

Applying Ancient Stoic Ethics to Modern Problems

Problem

My research paper notes multiple ethical dilemmas but this presentation will focus on only one. Because of recent technological advances, members of Generation Z (born 1995-2005) face problems unlike those of past generations. One of these problems is dealing with social media influencers who perpetuate ideals which negatively impact the mental health of many members of Gen Z. This negative impact of influencers is greater than that of celebrities of the past because influencers are easier for consumers to compare themselves to.

How should members of Gen Z approach influencer culture as to not have negative impacts on their mental health?

Application of Ethics to the Problem

To apply Stoic virtue ethics to the problem of social media influencers impact on Generation Z's mental health, one has to individually approach the problem.

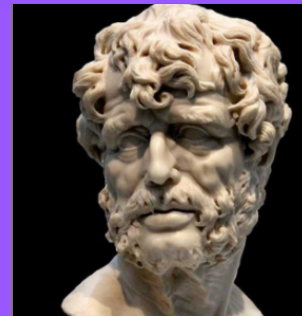
Imagine you are on a social media platform you enjoy. You see a post by an influencer which immediately makes you feel self-conscious. This feeling may have occurred because you do not have, for example, the economic success, body type, or sexual orientation of the influencer. At this point Stoic virtue ethics may be applied. First, use self-control and courage to pause and not take your immediate emotional reaction to heart. Next, use wisdom to remember that people's social media is not an accurate portrayal of their life, and your personal goals in life are different from that of influencers. Thus you can rationalize that your envy and negativity towards yourself are unfounded. Finally, if you believe the post is discriminatory or may harm the mental health of others use your sense of justice to explain these points to the influencer and others.



History of Stoicism

Stoicism was an ancient philosophical school that began in Greece around 300 BCE and ended in Rome around 350 AD. Famous Stoic philosophers include: Seneca the Younger, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

Stoics believed that there was a natural logic to everything in the universe, and humans should pursue this logic by habitually learning to make rational choices. Their goal was to become sages: a person who made rational decisions in every circumstance. Sages would feel joyful—in a similar way to the Buddhist ideal of Nirvana—since their complete rationality freed them from being impacted by any occurrence which took place.



Statue of Seneca the Younger

Stoic Ethics

To become a Sage, Stoics believed one must practice rational decision making everyday until rationality was so habitual it formed into an unconscious habit. Additionally Stoics saw decisions caused by emotion as antithetical to rationality.

Thus Stoics approached decision making by trying to think through their emotions, so they could get to the correct rational choice of which action was best to take.

One pragmatic Stoic approach on how to think through emotions was written on heavily by Seneca the Younger. Seneca's approach was a type of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics are types of moral theories in which the right actions to take are determined by the following of specific virtues. For Seneca and other Stoics there virtues were **wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance (self-control)**.

Sources & Notes:
Liz Frissell
Occidental College
CSLC Department
efrissell@oxy.edu

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Bibliography: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iNPzncaPwVsKBJKgK0LYAZfDDJXufJi06pchs8y12E/edit?usp=sharing>