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## THE PHENOMENON OF MODERN STOICISM: IS ETHICS POSSIBLE WITHOUT METAPHYSICS

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### Abstract

The article analyzes the rich heritage of representatives of one of the most important philosophical schools of the ancient era – Stoicism. The significant changes and transformations it has undergone in the historical context up to the present day are demonstrated. The concept of modern Stoicism and its varieties, in particular therapeutic and "popular" Stoicism, as well as the range of issues that are positioned in its context are defined. The relationship between the main philosophical doctrines of the Ancient Stoa and modern Stoicism was investigated, and the fundamental difference between them in ontological and ethical issues was revealed. An attempt was made to conduct a detailed study of the issue of "nature" in the context of its understanding in the writings of representatives of the Ancient and Late Stoics. And the significant difference in the understanding of the fundamental Stoic ideas of fatalism and cosmopolitanism is also actualized. Modern Stoicism is analyzed through the prism of psychological practice and applied meaning. Based on the results of this study, we can conclude that, modern Stoicism is incredibly ambiguous and different depending on who is the author of the books and articles. On the one hand, we see the results of the works of academic philosophers who are trying with all their efforts to preserve the authenticity of the original teaching, and on the other hand, the so-called "popular" Stoicism, which is strikingly different from its ancient basis, because its authors are professional marketers. Discarding physics and metaphysics, modern Stoicism increasingly turns into a set of life hacks and psychopractices for passive-thinking people who, while accepting the idea of classical Stoics about fate and the idea that there are many things in this world that we cannot change, they completely forgot that there are also many aspects of social and political life that we can and must change. Thus, beneath the beautiful picture of modern Stoicism, we see a movement that is certainly capable of helping people psychologically, but calls for inaction, political and social passivity, and total conformity, unlike the true ancient Stoic teachings.

**Key words:** stoicism, nature, fate, cosmopolitanism, ethics, metaphysics, conformism.

### The relevance and formulation of the problem in general and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks

Nowadays, when a person is increasingly faced with external threats, which stimulate difficult internal problems and the search for at least some way out to stabilize the internal state in difficult periods of pandemics, wars, crises and the eternal human desire for happiness, which like a soap bubble constantly escapes from us and cracks, tries to find in this uncertain, threatening unstable world an element of peace, some basis, a foundation that will help her maintain at least the illusion of stability and confidence in the future. Many philosophical doctrines, religious systems, psychological practices, etc. come to help solve these complex life and worldview problems. One such system that has gained a huge following over the past few years is Stoicism. But whether modern Stoicism, or rather its understanding in general, is the same ancient ancient philosophical doctrine, or whether it is a new system that was formed on the

basis of ancient Stoicism, is the task of this article to find out.

### Analysis of the latest research and publications, from which the solution of this problem was initiated and on which the author relies.

The topic of Stoicism is quite widely researched, there is a significant number of both international and Ukrainian scientists who have devoted a significant number of scientific works to this topic, among them the following works should be noted in particular: J. Deleuze, M. Foucault, P. Ado, V. Frankl, A. Ellis, M. Nussbaum, L. Becker, N. Taleb, T. Irwin, M. Piliucci, R. Brouwer, A. Baumeister, O. Stebelska, R. Pyatkivskyi, V. Turenko, V. Prykhodko, A. Sklyar. However, there are still a certain number of gaps in this topic, one of which this article will try to fill.

### Presentation of the main material of the study with justification of the obtained scientific results

Stoicism has come a long way from Antiquity to the present day and has undergone significant transformations.

Modern Stoicism is a system that has rightfully taken its place among modern worldview concepts. However, the question arises whether modern Stoicism is endowed with the same features and is

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the same philosophical system as the Ancient Greek Stoia. For this, it is necessary to review the chronology of the development of this phenomenon.

The revival of Stoic ideas took place during the Renaissance at the end of the 15th century. and connected with the activities of Italian humanists, in particular Angelo Poliziano, who in 1479 wrote a letter to the chancellor of the Florentine Republic, Bartolomeo Scalla, in which he expressed a position in defense of the Stoic Epictetus. He later published a Latin translation of Antivindius and made the Stoic legacy accessible to the general public. At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the works of other Stoic authors, including Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, began to be actively published. As a result of the translation of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* into French, it became one of the most famous works of that era.

