# **Modern Stoicism and the *Hegemonikon*: A Comparative Analysis**

## **Ryan Holiday (The Daily Stoic / “Obstacle is the Way” School)**

Ryan Holiday’s popular Stoic writings tend to **avoid technical Greek terminology** like *hegemonikon*, but they **do convey the same ideas in plain language**. Holiday emphasizes controlling one’s perceptions and **pausing before reacting**. In **The Daily Stoic** and related content, he discusses Epictetus’s “discipline of assent” – essentially the practice of **not letting initial impressions trigger impulsive actions** ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=The%20Stoics%20were%20big%20on,that%20is%20really%20freakin%E2%80%99%20hard)). For example, Holiday writes that Stoics “were big on not getting carried away by thoughts and feelings,” explaining that the discipline of assent means feeling an impulse to do something rash but *not* giving in ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=The%20Stoics%20were%20big%20on,that%20is%20really%20freakin%E2%80%99%20hard)). He illustrates this with Epictetus’s advice to **stop and examine one’s impression**: *“Don’t let the force of an impression when it first hits you knock you off your feet; just say to it, ‘Hold on a moment; let me see who you are and what you represent. Let me put you to the test.’”* ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=,%E2%80%9D)). In Holiday’s works (e.g. *The Obstacle is the Way*), this ancient practice is often reframed as **objective judgment** or controlling one’s narrative about events. Holiday frequently **integrates modern anecdotes and research** – for instance, he cites habit science studies that echo Epictetus’s point about postponing reaction ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=And%20modern%20research%20into%20breaking,the%20act%2C%20and%20then%20postpone)).

**Is the *hegemonikon* central for Holiday?** Not by name. Holiday typically **refers to our rational mind or “inner citadel”** (a term Marcus Aurelius used) rather than using the word *hegemonikon*. The Daily Stoic *Glossary* does define *hêgemonikon* as the “guiding reason; ruling principle” of the mind ( [Glossary](https://dailystoic.com/glossary/#:~:text=H%C3%AAgemonikon%20,Greek%20Models%20of%20Mind)), showing that Holiday’s team is aware of the concept academically. In practice, however, Holiday’s advice stresses *outcomes* of a well-governed mind (calm, objective perception) more than it dissects the faculty itself. The **process of impressions → impulses → assent is acknowledged in substance**: Holiday often reminds readers that **it’s not events, but our opinions about events, that upset us**, urging a separation between the two. He highlights that brief moment of decision **when a person can choose to resist a destructive impulse**, which is essentially the Stoic *pause* before giving or withholding assent ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=The%20Stoics%20were%20big%20on,that%20is%20really%20freakin%E2%80%99%20hard)).

**Essential vs. glossed over?** Holiday presents this cognitive schema as **essential practical advice**, even if he glosses over technical labels. For instance, one Daily Stoic article explicitly instructs readers to “Use the ‘Discipline of Assent’” as a ritual for a happier life ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=The%20Stoics%20were%20big%20on,that%20is%20really%20freakin%E2%80%99%20hard)). He considers it a key to breaking bad habits: *catch yourself, pause, and choose your response* ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=Epictetus%20thought%20the%20key%20was,In%C2%A0Discourses%20and%20Selected%20Writings%C2%A0Epictetus%20said)). What Holiday omits in theory he often makes up in **actionable maxims**. He does not explore Stoic psychology in scholarly depth (he won’t analyze Stoic syllogisms or debates on the soul’s parts), but **the core idea of a rational ruling faculty guarding against rash judgments is preserved** in plain English. When Holiday writes *“Objective judgment, now, at this very moment”* (a Marcus Aurelius quote) or talks about controlling one’s perspective, he is invoking the hegemonikon’s role without naming it.

**Modern frameworks or replacements:** Rather than replacing Stoic psychology, Holiday **reinforces it with modern concepts in a complementary way**. He draws on **behavioral science, cognitive research, and even Viktor Frankl’s famous dictum** about the space between stimulus and response ([Between the Stimulus and the Response - Daily Stoic](https://dailystoic.com/between-the-stimulus-and-the-response/#:~:text=Between%20the%20Stimulus%20and%20the,%E2%80%9D%20Frankl)). In doing so, he essentially recasts the Stoic notion of assent in contemporary terms. For example, postponing an impulse (“I’ll check my anger later”) is likened to research on willpower and habit formation, which shows saying “later” instead of “never” tempers cravings ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=And%20modern%20research%20into%20breaking,the%20act%2C%20and%20then%20postpone)). Holiday does not explicitly mention “mindfulness” by name very often, but the practice he describes – *being fully present and aware of one’s thoughts before acting* – closely parallels secular mindfulness techniques. Overall, Ryan Holiday **preserves the Stoic architecture of agency in practice**, if not in academic language. Readers of his works come away understanding that there is a *central controller* (their reasoning mind) that can **observe impressions and choose its response**, which is the very function of the Stoic hegemonikon, even if he’s more likely to call it “your reasoned choice” or simply “your mindset” than use the ancient term. Holiday’s focus is on **accessibility and action**, so the ethical weight of Stoic rational agency is sometimes **implicit** – but it is certainly present. As a result, modern Stoicism in Holiday’s popular mode **retains the substance of the impression→assent model**, though casual readers might not learn the word *hegemonikon* itself.

## **Donald Robertson (Stoicism and CBT)**

Donald Robertson, a cognitive-behavioral therapist and Stoic author, **explicitly emphasizes the Stoic model of the mind**. He frequently uses terms like *hegemonikon* and *phantasiai* (impressions) in his writings, linking them to modern psychology. For Robertson, the **ruling faculty (hegemonikon)** is *the* central concept in Stoic practice: he describes Stoicism’s core as **continual mindfulness of one’s ruling mind and judgments** ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=think%20it%E2%80%99s%20clear%2C%20though%2C%20that,opinions%2C%20particularly%20our%20value%20judgments)). In one article, he writes that all Stoic techniques “are grounded in one continual practice, which Epictetus called *prosoche* or ‘attention’, i.e., paying attention to our ruling faculty (*hegemonikon*) and the way we use our judgment to form opinions, particularly our value judgments” ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=think%20it%E2%80%99s%20clear%2C%20though%2C%20that,opinions%2C%20particularly%20our%20value%20judgments)). This is a direct acknowledgment that **Stoic training is fundamentally about the hegemonikon’s careful management of impressions and assent**. Robertson even quotes Pierre Hadot on this *prosoche* as *“continuous vigilance and presence of mind”* ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=,84)), reinforcing that Stoic mindfulness is a constant guarding of the ruling center.

