

Are Stoics Still Happier? Stoic Week 2018 Report part 2 (of 4) Tim LeBon

Introduction

A strong positive relationship between Stoicism and well-being has been well documented in [previous Stoic Week reports](#). This article analyses the findings from analysing questionnaires from the *start* of Stoic week 2018 and in addition introduces the improved version of the Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours Scale (SABS v4.0) . Future reports will discuss the effect of *taking part* in Stoic Week (part 3), summarise participant feedback and suggest future directions of research (part 4).

The New SABS scale

Stoic Week 2018 saw the introduction of SABS 4.0. A small team of helpers (thank you all!) reviewed SABS 3.0 and critiqued each question in terms of its clarity and simplicity. In addition, the data from Stoic Week 2017 was analysed with the extremely valuable assistance of Ray diGuseppe to eliminate items which did not have good psychometric properties. The result is a 77 item questionnaire as described Appendix A. If you took part in Stoic Week, you might like to turn straight to Appendix A where we say a little bit about each of the 77 items, provide comparison data for each item (average, low and high scores).. We intend in future to further refine the SABS scale, producing a psychometrically valid SABS 5.0 with a number of subscales.

Stoicism and Well-Being

The relationship between Stoicism and well-being has been well documented in previous reports. This section summarises the findings and answers questions that interested readers are likely to ask.

Q: In the past you've found significant correlations between level of Stoicism (as measured by SABS) and the various well-being measures. Has this been replicated?

A: Indeed it has. With 3702 valid scores the probability of the correlations indicated in table 1 below being accidental are less than 1 in a million. The correlations are slightly higher than in 2017 (figures in brackets are those for 2017) The highly significant correlation between Stoicism and many measures of well-being has now been replicated with large samples over 5 years . See appendices A, B , C and D for further information about each scale.

	Flourishing	Emotions (SPANE)	Life Satisfaction (SWL)
STOIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS	.54 (0.47)	.45 (0.43)	.39 (0.36)

Table 1 Overall association of Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours with various scales (2018 Stoic Week compared to 2017 Stoic Week)

Q: OK, so that looks like a solid finding, at least for the sort of people who take part in Stoic Week. In general, Stoics are still happier than non-Stoics. I seem to recall that in previous years you also listed how Stoicism was associated with particular emotions, as measured by the SPANE scale. What were these results this year?

A: Table 2 below shows that as in 2017, there is a significant positive association between Stoicism and each positive emotion. There is also a significant negative correlation between every negative emotion and Stoicism. We can't be so confident about which emotions are most connected with Stoicism as the differences are quite small and changeable.

Emotion	2018	2017	2016
Negative	-0.35	-0.36	-0.29
Bad	-0.31	-0.32	-0.28
Unpleasant	-0.29	-0.27	-0.24
Sad	-0.26	-0.28	-0.26
Angry	-0.24	-0.27	-0.24
Afraid	-0.24	-0.23	-0.26
Contented	0.36	0.33	0.35
Positive	0.36	0.32	0.31
Happy	0.35	0.29	0.28
Good	0.34	0.32	0.32
Pleasant	0.34	0.32	0.3
Joyful	0.32	0.28	0.26

Table 2 : Correlation of SABS 4.0 scores and emotions as measured in SPANE

Q: All this talk of correlation coefficients is a bit confusing for me. Can you just tell me how much difference it makes to my happiness whether I am Stoic or not?

A: Remember that these findings do not necessarily imply causation, so we can't say that being more Stoic makes you more happy. However we can look at the group of people who are in the top and bottom 10% in terms of Stoicism and compare their well-being scores on the various scales. Table 3 below gives this information

	SABS	SWL	SPANE	FLOURISH
Top 10% SABS Average	459.3	27.2	10.7	48.3
Bottom 10% SABS Average	291.9	18.8	-1.0	33.7
Average	372.3	23.1	4.6	41.5

Table 3: Top and Bottom 10% in Stoicism and their scores in various scales (2018)

As can be seen, those in the top 10% as measured by SABS score significantly higher than the average in all well-being scales, whilst those in the lowest 10% score significantly lower. We will also see in the next report whether doing Stoicism for a week improves well-being (it has in previous years) which would support a causal explanation of this correlation.

Q: The SABS scale now covers a really wide range of Stoic attitudes and behaviours. Can you tell which items are most connected with well-being?

