

How to become virtuous – Lessons from Compassionate Mind- Training/Compassion Focussed Therapy



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Why?

1) Unfinished Business

- A comment from the audience at Stoicon 2014
- “This is all very interesting, and I understand the Stoics want to help us all become more virtuous
.... But how exactly do I become more virtuous?”

How can we become more virtuous?

- It's partly a philosophical question
 - Why is virtue important?
 - What are the virtues?
 - The Stoics and ancient philosophy can help us out here!

What are the virtues?

- Wisdom (theoretical and practical)
- Justice (& Compassion)
- Courage (& Persistence)
- Self-Control (& Moderation)



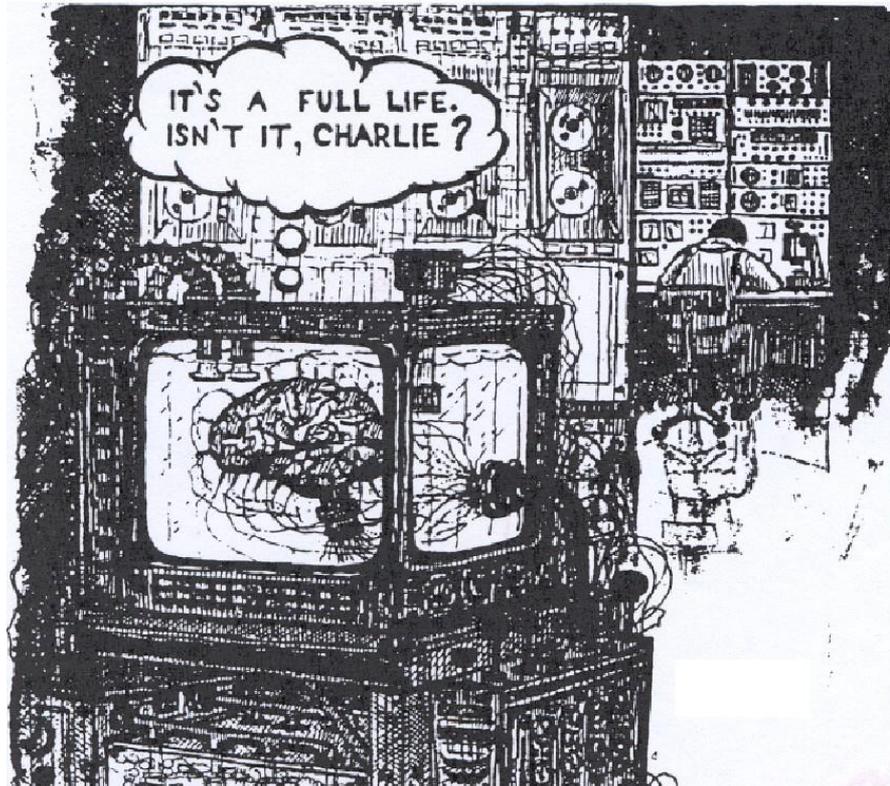
“Social science unguided by ethical philosophy is a chicken without a head.... ”

[Jules Evans](#)

How can we become more virtuous?

This an empirical question and therefore one more for the social sciences

- What training can help us become more virtuous?
- What works?



"Philosophy ungrounded in social science is a brain in a vat."

[Jules Evans](#)

Can the Social Sciences help out?

- The Stoicism Today team has been using the methods of the social science to provide some evidence that Stoicism can help
- Can we go further and reach out to see if there are evidence-based therapies that we can draw on to help us train to be virtuous?
- I'll give you my answer in a moment ...

Why Compassionate Mind Training?

2) Stoicism and Compassion

- Stoicism can come across as a somewhat cold philosophy – and not just amongst uneducated people.

Martha Nussbaum "Stoicism is an anti-compassion tradition"

- When I trained some therapists in Stoicism a couple of years ago, one person came up to me and at the end & said
- "This is all very interesting, Tim, but I've got a bit of a history about being hard on myself, and my worry is that this material will make me even tougher on myself"
- This may partly be a matter of presentation
- The challenge is then to present Stoicism in a way that clearly fosters compassion to others – this may be a matter of the language we use –avoiding the language of Spock and, to be found in some of the Stoic texts.



