

MARCUS AURELIUS' STOICISM AND ITS SOLUTION TO OVERTHINKING



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Abstract

This research was library research with overthinking as its material object and the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius as a formal object. The main problem in this study is how Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism becomes a solution to overthinking. This research used critical analysis and heuristics methods. The data source in this research refers to the book or personal record of Marcus Aurelius, namely *Meditations*, which is supported by other sources that are closely related to the problems of Stoicism and overthinking. There are some critical points as the solution to the overthinking of Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism, namely, first, living in harmony with nature, where things beyond human control are on the scale of nature. Second, regarding the treatment of others, the actions and words of others are beyond human control, and what should be controlled is their perception. Third, self-restraint is in of control of humans. Everything that comes from out of control will not affect and interfere if in of control can be managed with the argumentation that humans as a whole are human beings that have a ratio; then this is the core of Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bercorak kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan objek materinya *overthinking* dan objek formalnya *Stoisisme Marcus Aurelius*. Permasalahan pokok di dalam penelitian ini adalah bagaimana *Stoisisme Marcus Aurelius* menjadi solusi terhadap *overthinking*. Sedangkan Metode Penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode Analisis Kritis dan Heuristika. Sebagai sumber data dalam penelitian ini merujuk kepada buku atau catatan pribadi Marcus Aurelius yaitu *Meditations* yang ditunjang dengan sumber lain yang erat kaitannya dengan permasalahan *Stoisisme Marcus Aurelius* dan *overthinking*. Penawaran akan solusi terhadap *overthinking* dari *Stoisisme Marcus Aurelius* ada beberapa poin penting yaitu Pertama, hidup selaras dengan alam, dimana hal yang berada di luar dari kendali manusia adalah sesuatu yang berada pada suratan alam. Kedua, terhadap perlakuan orang lain, tindakan maupun perkataan orang lain berada di luar kendali manusia dan itu semua berada di luar kendalinya yang seharusnya dikendalikan ialah persepsinya. Ketiga, pengendalian diri yang merupakan *in of control* dari manusia. Semua yang berasal dari *out of control* tidak akan berdampak dan mengganggu jika *in of control* bisa dikendalikan dengan dalil manusia secara utuh yaitu manusia yang memiliki rasio dan inilah inti dari *Stoisisme Marcus Aurelius*.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is the mother of science; unsurprisingly, the discourse of philosophy was so broad. Examples of the discussion of philosophy are politics with reference to political philosophies, with the well-known figure as Plato. Then, philosophy with a discussion of economics is called economics philosophy with the figures such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx and others. The philosophy that takes up the sphere of religion is called religious philosophy with the characters of Alkindi, Alfarabi, Immanuel Kant and others. Furthermore, Philosophy in psychology involves the figures of Sigmund Freud and other discussions that exist in scientific philosophy (Boer, 1967; Rofiq, 2018).



Stoicism is included in the discussion of philosophy which makes humans the object of study. Stoicism first appeared in the 3rd and 2nd BC. Zeno, a philosopher from Citium, was the person who first popularized the word Stoicism. Not only introducing Stoicism to the broader world, Zeno also taught the philosophy of this Stoicism (Frances & Hazlitt, 1984, p. 1). According to its name, Stoicism was taught on a terrace with a pillar or a wide and open porch of a house (stoa atau stoic in ancient Roman) (Holiday & Hanselman, 2016, p. 4).

At the beginning of the establishment of the stoa, Zeno not only taught the philosophy of humanity but also discussed several topics such as physics, logic in the form of rhetoric and dialectics, as well as political and religious ethics (Wibowo, 2019, p. 6). All these discussions express Epicurus' thought that disagrees with Zeno. But as time passed, the discussion of Stoicism was only focused on humans.

As God's most perfect creature, humans are equipped with heart and mind. It is fascinating to explore further the aspects of humans as the developments that happen socially. In understanding everything that happens around them, humans must show different reactions. This reaction arises from the difference in human thoughts to respond to actions, such as experiences, teachings and personal opinions.