A: Yes, tables 4,5 and 6 below show what appear to be the most “active ingredients” in terms of Satisfaction with Life, emotions and flourishing respectively. It appears that different items are most associated with life satisfaction and emotions on the one hand and flourishing on the other. The items connected with overthinking about the past or present have a big impact of Life Satisfaction and emotions. However practical wisdom and courage and justice are more potent when it comes to flourishing.

#	SABS Item	Satisfaction with Life correlation
11	I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what has gone wrong in the past.	0.40
20	When I have a problem, I am good at taking constructive action in a timely manner.	0.39

30	I spend quite a lot of time worrying about the future.	0.35
53	I usually do the right thing.	0.31

Table 4 : Most active Stoic ingredients of SWL

#	SABS Item	Flourishing correlation
20	When I have a problem, I am good at taking constructive action in a timely manner.	0.50
53	I usually do the right thing.	0.45
55	I do the right thing even when I feel afraid.	0.41
23	I am committed to helping my friends.	0.36

Table 5 : Most active Stoic ingredients of Flourishing

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#	SABS Item	SPANE emotions correlations
11	I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what has gone wrong in the past.	0.50
30	I spend quite a lot of time worrying about the future.	0.50
63	Even when I can't do anything more about a problem I still worry about it a lot.	0.47

20	When I have a problem, I am good at taking constructive action in a timely manner.	0.40
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Table 6: Most active SABS ingredients in terms of emotions

Conclusions

These findings replicate previous research about the relationship between Stoicism, life satisfaction, flourishing and the emotions. A more comprehensive SABS scale (SABS4.0) has helped us to be more confident about the validity these findings.

Appendices

Appendix A Stoic Attitudes and Behaviour Scale 4.0 (SABS 4.0)

#	SABS ITEM	Reverse Coded?	Explanation and Comments	Average score (all participants)	Average for those in bottom 10% SABS	Average for those in top 10% SABS
1	I think about what the ideal wise and good person would do when faced with various misfortunes in life		Many Stoics suggested we should imagine the Stoic "Sage on our shoulder", or an ideal Stoic advisor to guide us at difficult moments.	4.8	3.3	6.1
2	It can sometimes be a good thing to become angry at people.	(reverse-coded)	Read Seneca's On Anger to learn all the reasons Stoics believe that you should never become angry with people	4	3.4	4.9
3	I try to anticipate future misfortunes.		Stoics believe anticipating misfortunes can prepare us better for them. The negative visualisation exercises can help you do this.	5.3	4.9	5.8
4	The best idea is to give up trying to control people and instead focussing on ourselves and our own behaviour.		This is a key Stoic idea – we can't control other people, we can control ourselves – the "dichotomy of control"	6.1	5.2	6.8
5	Even if my circumstances in life are favourable, I will not be consistently happy unless I develop the right understanding and character.		This is central to the Stoic view of happiness – character (i.e. virtue) is the most secure route to happiness and not circumstances.	5.9	5.3	6.6
6	As long as you have the right attitude, you can lead a good life even in the most difficult circumstances.		Since a good life is one in which you exercise the virtues, difficult circumstances do not prevent you leading a good life.	5.8	4.8	6.7
7	I rehearse rising above future misfortunes..		As with item 3 this can be developed by negative visualisation exercises – it adds to item 3 a key idea which is that you rise above misfortunes (rather than, for example, imagining them happening and you being overwhelmed)	5.4	4.1	6.4

8	To flourish as a human being all you need is good understanding and good character.		Stoic virtue theory says that these are all the things you need to flourish.	4.7	3.6	6
9	I take active steps to reduce the suffering of others.		Stoic compassion involves helping others and can be developed with exercises like the Circles of Hierocles.	5	3.8	6
10	It doesn't really matter what other people think about me as long as I do the right thing.		Other people's views are not entirely in our control and are a preferred indifferent. What matters is our character and acting virtuously.	5.2	3.9	6.5
11	I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what has gone wrong in the past.	(reverse-coded)	The past is out of our control and so should not be an object of our concern, except in so far as we can learn from it. Stoic versions of the Serenity Prayer (which can be found in Epictetus) can help here.	3.5	2.5	5
12	I often think about how small humanity is compared to how big the universe it.		Exercises such as the View from Above can help us gain a perspective on our position in the universe/	5	3.9	6
13	I consider myself a part of the human race, in the same way that a limb is a part of the human body.		This analogy is to be found in several Stoics and helps us develop an attitude of Stoic Cosmopolitanism.	5	3.5	6.3
14	When making a significant decision I ask myself "What really matters here?"		This is part of Stoic practical wisdom – according to the stoics, the answer should be – acting virtuously.	5.3	3.8	6.4