Can any modern evidence-based therapies inform us on virtue-training and compassion?

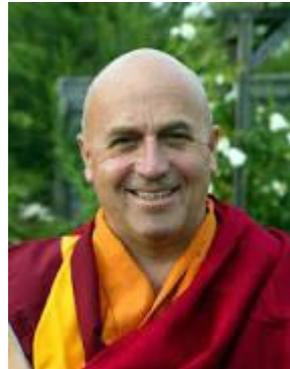
- CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy)?
 - Not so much, CBT is all about thinking realistically and behaving helpfully (part of wisdom)
 - It's more about reducing emotional distress than inculcating virtue

Can any modern evidence-based therapies inform us on virtue-training and compassion?

- Mindfulness?

- Part of virtue – the capacity to take a step back and respond rather than react – but again, not the whole of virtue
- Mindfulness without the rest of virtue could do harm

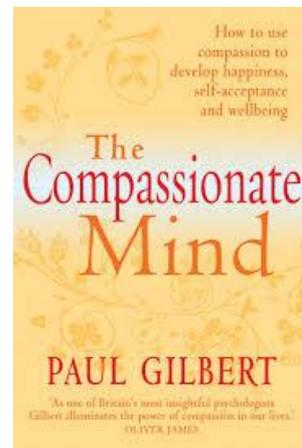
Mathieu Ricard - “a sniper waiting for his victim: ... To succeed in his ominous goal, he has to ward off distraction and laxity, the two major obstacles to attention. The practice of mindfulness thus needs to be guided by right view and insight ...and motivated by the right intention”



Compassion Focussed Therapy (CFT) and Compassionate Mind Training (CMT)

A very brief outline

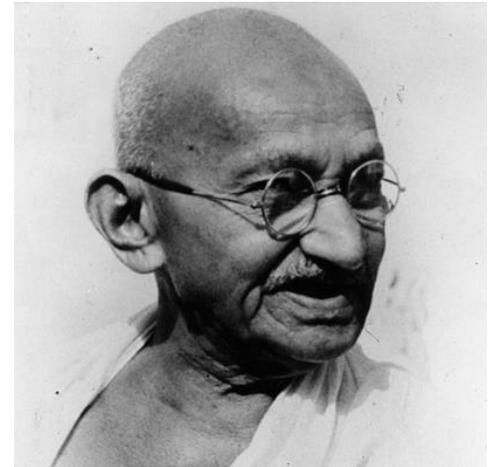
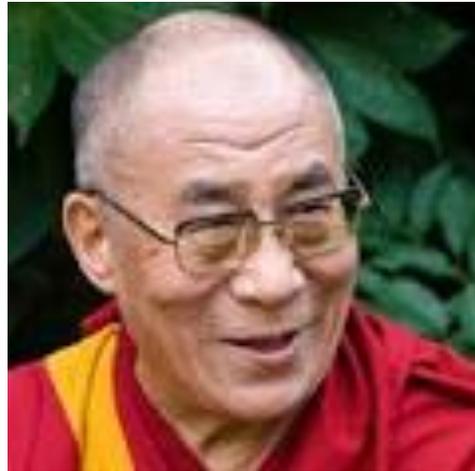
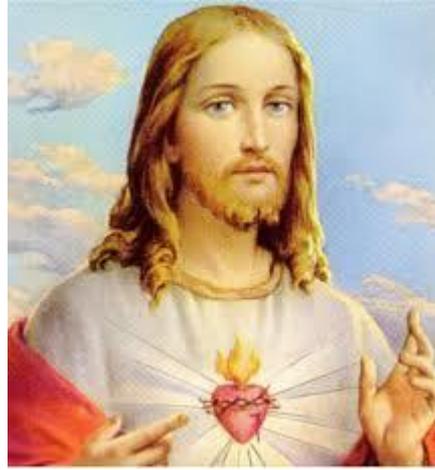
- Developed by Paul Gilbert and colleagues in the UK, building on CBT “with a heart”
- Builds on theories about the brain and emotional systems
- Aim is to develop a compassionate self in charge of us able to achieve emotional balance, compassion to others and self-compassion
- An evidence-based third wave CBT therapy
- Third wave CBT are CBT therapies with large elements of mindfulness often directed towards valued action
- CFT is the therapy, CMT is the practice for the general population



Can any modern evidence-based therapies inform us on virtue-training and compassion?