The human mind becomes a sexy object when examined using the Stoic approach. In Stoicism, there is the term dichotomy of control, which is a reaction to the actions that occur around it, a reaction in control and out of the control of humans themselves. The teaching of Stoicism comes from Zeno's personal experience of having a shipwreck while sailing for trade. Zeno's stuff, in the form of a purple dye of sea snail extract and worth selling expensive, was swallowed up by the sea along with the ship. Zeno's self – control towards this calamity later brought out the philosophy of Stoicism (Manampiring, 2019, p. 22).

Stoicism is not only famous because of Zeno, but some figures have contributed to popularizing this thought. Epicurus had already discussed humans to reach the happiness of life that Zeno later studied while in Athens (Miswari, 2016, p. 100). Then, Seneca reviewed the lives of the Stoics and tried to apply it in his life even when he was slandered and exiled (Cambell, 2004, pp. 1 – 2). Lastly, Epictetus was an enslaved person who could still enjoy life even though he was locked up in slavery. Because of the figures above, Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, better known as Marcus Aurelius, knew about Stoicism. He was a Roman emperor who had great influence and power over the Roman Empire, with thousands of soldiers and Roman nobles under his rule.

Marcus Aurelius was one of the emperors who brought the Romans to the height of their success (Machiavelli, 2015, p. 127). Stoicism is very interesting to be studied by the emperor. The background and the way Marcus Aurelius ruled was very lovely and good (Robertson, 2019). It is exciting to research in order to see how Marcus Aurelius combined the philosophy of Stoicism with the way he ruled. The researchers referred to the writings of Marcus Aurelius in the form of sheets which were then recorded in a book under the title of *Meditations* (Sellars, 2021, p. 1).

In this study, the researchers tried to explore the solution to the problem of overthinking. Overthinking originates from the human reaction to the circumstances around it but only occurs in the head and plays in the mind, making overthinking an exciting word to combine with Stoicism. Overthinking is categorized as a negative emotion that exists within human beings, so the researchers are trying to find a way out or a cure so that overthinking or ruminations or similar things no longer become reckless; in other words, curtail overthinking and turn them into positive emotions so that it no longer disturbs the sufferers.

Based on the researchers' explanation above, it would be interesting if the teachings contained in stoicism and its application in Marcus Aurelius would be a solution to overthinking so humans can enjoy a happy and meaningful life. The research on Stoicism by Marcus Aurelius as a solution to overthinking was qualitative research with the type of library research. The researchers used critical analysis and heuristic methods to analyze the data. Then, a book entitled *Meditations* became a primary source of the data and other sources such as books, journals or research that have coherence with this research as its secondary source.

THE CONCEPT OF OVERTHINKING

The word overthinking consists of two syllables, namely over (insufficient tact and overaggressiveness are two of his problems) and think (to have a conscious mind, to some extent of reasoning, remembering experiences, making rational decisions, etc or to employ one's mind rationally and objectively in evaluating or dealing with a given situation). So *overthinking* means thinking more about something than is necessary or productive (Echols & Shadily, 2010, p. 588).

Rumination is synonymous with overthinking. It can be understood as a condition in which human beings are trapped in negative thoughts and emotions so that they feel anxious and stressed (Megarina *et al.*, 2021). Overthinking or rumination is excessive thinking that makes humans stuck to their own thoughts. Overthinking turns the sufferer into an exaggerated person when faced with one incident. These are the negative effects of overthinking that humans should control so they are not trapped in exhausting thoughts with futile results.

Overthinking is an activity that takes too much time to think about something in a detrimental way, and it can also be meant as rumination or anxiety. Overthinking can also be defined as thinking too deeply about a problem (Amrullah, 2020). Kevin Moore argues that, in short, overthinking or rumination is not a bad thing because thinking is a peculiarity and an exaggeration of humans. Still, it is worth remembering that too much thinking is detrimental to the mind, body, activity and even time (Dewajani & Karneli, 2020).