Robertson provides **detailed descriptions of the impression→assent→action sequence**. He often cites Epictetus’s formula: when an upsetting impression strikes, *“You are just an impression and not at all what you claim to represent”* ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=by%20an%20impression%20concerning%20external,us%20to%20experience%20emotional%20distress)) ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=impressions%20%E2%80%94%20such%20as%20%E2%80%9CMy,us%20to%20experience%20emotional%20distress)). He explains that impressions carry implicit judgments (e.g. “This is terrible!”), which our hegemonikon must critically evaluate before assenting. Robertson’s works (like *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor*) devote significant attention to what Epictetus called the **“Discipline of Assent”** – training oneself to withhold assent from misleading impressions. He calls this ability to step back and view one’s thoughts objectively the **psychological “core” of Stoicism** ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=I%E2%80%99ve%20increasingly%20come%20to%20the,difficult%20situations%2C%20in%20Stoicism%20it)). In fact, he identifies the Stoic *philosophical* act of distancing oneself from impressions with the **CBT technique of cognitive distancing** ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=Aaron%20T,separate%20from%20reality%2C%20%E2%80%9Ccognitive%20distancing%E2%80%9D)). For example, he notes that Aaron T. Beck (founder of CBT) uses “distancing” to mean viewing thoughts as hypotheses or “constructions of reality rather than reality itself” ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=Aaron%20T,separate%20from%20reality%2C%20%E2%80%9Ccognitive%20distancing%E2%80%9D)) – almost exactly what Stoics urge when they remind themselves an impression is just an impression, not the thing itself ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=by%20an%20impression%20concerning%20external,us%20to%20experience%20emotional%20distress)). Robertson explicitly connects **impression and assent to modern therapeutic frameworks**, writing that Stoicism foreshadowed CBT’s insight that *“it’s not events that upset us, but our opinions about them.”* In his view, **Stoic psychology not only is essential, it is remarkably modern**.

**Centrality in practice:** Donald Robertson treats the classical schema as **absolutely essential to Stoic practice**. In his courses and writings for the Modern Stoicism organization, he teaches exercises like *mindfulness of the ruling faculty (prosoche)* and *cognitive rehearsal* of difficult impressions ([Your favourite Stoic Exercises 3) Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty (prosoche) | Modern Stoicism](https://modernstoicism.com/your-favourite-stoic-exercises-3-mindfulness-of-the-ruling-faculty-prosoche/#:~:text=Deemed%20third%20most%20useful%20was%C2%A0Mindfulness,When%20dealing%20with)) ([Your favourite Stoic Exercises 3) Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty (prosoche) | Modern Stoicism](https://modernstoicism.com/your-favourite-stoic-exercises-3-mindfulness-of-the-ruling-faculty-prosoche/#:~:text=at%20any%20moment%20to%20have,by%20your%20own%20foolish)). One Stoic Week exercise he helped design was literally titled **“Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty”**, instructing participants to *“be mindful continually of your leading faculty (your intellect and volition) and guard against it being harmed… All of your attention should focus on the care of your mind.”* ([Your favourite Stoic Exercises 3) Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty (prosoche) | Modern Stoicism](https://modernstoicism.com/your-favourite-stoic-exercises-3-mindfulness-of-the-ruling-faculty-prosoche/#:~:text=at%20any%20moment%20to%20have,by%20your%20own%20foolish)). This is a near-direct translation of Epictetus (Ench. 41) and shows Robertson’s commitment to **preserving the original Stoic architecture of agency** in modern practice. The hegemonikon isn’t glossed over or replaced – it is **actively cultivated**. Robertson often mentions that Stoics see our **prohairesis** (volition or faculty of choice, closely related to the hegemonikon) as our true self, untouchable by externals, which must be exercised with wisdom. His social media posts even echo this: *“You only harm yourself by assenting to false impressions. The true self is that reasoning faculty.”* (paraphrased) ([# You are prohairesis. Do not identity with the body or even your ...](https://www.facebook.com/groups/Stoicism/posts/8914287665290924/#:~:text=,true%20self%20is%20that)). Clearly, he **preserves the ruling faculty and assent process in substance and name**.

**Modern analogues used:** While Robertson keeps the Stoic terms in view, he **freely uses modern psychological frameworks as parallel explanations**. Chiefly, he draws on **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**, which he calls a descendant of Stoicism ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=Recently%2C%20I%20was%20sent%20a,me%20in%20the%20direction%20of)). When Robertson describes **Stoic techniques**, he frequently notes their CBT counterparts: e.g. *Stoic negative visualization* and **CBT imagery exposure** for fear, or Stoic **premeditation of adversity** and habituation theory ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=The%20ancient%20references%20to%20this,reduction%20in%20anxiety%2C%20although%20seemingly)) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=rehearsing%20Stoic%20principles%20in%20the,naturally%20with%20the%20goals%20of)). Regarding impressions and assent, he might point out that Stoics realized the need to get *cognitive distance* from initial thoughts – just as CBT teaches clients to “decatastrophize” or label thoughts (e.g. *“I notice I am having the thought that...”*) ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=Other%20common%20ways%20of%20gaining,cognitive%20distance%20include)) ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=,manner%2C%20literally%20from%20a%20distance)). He also likens the *hegemonikon* to the **“executive function” of the brain** in modern terms ([Stoicism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/#:~:text=when%20we%20are%20suddenly%20presented,executive%20function%20of%20the%20brain)), which is a way to explain to today’s readers that our prefrontal cortex (so to speak) can regulate emotions by choosing how to interpret stimuli. Rather than replace Stoic ideas, Robertson’s approach **confirms them through psychology**. This preservation-under-new-names **does not dilute the Stoic framework** at all; if anything, it bolsters the movement’s philosophical depth by demonstrating **empirical support**. Robertson often warns against losing the original focus: for example, he critiques interpretations (like some of Irvine’s ideas) that stray too far from Stoic principles ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=judged%20%E2%80%9Cbad%E2%80%9D%2C%20either%20in%20the,the%20goals%20of%20Epicurean%20philosophy)) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9CTrichotomy%E2%80%9D%20of%20Control)). In sum, Donald Robertson and those in the Stoicism-and-CBT camp have **strongly preserved the Stoic ruling-faculty model of agency**, essentially translating it into 21st-century psychological language and reinforcing its importance for ethical development and emotional resilience.