- Could CFT/CMT help us?
 - Clearly relevant to compassion
 - When we look at what CFT/CMT mean by compassion we can see that it is quite close to what the Stoics mean by virtue

What is Compassion?

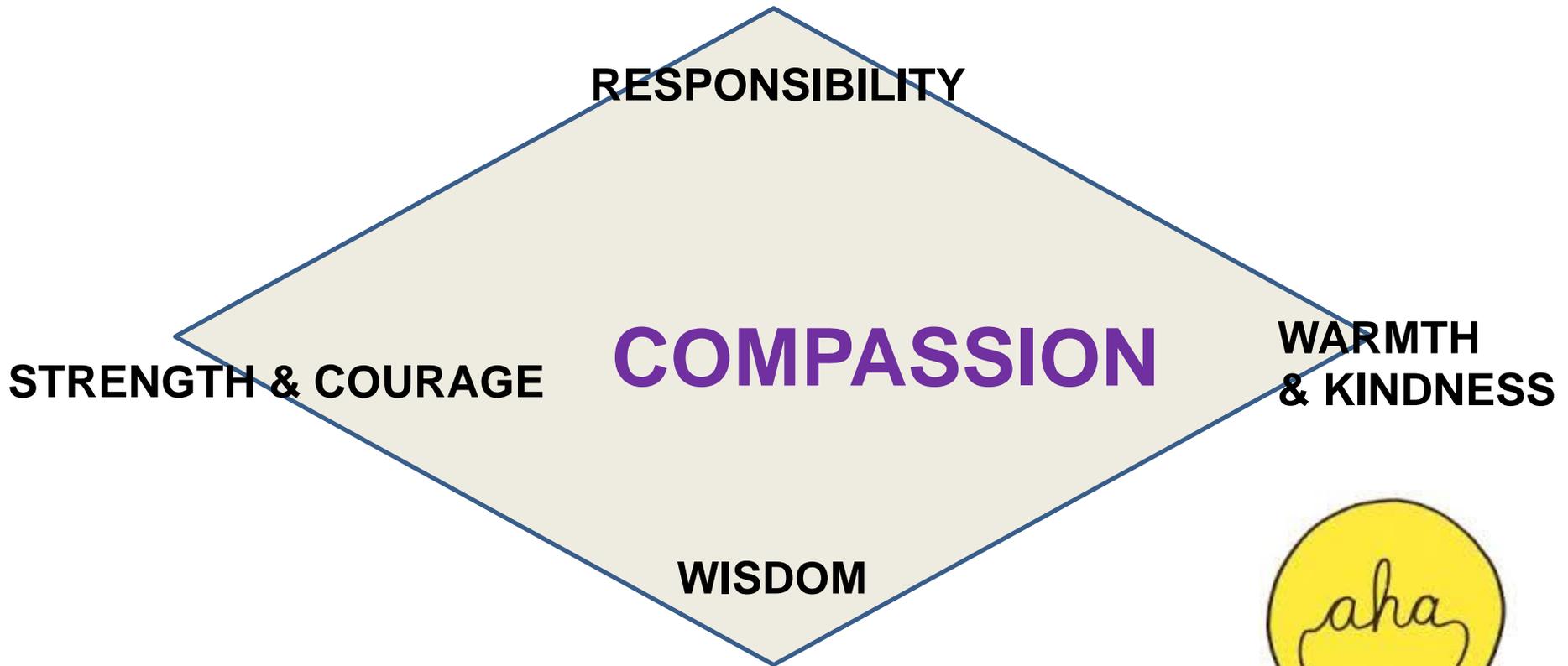


Compassion Focussed Therapy (CFT) and Compassionate Mind Training (CMT)