Philosophy does not recognize overthinking specifically, but some philosophers mention overthinking meaningfully. As Epictetus once said, "*It is not things that disturb us, but our opinion of them.*" (Frances & Hazlitt, 1984, p. 85). The point of the sentence is that human opinion often disturbs the mind due to fear and anxiety about something. Alan Watts also defines overthinking as something that interferes with reason in an excessive way about something that leads to one's unhappiness. According to him, overthinking will make the sufferer trapped in past events "*The future is a concept; it doesn't exist.*" (Watts, 1951, p. 70). Philosophy recognizes the term overthinking in practice because overthinking and philosophy have the same object, namely thought.

Overthinking makes it difficult for humans to find solutions because some problems cannot be solved as they only revolve around thoughts. One cannot undo a traumatic event that has already happened. Thinking of these things will only ruin psychological well-being. There was a chaos of focus between being stuck on the problem and finding a solution. It will make someone stuck in a whirlwind of rumination. Then, he is not proactively looking for new perspectives in identifying problems to take appropriate action. Overly anxious people can cause both physical and mental pain. Overthinking is also called paralysis analysis, where this person has thought about the problem without

finding a solution (deadlock). In psychological discourse, this tendency is called rumination.

Susan Nolen–Hoeksema, from the Yale University of America, explains the characteristics of rumination and its phenomena empirically with her theory, *Response Styles Theory* (RST). Her idea was used in research on *Rethinking Rumination* to rethink a person's negative (emotional) experience about causes, situational factors, and consequences trends. The rumination process goes through three stages. First, it can cause a person to constantly think of a painful past, which can lead to stress. Second, rumination hinders people's ability to solve problems effectively. They often think pessimistic and fatalistic. Third, rumination will subsequently destroy a person's instrumental behavior and place him in a state of depression. In this case, there is an excessive anxiety (Dewajani & Karneli, 2020).

Overthinkers often think about things that are not in their capacity to control them, which results in many assumptions of past circumstances so that regrets of the past also emerge. There are too many assumptions about events that can't even be recounted from the past in the present time. This causes anxiety and fear of living life in the future. The dramatization of an event resulting from overthinking also becomes an obstacle to one's ability to think rationally about the future and the solution to the events that have occurred.

The causes of someone having overthinking can vary. It is usually when a person is considering a decision, trying to understand another person's action or decision, predicting the future too early, over – reflecting on what happened, wishing too much and just trapped in that assumption and thinking negatively about everything that happened (Sofia et al., 2020). There are many things that cause overthinking that then makes the habit stick in a person. Even worse, overthinking inhibits human ability to think rationally. Emotions that are difficult to control and explosive are also the cause of overthinking. Anxiety will affect the person who treats the overthinking.

Consideration for a decision must exist in humans. The only thing that makes overthinking flourish is when such thinking is not excessive and only trapped in the "vicious circle" which has no end. Consideration without action is also meaningless. Understanding other people's actions or decisions requires validating and seeking clarity clearly and correctly.

People who overthink will feel an excessive burden of thought that will affect the meaning of life because the assumptions in the head make the whole activity and time busy thinking about these assumptions so that the action and energy that should be spent on the more valuable things only ends on the less helpful hypothesis. Excessive contemplation about the past is dangerous, but people who overthink enjoy it (Sofia et al., 2020).

Fear of things that are out of control makes it the main factor in causing something to happen, and regrets every event that does not fit his wishes. It is necessary to remember past mistakes so as to not happen again in the future, but remembering past events has the possibility of happening and thinking about such things excessively is just a waste.

Lack of self – confidence is also a cause of overthinking because believing in oneself is difficult, even in circumstances where humans should be sure of their abilities and themselves. Do not rely on others who do what they desire; for that, there are no controllers over them except themselves. Therefore, a decrease in self – confidence makes a person not enjoy his role, which results in agitated simulations and only revolves around the mind (Sofia et al., 2020).