15	We can sometimes influence how others behave but we can't completely control other people.		This is part of the Stoic dichotomy of control. Although some argue for a trichotomy of control, it's also arguable that it's better to see it as a dichotomy and we best influence others by acting virtuously. See https://howtobeastoic.wordpress.com/2017/07/24/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-dichotomy-of-control/	6.3	5.8	6.8
16	I cannot really be harmed by what other people say.		Since the only thing that really harms us is not being virtuous ourselves,.	4.3	2.7	6.1
17	I am committed to helping humanity in general.		Part of Stoic justice and cosmopolitanism. See http://www.paulrittman.com/Stoicism.pdf	4.4	3.2	5.8
18	The universe is a living thing.		Part of Stoic cosmology. See https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/stoicism/v-1/sections/cosmology-and-theology	5.1	4.1	6
19	I need quite a lot of money in order to be happy.	(reverse-coded)	Money is a preferred indifferent. You don't need money in order to be virtuous.	4.7	3.8	5.9
20	When I have a problem, I am good at taking constructive action in a timely manner.		This is a part of Stoic practical wisdom.	4.7	3.4	5.9
21	It is good to think about life as an ongoing journey towards becoming a better person.		According to the Stoics a key part of being a good human is to work on our ethical development. It is likely that Marcus Aurelius kept his diary (which became known to us as Meditations) for this reason.	6.1	5.1	6.8

22	Having good understanding and good character is all that is required in order to be happy.		According to the Stoics, happiness is under our control since we just need understanding and character (i.e. virtue).	4.6	3.3	6
23	I am committed to helping my friends.		Stoicism is not a passive philosophy of resignation – this is part of Stoic justice.	5.8	5	6.4
24	We can't really control other people.		This is part of the dichotomy of control.	6.2	5.6	6.8
25	There is a rational and orderly plan in the universe and in the causation of events.		This is part of Stoic cosmology and worldview.	3.6	2.5	4.9
26	When making a significant decision I reflect on what a good role model would do.		Stoic practical wisdom can involve imagining the "sage on your shoulder"	4.6	3	6
27	Nothing except our judgements and voluntary actions are truly under our control in life.		This is part of the dichotomy of control	5.8	4.9	6.7
28	I pay attention to my judgments as I am making them.		This is part of what has been called "Stoic Mindfulness".	5.1	3.8	6.2
29	I need to be well thought of by others in order to be happy.	(reverse-coded)	Since only our virtue matters, what others think of us is at best a preferred indifferent.	4.1	3.2	5.7
30	I spend quite a lot of time worrying about the future.	(reverse-coded)	The Stoic will focus on the future only in so far as that is helpful. Worrying often involves unhelpful dwelling on things outside our control	3.4	2.4	4.9
31	If bad things happen to you, you are bound to feel distressed.	(reverse coded)	Stoics believe that we do have control over our emotions by focussing on our judgements as in Epictetus's famous saying "It is not events but our interpretations of them that upset us"	3.4	2.4	4.9

32	Bad luck could stop me being happy.	(reverse-coded)	Bad luck may mean we don't get so many of the preferred indifferents, but it's virtue that really makes us happy, according to Stoics, and that's not at the mercy of luck.	3.9	2.6	5.7
33	I pay attention to my thoughts about what I intend to do before I act on them.		Stoic Mindfulness before acting is a part of Stoic virtue and practical wisdom.	5	3.8	6.1
34	I treat everyone fairly.		Justice and fairness are Stoic virtues.	5.2	4.2	6.1
35	Whatever happens to you, it's possible to rise above it and feel calm.		Stoics believe that we can control our responses and in so doing manage our emotions (dichotomy of control and Stoic theory of emotions)	5.3	4	6.5
36	If things don't go well for my friends, I can't lead a good life.	(reverse-coded)	This is the opposite of the Stoic view about well-being, flourishing and happiness. The extreme version of the Stoic view is that you can be happy (that is, act virtuously) on the rack of torture.	4.8	4.6	5.7
37	I want to become a better person ethically.		The desire and motivation to be better is a very good starting point for being a better Stoic.	6.2	5.6	6.8
38	When a negative thought enters my mind, the first thing I do is to remind myself that it is just an interpretation of the situation.		This is what the practically wise Stoic does to become calm and also to help them do the right thing.	4.3	2.7	5.9
39	We should learn to accept things that are outside our control.		This is about putting the dichotomy of control into practice	6.1	5.6	6.7