When people hear the word compassion, they tend to think of kindness. But scientific study has found the core of compassion to be courage. (Paul Gilbert)



Compassion in CFT

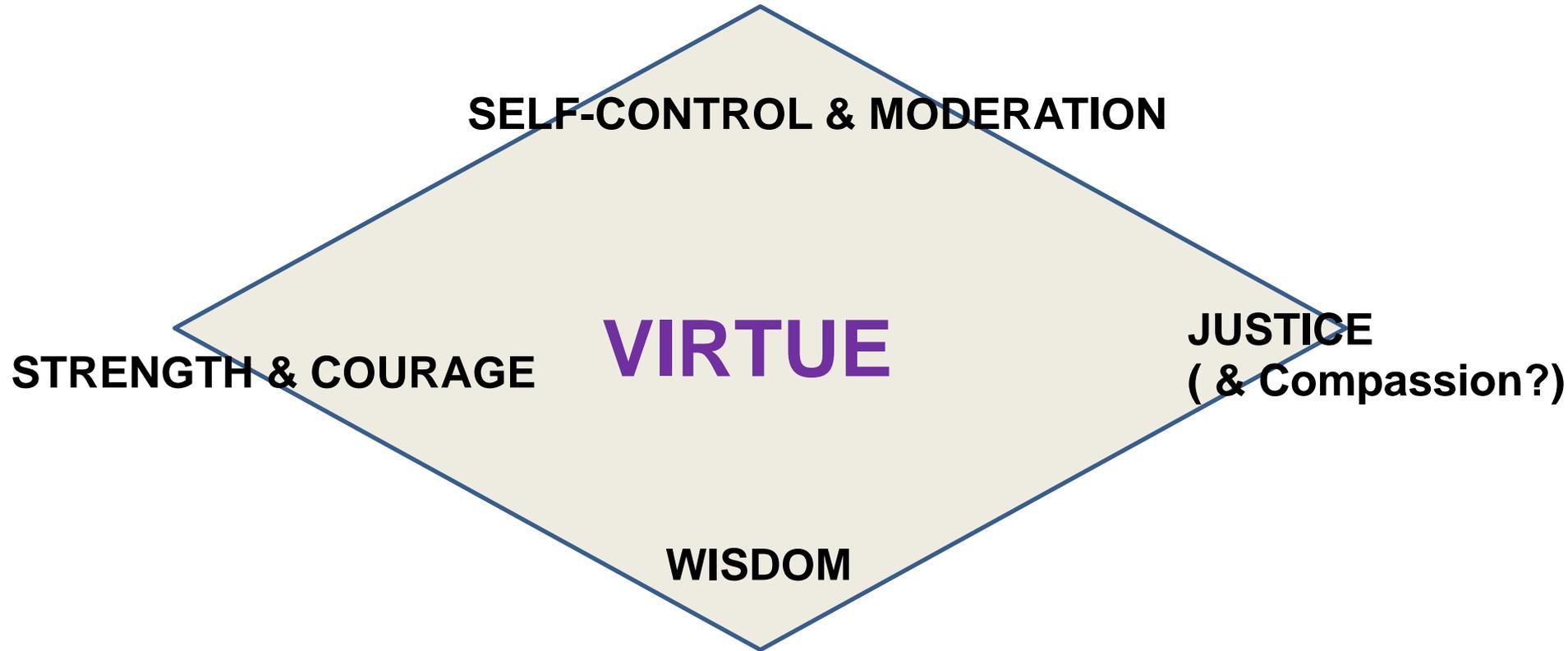


My Aha moment

“Compassion in CFT starts to look a bit like Virtue in Stoicism and ancient philosophy”



