well-being as humans. Because human nature is characterized by our ability to reason, if our choices reflect our rational ability, then we are functioning optimally as human beings. It is through our rational ability that we can make sense of our environment and act accordingly. Reasoning allows us to “turn every hindrance into material for itself” to grow from our experiences and turn our challenges into opportunities for learning and growth, which is essential in the pursuit of a good life. For the Stoics, living well as a human entails living in agreement with nature and, as a result, allowing reason to guide us. By allowing reason to guide us and by moderating and managing our emotions, we can do the most crucial thing for ourselves and live by reason (Murguia and Diaz, 2015, p. 42).

To live in harmony with nature Marcus Aurelius writes that if you have ever done a favor for someone and if you expect something in return instead of seeing the action itself as a reward, as he put it, “You don’t reward your feet for walking; that’s what they were made for. By doing what they were designed to do, they’re performing their function, just like that. When we help others, we’re doing what we were designed for” (Hays, 2002, p. 220). Don’t make a big deal about something inconvenient. When we help others or when others help us, we should know that it is a part of nature. In other words, when we do something good, we should do it not for a reward but because it is the right thing to do. Helping others is actually what makes us human.

Furthermore, Epictetus emphasized that we can pursue a moral life by taking that notion to include the good of others as well as oneself (A. A. Long 2018, p. 16). This means we are all connected, and to pursue a morally right life, we must be good to others, as we all are part of nature, and if we are good to others, we are definitely good to ourselves, and we are pursuing life following nature's rules. The one thing that Epictetus emphasized in his lectures to his students is that if they want to pursue a good life, they must consider their nature and the purpose for which God created them to live accordingly.

Marcus Aurelius believed that it is really essential to accept the permanence of life and the inevitability of death. We are all mortal and shall always be grateful for the present moment and for the beauty of life. The acceptance of mortality is a vital aspect of pursuing a virtuous life and makes us live a meaningful life. The way we think is crucial in shaping our beliefs, and the way we think can ultimately be the expression of the way we act. Thus, by focusing on our thoughts and the effects of them, we can choose to think and act in certain ways we want to. Think and act.

The Stoics considered the cosmos to be run by a rational order; so, living in accordance with nature means living the life that we are made for. Living in accordance with nature means accepting things that we can't change. We have no power over death; it is one of the things we have no power over. Marcus Aurelius writes, "Don't look down on death but welcome it. It is one of the things required by nature, just like youth and old age. So this is how a thoughtful person should await death: not with indifference, not with impatience, not with disdain, but simply viewing it as one of the things that happen to us"(Hays, 2002, p. 206).

Marcus Aurelius advises us to accept things that are part of nature. In *Meditations*, he reminds himself over and over again that all mortals will eventually die, and he, too, accepts that he can die at any moment. So, we shall live our lives embracing the present moment, the now. Living in accordance with nature, as Marcus Aurelius emphasized, we should accept the things nature offers us and death as part of the human experience. Sure, we are nature. We inevitably and inevitably are indifferent to death; we shouldn't fear something that is part of nature. Thus, embrace things that are part of nature; we should not see them as good or bad; they're just part of nature. This acceptance of mortality is a vital aspect of pursuing a virtuous life.

Likewise, by understanding what makes us different from others who belong to nature, we can think about the nature of our thoughts, rationalize, and think. If we are capable of that, then we can use that for our benefit. The other important thing we can do to live in harmony with nature is to treat other people with respect, with empathy, and with kindness. We should always act under universal principles. So, by being virtuous and practicing virtue in our relationships with others, we can create a harmonious and just society based on mutual respect and cooperation.

In addition, Epictetus believed that the physical world is an entirely determinate structure of causes and effects. He believed that nothing happens purely by chance or for no reason; that is why Stoics find it absurd to complain about natural events that were bound to occur. All phenomena are providentially caused by a rational agent that is intrinsic throughout everything, living and non-living. Nonetheless, Stoicism is criticized for having a fatalistic view, and many thinkers believe that this view can potentially make people passive. We will explore this more in chapter four.

2.4 The Contemporary World and the Significance of Stoicism

The Stoics believed that people are unhappy, in large part because they are confused about what is valuable. Because of their confusion, they spend their days pursuing things. That, rather than making them happy, makes them anxious and miserable (Irvine, 2008, p. 166). Furthermore, the problems in the modern world have been growing rapidly, as reported by the World Health Organization's research, which was published in 2017. Mental health issues in modern society have been growing more than ever, which makes it a major issue. It also shows its concern for the increasing number of people who showcase symptoms of depression and other mental health issues. The study stated that one in four people worldwide is affected by these issues. Also, as reported by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in 2019, mental issues lead to suicide, which makes millions of people take their own lives. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US, with an average of 132 suicides per day. Suicide is a tragic outcome of untreated mental health issues, with millions of individuals taking their own lives each year.

Moreover, as one of the major problems of the contemporary world, the movie *Fight Club* can portray major problems that affect present-day society. *Fight Club* is a movie that was released in 1999 and was directed by David Fincher. The movie was based on a novel that was written by Chuck Palahniuk. The movie portrays a man who was played by the actor Edward Norton.

Norton portrays a man who lost a sense of purpose in his life, a man who is unhappy with his life, and a man who struggles with insomnia and then tries to fill the void in his life by buying things. The movie portrays a man who is a loner and goes to different support groups for people suffering from different illnesses, and most of those support groups had incurable diseases, even though he was not affected by any of those diseases. For Norton, those groups made him have an emotional connection although it didn't last. The movie portrays life in a modern society where most people are lost and seem to seek things that will give them instant relief. But possession of things or a constant need to seek validation from the outside world will not give inner peace; Stoicism can play an essential role and can contribute a lot to modern society as a resolution for this type of problem of being lost.

Victor E. Frankl's advice in his famous book *Man's Search for Meaning* can be beneficial, he writes. People need to have aspirations and goals and know their purpose to live a meaningful life. He writes that having aspirations and striving to fulfill them would give individuals a sense of purpose that would give a sense of satisfaction. Having aspirations would give people a determination to fulfill them, which would make people resilient in any challenging situation; as long as people have the ambition to achieve something, they will live a purposeful life.

Although Viktor E. Frankl was not a Stoic philosopher, his book emphasizes many Stoic principles. Victor E. Frankl emphasizes the importance of freeing our minds from the control of other people. Even in the hardest time of his life, he found out that what he can control is his mind, not external events. In his book, he stresses ideas like being present and being detached from external problems, and he also sees obstacles as being the catalyst for becoming resilient. To pursue a meaningful life, it's essential for individuals to feel a sense of belonging by building solid relationships with people. By having a connection with people, according to Baumeister and Leary, who believed that having a social life is vital for leading a life that is filled with happiness, believed that cultivating connections and having a solid relationship with our loved ones and with the broader community can make us joyous individuals.

In the contemporary world, Stoicism can play a vital role in mental health issues, especially nowadays when there is a spike in problems related to mental health. Modern psychologists and philosophers, such as Massimo Pigliucci (2017) and Donald Robertson (2019), have both emphasized how Stoic principles can help us in mental health and contemporary psychological practices, particularly cognitive-behavioral therapy. Donald Robertson (2019) argues that we

should mix stoicism with modern wellness practices. He believed that the practice of stoicism, such as the teachings of resilience and how to manage our emotions, would solve contemporary psychological challenges, such as anxiety and depression.

By seeing adversity as an opportunity to be a better version of ourselves and by having values that do not waver in the face of other people's opinions, the teachings of Stoicism can play an important role; Stoicism can be beneficial to the contemporary world that is absorbed in stress, anxiety, and depression. On the other hand, it would be important for us to know that as long as we exist and as long as we are part of existence, experiencing pain and struggle is inevitable, but what matters is how we respond to that certain pain or challenge. The thing that matters is our reaction and the lesson we got, how we experienced the pain, and what we learned and made out of the challenge. We need to choose what is more important for our lives, and that is a vital decision we all have to make in the face of adversity: the understanding that we are the ones who can give meaning to any situation or circumstance, good or bad, that happens in our lives is truly a great step for us to pursue a meaningful life, and through our reactions and expectations, we can definitely bring change. Accordingly, if pain is part of life, we shouldn't complain about it; we should just take it as it is, and if it's possible, we should turn it into something beautiful. If it is something that is not in our control, then we should just accept it and let it go.

A. The role of social networks

Social media plays a fundamental role in the contemporary world. Even though social media has its good side, it also seems to be problematic. One of the problems with social media is its manipulative nature; some use social media as a platform for brainwashing people, as anything can spread fast, and many people on social media tend to be followers, and as most people base their value on the validation of others, that is an obstacle that can get in the way of people living a virtuous life. As a concern, Marcus Aurelius writes, "It never ceases to amaze me: we all love ourselves more than other people but care more about their opinion than our own." This saying shows us one of the concerns of Marcus Aurelius, which can show us the insecurity of most people, even though most of us claim to love ourselves, despite that. Most of us tend to care about the opinions of others.

Furthermore, the Stoic view on knowing what is in our power and not in our power can be a resolution to the modern world, as the Stoics believed we should not concern ourselves with

things we can't control. As Marcus Aurelius writes, "I don't have it in my power to stop others from sneering at me, so it is foolish for me to spend time trying to stop them." I should instead, says Marcus, spend this time on something I have complete control over, namely, not doing anything that deserves a mock. (Irvine, 2008, p. 168) The Stoics show us the importance of just focusing on what we have power over and letting go of everything that is not within our capability to change.

As a resolution for those problems, it would be important for all of us to know what matters and what does not matter. It would be essential for us not to let anyone define us, build us, or break us. We should be the ones who are responsible for building ourselves, and knowing that is essential. To know what works and what does not work is an essential step for us all. It is essential for us not to compare ourselves with anyone; embrace what we have and understand that true inner peace and joy can only come from us, not from the outside. Understand that we can be happy from external circumstances; we should also realize the fact that as something comes, it can also go.

Moreover, to pursue a good life, it is essential for us to know what's within our power and what's not; other people's thoughts and opinions are not in my power, but what's within my power is my own actions. What I do today is my own actions, thoughts, and reactions; those are the things that I have power over. Thus, I shall focus on that, not on other people's actions. If I want to have peace and serenity in my life, I cannot give others the benefit of making me angry, unhappy, or miserable; they cannot have that power over me, and that's what stoicism teaches us if we want to pursue a good life.

Additionally, Marcus Aurelius gives us a glimpse of how silly it is to seek fame and idolize people; he writes that it is "an empty, hollow thing." The first foolish thing is to want to be remembered after we die. For one thing, since we are dead, we will not be able to enjoy our fame. For another, we are foolish to think that future generations will praise us without even having met us. Instead of thinking about future fame, Marcus says, we would do well to concern ourselves with our present situation; we should, he advises, "make the best of today" (Irvine, 2008, p. 168). His advice can be beneficial for individuals who idolize famous people and see celebrities as something extraordinary. We should not forget that we all are mortals; fame does not change this fact.

2.5 Stoicism and different worldviews

In pursuing a good life or leading a morally good life, different worldviews and perspectives advise their followers to live life in a harmonious way with nature and to live their lives following nature's rules, as most of them believe in the interconnection of nature. Nevertheless, with philosophical views like hedonism and existentialism, Stoicism has a different view. Hedonism, which is a philosophical view that puts great emphasis on individual gratification in getting pleasure, has the moral aim of avoiding pain; however, for the Stoics, the highest good is a virtue, and we can get inner tranquility from virtue, not from external things or situations.

The Stoics believe that, other than virtue, other things fall into the category of indifference. The Stoics believe we can live a purposeful life through virtue. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that puts great emphasis on individual autonomy and duty and also the journey of searching for meaning in any world that seems to be meaningless, while Stoics believe in living following the laws of nature. In existentialism, they believe there is no such thing as fate; it is the individuals who give meaning to themselves and create their values and morals, not destiny. Being aware of what is in our control and what is not is one of the most important things in life.

In the teachings of different worldviews, religious, cultural, or philosophical, although most of the time they have some divergences in their beliefs, almost all seem to agree on the importance of acceptance in the pursuit of a good life. Acceptance can free individuals from overthinking things and help them understand the fact that overthinking the future or trying to control things that are not in their power to change will make individuals miserable. Understanding this will make individuals free from the burden of unnecessary worry and will motivate individuals to always focus on what's in their power.

A. The path to a good life according to different religious sects

Stoicism and Buddhism have certain things in common. They both, for example, emphasize the importance of contemplating the permanent nature of the world around us and the importance of mastering desire; they also advise us to pursue calmness and give us advice on how to attain and maintain it. (Irvine, 2008, p. 7) Correspondingly, Buddhism and the practice of Stoicism both have a practice of self-reflection on one's life. According to the teachings of Buddhism, adversity and pain are part of life; however, Buddhists believe that we can overcome our

challenges by practicing meditation. By practicing mindfulness in our lives, being kind to others, and being free from material gains, we can pursue a good life (Gethin, 2008, p. 45).

The Stoics believe that individuals can pursue a good, meaningful life by concentrating their minds and attention on reason and virtue, being reasonable, and seeing the world objectively. The Stoics believe that by doing so, individuals can accept the accordance of how the world works. By distinguishing what is objectively right or wrong or what can elevate us as individuals, we can undoubtedly make good decisions. On objectivity, the Stoics claim that treating other individuals, who exist in nature, with respect and kindness, this type of consideration would lead us to live a harmonious life. The teachings of the Buddhists endorse the act of meditation and practicing mindfulness; they believe these practices would help individuals become aware of their thoughts, and those practices can help individuals have a better awareness of themselves.

This teaching of the Buddhists is somehow similar to the Stoics' view of self-observation. The Stoics' view toward being courageous in the face of challenges is somehow similar to the Buddhist view of seeing obstacles as part of nature. The Stoics believed we should all be courageous; they viewed adversity as an opportunity to be elevated and to become more resilient. They both advised individuals to stand firm and do things following virtue and nature, and standing firm in a challenging situation would help individuals live virtuous lives. Both the Stoics and the Buddhists advise individuals to always do the right thing.

Both the teachings of Stoicism and Buddhism emphasize the importance of enduring fear regardless of anything. The Stoics believed being courageous is not being fearless but doing the right thing regardless of fear. The Stoics viewed physical courage to be essential; both the Buddhists and the Stoics believed that the ability to endure physical suffering would make individuals resilient. They believed that even though pain is real, mastering our response to that pain is what matters. The Stoics believed in always doing the right thing regardless of whether that meant facing an external threat. We can see both Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus as the embodiments of being courageous; both faced hardships in different ways, but both were not internally shaken.