40	It is right to feel intense and overwhelming grief after a significant loss.	(reverse-coded)	Seneca for example wrote about grief in his letter to Marcia. Stoics do not think that intense are overwhelming grief is appropriate given that loss is out of our control and an inevitable part of being human.	2.5	2.2	3.3
41	I view other people as fellow-members of the brother/sisterhood of humankind.		This is a statement of Stoic Cosmopolitanism and can be developed by exercises like the Circles of Hierocles Meditation	5.2	3.6	6.4
42	Peace of mind comes from accepting that you should not care about things outside your control.		This item connects the dichotomy of control with Stoic serenity.	5.5	4.8	6.2
43	Viewing other people as fellow-members of the brother/sisterhood of humankind helps me to avoid feeling angry and resentful.		This item links Stoic cosmopolitanism with the management of emotions.	4.7	3.3	6
44	If things don't go well for me, I can't lead a good life	(reverse-coded)	Stoics believe that if things don't go well we won't get some preferred indifferents but whether we lead a good life is entirely under our control	4.6	3.3	6.1
45	Every day I think about how small we are in comparison with the whole universe.		There are exercises to help develop a sense of perspective such as the View from Above.	4.1	2.8	5.6
46	Our voluntary actions are amongst the only things truly under our control in life.		This is part of the dichotomy of control.	5.8	5.1	6.6
47	It is my duty to help others.		This is part of Stoic justice and cosmopolitanism	5.4	4.4	6.4

48	I can't control how I feel.	(reverse coded)	Stoics believe that you can control how you feel. It's true you may not have control over your initial automatic responses, but by being aware of them and challenging them you can control how you feel.	4.8	3.5	6
49	I do not act on urges when it would be unwise to act on them.		This is part of Stoic self-control.	4.4	3.3	5.6
50	Recognizing that being the best kind of person is the only thing that matters helps me face how short life is.		If all that matters is virtue, then as long as we have been a good person it doesn't matter if we have a shorter life.	4.7	3.4	6.1
51	I need to be in good health in order to be happy.	(reverse-coded)	Good health is a preferred indifferent and not essential for happiness	3.5	2.8	4.9
52	I regularly spend time reflecting on what is most important for me to live a good and happy life.		This is good Stoic practice to help us be virtuous rather than just have an intellectual awareness.	5	3.7	6.2
53	I usually do the right thing.		This is part of Stoic virtue.	5.2	4.3	6
54	Every day I spend some time reflecting in a constructive way on how I am doing as a human being.		This is to develop virtue. It can be done for example by an end of day meditation.	4.2	2.5	5.9
55	I do the right thing even when I feel afraid.		This is courage, one of the Stoic virtues.	4.7	3.4	5.9
56	Improving my ability to reason well and develop good judgement is very important.		Reason and practical wisdom are important virtues for the Stoic	6.3	5.8	6.8
57	I am committed to helping my family.		This is part of Stoic justice and compassion and virtue	6.1	5.5	6.6
58	Every day I spend some time thinking about how I can best face challenges in the day ahead.		This can be done for example in an early morning meditation including some Negative Visualisation.	4.6	3.3	6.1

59	The universe is benevolent in its overall plan.		This is part of Stoic cosmology and the Stoic worldview	3.7	2.7	5
60	I regularly think about the inevitability of death.		This is the ultimate negative visualisation and was regular practice for many ancient Stoics.	5	4.2	6
61	Pleasure is one of the most important things in life.	(reverse-coded)	Pleasure is at best a preferred indifferent and virtue is of a different order of importance.	4.1	3.3	5.2
62	Our judgements are amongst the only things truly under our control in life.		This is part of the dichotomy of control	5.6	4.8	6.5
63	Even when I can't do anything more about a problem I still worry about it a lot.	(reverse coded)	This goes against the dichotomy of control, so unproductive worry is not a Stoic practice	3.2	2.1	5.1
64	I care about the suffering of others.		This is part of Stoic compassion and virtue.	5.8	5.2	6.3
65	Every day I reflect on how all human beings are just like me in important ways.		This can help with Stoic compassion and cosmopolitanism	4.3	2.7	5.8
66	I often do what I feel like doing rather than doing what I believe to be the right thing.	(reverse-coded)	This is the opposite of virtue.	4.2	3.2	5.5
67	I try to treat everybody fairly even those people who I don't particularly like.		This is part of justice, an important Stoic virtue.	3.9	2.6	5.7
68	Every day I think about our place in the universe.		This can develop a sense of perspective. The View from Above could help achieve this.	5.4	4.4	6.4
69	I see my happiness as fully compatible with caring for other people.		This an attitude that will help people be compassionate and just	5.4	4.4	6.2