The external factors also make someone overthinking, such as disliking others who say or act contrary to what they want. Since self – control is the only one who can, other people are only the objects of such words or actions; the doer or subject is oneself. Thinking about other people's behavior and comments is just a waste of time and energy. In other people's behavior and words, they only make their lives as pleasant as possible, and this is where humans are figures who compare themselves and other people who cannot be reached. Between one person and the other, there's a portion of each other, and that proportion is not something to compare (Sofia et al., 2020).

Worrying about future circumstances and events also trigger a person to dwell on overthinking and rumination. Excessively experienced anxiety will be an obstacle for someone to step forward and do what he can, even when anxiety about something combined with negative assumptions and thoughts will cause damage to the person's physical and mental. Ultimately, someone will make himself an object of regret and will always mourn for everything he has done, not for self – introspection.

THE STOICISM OF MARCUS AURELIUS

Stoicism refers to the word *stoa*, a Greek Language (Ancient Greek) meaning a space full of carvings (Hatta, 1986, p. 148). *Stoa* is also meant to be a broad and open porch between the pillars supporting the roof of the house, or it is defined as an intersection between the pillars that support the tall and large canopy (Holiday & Hanselman, 2016, p. 4). Some say that Stoicism comes from a word that indicates character, attitude and steadfast behavior, referring to the terms *stoic*, *sceptic* and *cynic* in English (Long, 2006, p. 3). *Stoa* was a place where Zeno loved to teach his philosophy among the pillared terraces located in the *agora* (square) of Athens (Wibowo, 2019, pp. 22 – 23). Stoicism is also referred to the word *stoic*, which, when translated into Indonesian, is more popular with the term Terrace philosophy. The naming of Stoicism as a Terrace philosophy refers to the fact that *"Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in the early third century BC. Its name is derived from the Greek "Stoa", meaning porch, because that's where Zeno first taught his students."* (Somawati, 2021).

The teachings in Stoic philosophy are very implementable because *"Stoicism was one of the most influential and respected schools of philosophy for five subsequent centuries. It was practiced by rich and the poor, the powerful and the sufferer a like, in the pursuit of the good life."* (Somawati, 2021). The focus of the teachings of Stoicism is because that is that it allows humans to enjoy life and happiness by finding and organizing the thoughts (Wibowo, 2019, p. 26).

Marcus Aurelius was born on April 26th, 121 AD under the name of Marcus Annius Verus. Before moving to Rome, he lived in the small town of Ucubi in the Roman province of Hispania Baetica (modern Spain). Marcus Aurelius was an emperor from 161 AD to 180 AD with the full name Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus but was more familiar with the name Marcus. During the reign of the Emperor Marcus, the ancient Rome achieved its glory even though it coincided with the outbreak of the Antonine Plague, a deadly epidemic originating from the eastern hemisphere in 165 AD which spread widely in its territory (Yeomans, 2017, pp. 22 – 24). Nicolo Machiavelli, in his book *Discursus*, also mentions that Marcus Aurelius was among the top five Roman emperors of all time because he ruled so well that the Roman society was prosperous at that time (Machiavelli, 2015, p. 127).

Stoicism is indeed much attached to Marcus Aurelius, because the peak of the glory of Stoicism in the Rome era was in the hands of this emperor. Thus, the experience and

teaching of Marcus Aurelius throughout his life was Stoicism itself. Even though there were gaps and shortcomings in Marcus' dissemination of his views, the Emperor basically had legitimacy in the form of personal notes which were later written into a book entitled *Tῶν Εἰς ἑαυτὸν* which was then rewritten and translated under the title *Meditations* that is very well known until now (Sellars, 2021, p. 21).