The middle of the 16th century becomes a kind of "golden age" of neostoicism thanks to the works of Justus Lipsius (*"De Constantia"* 1584), Guillaume du Ver (*"Traité de la Constance"* 1594) and Pierre Charron, as well as a number of works by French moralists.

However, in the 19th century classics of the history of philosophy, the German scholars Blomberg and Ziller considered Stoicism to be a kind of decline and decay of ancient philosophy after such great figures as Plato and Aristotle.

Later, on the basis of neostoicism, the so-called therapeutic stoicism began to form, on a par with academic stoicism. The first mentions of him appear at the beginning. 19th century from the German philosopher Friedrich Irwag, who writes about the popularity at that time of treating neurasthenias and psychosthenias by studying the works of Epictetus, which were given to patients in German translation and the wonderful results of this treatment were confirmed. In the 20th century therapeutic stoicism is gaining more and more popularity. In particular, the French scientist Gustave Loisel in the 1920s made an attempt to create a new secular religion based on the teachings of Marcus Aurelius, as a result, a scientific community appeared that published journals and held assemblies.

In the second half of the 20th century, cognitive-behavioral therapy emerged, which contained a significant affinity with stoic principles, which was directly stated by the founders of this direction, Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis. The expression "You feel like you think" became a peculiar slogan of this type of therapy, which reminded us of the postulates of the

early Stoics that passions (*πάθη*) are nothing more than wrong judgments. By correcting and correcting our own judgments, we transform our passions, resulting in a healing effect (Butler, 2000).

Also in the second half of the 20th century. Pierre Ado, Michel Foucault, Marcus Nussbaum discover Stoicism as a way of life based on academic positions, which was not characteristic of previous historians of philosophy. The main work *"La Philosophie comme manière de vivre"* by P. Ado. And *"Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?"* (the attitude towards them has changed significantly in a positive direction compared to the 19th century).

The famous researcher of Hellenistic philosophy, Tony Long, who in the 1960s studied Stoicism, was one of the first researchers in this field, because before him it was not accepted to do this. In fact, Ado and Nussbaum were the scientists who tried to revive interest in Stoicism, and based on their research, the phenomenon that we today can call modern Stoicism arose.

Modern Stoicism is a fairly popular intellectual movement that began at the end of the 20th century aimed at reviving and rethinking the practices of Stoicism. The first work of modern Stoicism, which we can call the forerunner of further research, was the work of Lawrence Becker *"New Stoicism"* (Becker, 1997), this is a serious theoretical work that differs significantly in its academicity from the subsequent more accessible works of other authors who work in the field of therapeutic and so-called "popular" stoicism. Another important work was the work of William Irwin *"How to leave a good life"* (Irwin, 2021).

In today's environment, it is popularly believed that modern Stoicism offers exciting prospects for business leaders and governments solving global problems in the modern world. There is also a thesis about the emergence of the so-called "Silicon Valley stoicism". What is the secret of modern stoicism and what are the nuances behind it. The famous historian Ada Palmer in his interview with the Times magazine emphasizes that works for business leaders. Other schools of thought during Stoicism's ancient rise had warned that politics and the pursuit of wealth would lead only to stress and risk, Dr. Palmer said, and some encouraged retiring from active life and even renouncing property. But Stoicism did not.

Instead, Stoics believed that everything in the universe is already perfect and that things that seem bad or unjust are secretly good underneath. The philosophy is handy if you already believe that

the rich are meant to be rich and the poor meant to be poor. "The new popularity of Stoicism among the tech crowd is, in my view, strikingly similar to Stoicism's popularity among the powerful elites of ancient Rome," Dr. Palmer said. "As Rome took over, it surged in popularity because it was the one system of ethics that worked well for the rich and powerful." (Bowles, 2019)

However, as you know, significant popularization of something can lead to a certain profanation of certain ideas, or did it happen with Stoicism?

Modern Stoicism is turning into a set of life hacks and cognitive techniques, as Nancy Sherman, professor of philosophy at Georgetown University notes. Stoicism becomes a tool for meditation and reflection. Each era offers us its values, tries to understand them, and then presents different teachings based on them, which would be demanded by society. According to the doctrine, a wise person seeks only to be virtuous, since virtue does not require health, wealth, or anything that depends on luck and circumstances. "When you ask the questions "how long can I live?" and "Will I become immortal?" makes it look like you've gone where you shouldn't" (Sherman, 2021).