70	There is no overall plan to the universe.	(reverse-coded)	This is not the Stoic worldview	3.2	2.4	4.5
71	I think about my life as an ongoing project to become a better person.		This captures two ideas – that becoming a better person is important and that we are working towards becoming this, it is a life's work.	5.8	4.5	6.7
72	I try to treat people fairly even those people who have behaved badly towards me.		This is part of justice	5.2	4	6.3
73	If things don't go well for my family, I can't lead a good life	(reverse-coded)	This is the opposite of the Stoic view that happiness and leading a good life is under our control and depends on our virtue, and not on preferred indifferents.	4.1	3.4	5.5
74	Improving my ability to do what an excellent human being would do is very important to me.		A Stoic will rate being virtuous as the most important thing in life.	5.8	4.8	6.6
75	I am committed to helping in my local community.		This is part of Stoic cosmopolitanism and justice	4.8	3.6	5.9
76	The universe embodies wisdom.		This is part of the Stoic worldview	4.2	3	5.6
77	Some things that matter a lot for my happiness are outside my control.	(reverse-coded)	This is the opposite of the Stoic view that happiness is under our control (because it comes through practising virtue, which is under our control)	3.5	2.6	5.2

Instructions to Stoic Week participants

For each of the above items, please mark on a 7 point scale whether you agree with it from Strongly Agree (7) to Strongly disagree (1) as follows:

Strongly Agree 7

Agree 6

Slightly Agree 5

Neither agree or disagree 4

Slightly disagree 3

Disagree 2

Strongly Disagree 1

Please respond according to what you yourself think, not what you think the answer ought to be or what you ought to think.

SCORING

To obtain the scores for reverse-coded items, subtract the score from 8 (e.g. a score of 7 becomes 1).

The higher the score, the more Stoic your attitudes and beliefs are. The possible scores range from 77 (very unStoic) to 539 (extremely Stoic).

The Average SABS score for participants at the start of Stoic Week 2018 was 372

In Stoic Week 2018 (at the start) a score of

434 or above would place you in the top 10%

412 or above would place you in the top 20%

398 or above would place you in the top 30%

382 or above would place you in the top 40%

370 or above would place you in the top 50 %

358 or below would place you in the bottom 40%

344 or below would place you in the bottom 30%

330 or below would place you in the bottom 20%

311 or below would place you in the bottom 10% in terms of degree of Stoicism

Appendix B The Satisfaction with Life scale

The SWLS is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. This scale is widely used as part of the measure of Subjective Well-being (also known as happiness).

Question	Theme
Q1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal	Life is ideal
Q2. The conditions of my life are excellent	Externals met
Q3. So far I have got the important things I want in life.	Needs met
Q4. I am satisfied with my life	Satisfaction
Q5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	Acceptance

Using a 1-7 scale, users score between 35 (extremely satisfied) and 5 (extremely dissatisfied)

The SWL scale was developed by Ed Diener, Robert A. Emmons, Randy J. Larsen and Sharon Griffin as noted in the 1985 article in the *Journal of Personality Assessment*. See <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SWLS.html>

Appendix C The Flourishing Scale

The Flourishing Scale is a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score. This scale was developed by Ed Diener and associates to measure a broader conception of well-being than purely subjective life satisfaction and the presence of positive and absence of negative emotions.

Flourishing Scale Item	Theme
1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	Purpose and meaning
2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	Relationships
3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	Flow & interested
4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.	Benevolent
5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me.	Competent
6. I am a good person and live a good life.	Ethically Good
7. I am optimistic about my future.	Optimism
8. People respect me.	Respected

Reference: Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247-266. <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/FS.html>

Appendix D The Scale of Positive and Negative Emotions (SPANE)

The SPANE is a 12-item questionnaire which includes six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative feelings. For both the positive and negative items, three of the items are general (e.g., positive, negative) and three per subscale are more specific (e.g., joyful, sad). Along with the Life Satisfaction scale, presence of positive and absence of negative emotions forms the other part of Subjective Well-being. Users are asked to select a number between 1 (very rarely or never) and 5 (very often or always) to indicate how often they have experienced the emotion in the last 4 weeks.

Positive Emotions

Contented
 Joyful
 Positive
 Good
 Pleasant
 Happy

Negative Emotions

Unpleasant

Bad

Negative

Angry

Afraid

Sad

Reference: Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247-266.

<http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SPANE.html>