



## Philosophical Remedial Measures for De-Stressing

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**Abstract:** There is always a heavy load of expectations and an unbearable burden of idealism from human personality. Most of the times people suffer from own bookish idealism. Further, there is so much trust in the religious scriptures and the promises therein, that generally everyone waits, with patience, for some miracles to take place! Very few sportingly accept the fact that most of the times they only are responsible for the ongoing scenario. It is always a soothing idea to develop self-pity and place the blame on someone else for the resulting situation. In addition certain religions do encourage fatalism and past life deeds as the chief responsible factors. Much of the damage is caused owing to the habit of denying scientific temperament. Excesses have gone to the extent of relying on the higher force, God, for controlling even Nature-phenomena. For seeking answers to many of the common problems of humanity, usually people devotedly turn to religion as the last resort to get solutions. Very few turn to Science, human Psychology and Philosophy. Throughout the history same questions have repeatedly occupied minds of the thinkers and even common man. There is not a clear attempt to dislodge certain rotten emotionally stuffed concepts which have done absolutely no service to humanity as such, rather a damage is visible.

It would be wise to initiate the process of pruning human personality as a whole, in an impartial way, to understand its limitations on physical as well as mental planes. Just idealizing human personality in a theoretical manner is nothing else than wishful thinking and exhibiting own folly. It is sad to see that life is more idealized through wishful thinking than accepting its unpredictability and vagaries. Life goes on and no proposed set of answers shall ever remain eternal. Decade wise at least, a revision is a must. There are quite a good number of psychological facts indicating stress as a continuous companion in all phases of life. Unless we adopt a philosophical outlook there may not be any respite worth claiming. This paper attempts to put forth a select few 'isms' to tackle with the perennial problems of stress in human life.

**Keywords:** Human Personality, Stress, Philosophical Remedies

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## INTRODUCTION

At every phase of life there are challenges which are not, for sure, similar for all. Human nature indicates that stress is well connected to it in many ways. It all depends on one's own capacity or incapacity, to handle it. Therefore the intensity differs from person to person. In other words it is the individual response to a given situation or work. That is why there are various types but the major ones could be grouped under Acute, Episodic and Chronic. The last one does maximum harm owing to its magnitude and duration. Unfortunately our discerning capacity is not fit enough to classify and recognize all the types. Therefore, as the dormant stage is missed out of ignorance or egoistic attitude the aftermath could be quite dangerous. Well, there is yet another view, that a psychological stress is quite common and it gets extended with age unless a strict regime is followed. In short it is natural to feel stressed though sometimes we are totally responsible due to the unrealistic aims or expectations carried forward without any scrutiny. Certain incidents in life over which we have absolutely no control can even cause a Traumatic stress and that might affect all the planes of our personality. Whether a psychologist or philosopher, human nature is fascinating to one and all. We all, honestly speaking, whether educated or not, live with many unresolved conflicts within the mind. In fact, it is an enormous waste

of energy and since our attempts to dislodge are not wholeheartedly levelled, conflicts do continue to swirl around. Since we care a lot for our own chosen self-image to be presented before the society, the resulting stress continues. Similarly it is the burden of the typical luggage evolving out of much nurtured ambitions that periodically give birth to stress. It is very sad that generally despite knowing the reality and our own severe limitations, people energetically march forward to pursue a mirage. There is no acceptance of any substitute or subsidiary plans. This means mostly the stress is invented by us and though intolerable to bear, we do continue with a hope of striking something worthy in near future. There are neurotic tendencies that are voluntarily developed, may be from young age, which rigidly set in and could lead to a disaster. Refuting others point of view and striking on to own motivated decisions, becomes a habit and proves to be detrimental.