Virtue in Stoicism



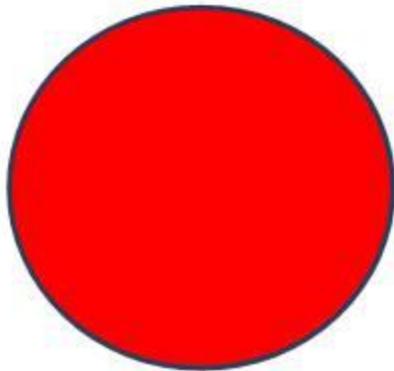
SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

3 CIRCLES EMOTIONAL SYSTEMS

adapted from Paul Gilbert's Compassion-Focussed Therapy

RED

THREAT & SELF-PROTECTION

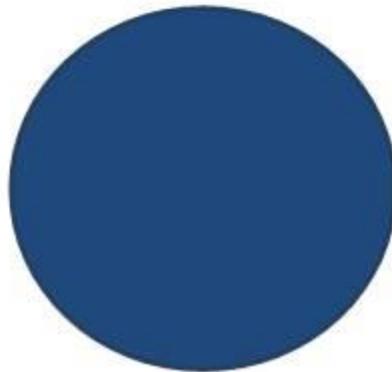


**NEGATIVE
EMOTIONS**

anxious, angry, depressed,
ashamed, disgusted,
worried, envious & afraid

BLUE

DRIVE & ACHIEVEMENT

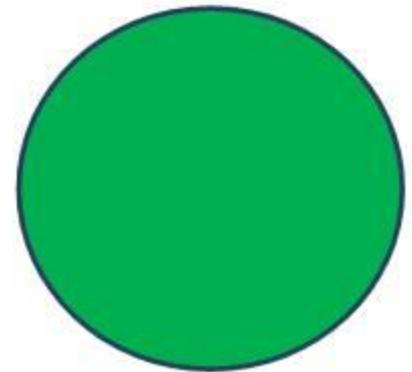


**DYNAMIC POSITIVE
EMOTIONS**

Excited, joyful, achieving,
successful, enthusiastic,
active & ecstatic

GREEN

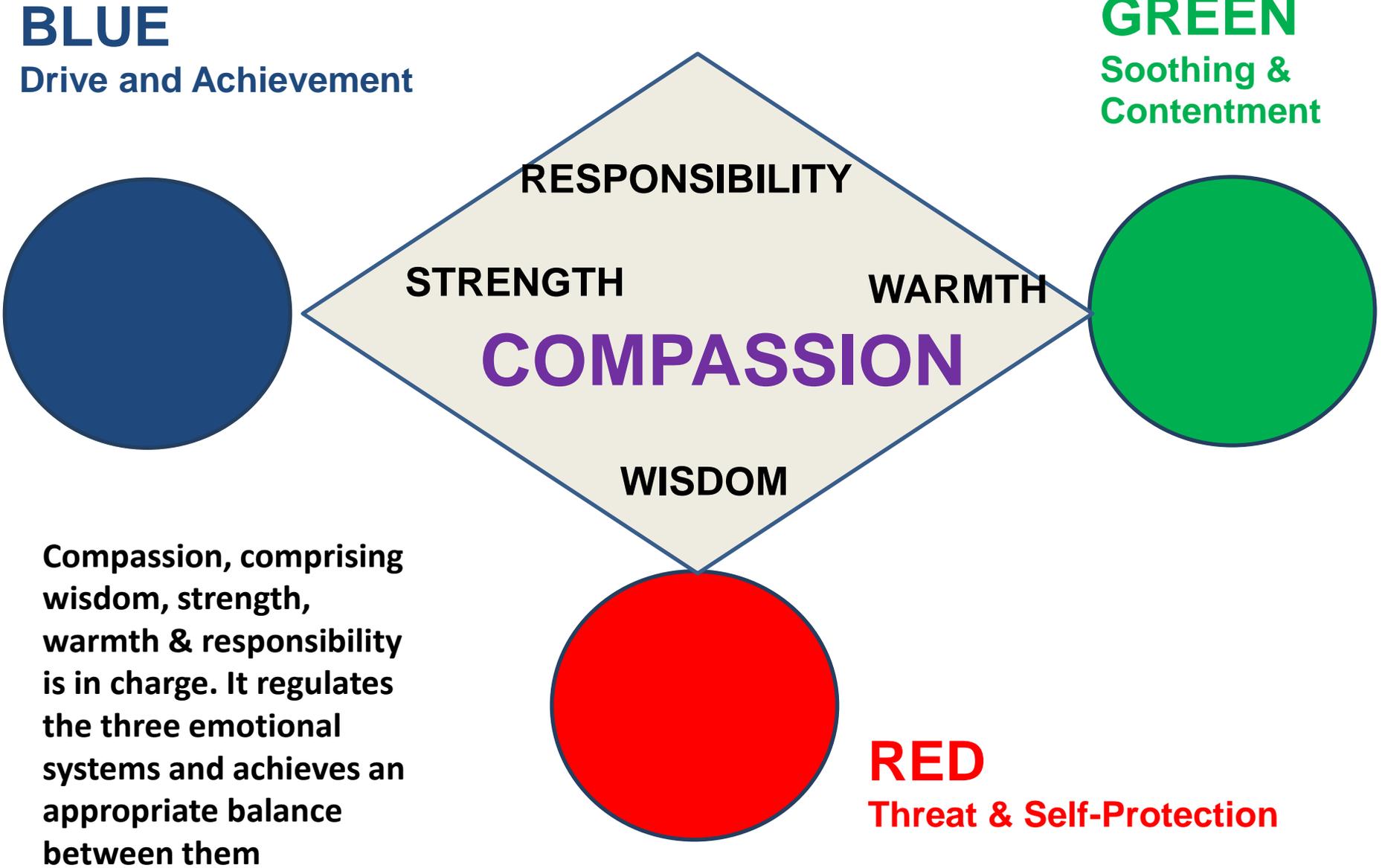
SOOTHING & CONTENTMENT



**CALM POSITIVE
EMOTIONS**

calm, content,
connected,
safe, secure and warm.

The Aim of CFT

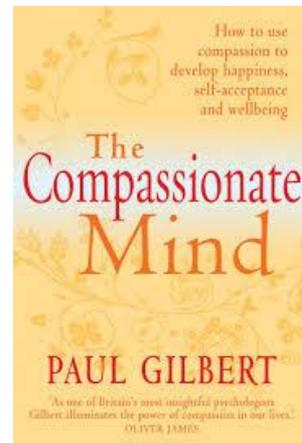


CMT/CFT – Some Techniques

- **Compassionate Breathing** – start to get the green soothing system on line
- **Mindfulness** - to help with the skill of awareness to help us respond rather than react
- **Self-compassion guided meditations.**

Imagine self acting compassionately – to help us develop a sense of self-compassion

- **Ideal Compassionate Other guided meditations** -
Imagine compassion flowing to you from another, imagine what advice they would give you – to help us get a sense of compassion from another and also to understand compassion better



Stoicism and CFT/CMT

A comparison

STOICISM

- **Virtue**
- **Negative visualisation/
early morning meditation**
- **Evening review/
Sage on your shoulder**

**Need to be vigilant so “first movements”
Don’t turn into full-blown negative emotions**

Reputation for being cold

**Philosophical investigation
- Nature of virtue & wisdom**

CFT/CMT

Compassion

**Self-compassion meditation/
Rehearsal**

**Compassionate other meditation
After the event review**

**Soothing Breathing &
Mindfulness**

Compassionate and self-compassionate

**Psychological research
- the brain, neuroscience etc**

Implications

- CFT & Modern Stoicism many similarities
- Stoicism more philosophical, so more insight into nature of wisdom and many ancient practices and readings to draw on
- CFT more psychological, so many evidence-based techniques and better understanding of the brain (“in accordance with nature”)
- Can we begin to integrate CFT & Stoicism?

5 Practical Ideas for Modern Stoicism

1) Use the language of compassion and self-compassion

- “We are all fallible human being”
- “It’s not your fault”
- “You can’t choose what’s happened to you so far – your genes, your upbringing – but you can choose how you respond to it”
- “Work towards being the best possible version of yourself”

Practical Ideas for Modern Stoicism

2) Learn soothing breathing and mindfulness so you have a better chance to notice the “first movements” and bring the green soothing system on line

Practical Ideas for Modern Stoicism

3) Use CFT-style self-compassion meditations as rehearsals for the day ahead and for challenges you face in general

- Eyes closed exercise
- Start with soothing breathing
- Like an actor, imagine yourself with all the elements of virtue – wisdom, courage, persistence, justice, compassion, self-control, moderation
- Imagine yourself behaving in a virtuous way, even when difficulties arise

Practical Ideas for Modern Stoicism

4) Use CFT-style ideal compassionate-other meditations to review how you've done in the day and how you have faced challenges

- Eyes closed exercise
- Start with soothing breathing
- Imagine an ideal virtuous other - someone who fully embodies the virtues – wisdom (including Stoic wisdom), courage, persistence, justice, compassion, self-control, moderation
- Imagine yourself interacting with this being – and that they are encouraging you, being warm to you, and also helping you become the best version of yourself.

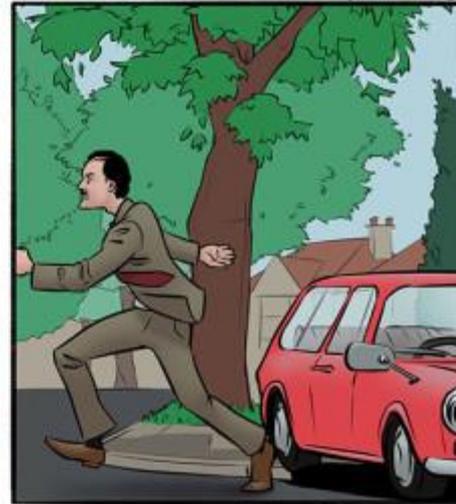
Some resources

- See my blog for Ideal Stoic Advisor Script
- <http://blog.timlebon.com/2015/06/ideal-stoic-adviser-meditation-script.html>
- <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/2014/09/08/does-stoicism-work-stoicism-positive-psychology-by-tim-lebon/>
- <http://blog.timlebon.com/2015/06/fawlty-stoics-cartoon-how-not-to-be.html>

<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/2015/06/14/how-to-become-more-virtuous-and-less-like-basil-fawly-tim-lebon/>

Fawly Stoics

Tim LeBon illustrated by Matt Aldridge



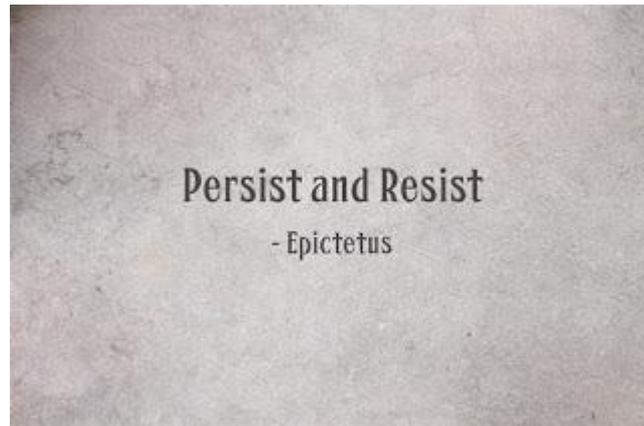
5) Blending CMT/CFT & Modern Stoicism

- This week I have produced a number of meditations of my blog
- Idea is to blend Stoic ideas about wisdom and other specific virtues using compassionate language and some CMT/CFT methods like soothing breathing and rehearsals and reviews.
- Let's try one now on persistence, an important quality (modern psychologists call it "grit")

Modern Stoic Meditation on the virtue of persistence

According to Favorinus, Epictetus would also say that there were two vices much blacker and more serious than the rest: lack of persistence and lack of self-control. The former means we cannot bear or endure hardships that we have to endure, the latter means that we cannot resist pleasures or other things we ought to resist. ‘Two words,’ he says, ‘should be committed to memory and obeyed by alternately exhorting and restraining ourselves, words that will ensure we lead a mainly blameless and untroubled life.’ These two words, he used to say, were ‘persist and resist’.”