The other view is that both the Stoics and the Buddhists put great emphasis on the importance of self-restraint, the importance of doing everything in moderation, and the importance of having

self-control over sudden desires and impulses. Both of them believe in the importance of self-discipline for the pursuit of a good, virtuous life. Both the Stoics and the Buddhists advise individuals to live in abstinence of pleasures, not to seek validation from external events, and to only focus on virtue, as it is the highest good.

Furthermore, the teachings of Hinduism, the concept of Dharma involves the duties of individuals and the moral obligation of individuals, and by following and completing their dharma; individuals can live under nature, which will eventually lead to their spiritual growth, which then would ultimately free them from reincarnation. This view is somehow similar to the stoic view of living life in accordance and harmony with nature by living our life as nature accords.

Similarly in the Abrahamic religions; Particularly in Christianity, the teachings of Jesus Christ play a huge role; his teachings put great emphasis on being loving, forgiving, and kind to others and helping those in need. We can ultimately pursue a good life, and also by praying to God, Christians aspire to live their life with the will of God (McGrath, 2011, p. 331). Both Stoicism and Abrahamic religions emphasize the importance of living our lives following God's will and obeying God's commands. Or as the Stoics believe in logos and accept what nature needs from us, in the pursuit of a good life, we can see that stoicism has a lot in common with different worldviews, which include the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism on the importance of being mindful and being present.

Moreover, in the issues of affluence, most Stoics viewed wealth differently; however, Marcus Aurelius thought it possible to live in a palace without being corrupted. This view is similar to the Buddhist viewpoint regarding wealth. It is permissible to be a wealthy Buddhist, as long as you don't cling to your wealth. (Irvine, 2008, p. 181) As long as you are detached from your wealth and as long as your wealth doesn't make you commit morally wrong things, it's okay to have it.

On the conception of God, the teachings of Stoicism are different from Christianity; in Christianity, there is an omnipotent and extraordinary God who has complete power and controls everything in the world. The Christians believe that individuals can get deliverance from believing and having faith in Jesus; however, the Stoics believe that individuals can emancipate

themselves by cultivating a virtuous life. The Christians believe in having an afterlife, whereas the Stoics don't.

On the conception of cause and effect, the Stoics believe that the cosmos is operated by reason, a natural law; they see the self as a rational creature, whereas the Buddhists believe occurrences occur from causes and circumstances. The Buddhists view the self as Maya, or as an illusion, and advise individuals to detach from the self. On the conception of self, the Hindus perceive the self as a multifaceted creature; the Hindus believe in the concept of rebirth, whereas the Stoics don't. The Stoics perceive the cosmos as an interconnected organism that is run by natural law. In the conception of morality, Confucianism and Stoicism both believe in the importance of having personal moral standing; they both believe in the importance of having a shared order that cultivates social interactions. The Stoics focus on the personal practice of virtue for self-elevation and practicing reason, whereas Confucianism puts great emphasis on traditions and customs that retain communal order.

Additionally, Confucianism and Stoicism are similar in the way they see virtue as the highest good and in pursuing a good life. Fostering virtue is essential for the Confucians; the teachings of Confucianism emphasize the importance of respecting our elders, living in harmony with nature, and improving ourselves through education and self-introspection. Following those teachings can contribute to and help individuals live a meaningful life.

B. The Power of Gratitude

Almost all religions in the world share similar beliefs about the importance of being thankful and focusing on what we already have, the things we have, and not on the things we don't have or the people we don't have; nearly all religions emphasize the importance of gratitude. Nonetheless, the Stoics have a practice that involves negative visualization, which most of them involve visualizing the worst thing happening; doing this would ultimately lead individuals to be grateful for what they already have. By imagining the worst, the Stoics believed that it would make them more grateful for what they have and, when they lose that certain thing, not lose hope. Being grateful for what we have can be beneficial for us to live a meaningful life. By putting our focus on what we're thankful for and embracing what we have, the little things that matter to us, we can live a life that is filled with joy.

Besides, Epictetus teaches us that “all things everywhere are perishable.” If we fail to recognize this and instead go around assuming that we will always be able to enjoy the things we value, we will likely find ourselves subject to considerable distress when the things we value are taken from us (Irvine, 2008, p. 65). Understanding that whatever is created is going to perish and that in every moment the world changes and nothing stays the same. Understanding that all that we have can be lost or destroyed is a crucial step in the path to pursuing a good life. It also means we should not have attachments to things or people; we should be full of gratitude, embrace all we have, and not take anything for granted. Also, when the time comes that the thing is no longer with us, we shall let it go.

Accordingly, gratitude is a critical step for us to live a life that is meaningful and a life that is filled with tranquility. Being grateful for the things that we already have can be an important step to living a life that is filled with inner peace, so let us reflect and look at what we worked hard for and got, what we once wanted and did everything to get, but now it's here and we are taking it for granted. Let us all be grateful for what we have now and not think about what we don't have.

As Irvine emphasized, the key to happiness is to prevent the adaptation process. Individuals should take steps to prevent themselves from taking things they have for granted once they get them, the things they once wished for and worked so hard to get; however, individuals have probably failed to take such steps in the past. There are, without question, many things in life to which people have adapted, things that they once dreamed of having but that they now take for granted, including, perhaps, their spouse, children, house, car, and job (Irvine, 2008, p. 67). If you did not get a certain thing you wanted, just look at the situation and take what you learned out of it; what matters is that you did it with all you got. Individuals should appreciate things or people when they have them, not when they lose them; individuals who want to live a virtuous life should be thankful for what they have and not complain about what they don't have.

Practicing gratitude has plenty of benefits for the people who practice it. When we take a look at what gratitude can do for individuals who practice it, the first thing I have noticed is being thankful will lead individuals to be less stressed, as those individuals only focus on what they have in their lives. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association Champlain East, being grateful can help individuals who suffer from insomnia. The report states that individuals who practice being grateful will have better moods and better sleeping habits; they even believe that

those individuals will have better health and fewer chances of getting sick. According to the article written by Amy Morin in 2015 on Psychology Today, which stated the scientifically proven benefits of gratitude, Morin stated that by being grateful, people can open the portal of a good connection with people. He stated that showing gratefulness for people around will make those new individuals closer to the one who is practicing gratitude. Morin advised individuals to take the time to thank a neighbor for their help or send a thank-you note to a colleague who provided advice and support with a project.

Morin writes that gratitude improves physical health. He believed that individuals who are grateful experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other individuals do. Grateful people are more likely to take care of their health. Morin stated that gratitude improves empathy and reduces anger. Grateful people are more likely to be friendly, even when others behave less kindly. He advises individuals to practice journaling gratitude; he believes this practice will improve the quality of sleep. He advises individuals to always write three things they are grateful for before they go to sleep. Morin writes that gratitude improves physical health. He believed that individuals who are grateful experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other individuals.

Furthermore, Morin states that gratitude improves self-esteem. He stated that being grateful will reduce social comparison; this advice is beneficial advice for individuals who compare themselves with others, as a comparison will make them resentful of more successful people. Morin stated that grateful people can appreciate other people's accomplishments, which he believed is good for self-esteem. Also, Morin stated that gratefulness improves psychological health. Practicing gratitude reduces many toxic emotions, such as jealousy, resentment, and frustration. Practicing gratitude is a crucial step for individuals who aspire to live a stress-free life; being thankful for what is already here in front of us is an essential step toward living a virtuous life, as gratitude will improve people's mood and will lead individuals to be more present in their lives, which will make individuals that practice gratitude achieve their goals.

Additionally, the negative visualization that the Stoics advise individuals is the practice of imagining the worst. Doing this might sound negative; it's rather a way of seeing the things that the individuals already have, their blessings. Imagining the worst will make individuals realize what they already have and what it would look like if they no longer had that thing. Negative visualization will also lead individuals into gratitude mode, which will lead individuals into

serenity and resilience and also teach individuals to develop strong skin that will make them stand strong in the challenges of life, as challenges in life are inevitable. There are certain things in life that we are not capable of changing. Understanding what's within our control is a vital step we can take. And being grateful for what we already have would help us live a meaningful life. Different individuals and religions can define living a good life differently or have different worldviews, but the majority of them seem to agree on being grateful for all that one has and letting go of the things that one can't control. Some worldviews believe in not being impulsive or engaging in activities that are not morally right. Like the teachings of Buddhism, they believe in the healing aspect of meditation and not getting attached to things, as they believe that ends suffering.

CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHY AS THE EQUAL GROUND OF REALITIES

The atmosphere where a person grows up and who raised that person plays a huge part in shaping the character and destiny of that person. Even though this is accurate most of the time, the story of Epictetus says otherwise. Epictetus is the archetype of not being defined by the environment one is brought up in. Epictetus shows us that it doesn't matter where you came from as long as you are resilient in the face of adversity. Most of the time in the world, we can see that the most resilient people are the ones who had hard lives but somehow found a way to make themselves better and got elevated from that hardship with resilience.

The Stoics believed that the pursuit of a good life is not totally dependent on having material comfort, even though it's advantageous to have it. This is to say, for the Stoics, just having wealth would not make one live the good life, as they put virtue above all else. Epictetus was not privileged in terms of having a prestigious family since he was subjected to slavery as a child. But the degraded start of life he had did not stop him from becoming a prominent Stoic philosopher who, later in his life, opened his school and influenced many great thinkers, including Marcus Aurelius, who was born into a favorable upbringing. The emperor of Rome, Antoninus Pius, adopted Marcus Aurelius, he came from a good family. His mother came from a distinguished family, and his grandfather was a high-ranking figure in the Roman Empire's political affairs.

It does not matter if you are the most powerful in the world or just a common man. Philosophy is the greatest equalizer; philosophy does not discriminate against one man from another based on possessions or affluence. Philosophy seeks to understand, not judge; philosophy perceives things objectively; it reasons to conclude something; it is open-minded; it aspires to see things in multidimensional ways. Through philosophy, we find great thinkers like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus who come from different backgrounds; they show the multidimensional nature of philosophy. Epictetus illustrates the significance of having a mindset that is not controlled by anyone or by any external situation.

Epictetus shows the beauty of having inner freedom that can't be triggered by anything external to one's life. His philosophy guides individuals to be the controllers of their thoughts and reactions that can help them gain self-mastery and live life virtuously. Marcus Aurelius stresses the importance of ethical living, accepting one's life gracefully, and leading life following reason.

This chapter will explore two of the most prominent Stoic philosophers with different upbringings. Although they had different upbringings, nothing was able to stop one or the other or both of them from being remarkable thinkers.

3.1 Background of Marcus Aurelius And Epictetus

The emperor of the Roman Empire, Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180), was known as the philosopher king, even though he never considered himself to be a philosopher. He wrote a journal for himself in Greek, and that journal turned out to be a book known as *Meditations*. The book was a personal journal that he wrote for himself, not for others. Marcus Aurelius was somehow advantaged by the privileged environments; He lived in the castle and was adopted by the emperor of Rome, Antoninus Pius, who was also adopted by the emperor Hadrian.

Then Hadrian suggested that Pius adopt Marcus Aurelius and Lucius. Marcus Aurelius, from his childhood, had a life filled with tasks and learning. As a result, he had many skills and wisdom in philosophy, law, and the history of Roman politics; horseback riding; public speaking; and Greek and Latin writings. Marcus was deeply devoted to his philosophical quests; he led his life following stoic philosophy, and that gives him the title, the philosopher king. Even though Marcus's life seems privileged, it was not just blissful. When his father died, he had to take on a big responsibility, from being the son of the emperor to becoming the emperor, and that shift became a pivotal moment in his life.

Although Marcus Aurelius was raised to become the emperor, becoming the emperor was not so easy for him. He needed to shift to his new reality and have an objective outlook for his new life. This was a tough job to deal with. The years of being the emperor of Rome challenged Marcus Aurelius mentally; his principles challenged his combat plans. He had to make critical choices and moves. In those hardships, Marcus executed his obligations as a leader and as a true stoic.

Even when being pressured by hardships and wars, Marcus Aurelius remained composed. He was a true Stoic who fulfilled his duty both as an emperor and as a Stoic. In times of adversity, Marcus did not lose track of his duty as an emperor. He got married at a young age for political reasons. He got married to the last child of Antoninus Pius, and together they had thirteen children. But they lost some of their children. His wife supported him mentally, and Marcus was devoted to his family; regardless of the pressure he had, he worked hard in balancing his life.

In his *meditations*, Marcus Aurelius focused on philosophical questions, which involve issues like what the point of creation is and how individuals can pursue a good life and do the right thing. What is the right thing to do? Aurelius focused on life challenges and personal struggles. In the first book of *Meditations*, he shared his philosophical thoughts, and he gave thanks to the people who influenced him, like his adoptive father, his brother, and his mother. He also thanked his instructor Junius Resticus, who taught him a lot about philosophy.

Marcus Aurelius even thanked Rusticus for giving him the Epictetus lecture book that was written by one of Epictetus's students, Arrian, and the list goes on. He wrote about how those people influenced him in his life. In the interest of acknowledging, he wrote about the battles he fought as the emperor of Rome and as an individual, as a son of Antoninus Pius. In the first book of meditations, Marcus showed his gratitude to Antoninus Pius, who adopted him; his adoptive father had a long-lasting impression on Marcus as he watched him growing up. Antoninus Pius was known for his leadership and management. He was tolerant towards everyone, he was calm and collected, and he was persistent in everything he did. Marcus Aurelius was deeply influenced by such a man who composed himself during hard times; his adoptive father was a man who kept his word, a man who always fulfilled his duty. So it's safe to say that Marcus was highly influenced by Antoninus Pius, who was a great leader and a great father.

Marcus Aurelius' character as an emperor and as a great person illustrates how much Antoninus Pius influenced him growing up, especially on the acts of compassion towards fellow humans. Pius was like an idol for Marcus; he appreciated him for his energy, for always doing what's right, his devotion to standing for what's right, his respect for others, his meekness, his humility, his nature of examining things deeply, his kindness even in unkind situations, and his reliability as a leader, as a father, and as a fellow human. His rationality led him to try to examine everything and everyone objectively. Marcus Aurelius wrote about the irrationality of being angry with someone for wanting something he wrote. How cruel to forbid people who want what they think is good for them. Yet that is just what you will not let them do when you get angry at their misbehavior. They are drawn toward what they think is good for them. However, this is not good for them. Then show them that. Prove it to them instead of losing your temper (Hays, 2002, p. 154).