## **Massimo Pigliucci (Philosopher & Public Stoic)**

Massimo Pigliucci, a philosopher of science turned Stoic exponent, **explicitly engages with the classical Stoic schema of impressions→assent→action**, though he sometimes uses slightly different terminology. In his book *How to Be a Stoic* and various essays, Pigliucci emphasizes Epictetus’s three disciplines (Desire, Action, and Assent), with the **“Discipline of Assent”** treated as *equally crucial* as the others ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=One%20powerful%20example%20of%20philosophy,with%20the%20discipline%20of%20assent)) ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%2C%20exactly%2C%20is%20%E2%80%98assent%E2%80%99%3F%20In,of%20driving%20such%20a%20car)). In a Philosophy Now column, Pigliucci asks pointedly: *“What, exactly, is ‘assent’?”* and proceeds to explain: *“In Stoic psychology, we are bombarded by ‘impressions’ … to which we automatically, unreflectively, attach a judgment… But according to the Stoics, we should never assent – that is, agree with our reflex judgment of any impression – until we have had a chance to slow down and examine it more carefully.”* ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%2C%20exactly%2C%20is%20%E2%80%98assent%E2%80%99%3F%20In,of%20driving%20such%20a%20car)). This clear description shows he **teaches the classical model in detail**. He even gives a concrete example: seeing a luxury car and fantasizing about owning it is a natural impression + value-judgment, but a Stoic, upon reflection, *“decide[s] to deny assent to the impression”* after considering reasons (cost, environmental impact, etc.) ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=But%20according%20to%20the%20Stoics%2C,go%20for%20a%20walk%20instead)). Here Pigliucci demonstrates step-by-step the Stoic *pause* and examination before assent. In doing so, he is **preserving the central role of the hegemonikon** (though he prefers plain terms like “rational mind” or simply *“we”* as the decision-maker). Indeed, in one blog post he notes Marcus Aurelius’ frequent admonition to *“cultivate one’s ruling faculty”* – the part of us that can give or withdraw assent from impressions ([From ancient to modern Stoicism — part I - WordPress.com](https://howtobeastoic.wordpress.com/2016/01/26/from-ancient-to-modern-stoicism-part-i/#:~:text=From%20ancient%20to%20modern%20Stoicism,withdraw%20assent%20from%20%E2%80%9Cimpressions%2C%E2%80%9D)).

While Pigliucci might not always use the Greek word *hegemonikon* in his popular writing, he doesn’t shy away from it either. In a Modern Stoicism piece discussing updates to Stoicism, he drops a “fun fact”: unlike ancient Stoics who thought the hegemonikon was in the heart, *“we… think it [the seat of the hegemonikon] actually pertains to the brain”* ([Updating Epictetus And Stoicism For the 21st century by Massimo ...](https://modernstoicism.com/updating-epictetus-and-stoicism-for-the-21st-century-by-massimo-pigliucci/#:~:text=,It%20actually%20pertains%20to)). This aside shows he acknowledges the concept of a governing center of the mind, and simply notes modern science’s correction of its physical locale. Moreover, in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Stoicism (which Pigliucci co-authored or influenced), it explicitly equates the **ruling faculty with the brain’s executive function**, and explains Stoic emotion theory in those terms ([Stoicism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/#:~:text=when%20we%20are%20suddenly%20presented,executive%20function%20of%20the%20brain)). Such statements reflect Pigliucci’s approach: **preserve the Stoic architecture, but translate it into a scientifically informed framework** (brain, cognitive systems, etc.).

**Impressions and assent as essential:** Pigliucci treats the impressions→assent process as *essential to Stoic practice*, not an optional antiquarian detail. In his view, mastering assent is actually the capstone of Stoic training. He interprets Epictetus’s teachings as aiming to **internalize virtue so deeply that proper assent becomes second nature**. He draws an analogy with Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: our untrained mind (Kahneman’s “System 1”) is quick and often wrong, so we must train our deliberative mind (“System 2”) to step in ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%20I%20just%20described%20isn%E2%80%99t,to%20buy%20a%20new%20Lamborghini)) ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=One%20psychological%20problem%20identified%20by,of%20modern%20cognitive%20science%2C%20anticipated)). Pigliucci notes that **modern psychology confirms Stoic insights**: System 1 corresponds to those reflex impressions and automatic value-judgments, while System 2 is like the Stoic ruling faculty engaging in careful reflection ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%20I%20just%20described%20isn%E2%80%99t,to%20buy%20a%20new%20Lamborghini)). A problem, he says, is that *“too often we delegate type II decisions to type I thinking – reacting when we should be considering”* ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=One%20psychological%20problem%20identified%20by,of%20modern%20cognitive%20science%2C%20anticipated)). The Stoic solution? *Exactly what Epictetus taught.* Pigliucci writes that Epictetus anticipated the need to *“stop, reflect… then decide”* despite the difficulty, and even to eventually *“render our judgments automatic”* in the right way by habituating good thinking ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=commercial%2C%20we%20should%20not%20%E2%80%9Cjust,the%20problem%20and%20the%20solution)) ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=The%20first%20two%20disciplines%20we,we%E2%80%99re%20tired%2C%20sick%2C%20or%20drunk)). This is effectively a description of **training the hegemonikon** to always apply virtue-informed assent.