Broadly classifying, stress may show its presence mostly on the mental and physical planes. However, emotional stress and behavioral stress cannot be ruled out totally. Whether a person be an extrovert or introvert, if he carries stress, an onlooker can easily make out from the disposition. This is because stress easily manifests over the victim through aggression and irritability. Sometimes it may be expressed through fatigue or easily giving away to tears or becoming a

victim of Lethologica and Lethonomia. If remedial measures are not taken on time, it might get extended enormously and transform into a morbid guilt. There are many ideological suggestions put forth to tackle stress mostly based on physical activities and meditation, but then, the results do not seem to be very encouraging. No doubt they do help the affected person but the root cause, somehow, is not thoroughly eliminated. It is in this context that one has to go to the core of the problem where a lot of concentrated chaos is active much because of confusion and conflicts within. "Aristotle believed that happiness comes from expressing what we have rationally decided is good for us over the longer term, such as service to the community. Everything in nature is built with an end or purpose in mind, and what is unique to humans is the ability to act according to our reason and preselected virtues. A happy person is one who is stable through their cultivation of virtue, who makes the vagaries of fortune irrelevant" (Butler-Bowdon, 2013)

## PHILOSOPHICAL HANDLING OF STRESS

With all said and done, it is clear that the root cause of stress is our own wavered mind and therefore its unreasonable demands. However, physical stress may be omitted from this viewpoint because it has a well-defined arena as well as open limitations. Our thought process pattern changes with age and experience. Therefore, when we look back to the past events and our subsequent response in those times, we do feel, many of the situations did not deserve our attention so much. Ultimately it all amounts to our level of maturity and comprehension in responding to an event. There are indeed many psychological factors which govern and shape our temperament. Even then, in case we exercise the control on mind evenly through philosophical outlook much of the damage can surely be averted. There are many philosophies which have clearly concentrated on the purpose of living and then the pathways to fulfill moderately at least our desires. At the same time, there are a sizeable number which go absolutely in an academic fashion, presuming certain principles to be already in vogue. Even in case of religious philosophies, very few of them have been concise and give a straight solution or guidance for living. But then many old religions are highly engrossed in Epics and thereby story-telling process to promote the morals, ethics and virtues. Let us refer to those philosophies which have given utmost importance to human life and its possible problems. Tackling any problem is an art and sign of intelligence. Therefore, it is a task which cannot be taken easy or in a casual manner. Unless the basics are clear, nothing can be dealt with efficiency. It is in this light that the following philosophical sketches are presented in brief.

### Stoicism

A clear understanding of the self with its limitations and the world around us is the primary requisition of stoical thinking. While advancing in life we realize that there are many things which are beyond our control and therefore, grieving over this fact or wasting time is of no use. It could be a clear sign of ignorance. Lamenting over such a reality is of no use, rather wasting energy and misleading self. The outside events are governed by Nature and many other factors. In other words, at any rate, we are not solely responsible for many of the happenings around us. Other way around we need to concentrate on our own resources, capacity and the self. A virtuous life is the best type but virtue itself comprises of courage, wisdom, moderation and justice. One has to follow all these to gain the fruits of a virtuous life. Therefore, once we cognize the facts of life, then it becomes very easy to look at life and its events in a sportive manner than unnecessarily exerting for that which is beyond the scope. In brief, study of the premise of any entity and cause of an event in a scientific manner would release us from the illusory life. 'Reason' is given the supreme seat so that we can analyse facts and eschew the habit of entertaining self-built conjectures. "Stoicism expects us to first embrace the reality as it is and then check out earthly solutions than relying on the miracles which have gained publicity through mythologies. Therefore, first we shall have to accept human personality as its and then its limitations. Once this is honestly done then everyone gets a fair idea about own capacity. With this we do realize, very few things can be handled properly or the way we want because they are under our control. The rest are all conditioned due to which unless we qualify, we cannot expect results (Sharma, 2023)"