The teachings of Stoicism left by Marcus Aurelius may still exist and be preserved to this day. The teachings of Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism are like; the first, between good and bad, nothing is truly eternal. Good and bad are merely assumptions and perceptions, so make yourself worthy of a human being who uses his humanity as a whole. The second is self-control, which humans should maintain because they control themselves, do not make humans submissive to desire only. Third, living in harmony with nature and there is nothing to be afraid of because nature acts for the common good. With all its orders, nature has its own values so as not to create disorder. Let the nature work as it does. What nature does is the best of its kind. Fourth, returning to the God, as a human being, one should submit to the God who governs the universe and that is the way to be a grateful human being. Be a servant who is grateful for His decrees without blaming His divinity. Fifth, toward the treatment of other people, everyone works as their needs are, in order not to be a trigger then the contrary should be avoided as much as possible. But what must be remembered is to keep doing well to other people even though their treatment does not get the same feedback. Concentrate on how you treat them so that everything that comes out of yourself is a good thing without the need for praise or approval or praise from others. Sixth, being a rational human, there are three elements, namely body, soul and mind. The body and the soul will return to their origins, then the body from the ground will come back to the ground and the soul that comes from the Creator will also return to Him, but the mind will be attached to the human, then become a human who always keeps his mind to be rational. Therefore, rational thinking is used according to its portion then no one will worry other than the perceptions and assumptions.

OVERTHINKING SOLUTIONS IN THE VIEW OF MARCUS AURELIUS STOICISM

As a famous figure in the philosophy of Stoicism, many of the teachings left by Emperor Marcus Aurelius as an adjuster to a happy life. As a stream of philosophy that explores the meaning of life and apart from the distractions that keep human trapped in their own thoughts, then Stoicism, with the help of Marcus Aurelius provides insights so that the mind can feel its freedom. Therefore, the researchers presented the teachings of stoicism within Marcus Aurelius that could be a solution to overthinking.

1. Living in harmony with nature

From the writings of the Emperor, living in harmony with nature can be a solution to overthinking. Life in harmony with nature is an attitude not to deviate and continue to walk in accordance with what nature has ordered. The meaning of life in harmony with nature is not merely for humans to surrender what nature has given them, but nature with its destiny can make people grateful for what they have. This case makes Marcus Aurelius never blames what nature has done for the common good.

Nature will use what is assigned to it. Nature will adjust its powers to the circumstances around it, as humans should navigate life (Aurelius, 2021, p. 107). Nature is constantly changing, and so is the human mind. Therefore, never blame the changing nature, but look at the human himself, whether he can draw the conclusions and the teachings of the nature changes (Aurelius, 2021, p. 90).

Life and death are common things in the nature, so a human being who lives in harmony with nature will not make a difference between these two things. But they will focus on what they can leave for the common good, which clearly affects human beings who will always strive to make everything they do up to the stage of goodness and will not turn around with everything that nature is. In the world of nature, humans should take the lesson from what nature has to offer in order to avoid wasting time on things beyond their control (Aurelius, 2021, p. 199). But humans can focus on things their control, namely themselves. So, the writers believe that the teaching of Stoicism Marcus Aurelius, which is living in harmony with nature, can be a solution to overthinking because there is nothing to be concerned about what nature has imposed on humans.

2. Treatment of others

Other people's behavior, actions, words, and thoughts are not self–controllable; therefore, they are not controllable by others outside the sufferer. Since that is not the real problem, it will only become a problem when the opinions or assumptions in oneself are volatile.

In fact, the treatment of other people, whether good or bad, will not affect life, but the assumptions make things good or bad, which has an impact on teaching humans about good things, regardless of bad things, as if bad things will only happen when good is not there. These two things are always going side by side; without one, the other will not exist either. There's no advantage if humans grumble and retaliate for the ill–treatment of others. The vision and self–control must be improved. The treatment of others toward themselves must be characterized by control of opinions and assumptions. The treatment of other people towards oneself must be interpreted by controlling opinions and assumptions. So that there is no burden when the treatment of others is not under the desire, the self must reflect and seek the good by keeping the consciousness of the mind over the treatment of others (Aurelius, 2021, p. 170).