**Omission or modernization:** Pigliucci does not omit this classical schema at all; rather, he **elucidates and updates it**. In some of his work, he rephrases Stoic ideas with contemporary concepts: for example, he might compare the *hegemonikon* to our **evolved prefrontal cognition**, or liken Stoic mindful practice to a kind of **secular mindfulness**. Indeed, he uses the term “Stoic mindfulness” in places – not meaning meditation on the breath, but *attention to one’s judgments* ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=In%20my%20experience%2C%20most%20people,same%20as%20%E2%80%9Cmindfulness%E2%80%9D%20in%20Buddhism)). He carefully distinguishes Stoic prosoche from Buddhist mindfulness, but highlights they both involve continual awareness of inner events ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=In%20my%20experience%2C%20most%20people,same%20as%20%E2%80%9Cmindfulness%E2%80%9D%20in%20Buddhism)). Additionally, Pigliucci sometimes invokes **cognitive-behavioral science** (like Kahneman’s work, or neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux’s findings on emotion) to validate Stoic psychology ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%20I%20just%20described%20isn%E2%80%99t,to%20buy%20a%20new%20Lamborghini)) ([Stoicism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/#:~:text=The%20Stoic%20view%20of%20emotions,The%20cognitive)). This approach effectively *replaces nothing essential* – it instead **bridges ancient and modern understandings**. Pigliucci does, however, take a modern stance on other Stoic topics (for instance, softening the Stoic view on “despising externals” or rejecting ancient determinism ([Updating Epictetus And Stoicism For the 21st century by Massimo Pigliucci | Modern Stoicism](https://modernstoicism.com/updating-epictetus-and-stoicism-for-the-21st-century-by-massimo-pigliucci/#:~:text=Externals%20don%E2%80%99t%20need%20to%20be,not%20the%20other%20way%20around)) ([Updating Epictetus And Stoicism For the 21st century by Massimo Pigliucci | Modern Stoicism](https://modernstoicism.com/updating-epictetus-and-stoicism-for-the-21st-century-by-massimo-pigliucci/#:~:text=No%20need%20to%20cultivate%20indifference,be%20expected%20to%20embrace%20it))). But when it comes to the **structure of human agency – impressions, judgments, and assent – he upholds it** firmly as the mechanism of Stoic ethics. In a recent interview, he stressed that Epictetus’s rule *“Some things are up to us, others are not”* underpins why we must scrutinize our impressions: the *hegemonikon* should only concern itself with what is *up to us*, i.e. our own judgments, choices, and impulses ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=More%20specifically%2C%20Epictetus%20explains%20that,taking%20greater%20responsibility%20for%20these)) ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=The%20reason%20we%E2%80%99re%20often%20unaware,%E2%80%9D)). Thus, Pigliucci clearly preserves the Stoic ruling-faculty model **in substance and importance**, even as he enriches the explanation with modern parallels like System 1 vs System 2 thinking ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%20I%20just%20described%20isn%E2%80%99t,to%20buy%20a%20new%20Lamborghini)).

**Effect on rigor and depth:** Because Pigliucci is consciously translating Stoicism for today, he is careful to maintain its philosophical depth. By showing that the Stoic theory of assent anticipated modern psychology, he **argues that Stoicism’s view of agency is still valid and essential**. There is no quiet replacement going on – if anything, Pigliucci is one of those making the **implicit Stoic model explicit for new audiences**. He even wrote that *“assent — that crucial Stoic concept on which Epictetus constantly insists — should be given only provisionally and with caution”*, urging modern Stoics to adopt the same careful mindset ([Think like a Stoic: Ancient Wisdom for Today's World](https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/think-like-a-stoic-ancient-wisdom-for-today-s-world#:~:text=)). In summary, Massimo Pigliucci’s work strongly **preserves the original architecture of Stoic agency**, using new terminology and scientific insights to reinforce (not replace) the roles of the ruling reason and the act of assent in achieving virtue and serenity.

## **William B. Irvine (Author of *A Guide to the Good Life* & *The Stoic Challenge*)**

William Irvine approaches Stoicism as a practical philosophy and occasionally diverges from strict classical interpretations. **Does he discuss the hegemonikon and impression/assent explicitly?** – *Only in a simplified way.* Irvine’s bestselling *A Guide to the Good Life (2009)* is aimed at introducing Stoic techniques to a general audience, and he tends to **avoid Greek jargon**. He does, however, introduce what he calls **“Stoic mindfulness”** or a Stoic way of being *present and attentive to one’s thoughts*. In fact, a summary of his book notes that Irvine presents the practice of *“Stoic mindfulness, also known as the Stoic Discipline of Assent,”* which involves *“being fully present in the moment and paying attention to one’s thoughts and reactions.”* ([Summary of A Guide To The Good Life by William B. Irvine - The Mindful Stoic](https://mindfulstoic.net/summary-of-a-guide-to-the-good-life-by-william-b-irvine/#:~:text=%E2%80%93%20He%20introduces%20the%20practice,to%20one%E2%80%99s%20thoughts%20and%20reactions)). This indicates that Irvine *does* cover the concept of managing impressions and assent, but likely in more approachable language. Indeed, Irvine draws heavily on Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius for practical advice, which inherently includes guidance like *“don’t be controlled by the impression”* or *“focus on what’s in your control (your own judgments and actions).”* For example, he echoes Epictetus by advising readers to be vigilant about their initial reactions and to mentally say “it’s just an impression” when something provokes them (though he might phrase it more colloquially).