What is the deep, meaningful difference between the teachings of the Ancient Stoa and its modern vision. In his later lectures, Michel Foucault returned to the theme of self-care and the connection with philosophy and identified two types of relationship between the subject and truth. According to the first approach, to which we can attribute Stoicism and other schools of late antiquity, such a relationship between the subject who knows and the truth that is known is characteristic, then life itself becomes the price of knowledge. It was necessary to change one's whole life, subordinating it to certain philosophical principles, so that the truth was revealed to the subjects. The price of knowing the truth was the very life of a person (his radical changes and transformations). The second type includes philosophy that begins to actively develop with the development of scientific thought and closely interacts with it. An example of this type is R. Descartes and a number of other philosophers of the New Age. This philosophy boils down to the fact that in order to learn the truth, the subject needs only a method, a set of techniques and principles of knowledge that will help the subject to come to a certain understanding (Foucault, 2008).

Stoicism of the Ancient Stoya was presented as a complete system that combined ontology, epistemology, and ethics – that is, the organization of all life in general. Stoicism is a certain way of life, a

full-fledged life strategy, which is connected with the experience of personal salvation (in the understanding of the Stoics, salvation from ignorance). An important component of comparing the Ancient Stoa and modern Stoicism is the analysis of the presence of the main, basic postulates of the Ancient Stoa and modern Stoicism.

The main postulates of the Ancient Stoya include, in particular, the theory of fatalism: "Fate rules everything, leads the obedient, pulls the disobedient." The main aspect of the ontology of Stoicism is the belief in the intelligence of the universe, and in a certain divine principle that this creation supports. The universe is intelligent, we are a part of it and everything that happens in it and everything is (pre-determined) by a certain natural course of things. Subjecting one's life to fate is an important ontological principle of the Stoics. A certain foundation of the ethical principles of Stoicism flows from this. Man and the sphere of his influence on what is within his control is really in the context of his relation to what is happening both inside and his relation to what is happening both inside and outside. For Epictetus, freedom is internal control over one's own judgments. Everything that happens is beyond our control (Epictetus, 2017).

Cosmopolitanism was also clearly expressed during the Early Stoya period. Stoics are citizens of the world (Стойцизм, 2021). Today's Stoicism is often presented as an exclusively personal system of self-help, which is completely separated from public, social and political activity and responsibility to society.

Now there is a certain hybridization of Stoicism and replacement of concepts. Understanding fatalism calls for minimizing fuss and gaining inner peace. However, modern society sees a certain ideal in constant excessive activity and even vanity, which is aimed at achieving success and multiplying wealth, gains and one's own efficiency. Modern culture encourages us to increase the hustle and bustle and at the same time we are sold ideas about the need to reduce it, to become more balanced, aware and calm by practicing certain exercises of the ancient Stoics. Also clearly present is the thought, born of Protestant ethics, that a person's professional activity is his vocation and what is given to you from God, from the mountain. This thesis is often used as identical to the Stoic notion of Fatum.

Our century is the century of life hacks, the desire to simplify everything as much as possible and put it in a short clip. Therefore, they are trying to turn

modern popular Stoicism into just such a system, which is formed from certain practices, exercises and recommendations that can suit us in the field of our stormy and busy life. At the same time, without even trying to transform our life into something radically different, which could forever leave behind the hectic everyday life and clearly, every day, advance in the knowledge of the highest truth.

Also, modern Stoicism denies the desire to change the external circumstances of life, external injustice, thus replacing the true understanding of Stoic fate with "beneficial" conformist elements of the present. Self-centered "pop stoicism" is a way of not denying and reducing the hustle and bustle, but rather more effectively accelerating it. M. Foucault noted: "The price of knowing the truth is a fundamental change in one's life (the life of the subject of knowledge), but a modern person is extremely rarely ready to pay such a price (Foucault, 2008).

Another key concept of the Early Stoic was the concept of "nature", which consisted in the understanding of the very philosophy of Stoicism, both its physics and ethics, and which Beck, because of its vagueness, difficulty in understanding and relativity, proposes to remove "without any loss" from the modern Stoic doctrine. But here the question arises whether we can even call this system Stoicism in such a case.