Marcus Aurelius was an honorable leader. During his time in power, Marcus led his empire with the utmost devotion. He was the philosopher king who chose his duty regardless of anything. He

was a devoted, disciplined leader who made many people astonished. How can one have all the power to do whatever they want but still be disciplined to their duty? That level of self-mastery is what made Marcus a remarkable leader; it is a quality that made him different from other leaders. Marcus was the leader who worked for the greater good; he was a noble man. It is said that Marcus's last years were extremely filled with hardships; during the past ten years of his reign, his empire had continuous wars, and he even lost his wife, Faustina, his colleagues, and his adopted brother, who took part in ruling Rome with him, Verus. From 169 to 179, Marcus had to cope with constant fighting on the border and the unsuccessful riot of Cassius, who was a Roman general who declared himself an emperor and then fled (Hays, 2002, p. 15). Marcus Aurelius was a great thinker and leader; he handled people well and took constructive criticism. He wrote that if anyone could refute him, better to show him the mistakes he has committed instead of looking at things from a wrong perspective.

What harms us, according to, Marcus Aurelius, is persisting self-deceit and ignorance (Hays, 2002, p. 153). He believed in doing his duty, what was expected of him to do, and other than things that disturbed him. He believed that when someone acts out of reason, or when you find yourself in that situation, the best thing to do is to be kind and transparent. He claimed you are rational, so be it. Unlike Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus did not come from a prestigious family; he was not only unprivileged but also enslaved. He did not live in a castle or have private instructors. Epictetus was born in Hierapolis in Phrygia, in modern-day Turkey. Although the year of his birth is not exactly known, many writers claim that he must have been born before the end of Nero's reign (Davis, B. H. S. 1903, p. 131).

Epictetus was a captive to a man named Epaphroditus, who was a wealthy man who had a connection with the emperor of Rome at that time, who goes by the name Nero, and because of that, Epictetus was able to hear philosophical conversations and get inspired. Even though he had a challenging life, he was able to conquer it, as he believed in the vitality of virtue and achieving inner freedom from external events. He believed that even though external situations are not in our control, we could control it the way we respond to that certain situation.

Just like Socrates, Epictetus did not write; in fact, his student Arrian is the one who wrote from following his lectures. Following Epictetus's teachings, Arrian wrote about his values and his way of life. Arrian was the upper-class historian and public official who published a broad record of the master's discussions, a manual typically referred to as the Discourses of Epictetus. He

later produced an edited version, the *Encheiridion Manual or Handbook* (Hays, 2002, p. 24). In *Discourses and the Enchiridion*, the focus is mostly on ethical behavior; Epictetus believed that what matters the most is the way one responds to any hardship or external situation, not the hardship. What matters the most is one's behavior towards any type of adversity, not the adversity.

As I have mentioned, Epictetus was born into slavery, but after gaining his freedom after the death of Emperor Nero, Epictetus began his institute in a city called Nicopolis, where he started teaching stoicism. Epictetus was an astonishing teacher who embodied his beliefs in his life. His students were deeply influenced by him as he taught them to practice their philosophy daily. Indeed, Epictetus's influence cannot be denied; one of his students dubbed Epictetus the greatest teacher, superior to all of those who used to teach in his time. Epictetus focused on the advancement of one's soul and the importance of virtue in one's life; he improved and healed people who were living in misery and pain. He believed that having self-control toward urges was essential. He believed that one must be the personification of their beliefs; before teaching others, one should be a representation of what they're teaching.

Epictetus is known as a man with untouchable inner strength is astonishing, and how he composed himself during painful moments makes him an extraordinary thinker. Unlike Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus lived for most of his life in a small hut with just a bed and a lamp in it. It is believed that he lived most of his life alone. He adopted a child who was unable to survive because of poverty. Lucian of Samosata writes that when Epictetus died, some enthusiastic admirer purchased his lamp for over five hundred dollars. Lucian mocks the purchaser as hoping to acquire Epictetus's wisdom by studying his lamp.

3.2 Awareness as the Starting Point

Having awareness about things is a pivotal step in acquiring or doing anything. Awareness is the catalyst for thinking rationally and making choices. Before becoming virtuous, one should be aware of what it means to be virtuous and understand how the world works. We wouldn't know what to do about it if we weren't aware of it. To be virtuous, one should know what it means to be virtuous. Epictetus believed that having awareness or knowing the difference between what is within our control and what is not within our control is crucial. Knowing what is in our control can be portrayed in the way we think, in our core values, or in the way we act, and those are what

we truly can manage and control. Having awareness does not just mean knowing about the nature of the universe but also about managing our thoughts and actions. For Epictetus, having awareness meant living harmoniously with nature and reason. He believed that by observing our thoughts and actions, we could understand why we acted in certain situations, what made us act in those situations, and what caused us to act that way, which would lead us to be mindful of our thoughts and beliefs, and most importantly, it would cause us to be attentive to our actions.

Having awareness consists of recognizing our thoughts and desires, the way we react to situations, and what is not in our power, which consists of other people's opinions; therefore, we shall be in control of what's within our control, and that is our actions and our behavior. Epictetus teaches us to prepare for the worst-case scenario and understand that the world is full of adversity; we shall prepare ourselves for it. Having awareness of the nature of the world and everything in nature can ultimately lead individuals to live a virtuous life. Epictetus believed that having self-awareness requires us to be attentive to the way we think, to our feelings, and to the actions we take, whether those actions align with our values and whether those actions contribute to the good of ourselves and others. Through awareness, people can have a better understanding of the world they live in and themselves.

Marcus Aurelius argues that if he can control his thoughts as necessary, then, he claims, how can he be troubled? He writes that what is outside my mind means nothing to it; just recognize that lesson, and your feet will stand firm (Hays, 2002, p. 166). Nothing can harm or hurt us unless we let it, and it is our interpretation of it that can trigger us or not trigger us, so we can choose to look at any situation objectively and not get triggered. Recognizing and being aware of what happens outside of ourselves is not in our control and is essential, as it is factual that one individual can't be the complete controller or dictator of how other individuals perceive the world or think about it.

Besides, having awareness of ourselves and others would help us become mindful of the way we treat others, which would lead us to have better relationships with people and live a good life. Understanding the nature of reality would encourage individuals to be persistent in the adversity of life. Having awareness of the world outside of ourselves, being aware of the way we see things, the actions we take, and our morals is a necessary step, as it would lead us to mindfulness, which would help us pursue a virtuous life. Being aware of what's within one's control begins with focusing on the internal, which is being aware of one's thoughts, beliefs, and

actions. One's behavior in any situation is just the confirmation of how someone thinks; it is pivotal to understand this. Being aware of our minds can help us in evolving our individuality and lead us to self-improvement. Self-awareness causes individuals to become virtuous as they elevate themselves and the quality of their lives, and that can only happen by shifting their attention to the way they see the world and react.

For Epictetus, being aware of what is within our control and what is not is our ethical duty; he believed that we are all accountable for the way we see and for the way we take action, and doing this will result in us living a purposeful life. Individuals can live virtuously by regulating their thoughts and reactions to external situations. Epictetus shows us the essence of recognizing our power and then separating ourselves from the events that are not in our control. This is the true freedom of the mind. Knowing this means that we are free from the outcomes of certain things, as we wouldn't become bothered or desperate for things to happen our way. Still, instead, we are beneficial regardless of the happenings of the outside world because we understand that the true essence of our self that knows true freedom is the one we give ourselves.

Knowing what is within one's control does not make one a passive individual; it does not mean that one cannot be creative or do things. Individuals can do anything that is in their power to do; individuals can stand and fight for what is right. Marcus Aurelius believed that it is always appropriate to stand for what is right. The story of Malala Yousafzai, who advocated and fought for girls' education, shows us that standing up for what is right can make a difference in the world. Individuals can do what they can. You see, even if Malala can't control external situations or the outcome that comes after advocating for what she believes is right, that does not stop her from standing for what's right; she did what was within her control and succeeded in doing so. Her story shows us the Stoic philosophy of having the courage to stand for what is right regardless of external situations.

3.3. The Significance of Rationality

Rationality plays an essential role in making one live a good life. By analyzing and thinking critically, one can become aware of what is valid or invalid; after that, one can make rational decisions based on that knowledge. Epictetus' *On Enchiridion* emphasizes that what makes us different from other creations is our rationality, and it is through reason that we understand the

dichotomy of reason by becoming aware of what is in our control and what's not. For Epictetus, it is through reason that we can be virtuous individuals and live in harmony with others.

Epictetus believed that being rational and seeing things objectively are essential steps in attaining virtue and comprehending reality. This helps one to understand the position one holds in the world. In *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius emphasized the importance of rationality. For Marcus, rationality is essential in making one's living in alignment with nature, which means that if one is living in alignment with nature, one fulfills one's duty and works for the good of the collective. Marcus Aurelius believes that the rational soul is the one that leads us, and he believes that the rational soul should always remain truthful to itself, regardless of what occurs in the external world.

In the pursuit of a good life, the role of reason is very significant, as the Stoics believed. One can live a good life only through virtue, and virtue can be tended through reason or through being rational. Reason is a powerful thing that humans have, and by being rational, one can pursue a purposeful life. As it is responsible for distinguishing whether it is within one's control or without it, reason is a vital component of life.

By perceiving everything in the world objectively, people can make good choices in their lives, avoid impulses, become unbiased, and live harmoniously with nature. The fact that people are rational makes them have a better understanding of how the world works, which makes them resilient in the face of adversity and accept things that are not up to them. Furthermore, not just in the pursuit of a good life but generally, rationality is fundamental, as it is through reason that one can arrive at scientific laws or theories through a process of logic and evidence. Logic, evidence, and observations are the two, and only two, pillars upon which scientific knowledge is based.

In science, theories and observations are interrelated and cannot exist without each other. Theories provide meaning and significance to what we watch, and observations help validate or refine existing theories or construct new theories. Any other means of knowledge acquisition, such as faith or authority, cannot be considered science. (Bhattacharjeem 2012, p. 3) We arrive at scientific laws or theories through a process of logic and evidence. Logic, evidence, and observations are the two, and only two, pillars upon which scientific knowledge is based. In science, theories and observations are interrelated and cannot exist without each other. Furthermore, Marcus Aurelius claimed that it is through reason that one can understand

and make better decisions and develop a discipline, virtuous persona. For Marcus, rationality gives individuals the strength to avoid decisions based on impulse. Through reason, individuals can master themselves and control how they perceive, think, and act. Marcus Aurelius believed that it is through reason that one can obtain knowledge, become aware of everything, and contribute to living virtuously.

Rationality plays an essential role in making one to be an open-minded person. We are rational as long as we remain open to criticism and willing to change our views when faced with criticism that we think is valid. We are rational, that is, as long as we are willing to appeal to reason and argument as opposed to violence and force to settle our disputes (Gattei, 2009, p. 4). Rationality leads one to perceive reality. Objectively, this reduces the bias inherent in observation; when more people observe the same thing under the same or different conditions, then the collection of observations becomes more accurate (less biased, more complete). Different observers, different situations, different locations, and different definitions of what to observe all contribute to the objectivity of facts and all reduce observation error (Bhattacharjeem 2012, p. 442).

A. THE ONENESS OF NATURE

The Golden Rule, which claims that one should do to others or treat others as he or she wants to be treated, can illustrate Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus's view on the web of life being interconnected. As Marcus believed, each of us plays a certain role in contributing to the world. The philosophy of both is based on the moral integrity of a person and doing well by others. Treating others respectfully means pursuing a virtuous life. Both believed that the world is interconnected, in which every individual should treat others with kindness and a sense of humanity. Indeed, being kind towards others is tantamount to being kind to oneself.

Marcus Aurelius believed that there is a category of things that people are fascinated by. The first batch of people is mesmerized by the things in nature. Things like fruits of nature, marbles and others are appreciated by the first batch of people. The second batch encompasses the understanding of the interconnectedness of things in nature. Animals that form their own clan; and lions that create their pride belong to the second batch. The third batch involves admiring

things that are made and used by reason. Developments of machinery or things that are used by reason are the examples of the third batch.

The ultimate batch is composed of people who value how human mind collectively works. These people put great emphasis on self-recognition and compassion towards the collective life. This is the part which focuses on having collective awareness and harmonized understanding. Marcus Aurelius, in the last part, examined the changing nature of reality. He believed that both humans and the universe are always in an ongoing evolution. To illustrate the evolution, Marcus Aurelius used the simple beauty of nature, the interconnectedness of everything in nature, the nature of the human mind, and the great advancement of this mind through reason and also the understanding of the ever-changing world. Each and every one in nature has different qualities, or its own essence. A cat can effortlessly climb a tree while a dog might not, but both have their own quality that makes them survive in nature. Thus, what is expected of us is doing the things we are made to do.

For Marcus Aurelius, similar things tend to gravitate towards each other. To illustrate this, let's take, for example, some things that have magnetic attraction towards one another. Minerals and rocks flow to those things that have a similar feature to them. In nature, we can observe that even animals gravitate towards those with the same features. This shows, if those things without reason can act like that, then those things that have reasonable power can even more easily be sympathetic for forming good and purposeful connections with others. This is the way of life that runs in accordance with the rule of nature.

According to the contention of Marcus Aurelius, each person is responsible for others. Each one of us, without any exception, should serve the universe by doing our best. In this world each person, according to Marcus Aurelius, has different tasks to perform, various positions and responsibilities to care for. External situations, for him, cannot hurt us if we don't let them. If someone chooses to become a criminal, it can't hurt us. If we perceive criminals or other vicious things can cause us harm in a certain way. The way we see things plays a crucial role in our lives. Thus for Marcus Aurelius, we should be considerate of others and work for the good of the cosmos.

Furthermore, Marcus Aurelius believed that people should always remind themselves of the way things are connected. The knowledge of their relatedness is very important. All things are

implicated in one another and some of them sympathize with each other. This event is the consequence of some other one. Things push and pull on each other, and breathe together, and are one (Hays, 2002, p. 157). Marcus believed in treating others with love and being one with them, as For Marcus everything is interconnected; and he believed that people can be happy when they are parts of this interconnectedness. They get delighted when they serve and work for their society. All rational beings, according to the belief of Marcus Aurelius, are connected and are the essential parts of the greater whole. That is why the Stoics considered themselves as citizens of the world, or cosmopolitan.

Comparing the world ruled by logos to a city where all human beings are citizens, with all the duties inherent in citizenship, Marcus Aurelius together with Epictetus, viewed the world as a whole, a collective, and all individuals in it are parts of the whole intertwined with one another. When one does good, it means doing good goes in and for the best interest of the collective entity. Similarly, when one does destructive things, the destruction hurts not only the victim or the one who does it but also to the collective - this is a hindrance for the pursuit of good life. Marcus Aurelius taught that all human beings should be kind to one another; because the universe is a whole, not parts. This is to say, that he viewed that the cosmos, goes beyond national and geographical borders.

B. The Beauty of Acceptance

Epictetus believed that individuals should accept their fate with ease, as it is the plan of the logos, and that cannot be bad. By surrendering to fate, one can truly live free from the worry of controlling everything in life. The willingness to accept situations that one can't control is essential. On the right life path, Marcus Aurelius considered acceptance an essential path to a good life. An attitude of acceptance is a crucial step for individuals who want to pursue a good life. Acceptance is a crucial step in pursuing a virtuous life; just to illustrate the importance of acceptance, for example, you can't put someone in rehab or convince him that he has a problem if he does not accept it. An addict who does not accept the fact that they are an addict will never consider going to rehab or stopping that addiction if they don't accept themselves as an addict, and thus, they have a problem they need to heal. This shows us that acceptance is not a hindrance but rather the first step for improving individuals who want to change or heal themselves. Epictetus believed that individuals should accept the place given to them in this world and do what is expected of them. This causes them to live a virtuous life.

To live a good life, one must be free from overthinking, as overthinking is caused by not accepting certain things. To illustrate this, let's imagine an individual who has lost something, and yet he has not accepted or convinced himself that he has certainly lost it. The failure to accept the loss of the thing might put the loser into an endless anxiety, which is an obstacle to living a good life. Therefore, the Stoics advise people to accept the uncontrollable things that are out of reach; individuals should make themselves free from unnecessary anxiety.

3.4 The Reality of Change and The Present Moment

In each moment, everything is changing. Both Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus considered that the world has a changing nature. It would be rational to accept this fact and the challenges one might face in life, as adversity is part of the nature of the world. For Marcus Aurelius, one should know the transient nature of life, the mortality of humans, power and affluence; and nothing in the world is promised to be eternal; one might be a wealthy person today, and tomorrow, they may cease to be the same person.

In book six of *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius writes that nature is adaptable and obedient, and the logos that governs it has no reason to do evil. It knows no evil, it does none of it, and causes harm to nothing. It dictates all the beginnings and all the endings. Then he writes that one should just do the right thing. The rest does not matter if you are cold or warm, tired or well rested, despised or honored, dying or busy with other assignments. Dying, too, is one of our assignments (Hays, 2002, p. 146).

At each moment, everything changes; it might well be an advancement in technology. For instance, in the past, when Nikola Tesla proposed his idea of having alternative currents of electricity that could be transmitted over long distances, many scientists supported him, but many others considered him to be delusional. But look at today's world: Tesla's alternating current is the one that is used more in the contemporary world. This can show us the reality of change. I mean, if you had told someone a hundred years ago about certain technological advancements that the world is practically using today, that person would then consider you ridiculous. That is the nature of the world: at any moment, anything could happen. Knowing and understanding the nature of reality, as Marcus Aurelius contended, what we have in our hands is now. Knowing and accepting the momentary nature of everything in the world, according to the belief of Marcus Aurelius, individuals would live their lives in contentment.

To show the nature of the world and mortality, Marcus mentions different people who were considered to be powerful at one point in history dying. Even those great people who were believed to have an earth-shaking power in history are not safe from death. Death awaits us all, Marcus pointed out; even Socrates, who was considered to be the greatest philosopher of all time, was not safe from death. Alexander the Great, who was a powerful conqueror, was not safe, and even Caesar, who was the leader of Rome, was assassinated. It doesn't matter whether you are the most respected or the most powerful; you will eventually die.

Marcus Aurelius believed that to live a meaningful life, one must not be bothered by how long or short life is; just be content with your life, don't be bothered by people's opinions, and why would you need validation from others who wonder and want validation from you? Be rational, stop being bothered by others, and be content with whatever you have. Marcus writes, Just look at yourself; you've wandered all over and finally realized that you never found what you were after: how to live, not in money, fame, or self-indulgence anywhere (Meditations 8.1). You can only live in contentment by living life following nature's rules and virtue.

Accepting the ever-changing nature of the world would help individuals understand the price of every moment and make it easier for them to be content with the present moment. Just by being present and by living in the now, individuals can create an atmosphere that causes them to have inner peace. Being present keeps individuals connected to their surroundings, to whatever is in front, and doing that maintains a sense of stability in one's life. Being present maintains one's composure as one who pays attention to the details of everything. Marcus Aurelius believed that we have various abilities present in all rational creatures, such as rationality itself. And this is one of them. Just as nature takes every obstacle and every impediment and works around it, turning it to its purposes and incorporating it into itself. A rational being can turn each setback into an instrument and use it to achieve its goal.

In Meditations, Marcus writes Don't let your imagination be crushed by life as a whole. Don't try to picture everything bad that could happen. Stick with the situation at hand and ask, "Why is this so unbearable? Why can't I endure it?" You'll be embarrassed to answer. Then remind yourself that the past and future have no power over you. Only the present, and even that can be minimized. Just mark off its limits. And if your mind tries to claim that it can't hold out against that, well, then, heap shame upon it (Hays, 2002, p. 195). The people who live in the present moment make decisions based on reason. Even though it is hard to be perfect, it's better to try

and pay attention to thoughts. It is imperative to know whether these thoughts are biased or not, whether people are acting or reacting based on their old habits, or on making choices based on reason.

The active presence of people makes it easier to differentiate these things. For the Stoics, being attentive is mandatory. Individuals can become more effective at anything they are doing if they actively do the thing both mentally and physically. Epictetus advises us in times when we struggle and can't do anything; he advises us to be present, and then we can do what we're supposed to do afterward. Just by being present, individuals can be more focused on the things they are doing. Marcus Aurelius advises individuals to always focus on the present. His teachings can show us the beauty of being present, mindful, and living in harmony with nature.

Furthermore, Marcus Aurelius emphasized the importance of the present moment. To live a worry-free life, we shall focus on now; the present moment is what we have, not the past or the future, but the present. Thus, by knowing that what we have now is the present, and by doing what is just in front of us, we can embrace the present moment instead of lamenting about what has already gone for good or about anything that the future will generate. By accepting what has happened in the past, we can no longer control the past—it is just like spilled water. Thus, accepting the facts on the ground, by focusing on the now and doing what is needed for us to do now, would give us the full capability to make our lives better.

Just being present will make it easier for one to face anything in life with calmness, as the present moment makes one see the beauty of life, which gives one greater enjoyment of life. Marcus Aurelius stressed the importance of accepting nature's way and of living in the present moment with contentment. Marcus Aurelius believed that the present moment is the only time that we genuinely own. Honestly, one can only be certain about the present moment. So one has to be content with the present. For Marcus Aurelius, the importance of the present moment lies in the fact that it makes it easier for one to observe thoughts objectively. This, as it is lived, would make one the author of his joy.

For Epictetus, being present is living by the rule of nature. He contends that this would make one live in tranquility, as she or he would not try to control situations and would rather accept just to live life. In short, for Epictetus, the “here and now” is what matters most. He contended that people suffer because they do not live in the present moment and try to control life and get

worried about the future. That is why Epictetus stressed the importance of just focusing on what is within one's control. These are one's mind, beliefs, and actions. He believed that individuals must let go of the need to control situations and live in the present moment, which would make one free from past regrets. For Epictetus, virtue, or the ultimate good, can only be obtained if one lives in the present; the four attributes of virtue can be truly applied by being present. Being present makes one think clearly and listen attentively, and this is good not only for others but also for oneself.

3.5 Self-Examination as the Door To Self-Discovery and the Influence of Perspective

Marcus Aurelius raised some questions about those people who were frightened of change. What is closer to nature's heart? Can you take a hot bath and leave the firewood as it was? Eat food without transforming it? Can any vital process take place without something being changed? Can't you see? It's just the same with you and just as vital to nature (Hays, 2002, p. 170). Even water changes from solid to liquid to gas; when it's exposed to heat, what once was ice melts and becomes water, and when water gets boiled, it evaporates into vapor. On the road to self-elevation, one must be ready to change its old ways. Marcus believed that we should take accountability and perceive the world objectively, as we are the ones who give it meaning. It does not matter whether it is good or bad; it is human beings who interpret and give meaning to things. The thing one society might consider to be good might be considered evil by another society. The way one person views the world might be different from another's.

By understanding that it is through change that one can improve, one can reestablish a new perspective that would help it become better, so reestablishing a new perspective is vital, as it would make us look at challenges in a new light. This means the things that triggered us before can no longer trigger us, since we look at them objectively and do what we are supposed to do. For Marcus, everything that occurs outside of us is insignificant; it's us, or our beliefs and actions, that give it significance. So Marcus concludes that we should not give relevance to things we cannot control. It is not up to you whether someone that you desire desires you or not, or whether you are betrayed by someone you trust or by other people. What is up to you is, in fact, your reaction in those situations. Just consider this: even though everyone has a different meaning for what struggle is, facing struggle is not something new to humanity; it's the thing

that every being can face in life, so why should they have a victim mentality when the whole of humanity goes through it?

In the book *The Obstacle Is the Way* by Ryan Holiday, Holiday writes about his understanding of Stoic philosophy. He argues about the important role to play in the issues of how one perceives something and takes action in challenging times. Holiday mentions Marcus Aurelius' perception of seeing obstacles as doors of transformation, as obstacles inspire individuals to grow and become successful. Holiday emphasizes the role that a mindset plays when one is faced with an obstacle. One can change the obstacle into an opportunity by changing its outlook and mindset. Concerning this, Holiday mentions the role of outlook, action, and will. He argues that obstacles are not bad; rather, they are essential, as they offer us the chance to educate and elevate ourselves. Holiday has a strong belief in challenge: it stimulates one to make crucial decisions and clear determinations. In doing that, Holiday emphasizes the importance of mastery over the self and becoming a courageous person irrespective of the outside pressure. If one cannot control something outside of himself, then he should focus on what he can control. This is how one should perceive and respond to the obstacles. Just like Marcus Aurelius viewed obstacles as opportunities, Holiday advises us to look at obstacles as turning points, not as ends. We human beings, according to Marcus Aurelius, are capable of erasing false perceptions. As he writes, "Tell yourself, I have it in me to keep my soul from evil, lust, and all confusion. To see things as they are and treat them as they deserve, you have to assemble your life yourself, action by action, and be satisfied if each one achieves its goal, as far as it can. No one can keep that from happening." *Meditations* 8.26

Additionally, Epictetus thought that human character and behavior are caused by the way they see the world. That might be biased or unbiased. If it is biased, then people cannot see things objectively, and that can be a hindrance. But if they change their negative perception to a positive response, a lot of affirmative reactions emerge. Epictetus teaches people to prepare themselves for the worst-case scenario. The reason is that the world is full of adversity that requires preparedness. Marcus Aurelius, too, sees the world objectively, and this includes observing people's outlooks and thoughts that help them achieve serenity. He further said that when people observe whatever triggers them and also whatever makes them have anxiety, they ultimately achieve a better understanding and get inner calmness in their lives.

A. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SELF-EXAMINATION

Self-examination is the door to self-elevation; by being aware of how the world works and then by examining oneself, individuals can improve their lives and live virtuous lives. Having awareness does not just lead individuals to inspect themselves but also to develop self-discipline. It would help them understand themselves better and become masters of their actions. It is only then that they understand their surroundings, themselves, and others. Focusing only on what's within their control and mastering self-control would lead them to a life of virtue.

Through reflective thinking, one can get inner awareness, which leads individuals to live a virtuous life. As Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus emphasized, questioning their core beliefs objectively is crucial for people. Epictetus believed in the importance of self-observation. In his lectures, he advised his students to watch over the way they think and react. It is not enough to observe others; it is equally important to be aware of oneself. When this is fulfilled, people can make more rational decisions.

In Michael A. Singer's book entitled *The Untethered Soul*, Singer gives an insightful role that self-awareness plays in achieving inner peace. In the book, Singer highlights the importance of examining oneself and the emotional hindrances that make one stuck in life. Singer believed that through awareness of oneself, one can get inner freedom. Indeed, he observed that people most of the time mix up their individuality with their emotions and thoughts. But for Singer, this is wrong. The remedy for this, in Singer's account, is that the individuals should be detached from the thoughts and the overthinking of the mind, as neither is their identity. Moreover, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* shows us that the philosopher king was a self-reflecting king who knew himself, his position, power, and roles very well. The *Meditations* was a piece of literature where in he wrote his core beliefs, his values, and what he thinks is right or wrong. He wrote it for himself. Self-reflection is an essential step for individuals who have goals to fulfill and for those who want to improve themselves.

Furthermore, self-reflection can help individuals make progress both in their personal and professional lives. Individuals can improve their lives by analyzing the way they think and act. Doing this will help people become more aware of themselves, their likes and dislikes, what makes them better or worse, and what they want to pursue or avoid. Self-reflection can help individuals to become resilient personalities who can stand strong in challenging situations. By

seeing and reflecting on any situation objectively, they can easily pursue a meaningful life and create a better environment for themselves and others.

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SELF-MASTERY

Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus are the epitome of what self-mastery and being disciplined could mean. They illustrated their greatness in different ways. Marcus Aurelius has shown his unwavering self-discipline in his struggle for power. Despite the challenges he encountered, the qualities of his leadership and the reliability of his integrity make him one of the greatest emperors of Rome in history. Marcus Aurelius did not get the title of a philosopher king for no obvious reason; it's because he had perfectly demonstrated the quality of being an emperor who was self-disciplined, and that makes other emperors look bad. His discipline was what truly made him a great emperor.

When he was in power as the emperor of Rome, he was never corrupted, even though he could do whatever he wanted to do. He always did what he considered to be the right thing. He believed that having discipline over one's actions would mean pursuing a virtuous life that granted serenity. Marcus Aurelius always aspired to do the morally right thing. We can also see the same quality in Epictetus, who always composed himself. Epictetus could be seen as the representative of what self-discipline looked like. Even though he was enslaved and had a harsh lifetime, nothing was able to stop him from becoming one of the greatest Stoic philosophers of all time. What was evident about him was that he mastered himself and was so self-disciplined that he stood above the adversity of his time.

Epictetus's level of self-mastery is what truly makes him a true Stoic. He was so disciplined that he had no place for impulses. He never acted out of desires or impulses, and he was the one who always did what he believed in. Being disciplined, for Epictetus, is critical above everything. For example, he claims that if one wants to study something, or if one wants to avoid or quit something, then he should make it a part of his routine. By mastering the self, one can make the right decision; by averting impulses that can hinder their lives, they can pursue a meaningful life. On desires and cravings of lust, Epictetus had the same idea. Just like how we move and do things in our lives, craving and doing our desires will also become part of our routine. The more we delight in those desires, the more they become part of our routine, and that makes everything in our lives predictable.

Marcus Aurelius also attempted to show the ways of getting disciplined. He thought that when someone encounters laziness in getting out of bed in the morning, he has to remember how to define characteristics. For Marcus Aurelius, what defines a human being is to work with others. Even animals know how to sleep. This is a characteristic or an activity that is more natural, more innate, and more satisfying (Hays, 2002, p. 188). Marcus always did his duty regardless of comfort; he did what nature and his people needed of him. He believed in being disciplined and doing even the littlest of habits since it is that which defines people's character.

Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus had shown their greatness through their self-mastery. They both believed that having discipline over their actions would make them have a morally great character. By being in control of their sudden desires that are not morally good, people could develop a discipline that would create a good life for them. Marcus believed that having self-discipline and mastering the way one reacts to external situations are essential things for individuals. Individuals, by being disciplined, can benefit themselves and attain inner peace.

3.6 Virtue as a Pinnacle of Morality: Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus's Perspectives on the Art of Living Well

For the contemporary world, where oftentimes individuals find it hard, unable to concentrate on one thing for a long time, a world that moves fast, in a world that is full of disturbances, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus offer essential principles that can guide individuals in pursuing a good, meaningful life. They both emphasize the importance of being present, calm, and collected in any situation or when doing anything. Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus believed in the vitality of virtue and that inner joy can be attained from within ourselves, not from external events. By fostering a virtuous life and being reasonable, individuals can pursue a good life.

Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus emphasize the importance of having bonds and treating others with kindness. They emphasize the importance of having bonds and treating others with kindness. Their philosophies make individuals strive for a life that is full of integrity. Their belief in just focusing on the present moment is an important antidote for overthinking and worry. Being present allows one to live life to its fullest, as the one who is present would not overthink the future or dwell on the past. Being present makes it easier for one to fit in with others who are around in a good way, which leads one to live a meaningful life. The modern world focuses on material gain, whereas for the Stoics, virtue is a foundational concept that holds the upper hand

in everything, as they considered virtue to be the ultimate good, and it's only through virtue that one can pursue a good life. Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus believed that one can achieve and live the ultimate good life through virtue.

Virtue is not just the ultimate good; it is the pinnacle of morality, and one can only live a meaningful life through it. One might ask why virtue is the ultimate good and why other things are indifferent; both Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus see virtue as the highest good, as they believe that it's through virtue that one can live harmoniously with reason and with the nature of the world. Virtue is the pinnacle of morality and plays an essential role in developing behavior and well-being. For Marcus Aurelius, virtue involves how one can respond to external situations. He believed that it's through virtue that one can become resilient; he believed that one should focus more on internal rather than external events, as it causes one to accept the uncontrollable and live in peace.

Now, one might ask, if the ultimate good is virtue, then what is the opposite of it? Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus saw, apart from virtue, other things as indifferent; anything that is not in our control is indifferent to them. For example, they considered external events as indifferent, like the prosperity or the status of a person, even though they don't deny them to be desirable. I mean, it is good to have affluence or good health; however, they believed that those material possessions are not the highest good, as they are not responsible for one's moral integrity. Epictetus labels affluence as a desirable indifference; even if it is desirable to be wealthy, it does not grant inner peace or happiness.

What should govern your intentions and your actions? Marcus Aurelius believed that nothing is good except what leads to fairness, self-control, courage, and free will. And nothing bad except what does the opposite. For every action, ask, How does it affect me? Could I change my mind about it? But soon I'll be dead, and the slate's empty (Hays, 2002, p. 186). Epictetus lived his life in detachment; he was detached from things and possessions, as they did not control him, but he advised his people to focus on the way they respond when faced with health problems or when losing something.

Although Marcus Aurelius was privileged in terms of wealth, as he was the emperor of Rome, he was the most powerful man at one point in history. He accepted the insignificance of affluence to living a virtuous life even though he was highly favored in terms of wealth and everything, and

even though he agreed that it's desirable to have affluence, he was detached from it as he believed those possessions to be short-lived. Both Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus believe that one can achieve inner stability from inner strength, not from external situations.

Furthermore, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus were the personification of their philosophy and lived their daily lives led by virtue; they thought that one must make a decision and act according to their core values during hard times. In *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius, through his writing, reminds himself to be dedicated to virtue and to endure impulses. For Marcus Aurelius, to live a virtuous life, one must always stay committed to virtue; for him, as long as one is alive, one must foster virtue, as virtue makes individuals resilient in the challenges of the world, as those challenges are endless processes of life.

Most people in the contemporary world complain about the littlest of things and have a victim mentality where they blame everyone and anything in their life instead of taking accountability. Whereas Epictetus teaches us that we should only be concerned with how they respond to the challenges they face in life rather than being concerned with the challenge. Epictetus believed true virtue can be portrayed by people that have the hardest lives but still choose to preserve their rationality and their moral integrity; for Epictetus, those are the ones that truly are virtuous, as they keep their sanity regardless of external situations. Marcus Aurelius believed that through the challenges of life, one can become a better version of themselves; he believed that harsh conditions develop a person's personality for the better.

At the end, what matters is living life in contentment; whatever we do in life, we gratify ourselves by running and looking for it in material possessions and titles, thinking that it would bring us the validation we need, but the thing is we don't find it there. We might think we do and think that's why, but then we realize that the more we get something, the more we want more; it's like an endless cycle. Then why don't we just appreciate the life we have, live in the present moment, and be unattached to the thoughts of the past or the future? The validation we need is us all along; we just need to make use of that.

CHAPTER 4: CRITICISM OF STOICISM

Stoicism essential principles still hold relevance in today's world. The mainstream is intrigued by stoicism; many contemporary writers seem to write and portray stoic philosophy. Stoicism is beneficial for individuals who seek to improve themselves and live life in serenity. Stoicism offers practices and principles that evoke mindfulness that strengthen inner strength and coping abilities, enabling one to overcome any type of obstacle. Stoicism is a philosophy that offers mindset reprogramming methods that can be helpful for the contemporary world. Even though Stoicism is admired by many and followed by many thinkers who emphasize the importance of Stoicism, despite the admiration that Stoicism gets and despite its widespread recognition, Stoicism is criticized.

Mostly Stoicism is criticized for endorsing passivity in people and for limiting their potential for exploration. Stoicism is criticized for its emphasis on rationality and making decisions based on reason; many claim this view is unrealistic, as some believe that human beings are ruled and influenced by biological urges and surroundings. Some critics, like Martha Nussbaum, criticize stoicism for suppressing emotions. She believes that repressing our emotions will lead to more problems and criticizes stoicism for being too rational to the point that it regulates emotions, which hinders one from having good, authentic connections with others. . Putting rationality above everything and suppressing one's emotions will result in, as Nussbaum makes clear, people becoming even more depressed. She also claimed that putting personal virtue first and controlling oneself would lead to limited social interaction and to being inflexible.

Others criticize it for being highly linked to the privileged and the selected few, which makes Stoicism difficult to access for those who are not privileged. But it's also good to understand that Stoic philosophy is an ancient philosophy. At that time, usually education was given to those who were privileged in history, so it's not just Stoicism that is the most privileged. Additionally, prominent philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche criticize Stoicism for endorsing emotional suppression, disdaining having desires, and promoting a passive mentality. He believed that always relying on reason would hinder the vitality of life. Nietzsche argued that Stoicism, endorsing detachment, would make one live a life devoid of life. I think some of Nietzsche's claims to be valid, as I believe that ignoring our emotions completely is unrealistic. Even the Stoics did not claim that one should completely detach from emotion; it's just that they suggested us to be rational.

Some others criticize and question the teachings of Stoicism and its applicability. The practicality of applying ancient Stoic principles in today's diverse and complex society and the applicability of Stoicism will be explored more in the last chapter. In this chapter, we will explore the fact that Stoic philosophy offers profound insights that are good for the contemporary world; despite that, we will assert that it comes with some limitations and explore the key arguments against Stoicism.

4.1 Emotional Repression: The Stoic Notion Apatheia

One of the major criticisms that Stoicism is criticized for is for suppressing emotions; in fact, when the word Stoic is mentioned, most would assume someone who is emotionless, a person who lacks sympathy. Being a Stoic does not mean becoming some type of machine, but it's about recognizing the nature of the world, being aware of oneself, and being rational. For instance, let's think of a courtroom that is led by emotion rather than reason. Can a lawyer make arguments based on emotions or reason? I argue that even if emotions are there, that lawyer needs to look at facts objectively, and that goes for judges also. We have to understand how the world works. When making decisions, it's better to make them based on reason.

Martha Nussbaum (1994) criticizes Stoicism. Her argument against Stoicism was that she claimed apatheia repressed emotions. Apatheia is a Stoic notion that emphasizes the importance of being emancipated from one's passion and having inner peace. However, the Stoics considered apatheia to be a way of achieving peace of mind but not as something that restrained one's emotions; they encouraged individuals to have a rational mindset that would make them express themselves and have a measured response but not bottle their feelings up. For the Stoics, apatheia is a way of becoming free of self-destructive desires, uncontrolled urges, and harmful obsessions but not denying one's emotions.

Same as Nussbaum, Friedrich Nietzsche also criticized the Stoic notion of apatheia, as he believed that it would restrain one's biological instincts and desires. Nietzsche claimed that suppressing the need for desires would ultimately restrain one's liveliness and creativity; for him, being free of desires would weaken the will to power. Nietzsche criticizes stoicism because he believes that Stoicism would endorse passivity in people, and denying or controlling emotions to live in serenity would make one's life empty of liveliness (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 56).

The Stoics have a concept called eupatheia that offers a well-proportioned outlook and promotes having good feelings, which are rational; one can achieve having those by being and seeing things objectively. Eupatheia is the ability to live a life that is in balance with virtue and reason and to resist irrational desires such as anger or fear. Eupatheia leads to emancipating oneself from the blockages that hinder one's life and encourages individuals to have good emotions, which would lead to living a virtuous life. The Stoics do not deny one from having emotions. It is just that they believe that it is better to become an aware individual who has emotional intelligence and who knows the effects of their actions—individuals who are aware of themselves, as in they are fully aware of what can make them act irrationally and their surroundings, and act rationally.

Usually, people misinterpret Stoicism; even William B. Irvine, who is known for his works on Stoicism, misinterpreted it. Before researching and writing about Stoicism, he misunderstood it, but when he started his research, he discovered that almost everything he thought he knew about Stoicism was wrong. Irvine stated that what he first knew about them comes from the dictionary, which defines a stoic as “one who is seemingly indifferent to or unaffected by joy, grief, pleasure, or pain.” Because of that, Irvine believed that the Stoics would be emotionally repressed individuals. However, Irvine discovered, though, that the goal of the Stoics was not to banish emotion from life but to banish negative emotions (Irvine, 2008, p. 7). Most of the criticism against Stoicism arises from misunderstanding. Stoicism does not endorse one to ignore its emotions or make individuals live an inauthentic life, but it makes individuals live a purposeful life and accept what can't be changed, as that is important for having clarity of mind, which is a good thing for one's stability.

A. Not Suppress but Express with Purpose

Stoicism does not endorse restraining one's emotions. Although expressing feelings and emotions is good for creating better relationships with other people, one can be rational and still express their feelings freely, but the misunderstanding is in the way most people interpret rationality as being illustrated as some type of robotic person who lacks feelings, which is entirely wrong. Expressing emotions is not being weak; as long as one is calmly expressing them, it is good. One can be rational and express their feelings; being rational doesn't mean you are a robot; expressing oneself while being rational doesn't make someone an overly dramatic

individual, but rather it makes individuals resilient when facing any type of challenge. Complaining over and over about the same issue would make you a person with bad character problem is, in both of those scenarios, they go to extremes in viewing them.; wouldn't you rather do what you need to do in challenging situations than complain? The thing is, the world is not free of obstacles, and what makes one a better person is the resilience they show when facing those obstacles.

Additionally, the important thing to understand is whether one fully emotionally expresses their emotions freely or not; that person might not be understood or form a good connection with others, and that does not solely grant one to have a good connection. The problem is that connecting with others would not grant one inner peace; inner peace is not something that others give to you—you give that to yourself. It's called inner peace for a reason; it's an internal thing, not an external one. Have a good mindset that is detached from the desire of pleasing others or seeking validation from others; give that validation to yourself, and forming good connections with others will come eventually. A person who does not need anyone's validation will become the most magnetic one. What matters is having serenity within yourself, and one can only have true inner peace by focusing on oneself, but if that person does not connect with themselves, there will always be a void that no one can fill—no external joy will fill it.

Emotions are meant to be felt. The point is identifying those emotions, recognizing what those emotions are signaling, and then seeing them objectively, recognizing where those emotions come from, what influenced those emotions, and becoming aware of where they are leading, especially if those emotions can hinder your life. You should be aware that, as in life, as much as it is important to express our emotions, it's also essential to express our emotions politely. Just imagine someone did a horrendous thing and called others names that they shouldn't have, just because someone needs to express how they feel. Just because one has to say something, it doesn't mean they should say it; just because one has some desire, it doesn't mean that person should, do it especially if it is morally wrong.

The main point does not lie in having those emotions; of course, humans have feelings, and having an emotion naturally comes to human beings. Have the emotions, but don't be the slave of your emotions and let them totally consume you, as emotions are meant to be felt, and reason is also meant to be used objectively. If we take a look at the most successful people in life, usually, those people are the ones who have used both their emotions and rationality.

B. Mastering the Art of Expression with the Blend of Reason

Usually the most successful people have mastered the art of articulating their ideas and feelings. Those people are known for speaking their truth with ease, and they are not overly emotional or blaming others for anything that has happened to them, but rather, they take their struggle to become resilient. Stoicism does not encourage one to ignore emotions. However, Stoicism gives us an understanding that one's emotions come from the way they see the world. Why just dwell on being emotional when you can also see those emotions rationally? Stoicism encourages looking into things rationally and doing what one is supposed to do.

Successful people like Oprah Winfrey, who had a hard life as a child but achieved success later in their lives, can illustrate speaking their truth and using that experience as an instrument for their success, using their emotions and intellect, and building big accomplishments out of it. Oprah is a well-known woman who has used her intellect as well as her experience. She is a prominent woman in the entertainment industry of the world, and the author Simon Sinek, who has equally used his emotional intuition and rationality and published books like “Start with Why,” offers inspirational approaches that make one an efficient leader who is a master at communicating with others. Being led by our emotions is the easy thing to do rather than doing a hard thing. If that is a choice, then one would rather not do the hard things than do them. However, usually, success comes from doing the hard thing in life.

The most important point is understanding that emotions are always influenced by one's judgment, so it's fair to say that one can change the way they act by objectively observing their thoughts. If one's thoughts are the sailors of their actions, then choosing to change them is not a bad idea. Nowadays, hearing someone complain about being stuck is a common thing. Hearing someone who complains about being trapped, having the same thought, and doing the same thing is a common thing. These issues are a common thing in the contemporary world, as most of us have routine lifestyles that involve doing the same thing every day, but for those that aspire to change and for those that seek to improve their lives, contemporary cognitive behavioral therapy would be beneficial, as it offers some help that is kind of similar to Stoicism. Even though they are different in so many ways, however, they have a trait that corresponds: the trait starts in the way they perceive human nature and the principles they use in dealing with the way humans behave and show their emotions.

Stoicism does not endorse one to ignore one's emotions. Stoicism endorses and offers principles similar to those of behavioral cognitive therapy as a way of directing our emotions and mental habits. Behavioral cognitive therapy suggests that one can direct the old pattern of thought by shifting ways of thinking, routines, and habits of the same thought. Similar to the Stoics, behavioral cognitive therapy also believes that the way we think, feel, and act are kind of influenced by one another. Mental misconceptions, like taking one struggle of one's life and believing that they can't survive, can be healed by BCT. Issues like panicking over small issues, like taking one thing that happens in life and then generalizing it, can be healed by BCT.

Behavioral Cognitive Therapy offers its help to individuals who deal with negative habitual thinking and behavior. So, objectively examining ourselves is crucial in helping us identify our own habitual thinking and behaviors, and by understanding that, one can overcome the problem that was created by oneself. Through mental reprogramming, individuals can foster mental resilience, which would help them live in serenity. The other thing that comes as a misunderstanding is that some individuals believe that being realistic and rational can make one lack sympathy or make one not express themselves; however, let's imagine two people: one who is not rational and the other who is led by reason. Which one of those two would express their ideas better—the rational one or the emotional one? Of course, the rational one would express themselves better. As they are calmer, more grounded, and more present, they have a better chance of winning the argument; if this works for winning arguments, then this definitely works for making individuals express themselves better without shouting and using unnecessary slurs. Individuals can express themselves in a better manner. Being rational is not discarding emotions or becoming a passive individual, but rather it's the wisdom that balances one's life; being rational is seeing everything objectively, understanding how the world works, recognizing the power of our mind, and becoming more aware of the nature of reality.

4.2 Amor Fati and Passivity

The other criticism stoicism faces is on having a fatalistic view and its emphasis on what one can control and one can be in control of the internal, not the external; the internal being our thoughts and the way we act, and the external being everything that is outside of ourselves, like external situations and other people's opinions. The Stoics advise us to only focus on the internal and to

be indifferent to the external. Most critics argue that being indifferent would make individuals passive. Stoicism gets criticized for endorsing acceptance. The critics believe that accepting destiny or fate would make individuals have a passive outlook on life, which can result in hindering people from acting up against unfair situations.

Martha Nussbaum (1994) criticizes the Stoic notion of Amor Fati, which is one's love of fate, a word that got its root from Latin, which translates as "love of fate." It means that one accepts and loves one's fate; it can be any type of obstacle in life, such as losing everything one has owned or losing a loved one. Nussbaum argues that the Stoics' view of Amor Fati, which is one's love of fate, accepting fate, and events beyond one's control, will make people passively participate in life instead of seeking justice or a different life, and this fatalistic view is not good. She believed that Stoic acceptance of the external endorses a passive mentality that is critical for one to take actions against unfair situations.

Even though Amor Fati has its origin in Stoicism, Friedrich Nietzsche was the one who made this concept known. However, the way the Stoics and Nietzsche interpret it differs: while the Stoics look at Amor Fati as a way of living in accordance with nature's rule— if one is rational, then one shall accept one's fate. Nietzsche perceived Amor Fati as being a way of bringing one closer to one's passion; he looked at it as being a way of becoming stronger, and thus he suggested that it should be embraced. Nietzsche believed that the struggle we face in life is a way to improve one's life.

The Stoics' view of Amor Fati leads one to accepting adversity and seeing it as an opportunity for change; While Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of desires and suffering. For Nietzsche, one should love one's fate and embrace it. Nietzsche emphasized the importance of desires and suffering, and he advised individuals and endorse struggle. Nietzsche criticized Stoicism for its belief in the world being led by the logos and its view on living life following nature. This view goes against Nietzsche's view of nature, as he saw it as meaningless. Nietzsche criticizes stoicism for endorsing a fatalistic belief of accepting every kind of struggle. He argues against the Stoics, as he believes that the Stoics endorse humans having unavoidable adversity and inescapable hardships that can't be avoided. Nietzsche claims that their view that endorses enduring challenging situations would endorse individuals to be submissive, as they accept without resistance (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 104).

Furthermore, Michel Foucault, who is a well-known French philosopher, believes that Stoicism is good for making one resilient. However, he criticizes it, as he believes that the Stoics' lack of focus on what lies in the external is not good for forming a cooperative that would fight any types of injustice. He argues that the Stoics should also focus on external situations and external issues that are unfair (Foucault, 1988, p. 104). Foucault believed that the Stoic's fatalistic view and being content in any circumstance would lead one to be indifferent towards societal transformation. He claimed that accepting suffering as part of life would lead one to become an inactive individual who wouldn't even make an effort to make a change in any dominating power structure. But let's not forget that accepting things that are not in our control doesn't mean we should stop trying anything in life; it just means recognizing the nature of the world. I believe that we should be brave and do what we can.

A. It is what it is: Accepting and Acting

“It is what it is” is a phrase that illustrates Stoicism; it reflects the Stoic insight that we frustrate ourselves unnecessarily by disagreeing with nature and resisting the flow of experience rather than surrendering to it (Murguia and Diaz, 2015, p. 43). It is what it is, whether you like something or not. Stoicism does not teach one to accept and let obstacles consume them, but rather Stoicism teaches individuals to accept what they can't change, to focus on what they can, to improve their life, and to become more resilient.

Moreover, it's important to understand that if one accepts what they can't change, it doesn't make them inactive. Accepting what can't be changed is not being a passive individual. If our actions can make a change in the situation we are facing, then we should make actions that help us achieve what we want to achieve, but if it's something that can't be changed, then why should we bother ourselves? Like the inevitability of death, every mortal is destined to die. Whether one accepts that fact or not, death is inevitable. For the Stoics, things happen in the strings of rational cause and effect. When we're facing an obstacle or something that we did not expect to happen to us, we have a choice: we have a choice to be a victim and let that thing consume us, or we accept what happened and take action that helps us combat that obstacle.

Anna wrote about her daily life during the Holocaust in her story, which was published later on by her father, who was the only survivor of their family, "Anna's Franks. Does Anna accepting the certain situation all the Jewish people were facing make her passive? Can we truly say that,

and how can one act in that type of situation? Well, one can try to save their life, but only if they have accepted the situation that they are in will they try to do that; then they can rationally think of ways that can save the part of them that cannot be controlled, which is their mind, and accept the fact that they all might get killed. It does not make any of the people that lost their lives in the Holocaust passive; an organized collective was executing its plan toward them. If those people didn't accept that they were being chased and killed, would that be any help to them? What was happening was factual, whether any of them believed it or not. Accepting the things that can't be changed is the rational thing to do. Acceptance is a critical step in overcoming any type of obstacle. It's by recognizing that life goes on regardless of what happens and by accepting what can't be changed that one can surpass any struggle. However, if a person is not willing to accept, then that person wouldn't try anything. For instance, why would a person that did not accept their overweight try to lose weight? If that person denies that, why should they even bother to try? A person who doesn't acknowledge there is a problem would never try to overcome it. Let's say that somebody made a mistake, but to move forward, that person should acknowledge that they have made some mistake; that person should, and then they can apologize and try to change the problem. It's by taking accountability and by accepting that one can move forward in life.

Stoicism does not make one rout, but conquer. Stoicism teaches one that they are the controller of their life. Stoicism makes one realize where our true power lies. Stoicism makes us realize that our life and the choices we make are influenced by our thoughts, the actions we take, and our will. So, in fact, what stoicism makes us is it makes us better humans for the world. Stoicism makes us the ones who are responsible for shaping our lives; rather than being a victim or blaming others, it teaches us to take accountability for our lives.

The thing is, acceptance of fate doesn't mean acceptance of being tortured. The Stoics believe being indifferent is better, as it helps approach any kind of situation rationally, and being indifferent means having a mindset that wouldn't get triggered by anything, as it doesn't differentiate between something being negative or positive but instead looks at it as just a thought or an outlook, not as bad or as good. Looking at any situation in life and analytically examining what one is capable of at that hardship would create a better atmosphere for individuals.

B. AMOR FATI WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE

Another point to mention, stated by Irvine, is that when the Stoics advocate fatalism, they are, advocating a restricted form of the doctrine. More precisely, they are advising us to be fatalistic with respect to the past, to keep firmly in mind that the past cannot happen in any different way. The Stoics would not advise a mother with a sick child to be fatalistic about the future; She should try to nurse the child back to health even though the Fates have already decided whether the child lives or dies (Irvine, 2008, p. 104). The Stoics are not endorsing fatalism in a way that makes one defeated, but instead to let go of what can't be changed and to take the lesson that came with it to make better choices in the future. The Stoics advocate for living life with clarity of mind.

Stoicism does not teach one to become a passive individual who lets struggle minimize oneself. The Stoics knew that the way they acted did in fact have an effect on the world, so they were never passive in their actions. Stoicism teaches individuals to make themselves aware of what truly lies in their control, that being their attitude toward the struggle. The Stoics are known for their strength and for their unwavering commitment to what they believed in. They did not wait for the future without doing anything, but rather, they were present, doing what was in front of them, which created a better tomorrow for them. In fact, what Stoicism basically teaches is to develop our strength and become better individuals who are good to both the collective and to ourselves.

The ones who are resilient do not deny the challenges they face; they face them and do what they have to do; they face their obstacles, as that is the way for their growth. Acceptance of problems is essential, as not accepting them would intensify them; accepting certain situations does not mean that one is stuck in that loop or makes one a passive individual, but instead, it's by accepting that one can make progress. If something can't be changed, the rational thing would be to accept it, like you can't unbreak a broken glass; accepting that it's broken is just the natural thing to do. By accepting what they can't change, individuals can put their attention on what they can, which is good for self-improvement. No one gets to choose what country or what race they want to be. Whether they are born into the most prestigious family or not is not something that is in their control.

However, when that person grows up, after a certain time, they have the opportunity to create their own life. Where someone is born, or the people who raised them, or the surroundings are

not up to that person, but after one becomes conscious, that person can choose who they want to become. It's essential to recognize that challenging situations are the doors to progress; the most resilient are the ones who go through the hardest challenges of life but choose to come out of that situation with resilience. Those who are resilient are known for their character and for recognizing resilience; that is what defines them, not the obstacle that they faced. Of course, the obstacle is the catalyst for their resilience, but what defines them as people is how they act; it's their endurance; it's the effort that they made and the obstacles that they faced that define them.

Stoicism is all about embracing what has happened and then live in the now. Stoicism teaches one to become a persistent individual; a persistent individual is reflected through actions and character. A persistent individual does not focus on the consequence but on its cause: what caused the situation to happen that way? If someone gained weight, that person should focus on the foods they were consuming and their lifestyle that led them to that, and only then can they find a solution to their problem, not by focusing on the effect, but on the cause.

Stoicism does not make people passive but rather make them be content with themselves and with what they have; the rational one expresses themselves freely, as they don't need people's validation for their happiness. Rational individuals have a mindset that contributes to the betterment of the world. Being realistic about how the world operates is critical for one who wants to live it well, and this is one of the benefits of being rational: being resilient. Being rational is recognizing the power of one's thoughts in influencing actions, which would lead one to focus on the power of thought and outlooks, as that is the part that gives meaning to things. I mean, would you be mad or get angry at someone who cuss you in a language you don't understand? I don't think so.

Accepting certain things in life as not being defeated, nor as passivity, but as a way to become better. Stoicism shows us what it looks like to pursue a virtuous life and be in control of our thoughts, minds, and actions. Accepting certain things in life that cannot be controlled is just the rational thing to do, but if you can bring change and make a difference, then that person should do it. However, if that certain thing is not up to us, or we have no power to control it, why would we bother ourselves with it? One can't change what happened in the past, so why bother? Something that can't be changed stays while one can live life now; that's what the Stoics teach us.

4.3 Avoidance of social engagement

The other critique that Stoicism is criticized for is by Martha Nussbaum (1994), who argues that the Stoic principle focuses on endorsing having self-discipline and being indifferent to what lies in externals. She claims that this type of endorsing would make one unsympathetic to other people; being indifferent would make individuals not participate in public problems that involve advocating for fair treatment of others.

Alasdair MacIntyre also criticizes stoicism for focusing on individuals' morals. MacIntyre argues that this type of individualistic outlook would detach individuals and lead them not to participate or connect with the collective. MacIntyre, in his book titled *After Virtue*, is found criticizing contemporary ethical philosophy. MacIntyre believed that going back to Aristotelian virtue ethics was essential, as he believed that society and custom play an essential role in influencing one's moral character. Even though MacIntyre has criticized Stoicism for focusing on individuals, MacIntyre is found to believe that stoicism can significantly help the modern world. He believed that stoicism gives essential principles that can be helpful for the contemporary world that is filled with complications, and stoic philosophy can be valuable (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 27). MacIntyre emphasized that Stoic philosophy offers a structure for making morally right choices that help individuals improve themselves. Stoicism makes one foster achieving inner resilience, as stoicism gives a realistic outlook on life and makes one differentiate between what's within one's control or not, and stoicism encourages individuals to just put their attention on what they can control, not on what they can't.

Furthermore, MacIntyre claims that stoicism gives a critical insight for the contemporary world that is focused on indulging more than needed, that is focused on seeking desires. For the modern world that is focused on consuming culture, stoicism gives an important outlook that fosters virtue; stoicism gives a balanced outlook that makes them see the world in a different light. Stoicism dares individuals to seek virtue rather than material possessions. By focusing on what is internal, one can live a purposeful life. MacIntyre believed that stoicism offers principles that foster resilience; he believed that by following stoic principles, individuals can live a good life.

Stoicism is criticized for being individualistic. Even though the Stoics emphasize the importance of achieving inner resilience, rationality, and indifference to the external, the Stoics don't deny the importance of having connections. Rather, the Stoics endorse being intentional in forming

any connection, which is a more meaningful connection than that which is formed out of impulse. Stoicism doesn't make individuals have limited social interaction but rather makes them more knowledgeable individuals who work for the collective good, as Marcus Aurelius believes that it's good for one to do good for others without expecting that the person would do good to you, and when you do good, you are doing good for the collective, which includes everyone. Most Stoic philosophers believe in treating others with respect without any attachment to the outcome. If one is just treating others without any attachment, that person would easily create good connections with others.

Additionally, the important thing to understand is whether one fully emotionally expresses their emotions freely or not; that person might not be understood or form a good connection with others that does not solely grant one to have a good connection. The problem is connecting with others would not grant one inner peace; inner peace is not something that others give to you—you give that to yourself. It's called inner peace for a reason; it's an internal thing, not an external one. Have a good mindset that is detached from the desire of pleasing others or seeking validation from others; give that validation to yourself, and forming good connections with others will come eventually. A person who does not need anyone's validation will become the most magnetic one. What matters is having peacefulness within yourself, and one can only have true inner peace by focusing on themselves, but if that person does not connect with themselves, there will always be a void that no one can fill—no external joy will fill it.

A. Made to live in harmony with others

Marcus Aurelius believed that we should all work for the common good. He believed that that's our duty, as they are given to us by fate, and we should show them true love. The Stoics believed that the function of man is to be rational. To discover our secondary functions, we need only apply our reasoning ability. What we will discover is that we were designed to live among other people and interact with them in a mutually advantageous manner; we will discover, says Musonius, that "human nature is very much like that of bees. A bee is not able to live alone: it perishes when isolated." We will likewise discover that, as Marcus puts it, "fellowship is the purpose behind our creation." Thus, a person who performs the function of a man will be both rational and social (Meditations, 6.7). The Stoics were, in fact, far from being unsocial, as they

believed in the interconnectedness of nature, so they believed we should serve one another and work for the greater good.

Even though the Stoics believed that external events or others couldn't disturb one unless one gave them the power to do that, that doesn't mean that one should not have a connection. The Stoics never believed or promoted the idea of not forming relationships with others. The Stoics are highly misunderstood because they endorse indifference to every external thing in life and because they have a realistic outlook on human nature. The Stoics advise individuals to be cautious of choosing their company, the people they let into their lives, as the same people they thought would bring them joy could bring them the same level of misery and disturb their lives. However, the Stoics never endorsed being antisocial, but rather they endorsed being rational in anything they do, as every action has an equal reaction. Their endorsement is not being antisocial, but rather it's understanding what's in one's control and what's not in one's control. One might not be able to control the external or other people's perceptions. One can work hard to create a great reputation, but there will always be someone who will discard that person. One can try to control other people, and it might work out a little bit, but not completely, but one can completely control oneself.

Although the Stoics are known to value tranquility, and because they appreciated the power other people have to disrupt our tranquility, we might expect them to have lived as hermits and to advise us to do the same, but the Stoics did no such thing. They thought that man is by nature a social animal and therefore that we have a duty to form and maintain relationships with other people, despite the trouble they might cause us (Irvine, 2008, p. 129). The Stoics emphasize the importance of treating others justly; one should avoid harming others and should work for the common good. Marcus Aurelius believed that we have to work for the collective good. The teachings and practices of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, their teachings of duty, and the importance of virtue being the highest good are good for living in harmony with nature. Personal virtue is a communal responsibility, and there should always be ethical engagement with ethical issues that resonate within modern contexts, such as environmental ethics and social equity.

The Stoics believed in accepting things that cannot be changed; however, if they can be changed, then one should do one's best to change them and do the right thing. To illustrate this, even though at the time of Seneca, who was a prominent Stoic philosopher, At a time slavery was justified, Seneca criticized it, as he believed that it was not right. This shows us that being Stoic

is not being a helpless victim, but rather that being stoic is being a fighter, a person who does the right thing, and an individual who works for the good of others. Stoicism advocates for social justice; for them, working for the collective good is good for the person doing it and for systematic change, as the action of one person in the long run could have a big impact on the collective good. The Stoic notion of acceptance is not just sitting around and waiting to die, but rather recognizing what the issue is and then working toward it.

4.4 Having a balanced outlook on life

Even though Stoicism has some limitations, Stoicism is an ancient philosophy so of course to the contemporary world, some of the Stoic beliefs might not align perfectly with the modern world; however, Stoicism offers great concepts and principles that the contemporary world can use and benefit from. The main point in living a purposeful life lies in knowing the limit. If a person gets bitten by a snake, that person might die if that person does not get the help it needs fast, but the same poison that can kill a person is used to heal several other diseases. The difference does not lie in the poison being poisonous; the difference lies in knowing the modification techniques, knowing how it can be controlled, and understanding the dosage of it. Many medicines are made out of snake poison—medicines that are used to treat high blood pressure and medicines that are used as painkillers. This shows us the same thing that might kill you: the same medicine you thought would heal you can kill you if you don't know the dosage. This shows us the essence of understanding the limit, the essence of not overindulging; it shows us that having a balance in things might be good for us. That's how I look at the essence of stoicism. Even though stoicism has a few limitations, it is one of the best philosophies that has great principles that can be used and are beneficial in the contemporary world.

Even though being too rational and self-disciplined is believed by some individuals to make individuals less passionate, self-mastery is the most essential thing to master for any individual who wishes to live a meaningful life and achieve their own successes. Having the discipline to maintain an unwavering persona that wouldn't be persuaded by impulses is vital in achieving any type of goal. In reality, anyone can want to achieve something, but it takes a great level of self-mastery to truly achieve it, as preparation equals outcomes. Let us imagine that there are two people who want to achieve something; that something can just be a simple thing, like wanting to lose weight. The first person is usually led by impulses and is not self-disciplined, and the second

person is a disciplined individual who stays committed to their purpose. Which one would achieve its goal? Usually, the one who is disciplined and is committed to their goal will achieve their goal and become successful. Usually, the one who lacks self-discipline wouldn't achieve anything, as self-mastery and being devoted are essential in achieving anything.

The pursuit of a good life is not free from challenges, but what matters is understanding that challenges are part of life and that everything can change by changing one's perception and the attitude that person makes after facing that certain thing. If you have to change your outlook to overcome something, then do it. One can overcome any type of obstacle as long as one is persistent. The one who lives a virtuous life understands that nothing outside of themselves can break them if they don't let it; it is they that give something power and also take that power back. It's by having determination and inner strength that one can become a resilient individual. Being a stoic is understanding the cause and effects of every action; it's about having a balanced outlook on life.

Just like the notion of a Chinese philosophy of yin and yang, which is all about understanding that balance is fundamental in everything, it's about living in harmony with nature, it's about flowing with the natural flow of life, it's about focusing on what one can control and being detached from what one can't. What Stoicism teaches us is that being overly emotional is not good for one's life, but blending that emotion with reason is. The Stoics teach us not to be bothered by what's not in our control, which would lead us to explore and focus on the things that are within our control, which are our mind and our perception, which would lead us to build ourselves. The one who knows that what is in that individual's control would do anything that it is doing using its full potential, as that individual takes full accountability for their life.

The Stoics believed that one could live a good life by seeing the world rationally, by accepting life's obstacles, and by aligning one's actions in harmony with nature. The Stoics believed that one can live a good life through virtue and achieve personal fulfillment through it. The Stoics totally reject the idea that one gains true happiness through material possessions, affluence, or fame. For the Stoics, virtue is the ultimate good; through virtue, one can gain wisdom, become resilient, treat others with respect without expectations, and master oneself by averting impulses. It can be shown in simple things like not overindulging in something unnecessary for oneself; like if one is full, one should stop eating.

Stoicism provides essential resources that can help individuals live a good life. Stoicism offers a realistic and rational approach to life. Even though being realistic is crucial for living a practical life. In the literature world, that can result in making writers communicate in an inauthentic way that would limit creative expression in writing, especially in artistic form, as vulnerability creates a more genuine connection with readers as it expresses originality, which is an essential thing, as it is what makes a writer a great writer. Moreover, being rational makes one have better character. The rational one focuses on what is in front of him. The one who is rational lives in the present moment and lets go of what's past. The rational one understands that they are mortal, that the people they are around are mortal, and that their loved ones are mortal, and that leads them to appreciate everything that is around them and have better relationships with other people, as the rational one understands that it all can change at any moment.

CHAPTER 5: APPLICABILITY OF STOICISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Some critics of Stoicism doubt the applicability of Stoicism in the modern world; their doubt doesn't come as a surprise—there is a huge gap in terms of period. The Stoics give us essential philosophy that they should use and apply to their lives in a way that can work for them. The contemporary world is full of distracting things that result in individuals having small attention spans. The applicability of Stoic philosophy is also doubted due to the high qualities the ancient Stoic philosophers have shown. The ancient Stoics left a big impression—a prototype that many thinkers question whether it's possible to apply Stoic philosophy in the current time. The Stoics have shown unattainable qualities that can be unmet for many individuals. Nowadays, most people lack half of the qualities the Stoics have shown. The Stoics have illustrated what ultimate self-mastery looks like. Major Stoic thinkers like Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Seneca are the epitome of Stoic philosophy, having successfully dedicated their lives to Stoicism and embodied Stoic teachings in their daily lives.

Although some critics of Stoic philosophy might doubt Stoicism being applicable, major Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus, a key figure in Stoic philosophy, believed Stoicism is not only applicable but also a philosophy that can make one acquire joy. Rufus underlined that living with Stoic principles is a *“cheerful disposition and secure joy.”* For Rufus, Stoicism can help one pursue a virtuous life that can give true happiness, inner peace, and serenity. He believed that individuals can attain joy through Stoic principles that emphasize virtue. Through inner virtue, we can pursue a good life following Stoic teachings that do not depend on outside circumstances but on our response.

Even though some thinkers have concerns about its applicability, Stoicism in the modern world is applicable. If one is dedicated to the practices, one might achieve a high level of success. This chapter will explore Stoic principles that can be practiced daily in the contemporary world. Recognizing and being clear about what one wants to become, whether one desires to be an aware individual or be led by impulse, is the first step in making change. In this chapter, I will use Stoic principles that can be applied in daily life and analyze real-life applications of individuals who embody Stoic principles.

5.1 The Shift of Mindset: Applying Stoic Philosophy

Before anything, having the desire to change is fundamental, so examining and understanding ourselves is essential. The other important thing when making a change is having discipline in making the new habit a daily routine. Before making any decision in life, one needs to understand the power of their mind, the role of perspective, and the role of thought in influencing how they behave and how they make decisions. Understanding those influences is, in fact, the most crucial thing for individuals, as that plays a huge role in their lives. The shift of mindset is fundamental for anyone who aspires to self-improvement or to change anything in their life.

The Stoic emphasis on perception—that it is one's perception that gives meaning to things—is factual. We should all ask ourselves if we are the product of our circumstances, as most of us are. Once we have the awareness that most of our beliefs were programmed to form, shaped by the way we grew up, the people that raised us, and the culture or religion that we were raised in, as adults, we should look at our beliefs objectively and rationally. After looking at the old beliefs with indifference, rationally, we can have our own objective beliefs. We are the ones who give meaning to things; there is no good or bad, so understanding this is a good way to start. Nothing is promised in life; push yourself to do the hard things. Through living a good life, we face our problems with ease. Stoicism gives us practical tools and guidelines and gives us insight to live our lives ethically. The Stoics offer principles, insight into a life that fosters being mindful, which can align with the contemporary cognitive approach, as the Stoics have been practicing this for centuries before the way to a good life.

To improve, making changes is crucial, and recognizing that some of the habits that are not good for them is also vital. The other important step in making change is understanding one's belief system that keeps them chained in making them do the things they do. Being aware of the things we keep doing or thinking about the same things—being aware of those—is essential in making us not make the same mistakes. The identity of a person is usually defined by what that person believes, what that person does constantly and how that person spends their time. These can be indicators of the characteristics of that person. Change is important for self-improvement. One's daily habits hold a significant place in shaping their behavior. So, more than anything, if one wishes to change anything in life, their determination, intention, and self-mastery are important. The one with a great mindset dedicated to their craft and its value is an unhittable individual who would conquer anything. One's character is the expression of who they are as a

person. Just saying aspirations or wishes without any following action is ridiculous. So, if I have a clear goal that I want to achieve, being determined to overcome old routines is a necessity for improving.

Usually, what one does in their day-to-day life can show a glimpse of what kind of person they would become in the future; even though everything changes, the now can be a ladder for building what one seeks to build or become. So, being conscious and having a definitive purpose is crucial. Understanding what one aspires to achieve in their life is essential for making new routines. Stoicism offers a critical practice that can make changing old habits effortless, and that is inspecting themselves daily, writing about their philosophy, and embodying their philosophy. This makes stoicism applicable in the contemporary world and able to be practiced daily. The Stoics self-reflect daily in their lives, and for those who seek self-improvement, observing their thoughts and actions is essential. One has an image of what one seeks to become; that person should embody what they want to become, and the new routine becomes part of who they are.

Once a person recognizes what they desire to change, the next step they should take is to replace the old habit with the new one that they want to have in their life. For instance, if one aspires to change their sleep routine, the first thing they should fix is the time they go to bed; they should go to bed earlier than they used to. as that is usually one of the causes of not waking up early, and keep waking up early regardless of the time they go to sleep and repeating that until that becomes their new sleeping pattern. The other important thing to consider in changing the old habit is being intentional about the new routine we want to adopt. That can be learning a new skill or physical exercise. Being intentional about that is essential, and making it part of the daily routine, doing it repeatedly until it becomes a habit, and making it natural is essential.