However, Irvine’s emphasis is often on the **outcomes (tranquility, reduced negative emotion)** and **techniques (negative visualization, fatalistic mindset toward externals)** rather than a deep theoretical explanation of Stoic psychology. In *A Guide to the Good Life*, he dedicates chapters to strategies like “Negative visualization” (premeditation of loss), “Dichotomy of Control,” “Dealing with insults,” etc., which implicitly involve controlling one’s responses. When discussing insults, for instance, Irvine suggests we pause and intellectually **reframe insults** as not truly harmful – essentially refusing assent to the idea that another’s words can hurt our character. This is classical Stoicism in action, though Irvine might not label it “withholding assent to a phantasia”; he just calls it *not getting upset because you control how you interpret the insult*. Similarly, in coping with grief or anger, Irvine advises examining and modifying one’s judgments (recognizing, for example, the naturalness of death or the triviality of many daily frustrations). All of this aligns with Stoic impression→assent theory, but Irvine tends to **gloss over the theoretical structure** and focus on **concrete advice**.

**Central or sidelined?** Irvine somewhat **downplays the formal Stoic schema**. It’s there, but **not foregrounded as the linchpin** of Stoic practice in his presentation. For instance, Irvine famously introduces a **“trichotomy of control”** (adding a category for things partly in our control) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9CTrichotomy%E2%80%9D%20of%20Control)), which strays from Epictetus’s strict dichotomy. This shift has implications: by suggesting we have *some* control over externals, he arguably muddies the Stoic focus on our internal judgments as the sole locus of good and evil ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=Irvine%20seeks%20to%20replace%20the,are%20partially%20in%20the)). Critics (and Stoic purists like Robertson) argue that this *trichotomy* undermines Stoic moral psychology ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9CTrichotomy%E2%80%9D%20of%20Control)) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=philosophical%20system,it%20seems%20to%20me%20that)). It implies that some external outcomes might be “partially good” or necessary for happiness, which is not Stoic doctrine and might inadvertently draw the hegemonikon’s concern outward. Irvine’s rationale is to make Stoicism more flexible for modern life, but the trade-off is a **step away from the original clarity** that *only* our deliberate faculty (hegemonikon) and its judgments are truly “up to us.”

Irvine does mention (in passing) practices akin to the discipline of assent. For example, he recounts Epictetus’s advice (Enchiridion 1.5) to mentally test impressions, and Marcus’s reminders to himself to see things “as they really are.” In his chapter on Stoic mindfulness (though he might not call it that explicitly), he encourages developing the habit of **self-monitoring thoughts and dismissing disturbing impressions** to maintain tranquility. In *The Stoic Challenge* (2019), Irvine introduces a gamified metaphor for adversity: viewing setbacks as “Stoic tests” or challenges to one’s resilience. This approach still fundamentally requires that one **reframe the impression** of a setback (instead of seeing it as misfortune, see it as a test or game). Thus, even when Irvine uses new metaphors, the act of reframing is basically the hegemonikon at work – choosing to assent to a different interpretation. That said, Irvine often packages these ideas without the doctrinal explanation. A reader may practice Irvine’s techniques (like saying “this inconvenience is a test of my Stoicism”) and never realize that behind this is a whole Stoic theory of impression and assent.

**Modern frameworks:** Irvine’s style of modernization is to incorporate ideas from **psychology and behavioral economics** in a light way, and to use catchy terminology. He cites, for example, research on **hedonic adaptation** – using “negative visualization” not only to prepare for loss but to increase appreciation of what one has ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=judged%20%E2%80%9Cbad%E2%80%9D%2C%20either%20in%20the,the%20goals%20of%20Epicurean%20philosophy)) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=adversity%2C%20which%20he%20calls%20%E2%80%9Cnegative,the%20goals%20of%20Epicurean%20philosophy)). This is a slight repurposing of Stoic practice (the ancient rationale was to pre-erode fear, Irvine also uses it to enhance joy). He doesn’t explicitly invoke CBT as much as Robertson does, but the influence of cognitive therapy is there in advice like *“internalize your goals”* (focus only on what you can control – which is your own actions, echoing the Stoic view) and *“catch yourself in the act”* of a bad habit to change it ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=Epictetus%20thought%20the%20key%20was,In%C2%A0Discourses%20and%20Selected%20Writings%C2%A0Epictetus%20said)). Irvine also sometimes mentions evolutionary psychology (for instance, explaining that we’re wired to never be satisfied, hence Stoicism’s value in countering desire). In interviews, Irvine has drawn parallels between Stoic practices and modern practices like mindfulness meditation, but usually to distinguish them (Stoics, for example, didn’t meditate in the Buddhist sense, but did reflect daily and remained mentally present).

Crucially, Irvine explicitly states that **his version of Stoicism departs from the ancient one in places**. He writes, *“The resulting version of Stoicism, although derived from the ancient Stoics, is… unlike the Stoicism advocated by any particular Stoic… and in various respects unlike the Stoicism one would have been taught to practice in an ancient Stoic school.”* ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=Irvine%20explicitly%20acknowledges%20that%20his,For%20example%2C%20he%20writes)). This honest admission (p. 244 of his book) covers not just his well-known departures (like the trichotomy of control), but also the general approach. For example, ancient Stoic training would have heavily stressed the **constant guarding of the hegemonikon** and the Stoic logic behind assent; Irvine’s Stoicism emphasizes **achieving tranquility and joy** through a grab-bag of Stoic “tools.” As a result, Irvine’s work sometimes **omits or softens the language of strict rational agency**. He is less likely to speak about the *prohairesis* or the innate moral *logos*, and more likely to talk about *psychological well-being*. Consequently, some critics feel that **ethical rigor may be lost** – e.g. Irvine’s Stoic is at times portrayed as someone who skillfully avoids emotional disturbance, rather than someone pursuing virtue for its own sake with emotions as a byproduct. James Warren, in a review of Irvine, noted concerns that *too much focus on tranquility* could excuse inaction against injustice ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=Warren%20objects%20that%20%E2%80%9Cnegative%20visualisation%E2%80%9D,preferring%20to%20have%20the%20offending)). For instance, Irvine suggests “accepting insults” to maintain inner peace, but Warren points out a Stoic should also prefer to **educate or discourage a wrongdoer** (a nuance that comes from Stoic ethics’ social dimension) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=Warren%20objects%20that%20%E2%80%9Cnegative%20visualisation%E2%80%9D,preferring%20to%20have%20the%20offending)).