### Existentialism

The basic inquiry in this philosophical thinking is connected to our existence. This had been and continues even today as a big issue, owing to which stress automatically gathers. These philosophers are keener to know the value or importance of human existence, the true meaning of life and the very purpose of living. Since us as human beings are granted an enormous freedom, it is true that we have lot many choices for electing a suitable purpose and the act related to it. Therefore, for every effect of an act the responsibility lies on us only. We have none to blame for the results. We need to gather experience and rely more on the empirical proofs than emotionally holding on to the theoretical assumptions. At the same time existentialists insist on the fact that anxiety is a part of human life and therefore existence. Flexibility in our thinking is clearly visible and therefore, we have to utilize this propensity to adjust to the ever changing world around us. With this we will be in a position to ascertain the genuine meaning of life. Since the freedom granted to us provides chances to finalize our own style of working or living, no agency should be held responsible. In the same way, meaning of life can also be inferred through own experiences. This thinking would encourage everyone to be self-reliant and trust in

individualism than easily falling a prey to others judgements. Jean Paul Sartre put it, "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does (Butler-Bowdon, 2013)."

### **Pragmatism**

The chief aim of this philosophical thinking is to reject those theoretically impressive outlooks which miserably fail in practice. Human nature is always keen on holding on to certain ideologies so as to gain a sort of psychological security. But then usually the selection of an ideology is carried out in haste and more in accordance with the society norms or sanctions. This it finally piles up to such an extent that nothing transforms in practical life. It is like a person having wealth of knowledge but no commonsense or very little wisdom for utilizing the same in actual practice. Pragmatism may be looked upon as a philosophical movement, which would regard only the practical consequences of a proposed theory. If the results are useful or at least stand as described or predicted in theory, then the theory would definitely be acknowledged or revered. Failing this, it would be dismissed as merely as an academic acrobatic exercise. Therefore, pragmatism is essentially a humanistic philosophy. It may also be considered as Experimentalism. Most of the terms that we casually use have in fact meanings in a relative manner. Pragmatism is more concerned with human welfare and therefore, it could also be termed as a purely humanistic philosophy. William James put it very candidly ascertaining that, "That alone, therefore, is true which is expedient in practice. An idea is good only if it has a 'cash value'. Let us not, however, confuse the 'cash value' pragmatism of William James with the crass materialism of our modern business life (Henry & Lee, 1993)".

### **Psychoanalysis**

Although Alfred Adler never considered himself a true follower of Sigmund Freud, he worked hard to present reasons which effectively shape human nature. That is why his main suggestion was that instead of taking it for granted, it is wise to accept that human beings have complex nature. Everyone strives to adopt a particular style of life in response to the challenges he or she would be repeatedly facing. Everyone easily understands what is lacking and just because it is not easily accepted, the stress factor dominates. This may further orient itself resulting into inferiority complex and cause a sort of insecurity for living or the very existence. Most of the goals are vainly created, without accepting the reality. Since the feeling of inadequacy is easily experienced it amounts to almost a rigid type of mental stress. The constant reminder of what we lack becomes the major handicap in the personality. According to Freud, there are many components which contribute to the human personality as a whole. Stress is never just due to one aspect of the personality which has failed. In his famous Psychoanalytic theory Freud emphasizes more on the trio, viz; the id, the ego and the superego. These

three unitedly cause the complex nature or behaviour. As these three continuously interact with each other, they together influence the personality as a whole. Of course, certain components are primary and definitely have greater impact or contribute enormously. The id begins with birth wherein we can expect mainly instinctive and primitive tendencies. In short it is an index of our wants. Next, the ego which has emerged out from the id cares for the societal norms where it has to combat with the existing reality of the world. It tries to transform the personality to gain social approval and appreciation too. The last one i.e. the superego provides a guideline though it begins at a very early age, thoroughly tries to prune the personality. The superego exhibits its presence at the conscious, subconscious and unconscious levels. It corrects the unacceptable demands of the id and forces the ego to act in a sane manner. Since all these elements are natural in a personality, a perfect balance is very much desirable. However, often commonly an imbalance is found between these dynamic factors causing stress and therefore naturally, suffering becomes inevitable. That is why we need to create a self-styled defense mechanism to de-stress. James wrote, "We feel things differently according as we are sleepy or awake, hungry or full, fresh or tired; differently at night and in the morning, differently in summer and in winter, and above all things differently in childhood, manhood, and old age...The difference of the sensibility is shown best by the difference of our emotion about the things from one age to another... Often we are ourselves struck at the strange difference in our successive views of the same thing (Butler-Bowdon, 2017)".

