Control and Choice Lesson (30 minutes) Middle School

Introduction

In this activity we will be exploring the concept of control and choice in Stoicism in a discussion style format. Specifically, this lesson goes into detail about when individuals have no control and when they do have control by using various questions to create examples. An example would be how children often have no agency over what they eat and we will explore the different ways in which children respond to this lack of control. Afterwards, we will discuss what they do have control over in these situations (This last part will be a lot more difficult depending on the age group).

Activity

Start off by asking the students a few questions about things they like and enjoy, preferably topics that are relevant to the age group.

Examples:

1. What is your favorite food?
2. What is your favorite toy?
3. What do you like to do for fun?

Then we can proceed to the other side of the spectrum by asking what they don’t like.

Examples:

1. Do you like waking up early?
2. Do you like going to school?
3. Brushing your teeth?
4. What’s your least favorite food?

Now we can inquire into how they feel when they have to do the things they don’t like, but are required to do.

Examples:

1. How do you feel when you have to eat something you don’t like for dinner?
2. How do you feel brushing your teeth?
3. Etc

If Students are in Middle School or Above

Ask if any students are familiar with Stoicism and then Introduce the Idea of Stoicism to the rest of the students, with some context of when it was from and what it’s about.

General summary:

Stoicism originated as a Hellenistic philosophy, founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium (modern day Cyprus), c. 300 B.C.E.

A fundamental aspect of Stoic philosophy is the twofold idea that ethics is central to the effort, and that the study of ethics is to be supported by two other fields of inquiry, what the Stoics called “logic” and “physics.” Together, these form the three *topoi* of Stoicism.

Links:

<https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/#:~:text=Stoicism%20originated%20as%20a%20Hellenistic,300%20B.C.E.&text=The%20name%20comes%20from%20the,to%20meet%20and%20teach%20philosophy>.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stoicism>

**END OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SECTION**

Explain that a key concept in stoicism is being able to realize what is under your control and what isn’t, and what you can't do with the things you can control.

Now give sample questions about what a stoic would do in these situations and appropriately respond or come to an agreement about the right answer.

Examples:

1. Reaction after dropping their ice cream on the ground
2. Being told they can’t go to school anymore due to covid
3. Not getting to meet friends due to covid-19

Slides for this section:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1_8GQvqkb8tqzWgtcUGXtJryKhATgIf9flyTR8e59TWA/edit?usp=sharing>

Reflection

Have a wrap up discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of stoicism, why some people practice and overall what are some examples of stoicism in the modern day (whether that be people's experiences or in media).