In sum, William Irvine **preserves the basic Stoic insight that we ought to control our responses and not be slaves to impressions**, but he **does not spotlight the hegemonikon or assent process as explicitly or rigorously** as the ancient sources do. The architecture is there in the background: one can infer from his guidance that we have a “central faculty” that can decide how to respond, and indeed Irvine’s readers are taught to use that faculty to cultivate cheerfulness and resilience. But relative to other modern Stoic writers, Irvine **glosses over the technical framework**. He replaces some classical terms with everyday language (“Stoic exercise,” “pause and reflect,” “choose your reaction”) and introduces a few novel concepts (trichotomy of control, Stoic tests) that are **adjacent to the classical model**. This makes Stoicism accessible to newcomers, though it risks **sidestepping some philosophical depth**. Irvine’s Stoicism still achieves much of the Stoic agency structure “in substance under new terminology” – e.g., his concept of *Stoic psychological strategies* implicitly requires the ruling faculty in charge – but if one isn’t already familiar with Stoic theory, one might not realize the full extent of what’s happening. In practice, however, an Irvine-style Stoic practitioner would still be **monitoring impressions, adjusting judgments, and exercising agency** (just perhaps without the rich Stoic vocabulary or a focus on *wisdom* as the reason for doing so). Notably, Irvine’s later work *The Stoic Challenge* doubles down on the idea of *training your mind* to automatically respond to setbacks with a positive, determined attitude – which in Stoic terms is really about **training the hegemonikon to automatically assent only to rational impressions** ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=The%20first%20two%20disciplines%20we,we%E2%80%99re%20tired%2C%20sick%2C%20or%20drunk)). Thus, even in Irvine’s creative re-framing, the Stoic architecture peeks through, albeit simplified.

## **Comparative Synthesis: Modern Stoicism’s Treatment of Stoic Agency**

**Preservation vs. Sidelining of the Original Architecture:** By and large, the modern Stoicism movement has **preserved the core architecture of Stoic agency** – the idea that humans have a ruling rational faculty that can examine impressions and choose whether to assent – but this preservation often comes with **simplified language or new metaphors**. All major modern Stoic figures recognize, in one form or another, Epictetus’s fundamental insight: *“It’s not things that disturb us, but our judgments about things.”* This implies a separation between an external event or initial impression and the mind’s assent. **None of the leading modernizers outright reject this idea**; on the contrary, they build their advice around it, whether explicitly or implicitly. For example, the very popular mantra of modern Stoicism – *focus on what you can control, let go of what you can’t* – is essentially a shorthand for focusing on one’s own faculty of choice and not assigning value to impressions of externals. Every author above, in teaching how to live stoically, is teaching the art of governing one’s own mind. Ryan Holiday tells readers to “see things objectively” and realize they have a choice in how to react ( [Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy](https://dailystoic.com/rituals-that-will-make-you-happy/#:~:text=The%20Stoics%20were%20big%20on,that%20is%20really%20freakin%E2%80%99%20hard)); Donald Robertson drills into how to catch cognitive distortions and reframe them ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=by%20an%20impression%20concerning%20external,us%20to%20experience%20emotional%20distress)) ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=Other%20common%20ways%20of%20gaining,cognitive%20distance%20include)); Massimo Pigliucci urges that we *stop and think* before letting System 1 take over ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=But%20according%20to%20the%20Stoics%2C,go%20for%20a%20walk%20instead)) ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%20I%20just%20described%20isn%E2%80%99t,to%20buy%20a%20new%20Lamborghini)); William Irvine coaches readers to consciously adopt perspectives that foster tranquility (which requires an act of assent to those perspectives). In these ways, **the Stoic ruling faculty (*hêgemonikon*) and its control over assent remain the linchpin** of Stoic practice, even if some writers mention it in passing while others give it center stage.

That said, there is **variation in terminology and emphasis**. Holiday and Irvine prefer everyday words like *mind, attitude, perspective,* or *mindfulness* over *hegemonikon*, whereas Robertson and academic-influenced writers often use the original terms and explicitly reference Stoic psychological doctrines ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=think%20it%E2%80%99s%20clear%2C%20though%2C%20that,opinions%2C%20particularly%20our%20value%20judgments)) ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%2C%20exactly%2C%20is%20%E2%80%98assent%E2%80%99%3F%20In,of%20driving%20such%20a%20car)). Yet even new terminology often points to the same structure: for instance, calling the hegemonikon the *“executive function”* of the brain is a way to contextualize Stoicism in neuroscience ([Stoicism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/#:~:text=when%20we%20are%20suddenly%20presented,executive%20function%20of%20the%20brain)), and referring to Stoic attention as “Stoic mindfulness” ties it to a familiar modern concept (mindfulness meditation) while clarifying it’s about monitoring one’s judgments ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=In%20my%20experience%2C%20most%20people,same%20as%20%E2%80%9Cmindfulness%E2%80%9D%20in%20Buddhism)). The movement has also seen **cross-pollination with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and related fields**, precisely because CBT’s model (“thoughts create feelings”) maps onto Stoic assent theory. This has actually reinforced Stoic teachings: modern Stoics often cite CBT success as evidence that *Marcus and Epictetus were right* about impressions ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=I%E2%80%99ve%20increasingly%20come%20to%20the,difficult%20situations%2C%20in%20Stoicism%20it)). Far from sidelining the Stoic model, this cross-pollination has **brought new credibility and tools**. For example, a Stoic might practice a CBT exercise like writing down a fear and rationally disputing it, which is analogous to Seneca or Epictetus advising to interrogate one’s impression for truth-value ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=by%20an%20impression%20concerning%20external,us%20to%20experience%20emotional%20distress)).