### **Epicureanism**

Many times Epicurus is misjudged, unjustly criticized and concluded as merely as an example of Hedonistic outburst. In fact, we have to remember that his philosophy never loosened its ties with morality at any stage. His very basic urge was to make his disciples understand the fact that there is no afterlife and therefore, we need to strive here only to make 'happiness' as the sole aim of life. Instead of directly charging the majority as ignorant of the existing realities of life, he exerted a lot to convince that unhappiness is the result of our own unchecked belief systems and phobias. One of the best solutions according to him would be to lead as far as possible a simple life. By adopting the platform of simplicity one can surely expect peace and happiness in its genuine sense. Getting influenced by the stories mostly coming from religions and myths, is to breed more ignorance. Universe always functions in its own orderly or sometimes erratic fashion, while us human beings with our limited knowledge try to explain the mechanism easily by connecting it to God's wrath or benediction. In order to gain happiness we must learn to disconnect ourselves with the nurtured illusions. This would ward off the prevailing confusions. Leading a life with pleasure as the chief motto is not a crime at all and that should be our aim also. However, he cautions us by clarifying that not all pleasures are to be picked up

haphazardly. Therefore, living a virtuous life in itself is as good as a pleasant life. Sticking on to the righteous path is one of the most important keys to happiness. Epicurus pointed out that, "First of all, then, let us distinctly understand who we are. We are not-asserts Epicurus- the children of a beneficent God, but the stepchildren of an indifferent Nature. Life is not the designed plan of a divine artist. It is merely an accident in a mechanical universe. But we can make it, if we will, a happy or at least an interesting accident (Henry, & Lee, 1993)"

## CONCLUSION

It is quite difficult to make a choice among so many available philosophical isms. There are various reasons for this. Even a common man can understand that situations in life change from time to time and from individual to individual. What suits one person at a given instant may not be appropriate to another. Human temperament is never governed by a single mood uniformly because that itself depends on many factors in addition to internal as well as external conditions. None is and can afford to be a thorough pessimist or optimist always. In fact a pessimist is ever struggling to sunder himself from the existing scenario, while an optimist is exerting a lot to maintain the mood. That is why it is found that those who claim to be a pessimist or optimist at times are on temporary basis or fake.

On the other hand it would be wise to accept the dictates of commonsense for the process of de-stressing. Philosophical isms do propose certain outlooks which are definitely suitable and workable too but strictly under certain conditions. They cannot be handled always and applied in all circumstances. Some of them qualify for certain age groups and also educated or learned class only. Each faction of the society differs with its own outlook compared to others. That is why Intersociety and Intersociety problems differ widely in many aspects. Therefore nation wise even the moral standards are

different although a very few have gained universal status. The same is true in case of the ethos practiced, they also differ notably. Professional ethics might get criticized when a common yardstick is applied.

Therefore, it would be wise to begin always with Pragmatism and then stick on to a suitable ism for treading on to de-stressing process. At the same time impartial analysis of one's own personality with its strengths and weaknesses should be carried out. By knowing own limitations which everyone has without exception, one can know the areas of comfort and discomfort. Secondly irrespective of the set of rules followed, religion adopted and philosophical ism or isms embraced, one has to remember that stress is bound to come. It is a part of human nature. The wise person learns to alleviate it by facing it head-on by properly using or selecting proper philosophical isms than vaguely trying to uproot it on a permanent basis. Leibniz is often quoted for declaring, "The world we live in is 'the best possible worlds,' but his real point was more subtle. The best possible world is not the one specifically designed for human happiness. Human beings are driven by self-interest and are not aware of the good result of everything that happens... The world we live in is the best possible world, he famously said, even if it appears to contain a great deal of evil, because 'an imperfection in the part may be required for a greater perfection in the whole.'"7

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