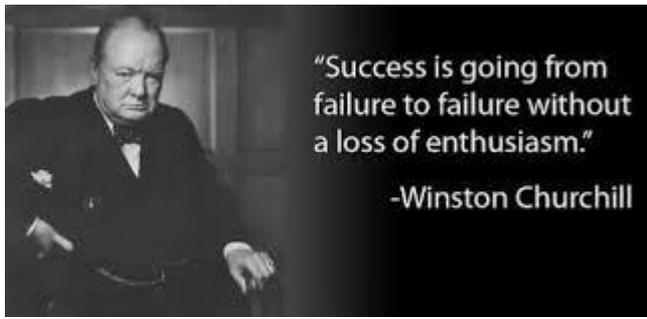
Epictetus, Fragment 10, “Discourses and Selected Writings”



Anyone who says that philosophers are too obscure or complicated should be made to read that quote. Stoicism couldn't be simpler. We must commit the words "Persist and Resist" to memory and keep saying them to ourselves. Move over mindfulness, recite the "persist and resist" mantra instead.

- At the time when we feel like giving up, we can train ourselves to become aware of the negative thoughts that make us feel that way. We can then remind ourselves “This thought is just an impression in my mind and not an objective fact like it claims to be.”
- For example, if you are running a marathon and thinking “I won’t be able to finish remind yourself

"This is just a thought, not a fact."



- As well as negative thoughts, people often give up because of a setback or obstacle . Here the Stoic advice to think of what the sage would do in this situation is valuable. When it comes to dealing with setbacks, I really admire the attitudes of Winston Churchill and Thomas Edison.
- Churchill said "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm."
- Thomas Edison suggested "Negative results are just what I want. They're just as valuable to me as positive results. I can never find the thing that does the job best until I find the ones that don't." When asked by a journalist how he had coped with failing in his first 10000 attempts to invent the lightbulb he responded "I had not failed. I had just found 10,000 ways that won't work."



- The Stoics give us one more relevant piece of wisdom in the analogy of the archer. An archer should take accurate aim, and then accept fate if the arrow gets blown off course. In the same way we should focus on what is under our control and not get discouraged if fate prevents success. We should control the controllables.

- So the Stoics give us four excellent pieces of advice when it comes to persisting and developing grit. We can use the mantra “persist”, we can challenge the validity of discouraging thoughts, we can reframe failure in the same way as the sages on success and failure do, and we can focus on what we can control and leave the rest to fate.
- Let’s spend a few moments using a visualisation informed by Stoicism and CMT/CFT to help us build up the virtue of persistence.

- So think of something you want to achieve – it could be completing Stoic Week, or changing career, or getting fitter – or something else that is important to you.
- Then nod when you've thought of something you would like to work on
- If you are comfortable doing so, now close your eyes and prepare for this modern Stoic meditation

- First to help your mind be in a calm state, let's try a few moments slow soothing breathing.
- Imagine trying to achieve this and then something getting in the way. Now in your mind's eye imagine saying to yourself "Persist, Persist". Next imagine a negative thought getting in the way – perhaps "I'll try again next year when circumstances are better". Remind yourself that this thought is just an opinion, it's not an objective fact. Reflect, like Thomas Edison did, on what you can learn from this setback. Perhaps you've learnt another way not to do it! Finally think of something you can do that is under your control to take you in the right direction. Imagine doing it, whilst repeating to yourself—persist, persist, persist. Then imagining yourself persisting until you succeed. Finally imagine feeling proud for having persisted, despite the temptation to give up.

So what does all this add up to?

Modern Stoicism + CFT

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Evidence-based and more compassionate and self-compassionate ways to train ourselves and others to be virtuous

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Thank you