**New Terminology vs. Original Substance:** In many cases, the **original concepts are preserved “in substance but under new terminology.”** Modern Stoic authors may rarely say “assent to impressions,” but they will talk about *choosing your response to events*, *questioning your initial feelings*, or *challenging your beliefs*. The Stoic idea that the mind has autonomy to **approve or reject a proposition presented by appearances** is translated into advice like *“Don’t jump to conclusions,” “Ask, is this up to me or not?”* ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=More%20specifically%2C%20Epictetus%20explains%20that,taking%20greater%20responsibility%20for%20these)), or *“Separate what happened from what you tell yourself about it.”* One striking example is how Viktor Frankl’s famous quote – *“Between stimulus and response there is a space… in that space is our power to choose our response”* – is frequently invoked on Stoic forums and even by Holiday ([Between the Stimulus and the Response - Daily Stoic](https://dailystoic.com/between-the-stimulus-and-the-response/#:~:text=Between%20the%20Stimulus%20and%20the,%E2%80%9D%20Frankl)) as a succinct summary of Stoic agency (despite Frankl not being a Stoic per se). This shows the Stoic notion of the *moment of assent* is being kept alive, just paraphrased in a modern idiom.

Another example: the Stoic term *prohairesis* (moral choice or will) is not widely used outside scholarly or specialist circles, but its essence is echoed every time modern Stoics talk about *character, values,* or *the choices that are “up to us.”* Some modern practitioners explicitly equate *prohairesis* with the idea of one’s **“core self” or agency** – e.g., describing it as our *“ability to choose how we act, which is our true self”* ([# You are prohairesis. Do not identity with the body or even your ...](https://www.facebook.com/groups/Stoicism/posts/8914287665290924/#:~:text=,true%20self%20is%20that)). So, even when vocabulary shifts, the conceptual structure often remains intact.

However, there **are instances of quiet modification or selective emphasis**. For instance, Irvine’s *trichotomy of control* or his focus on Stoicism as a “philosophy of life” geared toward tranquility can potentially **sideline fine points of the ancient framework**. If a reader only learns Stoicism through Irvine, they might think the key is to *dampen negative emotions via techniques*, and they might miss the constant analytical rigor Stoics applied to every impression. That said, Irvine does instruct readers in self-monitoring (he just doesn’t dive into why that’s philosophically significant beyond feeling better). Likewise, some of Holiday’s writing emphasizes **action and courage** (the “discipline of action” in Stoic terms) through historical anecdotes perhaps more than the introspective discipline of assent. Holiday assumes the latter in his advice but doesn’t explicate it as much – he often gives the *result* of proper assent (calm, effective action) without narrating the internal decision process in each example. The result is that **readers get the message** “you can control how you frame things” but might not explicitly learn the Stoic framework behind it. In effect, the architecture is preserved, but it’s somewhat *invisible* – operating behind practical tips.

On the whole, the **ruling faculty and assent are being preserved in modern Stoicism, sometimes under new names** like *mindfulness, cognitive distancing, rational choice,* or *inner freedom*. Modern Stoics still praise Marcus Aurelius’s resolve to “keep the ruling faculty in its own power” ([4 Key Stoic Terms Compared in 10 Translations of Marcus Aurelius ...](https://christopherhurtado.com/4-key-stoic-terms-compared-in-10-translations-of-marcus-aurelius-meditations/#:~:text=4%20Key%20Stoic%20Terms%20Compared,)) and Epictetus’s calls to *“not be carried away by impressions”*. The extensive use of Stoic quotes in blogs/books ensures these concepts surface frequently. Even if an author doesn’t explain the quote in technical terms, the idea seeps into the audience’s understanding. The Modern Stoicism movement (via conferences, Stoic Week materials, blogs) also publishes pieces on these topics directly – for example, articles on *prosoche* (attention) and *gnomê* (faculty of judgment) appear on Modern Stoicism’s site ([Your favourite Stoic Exercises 3) Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty ...](https://modernstoicism.com/your-favourite-stoic-exercises-3-mindfulness-of-the-ruling-faculty-prosoche/#:~:text=Your%20favourite%20Stoic%20Exercises%203,of%20the%20Ruling%20Faculty)), indicating ongoing interest in Stoic psychology.

**Impact on Ethical Rigor and Philosophical Depth:** The question of depth is important. **Does altering how we talk about the hegemonikon and assent affect the ethical rigor of Stoicism?** Some observers worry it might. Stoicism is not just about stress management; it’s about living virtuously according to nature (where *reason* plays a governing role). If modern Stoicism were to quietly drop the idea that *every* emotional disturbance is underpinned by a judgment we have the power to accept or reject, then Stoic ethics would be compromised. However, the evidence suggests that most modern Stoic writers *do* uphold this power of judgment. Even when Stoicism is sold as stress relief or productivity hack (a criticism sometimes levied at Holiday’s style), the fine print nearly always includes *“you are in control of your responses”*. That is the Stoic ruling faculty at work.

One potential area of dilution is that **some popularizers emphasize *outcome* (peace, happiness) over *process* (virtue, correct use of impressions)**. Ancient Stoics would say the goal is to live in accordance with reason (virtue), and tranquility follows. Modern presentations sometimes reverse this emphasis, highlighting tranquility or resilience as the goal. This could arguably lessen the **philosophical depth**, since Stoic agency is meant to serve virtue, not just peace of mind. For example, if one thinks Stoicism is just about *not getting angry* to stay calm, one might be tempted to avoid challenges or injustice (a point Warren raised about Irvine’s approach to insults) ([Review of Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (2009) – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/#:~:text=Warren%20objects%20that%20%E2%80%9Cnegative%20visualisation%E2%80%9D,preferring%20to%20have%20the%20offending)). Ancient Stoicism, via the hegemonikon, would ask: *Is my impression that “this situation is harmful” true, or is my duty actually to act for justice despite initial discomfort?* Modern Stoics like Pigliucci and Robertson explicitly remind readers that Stoic rational agency includes *ethical* choices (e.g. using courage or justice in response to impressions of risk or unfairness) ([Your favourite Stoic Exercises 3) Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty (prosoche) | Modern Stoicism](https://modernstoicism.com/your-favourite-stoic-exercises-3-mindfulness-of-the-ruling-faculty-prosoche/#:~:text=something%20sharp%2C%20be%20mindful%20continually,and)). Holiday and Irvine, focusing on individual improvement, sometimes under-emphasize the social virtue aspect.

