

By H. Kaji & J. Heirannia

TEHRAN — Eric Thomas Weber, an assistant professor of public policy leadership at the University of Mississippi, believes that “philosophy inspires a life of careful thinking and of meaningful action.”

Philosophy “is rich with outlooks on how best to live, what goals to strive for, and how to order society in the fairest ways,” Weber told the Mehr News Agency when asked how his specialty affects his personal life.

Following is the text of the interview:

The study of philosophy has benefited me in many ways. At bottom, philosophy inspires a life of careful thinking and of meaningful action. The field is rich with outlooks on how best to live, what goals to strive for, and how to order society in the fairest ways. In particular, one philosophical outlook has been instrumental in maintaining my happiness through hard times. It is the stoicism of Epictetus. