

AN APPRAISAL OF STOICISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled “An Appraisal Of Stoicism For The 21st Century Nigerian Youths” examines the relevance of stoic philosophy as a practical framework for addressing contemporary challenges faced by the youths such as depression, anxiety, suicide, caused by unemployment, cyberbully, and the “fear of missing out” (FOMO), in-authenticity, and contented nature of the youths in this 21st century. Using analytical, critical, and expository approaches of philosophical enquiry to explore the teachings of Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Central to the analysis is the dichotomy of control, the distinction between what lies within human power and what does not- and the call to live in accordance with nature. The paper argues that stoicism offers Nigerian Youths tools for resilience, character formation, and authentic living in the face of social and economic pressures. By cultivating virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance, the youths can develop mental fortitude, reduce vulnerability to external events and build self-confidence. Though critiques like Nietzsche and Julian call stoicism delusional and in Nietzsche’s words “self-tyranny” but this study concludes that stoicism, when applied contextually, provides a timeless solution for navigating well-being among Nigerian youths.

KEYWORD: Stoicism, Nigerian Youth, Dichotomy Of Control, Character, Resilience.

INTRODUCTION.

In Nigeria, much is out of our hands, for instance, grid power failures, erratic fuel queues, sudden currency fluctuations, and or unpredictable traffic, social media and peer group pressure, motivational speakers and preachers miracles and get-rich fast sermons among others. Stoics practice enduring minor hardships to inoculate themselves against major ones (dichotomy of control), there adapting to living according to nature. Deploying a qualitative approach grounded in analytic, expository, and critical methods of philosophical inquiry, to analytically breakdown stoic concepts such the dichotomy of control and living according to nature into their essential

components, clarifying their meaning and relevance. Expository methods is to present the historical development of stoicism through the works of Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, while highlighting their central themes of virtue, resilience, and character formation. The critical method evaluates stoicism's applicability to the lived realities of Nigerian youth, particularly in relation to challenges such as unemployment, cyberbully, peer pressure, and the influence of religious and motivational figures. Primary sources includes classical stoic texts such as meditations and The *Enchiridion*, while secondary sources consist of scholarly commentaries and contemporary analyses of stoicism. By synthesizing these materials, the study aims to provide a balanced appraisal of stoicism as a practical philosophy for fostering resilience, and well-being among Nigerian youths.

Starting with the historical background of the stoic, this paper will briefly look into its core tenets, who are youths is?, we look at the various causes that warrants anxiety, depression and suicide in youths such as in-authenticity, lack of contentment, that is crippling their self confidence and self-worth and a possible way out using the stoic philosophy, followed by evaluation and then conclusion.

The foundations of Stoicism can be traced back to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher like Socrates and his student Plato. Since Socrates believed in the importance of self-discipline and cultivating inner strength, which are key tenets of Stoicism. Plato also emphasized the idea of self-control and detachment from worldly desires. However, it was Zeno of Citium who formalized these ideas into a distinct philosophical system. (Lawhead 94). Then Epictetus picked it up from Zeno and other philosophers followed suits but with vary perspectives, as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius emphasized on perspective, Epictetus dealt on dichotomy of control from inner and external events.

Stoicism is an Hellenistic philosophical school of thought that originated in ancient Greece and became popular during the Roman Empire. The word "stoicism" comes from the Greek word "stoa," which means "porch" or "colonnade," as the philosophy was first taught in a public colonnade in Athens. The Stoic school of thought was founded by Zeno of Citium in the early 3rd century BCE and was later developed by prominent philosophers such as Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. The philosophy of Stoicism emphasizes the development of self-control and resilience, and has had a lasting impact on Western thought and culture. (Lawhead 94). The stoic philosophy was developed about the same time that Epicurus founded his school. This school developed into a formidable rival that competed with the hedonism of Epicurus for the minds of the Greek and Roman populace. (Lawhead 94). This Hellenistic philosophers emphasizes developing self-control and fortitude to overcome destructive emotions, aiming for a virtuous life, they include; Zeno Citium, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, among others. This paper will focus on Zeno's dictum of "living according to nature" and Epictetus's "dichotomy of control" respectively.

Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE): The founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, who lectured on porch or open colonnade. Accordingly, the name of the school comes from the Greek word stoa, which means "porch". he attracted many followers in Greece and Rome. He was wildly admired for his moral earnestness, and the Athenians gave him official honors. (Lawhead 94). Zeno's teachings focused on the concept of living in accordance with nature, or living in harmony with the natural order of the universe.

Epictetus, (C.50-120): Epictetus was a prominent Stoic Roman philosopher whose teachings focused on practical ethics, personal freedom, and moral responsibility. He was a former slave, who taught that philosophy is a way of life, not just theoretical study, aiming to

teach individuals how to achieve inner peace (ataraxia) by distinguishing between what is our control and what is not. He said, “If you have assumed any character beyond your strength, you have both demeaned yourself in that, and neglected one which you might have filled with success”. The foundation of Epictetus’s philosophy is that things are within our power our opinions, desires and actions (our prohairesis or moral choice) while others are not our bodies, possessions, reputation, and public offices. As he wrote; “Ask not that events should happen as you will, but let your will be that events should happen as they do, and you will have peace” (2.2).

This idea is reflected in the famous Stoic maxim, "Happiness (*eudaimoni*) and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle that is some things are within our control, and some things are not." Stoicism also places a strong emphasis on the development of moral character and living a virtuous life. And lawhead wrote that “ their ethical outlook was influence by Socrates’ life and death and by his confidence that no real harm can come to a person whose life is based on virtue and eternal values”. (94). Meaning that, Stoicism is a philosophical school of thought that emphasizes self-control, resilience, and living in accordance with nature. Its teachings have had a lasting impact on Western thought and culture, and continue to be studied and applied in modern times as this paper seeks to apply it on the 21st century Nigerian youth.

Though some critiques as Friedrich Nietzsche as a prominent critic of stoicism, particularly its doctrine of “living according to Nature”. He argued that stoicism is a form of self-tyranny and a denial of the passions and life itself, rather than a virtue. As Nietzsche mocks the stoic ambition of living according to nature, asking why they make a principle out of what they actually are, labeling it a “fraud of word” and a “self-deluding” tyranny (Twilight 13). Another critique is, Julian Baggini. She argues that the stoic idea of detachment makes them less engaged with life, fostering an unhealthy individualism that ignores human rationality. When Beggini said “The Stoic disinterest in “externals” such as loved ones and health, arguing that this makes them cold and stern “rather than merely resilient” (1).

In contrast, the Stoic demand to cultivate a radical differences to external events can lead to an unhealthy suppression of emotional complexity. While Seneca advises that we should feel pain but not allow ourselves to be overcome by it, suggesting “let your tears flow, but let them also cease” this high standard can inadvertently encourage the belief that sadness or anxiety have no place in a well lived life. This may be termed “toxic possibility” but is highly possible, because it is not right to let our fear have the best of us at any given time, because it maybe too late to recover.

THE NIGERIAN YOUTHS

Youths has various definitions, generally referring to the period of life between childhood and adulthood, the state of being young, or young people as a group. The precise age range associated with “youths ” can vary widely depending on the social, cultural, or institutional context (United Nations). Organizations use specific age ranges for statistical or policy purposes. For example, for statistical purposes, the United Nations defines “youth” as persons aged between 15 and 24 years (UN). The World Health Organization (WHO) similarly defines the word “youth” as those aged 15-24, while “adolescents” are 10-19 years old (UNFPA). However, the age range can differ in various countries, with the African Youths Charter defining youth as ages 15-35. Who within this age range behave in a certain way, by taking things too personal which resort to something serious like suicide if is not taken. This is where this paper seeks to propose a possible solution using the stoic philosophy.

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND THE STOIC WAY OUT

As stated in 2022 paper by the Ministry of youth development, Nigerian youth face multiple challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and underemployment, preacher influence, motivational speakers, limited educational opportunities, and health challenges. (Statista 2022). The low literacy level of Nigerian has had important implications for other indices of development, particularly health. (Dele-Adedeji et al., 2021). On the issue of unemployment, recent estimates for Nigeria indicate that only a minority of the youth demographic are employed within the formal sector (Federal Ministry of Youth Development). Young women in particular, face significant barriers to employment. Those from economically disadvantaged and /or low-income backgrounds are forced to accept precarious, unskilled and/or lowly paid jobs, such as beer promotion for alcohol producers and makers, where they are vulnerable to sexual harassment from predominantly male patrons by Dumbili and Nelson. Motivational speakers like Robert Kayosaki and Donald Trump influence youths positively by boosting self-esteem, encouraging resilience, and fostering innovation. However, they negatively impact youth through unrealistic success narratives, fostering unhealthy comparison, inducing depression, and promoting get-rich-quick schemes. These speakers can drive ambitious dreams or lead to disappointment if their messages are not tempered with realistic actionable advice. In like manner, Nigerian preachers wield immense influence over the youth, acting as Spiritual guides, social mentors and even “pseudo-welfare” providers. Their impact is a mix of moral grounding and community support, alongside concerns about financial pressure and the promotion of unrealistic expectations. They encourage material wealth and “seed sowing” over hard work, which can lead youth into reaction, while others are not (external events), the opinion of others, and outcomes should not affect us so much as to have the fear of missing out, depression or far most suicide (Limaj 50-52). The youth should be navigating Social Media and Technology, the “For You Page” and instant connectivity of social media often fuel anxiety and comparison. Stoic practices like *prosoche* (constant attention to one’s own mind) and *memento mori* (remembering one’s mortality) can be used to treat the internet as a tool rather than allowing it to dictate emotional state. Youth can apply the stoic advice to “ignore the rage bait”, reduce online consumption, and focus on genuine connections, thereby the “fear of missing out”(FOMO) and the impact of cyberbully. (Mobicip ,<https://www.effectofcyberbullying.com>).

THE SIGNIFICANT OF STOIC PHILOSOPHY AND ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

To mitigate these rising tides of despair, this paper proposes the deliberate integration of stoic philosophy into the psychological toolkit of the contemporary Nigerian youths. The core stoic thesis posits that emotional suffering does not emanate from external crises themselves, but rather from our faulty judgement s regarding them. Ranging from the issue of unemployment/inflation, which stoic believed can be approach with dichotomy of control, meaning for one to focus his/her energy on skills acquisition and personal character, accepting that macroeconomic factors are external and thus we can treat it as such. Social media FOMO/cyberbullying, pertaining this, the stoic suggested *prosoche* (mindful Attention), meaning for one to practice digital minimalism; realize that online vitriol and curated lifestyles are external opinions that cannot harm the soul. Preacher/Motivational pressure can be handled using Amor Fati/Contentment, this meaning implies reconditioning the mind to value internal virtue over the chasing of material wealth or deceptive “get-rich-quick” narratives.

Stoicism emphasizes the important of Purpose and Character, to provides a clear, actionable guide for living a virtuous life, focusing on wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance rather than purely materialistic success. It fosters a “growth mindset”, encouraging students to see setbacks as opportunities for learning, unlearning and relearning, rather than permanent failures. (Limaj 54).

EVALUATION

The foundations of Stoicism as a practical Hellenistic philosophy championed by figures such as Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who offers a compelling framework for navigating life's adversities through mental discipline and emotional detachment, or *apatheia*. Historically, Stoicism can be traced back to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher like Socrates and his student Plato who believed in the importance of self-discipline and cultivating inner strength, which are key tenets of Stoic philosophy. Plato mainly emphasized the idea of self-control and detachment from worldly desires. However, it was Zeno of Citium who formalized these ideas into a distinct philosophical system. (lawhead 94). A practice this paper believes should be adopted by the Nigerian youths, because, due to some circumstances the Nigerian youths finds their selves in ranging from unemployment, underemployment, harassment, motivational speakers, preachers, gender inequality etc. All this factor can geared any individual to doubt his/her self and act other wise like attempting suicide when fade up. To avoid such this paper proposes the adaptation of stoicism to remedy anxiety, depression and/or suicide, as the core Stoic argument suggests that emotional suffering arises false judgments about external events that is things beyond our control and that by adopting a perspective of indifference toward these externals, one can achieve tranquil equanimity. As Udofia puts it that, values ought to procede and initiate pursuit and not vice-versa..., from the correlation between value and goodness, some pursuits lack goodness, and hence, are evil and not worth pursuing. (116). It is pertinent, that, the youth get education no matter how little it may be, because that is the only thing that can never be taken from someone compare to any other material things that keeps changing value and can be taken development in every society. In developing countries including Nigeria, education is conceived as the tool through which national objectives (such as nation building, social integration etc. As pointed out by Itohowo, et al that, Education is the bedrock of economic development) are achieved. (itohowo and Umohtong 1). In a sense, education is the bedrock for any good thing. And by so doing, we can treat circumstances as external event, that will definitely pass, because nothing is permanent. As Obioha characterizes extreme individualism as a system “steeped in egoism, unhealthy and divisive competition”. (20), because enlightenment liberate any human state as Dennis in “Ethics of Posterity and National Sustainable Development” wrote that, "It is because human beings are bundles of consciousness who interpret their daily lives in time that existence... become symbiotically interrelated for meaning-making. (26). Conscious decision making will help and keep the youth sane, balance and unique. Dennis further add that Ethics of posterity is a principle of morality. It regulates human conduct along the path of care for the well-being of future generations and their world. (1). Dennis believes that individuals who care for the well-being of posterity in all their decisions, actions and policies are considered to live wrongly. (1). when people live right, with respect to care for posterity, they achieve inner personal peace and peaceful coexistence with others. (1). So the young should build a healthy relationship that will stand a test of time, learn their temperaments ranging from Melancholy, Sanguine, phlegmatic and choleric respectively, this will give them the power to practice the dichotomy of control as

strongly recommended by the Stoic, and enable them relate better with any circumstances they find their selves and know what to respond to and what to ignore. In that note, Seneca wrote as quoted from Roger that;

True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future, not to amuse our selves with either hopes, or fear but to rest satisfied with with what we have, which is sufficient, for he that is so wants nothing. The greatest blessings of mankind are within us and within our reach. A wise man is content with his lot, whatever it may be, without wishing for what he has not. (1).

This implies contentment with the present, now, rather than being shackled by restless desire or fears about what is to come, which mostly end up creating anxiety, endless want, and leave one felling void and empty.

CONCLUSION

This study has appraised stoicism as a practical philosophy for addressing the pressing challenges of 21st century Nigerian youths, challenges like; depression, anxiety, that is arises out of unemployment, cyberbully, and the fear of missing out. By analyzing the teaching of Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca, the research highlights the enduring relevance of stoic principles such as the dichotomy of control and living in harmony with nature. These concepts provides youths with tools to cultivate resilience, ethical character, and authentic self-confidence in the face of social and economic pressures. While critics such as Nietzsche and Baggini caution against stoicism's potential for emotional suppression or detachment, this study argues that, when applied contextually, stoicism fosters balance rather than denial. It equips young people to distinguish between what lies within our power, and what does not, thereby reducing vulnerability to external influences and promoting inner stability. Ultimately, stoicism offers Nigerian youth a timeless framework for navigating adversity, building sound character, and contributing meaningfully to personal and societal well-being.

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