Nonetheless, the **structure of agency itself is largely kept intact** and thus the system’s potential ethical rigor remains available to those who delve deeper. If anything, the best modern Stoic works encourage people to become more reflective about their thoughts and values, which is a gateway to the full Stoic ethical framework. Modern Stoicism’s **practical success** (helping people handle anxiety, grief, anger, etc.) actually hinges on the effectiveness of the Stoic model of the mind. People report that Stoic practices work – e.g., a community member using Stoicism to recover from depression noted the benefit of *“scrutinizing assent – separating fact from impression”* in moments of emotional turmoil ( [Stoicism And Overcoming Clinical Depression: An Interview With Henry Manampiring](https://dailystoic.com/henry-manampiring-interview/#:~:text=On%20practice,the%20fact%20from%20the%20impression)). Such testimonials demonstrate that the *agency structure* (deciding what to assent to) is actively being used and found valuable by practitioners today.

In conclusion, the modern Stoic revival has **broadly preserved the Stoic theory of the hegemonikon and the impression→assent process**, though often **rephrased in contemporary language**. There is no concerted effort to remove the “ruling faculty” from Stoicism; rather, there’s an effort to **explain it in ways a modern audience can grasp** – whether through psychology (CBT’s “distancing” ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=Aaron%20T,separate%20from%20reality%2C%20%E2%80%9Ccognitive%20distancing%E2%80%9D)), System 1 vs System 2 thinking ([The Discipline of Assent | Issue 160 | Philosophy Now](https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/The_Discipline_of_Assent#:~:text=What%20I%20just%20described%20isn%E2%80%99t,to%20buy%20a%20new%20Lamborghini))), neuroscience (executive function ([Stoicism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/#:~:text=when%20we%20are%20suddenly%20presented,executive%20function%20of%20the%20brain))), or relatable maxims (Frankl’s stimulus-response gap, or simply “pause and take a breath”). Some nuances have been **sidelined or simplified**, which can affect how fully someone embraces Stoic *ethical* rigor. But among the leading figures, there’s awareness that Stoicism’s depth lies in its psychology of agency. Even when new frameworks are used, they *tend to preserve the same structure of human agency*. A meditator focusing on the present moment (mindfulness) is functionally doing something similar to a Stoic watching over his ruling faculty. A CBT practitioner questioning automatic thoughts mirrors the Stoic interrogating impressions ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=by%20an%20impression%20concerning%20external,us%20to%20experience%20emotional%20distress)) ([Stoic Mindfulness in a Nutshell – Donald J. Robertson](https://donaldrobertson.name/2019/09/17/stoic-mindfulness-in-a-nutshell/#:~:text=Aaron%20T,separate%20from%20reality%2C%20%E2%80%9Ccognitive%20distancing%E2%80%9D)). Thus, *in substance*, the Stoic architecture stands.

**Does the shift in terminology meaningfully affect Stoicism’s depth?** It can, but it doesn’t have to. Modern Stoics who engage only at a surface level might miss out on how radical and comprehensive the Stoic view of agency is – for example, that it entails a profound ownership of *all* one’s value judgments and a commitment to align them with virtue. However, the movement also includes many gateways to deeper study (translations, podcasts, academic-blog collaborations). As one modern practitioner might start with Holiday’s quotes and then graduate to reading Epictetus, they’ll discover the robust framework behind the snippets. In fact, modern Stoicism’s accessibility has vastly increased the number of people conversant with ideas like controlling impressions. The *language* is updated, but when done carefully, this makes Stoicism more applicable without losing its soul. A line from Marcus Aurelius encapsulates what nearly every modern Stoic agrees on: *“The mind adapts and converts any obstacle into a means to achieve its goal”* – in other words, **a strong ruling faculty turns impressions (even negative ones) into fuel for virtue** ( [Glossary](https://dailystoic.com/glossary/#:~:text=person%20is%20their%20own%20guiding,Sometimes%20used%20interchangeably%20with%20ousia)). Modern Stoicism, in its best form, has kept that flame alive: the **rational, governing mind (by whatever name) remains at the center**, and the practice of mindful assent remains the tool for *turning obstacles into the way*.

Overall, the Stoic revival has **not jettisoned the ancient schema**. When we peel back the modern packaging, we find the Stoic hegemonikon alive and well – sometimes **disguised in new terminology, sometimes explicitly revered**, and continually essential to what makes Stoicism a distinctive and demanding philosophy of life. The degree of explicitness varies, but the consensus in the movement is that **we are responsible for our own judgments**. As Massimo Pigliucci put it, *“assent – that crucial Stoic concept – should be given only with caution”* ([Think like a Stoic: Ancient Wisdom for Today's World](https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/think-like-a-stoic-ancient-wisdom-for-today-s-world#:~:text=)). That caution, that moment of choice, is still where the Stoic rubber meets the road in the 21st century. Modern Stoics may use smartphones and cite psychological studies, but when they remind themselves *“This is just an impression, not the thing itself”*, or choose to reinterpret a setback as an opportunity, they are exercising the same **ruling faculty** in line with the same **ancient process of rational agency** that Zeno, Chrysippus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius insisted upon. The ethical rigor and depth *can* be maintained, so long as modern practitioners remember that Stoicism isn’t just a set of life hacks but a commitment to *living according to reason*. Encouragingly, many leading figures do stress this. Thus, while there is always a risk of Stoicism being watered down in popular retellings, the core architecture of **impressions, impulses, and assent governed by the hegemonikon** remains the backbone of modern Stoic practice – *preserved in spirit, often preserved in letter, and continuously rediscovered by new generations of Stoics*.

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