How one wakes up in the morning and what they do in the morning indicates how they will spend the rest of the day. What one does in the morning, whether it's exercising, journaling, or meditating, and how that individual started their day can be an indicator of what the rest of the day will look like. Some individuals try to start their day with positive energy, mainly by meditating, praying, or doing physical exercise. Most do not think about starting the day in the same manner as Marcus Aurelius; he is an inspiration for waking up early in the morning. He is an advocate of waking up early in the morning. Marcus Aurelius wrote that even though it's unfavorable for one to wake up early in the morning. Marcus Aurelius believed that one should

wake up early and one should fulfill one's duty, and he did that; he was a disciplined emperor who gave his duty more value than his desire and did what he had to do for his people.

Every morning, Marcus Aurelius got ready for his day with the mentality that he might encounter impolite, ill-mannered, or unkind individuals; that mentality made him calm and collected throughout his day. For Marcus, what truly matters is his being virtuous and fulfilling his sense of duty and obligation. So Marcus Aurelius started his day with the mindset of fulfilling his obligation, with inner strength, and with a mindset that wouldn't be disturbed by others' actions, irrespective of whether they were good or bad.

We can take the Stoics' morning practice and apply it to our lives. So, starting the day with the mindset that would reflect how one would want to do and be as a person, every morning one should reflect on how one would act in unfavorable circumstances and also reflect on what they wouldn't want to do or what is an old habit they don't want to do. This would help them become conscious of themselves, their thoughts, and their behavior. Being conscious of one's thoughts and actions throughout the day would help one become mindful and make better choices in their life. Starting the day with a sense of appreciation of life is a good way to start, and the understanding that we are the ones who give meaning to things in life—it's our belief that makes things good or not good. Being aware of that is good for one, as one can give relevance to a certain thing or not give it; it's totally up to them. This mindset would lead one to inner strength and make them resilient in their life.

One should end the day with self-reflection and write down what they did. It is essential to reflect at the end of the day on what we did right or wrong, what was virtuous or not, and what we can change for the next day. Writing those down is a good way of tracking oneself; this can be effective in a self-improvement journey, as it endorses having self-mastery and tracks one's thoughts, which would display in one's behaviors. Self-examination is a good way to start applying Stoicism, as it causes individuals to become aware of their thoughts. Accepting the unpredictable nature of the world is also good, as it makes one appreciate what one has in the present. Accepting the unpredictability of life means that in challenging situations, one would react with resilience and stay composed, accepting life's challenges with ease, as letting go of what's not in one's control will lead one to inner peace. We should also take the Stoics' lesson and apply it in our lives by being considerate of others.

5.2 The Importance of Intrinsic Motivation and Discipline

Having intrinsic motivation is a vital catalyst to make change. Intrinsic motivation comes from within. Intrinsic motivation does not come from needing validation from the external; it's internal, and it's not bothered about what is on the outside. This type of motivation is powerful and can elevate oneself to become a grounded and innovative individual who is productive. By discipline, one can build the life one wants for oneself. Being content with ourselves and not focusing on other people is a good way to start applying Stoicism in our lives. Having inner drive is far better than looking for motivation outside of ourselves. For instance, if my desire to achieve something solely comes from the need to show others my achievement, then other people might not even give that validation, which means that achievement would not give me that much gratification because the motivation wasn't intrinsic; if it was, whether others like it or not wouldn't matter.

Although having the inspiration and the desire to change is important, stability and continuity are the most essential things that guarantee true change. Usually before someone changes something completely that is part of themselves or their daily habit, it takes a lot of self-mastery to change that. Changing something completely takes a high level of discipline. Before changing something completely, there are times when one might fail. Before succeeding, there are times when a person might aspire to change something in their life but never take the action to do the work that would bring them change. There are times when one fails in changing themselves; they might do it for a few days, then they quickly tend to go back to doing the same thing they claimed they wanted to change.

A strong will for self-improvement is needed; it does not go without the continuity of embodying the new habit daily. So, having a clear intention and having the discipline to do what's needed daily is essential for creating new behaviors. For instance, if I don't water my plant daily or if it doesn't get the necessary things that it needs, like sunlight, do you think that plant would grow? Of course not. So, expecting something to change or improve without doing the necessary work consistently is just not rational. which goes the same with people; without doing anything, one should not expect a change.

To become a stable individual, some challenges come with it; overcoming those challenges is the way out. Once someone changes their routine, they need to have unvarying discipline to keep doing it as part of their identity and habit; otherwise, they would go back to their old habit. Because the old habit was what they did for most of their life, going back to it is easy, and that's why consistency is important. Self-mastery is important because, regardless of anything that we want or desire, we humans tend not to value something we desire as much when we get it; we always seem to run for the next best thing. We humans always aspire to get the next best thing; it's like a cyclical loop that never ends. Stoicism teaches us the essentially of having inner strength; the one who has mastered themselves is capable of doing anything in life.

Self-discipline is the most essential thing for creating new habits and new routines. Even though sticking to the new habits can be challenging, as sticking to the old routine comes naturally to us, having the same inner monologue is easier than programming our mind all over again. However, self-improvement does not come easily; it comes with dedication and endless learning. We learn something we did not know before. Programming our mind takes a high level of self-mastery, and doing it every day as we change something we have been doing for years is not an easy task. But if we don't make something part of our daily routine, we might forget the new habit easily. That's why repeatedly doing it is important. Self-mastery goes hand in hand with the Stoics; they were not bound to impulse. Even though it's hard to be as disciplined as the Stoics, it's good not to forget that even the Stoics were not some supernatural entity but people with strong willpower who embodied their philosophy wholeheartedly.

5.3 Application of Stoicism in Real life

Stoicism is a philosophy that is meant to be embodied. The thing about Marcus Aurelius that fascinates me is the fact that he had all that power but still chose to be a man of integrity. He could have done anything he wished, but he chose to fulfill his duty as emperor. The other thing that makes him a true stoic is the fact that he stayed true to himself, embodied his philosophy by writing daily, waking up early, and mentally preparing himself for the worst. For Aurelius, anything could happen at the end of the day; he was true to himself. Coming from a prestigious family or not does not matter as long as one is pursuing virtue.

So applying Stoic philosophy can be a good self-experiment. Before saying anything, individuals should experiment and explore the depth of their commitment to improving themselves. So, as

the Stoics believed, being rational is essential for the pursuit of a good life, and as long as we live a life that fosters virtue, it's all good. The Stoics put great emphasis on thinking logically; they believed that thinking rationally would eventually make anyone who thinks logically make better decisions than people who live their lives on impulse.

In the contemporary world, we can find inspirational people who might not identify with Stoic teachings but live their lives embodying Stoicism, like David Goggins, who applies principles of Stoicism. Goggins illustrates the importance of discipline and inner strength in his self-improvement journey and influences many people. Although Goggins's life was filled with hardships and violence, regardless of those problems, he still managed to build himself up through unwavering inner strength and self-mastery. Goggins' childhood was filled with struggle; he grew up in an unfavorable environment, being abused and bullied because of his weight. Regardless of his weight, once he decided to improve himself, he lost 45 kilos in just a few months and joined the Air Force. Then he made a name for himself by becoming a Navy SEAL, which is believed to be the most difficult military preparation program in the world, and even though he faced multiple physical injuries, that still did not stop him from overcoming them. In his book titled "Can't Hurt Me," Goggins explains the plans he used that made him have strong inner strength and rise above the obstacles he was facing in his life.

Through his life journey, Goggins shows his resilience in life by embracing obstacles and the importance of not limiting our capacity and doing anything in life with all our might. Nowadays David Goggins is influencing many people in the world by his participation in high-intensity endurance sports. He has shown mental strength and finished several long-distance ultra-runs and many high-intensity challenges successfully; he has made a name for himself. He changed the minds of people who have limited perception of humans' physical and mental capacity and showed that we have potential that we are not fully using.

The Stoics teach us to be courageous, and they regarded being courageous in two ways: first, moral courage, which is always advocating for the right thing and upholding integrity. Being courageous is a part of living a virtuous life. When facing adversity, the Stoics teach us to stand for what we believe in. Socrates is a major example of being courageous; he illustrates his resilience and self-discipline even when being pressured. Socrates remained infected and still did what he believed to be the right thing to do, even though that led him to lose his life in the end.

We can also see Bob Marley, who is not associated with the Stoics but shows a stoic nature in his acts. Marley was a prominent reggae singer who fought for justice; he showed his resilience and courage to the whole world. Marley used his voice and art music to speak against injustice, although many threatened to end his life. He survived getting murdered, and Marley remained resilient and advocated peace and justice against those who were being oppressed. Regardless of the pressure he was facing, Marley showed his devotion to what he believed to be true, and this shows us one of the major teachings of stoicism that advises individuals to stand for what they believe in, no matter what.

One can apply Stoicism and be courageous, standing for their beliefs regardless of the pressure that comes with it. Imagine a soldier or an investigative journalist who puts their life on the line for the sake of reporting the truth to the world, and that shows their courage, which is one attribute of virtue. The other two attributes of virtue are justice and temperance. Justice is responsible for making individuals act well toward others; justice invokes fair-mindedness in individuals toward others. The last but not least important attribute of virtue is temperance, which is responsible for invoking a sense of balance in life. It's through self-control that one can achieve stability in life.

One can apply Stoic philosophy and harmonize it in the way they want it, so taking one of the most crucial concepts of Stoicism is important. One of those concepts is to center our attention on what is in our power. This makes it easier to lead a peaceful life, as being focused on what is within one's control means that we shall not be concerned or worried about what's not in our control. This attitude is needed to lead a stress-free life. The one who focuses on themselves wouldn't blame anyone but rather would live their life doing what's up to them. Focusing on what one can control or do rather than what is not up to one to control is an essential attitude to have in living a stress-free life.

Being present and mindful is the other crucial lesson one should take from Stoic philosophy. Even though being present seems hard to do in the modern world, as most work uses sources that make it hard for one to be grounded, and although it's not easy to give it all up to modern technology for some, understanding being present is important, for one's mental clarity is also important. Being content with whatever one has, appreciating all things in life, letting go of whatever has passed, and taking the lesson that came with what has passed is a good way to live life. One can apply Stoic philosophy by understanding the nature of the world we are living in, by

seeing things objectively, and by making choices based on reason. By mastering ourselves, working toward the good of the collective, treating others with compassion, and journaling our improvement and what we seek to improve even more in our lives.

5.4 Conclusion

This thesis started with the aspiration of pursuing a good life through Stoic philosophy and offers ways of using Stoic philosophy in our daily lives. This thesis has examined how one can pursue a good life, the Stoic way, through the lens of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, major Stoic thinkers. The difference in people's upbringing is not the end of the story. The beginning of their lives might influence their lives, but it is not the complete end. That's what Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher king, and Epictetus show us: although their lives were on opposite sides, philosophy brought them back to each other. Both are rightfully important in Stoic philosophy. Marcus Aurelius was a man with integrity and a good leader to his people, and Epictetus was a prominent Stoic thinker who was born into slavery but, despite that, changed his life and inspired others through his philosophy.

If Stoic philosophy changed the life of a man who was a slave and made that man the most prominent Stoic philosopher, a man who is still to this day an influence, why can't it change it for anyone else? Even the history of Stoicism began with the obstacle that Zeno of Citium experienced in his life; he made it into a lesson. So Stoic philosophy began in hardships and turned out to be one of the most celebrated philosophies to this day. They started by seeing adversity as a way of developing oneself. The Stoics teach us that nobody can save us but ourselves—live life in harmony with the natural order. The Stoics do not put great emphasis on acquired wealth or anything material but on their virtue. Both Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus embodied their philosophy in their own way. Aurelius was the emperor, so he expressed his philosophy in his leadership, while Epictetus lived his life embodying stoicism and taught others his philosophy.

This thesis exposed that through virtue, wisdom, and living in the present moment, one can live in contentment by letting go of the past and by not over-worrying about what comes next. Nowadays, most people seem to lack inner strength, especially the people who look for gratification from outside of themselves and never take accountability for any of their actions and blame others for their shortcomings. It is always someone else's fault before it ever becomes

their fault. Most individuals seek a better meaning of life, regardless of race, religion, or culture. Stoicism teaches us to take accountability for our lives. Instead of blaming anyone or anything, we can do the things that we are supposed to do. The Stoic teaches us to master ourselves. We don't have to react to everything or become a victim of others' opinions of us or things. Managing ourselves is certainly better and gives us the certainty in ourselves to have and avoid unnecessary stress. Stoicism offers insights that can be used in improving oneself, developing inner strength, and having better mental clarity. One can live a meaningful life through the ancient philosophy school of thought, proving the timeless wisdom for the timeless question of how to live a good life. Stoicism can be used in the modern world.

Even though the thesis presents essential outlooks, it comes with its own prejudices. While some criticize Stoicism for being too idealistic or not applicable, some even assert that Stoic philosophy is only for the powerful and wealthy, as Stoicism has a history of being the philosophy of the most privileged, as in the past, wealthy people used to practice Stoicism. Despite some limitations of Stoicism, it brings a wisdom that can help one be more present and become an effective individual. Stoicism teaches us that the present moment is all we have, and we should only focus on it. The past has already passed, and the future is not here, so why should we worry about both? If one wants a better future, then being present is a good thing rather than worrying or having anxiety about it. In terms of over-thinking, why should we spend our time over-thinking when we can use that time living our lives and making ourselves better? That's what stoicism teaches us. The Stoics teach us to put our attention on the important things in life. on the things that no one would be able to take away from us, and that is our mind, so we should control the one thing we are completely able to control. Controlling our minds and thoughts will free us mentally and make us focus on things that matter.

In general, regardless of the criticism that Stoics get, individuals can pursue a good life through Stoicism. One should pursue virtue just for the sake of virtue and be indifferent toward other things. One should not focus on anything that one can't completely control; rather, turn to what's within their control. Epictetus's and Marcus Aurelius' teachings give us a pearl of eternal wisdom to pursue a good life; they teach us the importance of being a responsible citizens and having a moral compass. The importance of our actions being a match for what we're preaching. Their teachings give us an insight into the importance of self-reflection; it is so important for us to look into ourselves and observe ourselves. Their teachings are important for individuals.

Seeking change and self-fulfillment in their lives. Through making our actions and decisions through rationality. One can live a good life. By understanding that inner gratification is better than any type of external gratification, one can pursue a good life. In perusing anything in life, we all have an idea of what the good life would look like. Interestingly enough, Stoicism offers a profound philosophy that many of us can use and benefit from. That doesn't mean it's easy to do it or that one should exactly live as the Stoics.

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