Stoic ethics is one of the most vivid examples of naturalism in ethics. Nature is the starting and ending point of this ethical concept. Nature is at the basis of the doctrine of virtues and the basis of the concept of physics and logic, because in their essence they talk about nature. It is necessary to highlight two plans, which are at the same time mutually complementary and those that deny each other. First of all, the universal nature and the human nature should be separated. On the one hand, following the Cynics, the Stoics claim that a moral life is a life in accordance with nature, it is a life based on the example and experience of all living things in nature. Life is likened to reason, when man is to single out the human mind, man himself as such must show his likeness (similarity) to the cosmic mind, the intelligence with which universal nature itself, the cosmic nature or the Logos, is endowed, and in this case nature acts in the quality of the modeling moral principle, which sets all the foundations of Stoic ethics, is the plan that relates the Stoics to the Cynics and at the same time leads to the paradoxes that the Stoics inherited from Cynicism (Столяров, 1995).

It is this postulation of a universal cosmic nature as the modeling beginning of a virtuous life and ethics as such that leads to certain paradoxes. On the other hand, by nature, we can understand the nature of man, and this understanding reflects Aristotle's ideas and motives that are close and understandable to modern man, and the reasonableness of human nature is not meant in general. Or you can start from the very beginning, as the Stoics and Epicureans did, turning to how living beings behave, not necessarily intelligent, in particular animals. Any living creature by its nature strives for self-preservation, and therefore all the objects to which it strives appear natural as a given (cataphysis), this is something natural in particular, for example, it is natural for a person to strive for health, for a person it is natural taking care of oneself, one's offspring, serving one's country, these are the so-called proper actions.

What makes them proper is that a creature should do so by virtue of its nature. That is, as we can see here, nature also acts as a norm and a modeling principle, the basis from which all human actions sprout, or if we take another natural being, its actions, starting with self-preservation, indicate that this circle of objects is chosen by virtue of its own nature, they form what we aspire to and are the object of what is proper, but when a human being advances in his intelligence, that is, moves along the path of virtue, he learns to value these things and their nature of expediency. At some point, the sage should appreciate not the things themselves, but the fact that we should strive for them by virtue of universal nature (Стоїцизм, 2021).

And up to this point, we have two plans, the nature-human plan from self-preservation and ending with proper actions and the plan of following virtues, as they coincide with universal nature. In most cases, there are no contradictions between them. However, the specificity of Stoic ethics and their interpretation of nature is that at a certain moment a person must accept not only what is natural for him to strive for (eg. to the preservation of health, what is no less natural for her from the point of view of universal nature – to get sick, for example, if a person has to get sick, then he should strive for this as a sage. That is, in this case, all improper actions, affects, passions, actions arise due to the fact that we continue to strive for what we are accustomed to strive for according to our human nature, as precisely private nature, at the same time it is time to accept what dictates universal nature.

In this regard, Epictetus should be quoted: "As long as I am not clear about what follows, I always follow the more natural to achieve what is by nature. After all, God himself created me capable of this choice. And if, of course, I knew that now I was destined to be sick, then I would reach for it. After all, even a foot, if it had a mind, would be tempted to step in the dirt." (Epictetus, 2017)

That is, we see that universal, intelligent nature acts as a certain example, model and principle, and a person must follow exactly her command, even if these contradictions go against the no less natural, but private needs of a person.

We can learn about the Stoics' criteria for defining nature from the works of Diogenes Laertes: We can learn about the Stoics' criteria for defining nature from the works of Diogenes Laertes: "This is what they say: the Cytian Zeno, tired of years, put an end to his torment by rejecting food; or so he said, hitting the ground with his hand: "I'm coming to you myself – why are you calling?" (Diogenes, 2005).

Sages recognize the signs of fate, they are endowed with knowledge that makes it possible to recognize the correctness of actions in a particular situation. This is what distinguishes wise men from other people, he knows the reasons and what they lead to. A sage is one who fully embodies the higher mind. The wisdom of the sage and his following the rational nature is the basis of Stoic philosophy.

Imagination of nature as a completely intelligent universe. Which is imbued with higher laws, not rigid foundations, but certain internal connections. Nature is a collection of intelligent relationships, it is the embodiment of the mind itself. The ancient tradition perceived *fusis* (nature) as a set of laws. Kant defines nature as a set of laws. Nature acts as a reasonable basis for a person's moral life. Nature acts not only as the basis of moral existence, but as the goal, the aspiration of the moral subject. The idea of the highest good, which triumphs at the top of a person's moral existence. And nature acquires here the meaning of the highest goal of the life of a moral subject.