The behavior and treatment of other people are only as good or bad. As rational human beings living alongside a reasonable human being, treat the person as well as possible. Treatment is not based on the desire to repay treatment anyway but on the reflection of humans who use their natural intelligence in accordance with the nature of intelligence. In treating other people, do not expect a reward in kind but do good for yourself.

3. Self–control

In the philosophy of Stoicism, there are two things in this world, within humans and beyond human control. Everything that is out of human control cannot be dictated except by the self–concerned, such as the changes in weather, other people and fate. It doesn't make humans live as if they surrender without making any effort, but the effort must be everything that is actually in self–control. There's no point in mourning the rain, but wear a raincoat if you want to travel. There is no use in screaming at the words of people who slander yourself for what you have not done, do things that make yourself calm by being not care about those remarks (Aurelius, 2021, p. 219).

In the teachings of Stoicism, the self is the most important part and the main actor. Utilizing and using all that is attached to oneself is the most complete form of using grace. The mind, an inseparable part of oneself, also saves humans from overthinking. As a body of self–control, reason makes humans attain a different degree from other creatures. Marcus also affirmed that rational reasoning is a form of the whole human being. Marcus also explained through his teaching that the reason is the factor balancing and determining the direction of humans (Aurelius, 2021, p. 296).

Today's human judgment is based on understanding; actions are based on social goodness and attitudes to be happy with everything that happens. If all of that is done, then that is enough (Aurelius, 2021, pp. 232 – 233). Control yourself by including a perfect reason to achieve a meaningful and make rational as necessary considerations. Nothing is perfect beyond the good and the bad. Therefore, humans should not bother. It will make humans no longer engaged in overthinking or rumination. Most people overthink about the good and the bad, so activities are not carried out properly.

The researchers assessed that the teachings of Marcus Aurelius can make a person no longer argue in his mind about things that are just a waste of time. Everything that Marcus Aurelius conveyed in his book was indeed straightforward things or quotes, but this simplicity made the emperor's ideas enjoyable and applicable for thousands of years. In addition, Marcus Aurelius also provided enlightenment to achieve a useful life. The Ataraxia that exists in Stoa's philosophy also makes this teaching so meaningful, so that the apatheia is far from those who explore Stoicism in depth.

CONCLUSION

From the search of Marcus Aurelius' thoughts and references regarding overthinking, the researchers conclude that the teachings of Stoicism raised by Marcus aurelius in his personal record have a solution for the problem of overthinking in this study. The teachings of Stoicism left by Marcus Aurelius still exist and be preserved to this day. The teachings of Marcus Aurelius' Stoicism are like; the first, between good and bad, in essence, nothing is truly eternal. The second is self – control. Third is living in harmony with nature and having nothing to fear because nature acts in the common interest. Fourth is returning to the God. Then, the fifth is towards the treatment of others. The last is being a rational human.

Marcus Aurelius applied his teachings from the time he became acquainted with Stoicism at the age of 22 until his death. The application of the teachings of Stoicism is so inherent that it can even be seen in how he became a Roman emperor. One example of the implementation applied by Marcus Aurelius is when his people criticized him for the attacks on his kingdom. Marcus Aurelius did not make the person lose his life, but he gave a reward so that criticism did not disturb him.

There are some essential points of a solution to overthinking based on the teachings of Marcus Aurelius' stoicism, namely, first, living in harmony with nature, where things beyond human control are within the scope of nature. Second, against the treatment of others, the actions and words of others are beyond human control. Humans should control their perceptions rather than try to obscure and discredit other people's actions that are contrary to the moral things in them. Third, self – control is in of control of humans. Everything that comes from out of control will not affect and interfere if in of control can be managed with the argumentation that humans as a whole are human beings that have a ratio. Use the ratio that God has given as the best way to guide humans as a whole, namely rational humans.

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