

## The Dual Structure of the Stoic Attitude: Conceptual Analysis and Exploratory Empirical Convergence

Contemporary psychology and applied philosophy increasingly appeal to Stoicism as a unified ethical-therapeutic framework, often treating the “Stoic attitude” as a single, coherent disposition characterized by emotional regulation, resilience, and rational engagement with the world (Hadot, 1995; Nussbaum, 2013). This assumption underlies both modern Stoic self-help movements and therapeutic approaches inspired by ancient philosophy, most notably cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which has frequently been traced back to Stoic practices of cognitive and emotional regulation (Dobson & Dozois, 2001; Robertson, 2016). Despite its widespread acceptance, however, the unity of the Stoic attitude has rarely been subjected to sustained conceptual scrutiny. This paper challenges that assumption, arguing instead that the Stoic attitude exhibits a structural duality consisting of two distinct components: emotional control and social engagement. Recognizing this dual structure clarifies long-standing interpretive tensions within Stoicism and helps explain the selective appropriation of Stoic ideas in contemporary psychological practice.

The analysis begins with a conceptual examination of the Stoic attitude as it is implicitly reconstructed in both philosophical interpretation and psychological operationalization. On closer inspection, what is commonly treated as a single Stoic disposition decomposes into two separable normative and motivational orientations. The first concerns practices aimed at the regulation and transformation of emotional responses, including cognitive reframing, attentional discipline, and the cultivation of equanimity (Epictetus, trans. 2014). The second concerns active engagement in social and political life, grounded in cosmopolitanism, role-ethics, and duties toward others (Marcus Aurelius, trans. 2003; Reydam-Schils, 2005). While both components are clearly present in Stoic sources, there is little textual or theoretical support for the claim that one normatively entails the other. A defender of Stoic unity might object that emotional regulation enables virtuous social action. Yet such an instrumental relationship does not establish conceptual or motivational unity: equanimity may be cultivated for self-regarding reasons, while social duties may be pursued independently of emotional discipline. The components thus address different practical problems and operate according to different justificatory logics (Hadot, 1998).

Classical Stoicism seeks to unify these components through appeal to the metaphysical notion of nature (*physis*), understood as a rational and normative order with which human life ought to align. On this view, both emotional discipline and social engagement are required for living “in accordance with nature” (Reydam-Schils, 2005). Yet this metaphysical unification proves explanatorily fragile. Appeals to *physis* typically assert that emotional control and social virtue belong together without demonstrating why they must; unity is stipulated rather than derived. From a contemporary philosophical perspective, this appeal is difficult to sustain and, crucially, dispensable (Nussbaum, 2013). Once the metaphysical framework is set aside, the dual structure of the Stoic attitude becomes conceptually explicit rather than anomalous.

This duality is further illuminated by historical context. Practices of emotional control were not unique to Stoicism but were widely shared across Hellenistic philosophical schools and later

reappeared in early Christian ascetic traditions, suggesting that emotional regulation addresses a general human concern rather than a specifically Stoic one (Hadot, 1995). By contrast, the strong emphasis on social and political engagement is a distinctive feature of Stoicism, particularly in its Roman development. While earlier Greek Stoics often expressed ambivalence toward political participation, Roman Stoics articulated a robust ethics of duty suited to the administrative and moral demands of an expansive imperial order (Reydam-Schils, 2005; Hadot, 1998).

An additional perspective on this dual structure emerged unexpectedly through collaborative work on a psychological scale intended to operationalize the Stoic attitude. The scale was initially constructed under the assumption that Stoicism constitutes a relatively unified disposition with multiple interrelated facets. Exploratory analyses did not support this assumption. Instead, the data suggested a simpler configuration in which items clustered around two relatively independent dimensions corresponding to emotional regulation and social engagement (Stańko-Kaczmarek et al., 2024). This empirical pattern was not predicted in advance and is not presented as a replicated finding. Rather, it functions as a heuristic convergence point, rendering a previously implicit conceptual distinction salient and prompting reassessment of the philosophical assumptions embedded in the scale itself (Borsboom et al., 2004).

The final section considers the implications of this dual-structure view for contemporary psychology and psychotherapy. Therapeutic approaches inspired by Stoicism, particularly CBT, have overwhelmingly inherited techniques of emotional regulation while largely omitting the Stoic program of social engagement and ethical duty (Dobson & Dozois, 2001; Robertson, 2016). From the perspective developed here, this selectivity is not accidental. Emotional control constitutes a portable and cross-culturally adaptable therapeutic strategy, whereas Stoic social ethics is historically and normatively specific (Reydam-Schils, 2005). The Stoic attitude is therefore best understood not as a unified ethical-therapeutic system but as a composite structure formed by two independent components. Clarifying this structure preserves what is philosophically and psychologically valuable in Stoicism while avoiding problematic metaphysical commitments, and it opens space for more deliberate engagement with both its therapeutic and its ethical dimensions.

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