We can consider the main imperative of Stoic ethics as the main life task of a person to "desire what happens as it happens." (Столяров, 1995). Man from the position of private nature must stand on the position of universal nature. Mode must strive to become substance. Improper states of the human essence, affects keep a person within the limits of his private nature. All passions and inappropriate actions arise from the inability to make the transition to a change of position, point of view.

According to Epictetus, man must become God. There is more merit in the position of man, because man differs from the gods not only in mortality, but also in the fact that he has acquired everything himself. If a sage has become a sage, it is his effort and his achievement. Passion can also be interpreted as an incorrect judgment, as a delusion, as a false state of the *pneuma* (soul). Also, the Stoics have a thesis that virtue is not just knowledge and following fate, virtue is an exercise, the result of an exercise, a training of the soul. It is believed that all Stoic philosophy and ethics is not just following nature as a certain norm, proper, but also training oneself. All these requirements of integrity are natural. When the being coincides with the proper. At the level of a sage, the nature that exists and should be aspired to by any living being is fully realized. Desired and proper become one whole. Ethics is aimed at overcoming oneself and the difference between what is desirable and what is proper and the transition to a state of perfection in which this difference is erased.

We can predict that the sun will rise tomorrow and we do it not because we guess, but because we know the reasons. Therefore, the stoic ability to decipher the signs of fate is primarily knowledge of the causes. Knowing what follows and what can happen is not because there is some pre-written plan, but because nature is constructed by the unfolding of causes.

### Conclusions

As we can see from the results of this study, modern Stoicism is incredibly ambiguous and different depending on who is the author of the books and articles. On the one hand, we see the results of the works of academic philosophers who are trying with all their efforts to preserve the authenticity of the original teaching, and on the other hand, the so-called "popular" Stoicism, which is strikingly different from its ancient basis, because its authors are professional marketers. Discarding physics and metaphysics, modern Stoicism increasingly turns into a set of life hacks and psychopractices for passive-thinking people who, while accepting the idea of classical Stoics about fate and the idea that there are many things in this world that we cannot change, they completely forgot that there are also many aspects of social and political life that we can and must change. Thus, beneath the beautiful picture of modern Stoicism, we see a movement that is certainly capable of helping people psychologically, but calls for inaction, political and social passivity, and total conformity, unlike the true ancient Stoic teachings.

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**ФЕНОМЕН СУЧАСНОГО СТОЇЦИЗМУ: ЧИ МОЖЛИВА ЕТИКА БЕЗ МЕТАФІЗИКИ**

**Анотація**

У статті аналізується багата спадщина представників однієї з найважливіших філософських шкіл античної доби – стоїцизму. Продемонстровано значні зміни та трансформації, яких вона зазнала в історичному контексті аж до наших днів. Визначено поняття сучасного стоїцизму та його різновиди, зокрема терапевтичний і «популярний» стоїцизм, а також коло проблем, які позиціонуються в його контексті. Досліджено співвідношення основних філософських доктрин Античної Стої та сучасного стоїцизму, виявлено принципову різницю між ними в онтологічних та етичних питаннях. Зроблено спробу провести детальне дослідження питання «природи» в контексті її розуміння в працях представників античних і пізніх стоїків. А також актуалізується істотна різниця в розумінні фундаментальних стоїчних ідей фаталізму та космополітизму. Сучасний стоїцизм аналізується через призму психологічної практики та прикладного значення. За результатами цього дослідження можна зробити висновок, що сучасний стоїцизм різко відрізняється від своєї давньої основи, відкидаючи фізику і метафізику, сучасний стоїцизм все більше перетворюється на набір лайфхаків і психопрактик для пасивно мислячих людей, які, приймаючи ідею класичної Стої про долю та ідею, що в цьому світі є багато речей, які ми не можемо змінити, повністю забули, що є також багато аспектів соціального та політичного життя, які ми можемо і повинні змінювати.

Таким чином, під прекрасною картиною сучасного стоїцизму ми бачимо рух, який, безумовно, здатний допомогти людям у психологічних аспектах, але в той сам час закликає до бездіяльності, політичної та соціальної пасивності та повного конформізму, на відміну від справжніх стародавніх стоїчних вчень.

**Ключові слова:** стоїцизм, природа, фатум, космополітизм, етика, метафізика, конформізм.

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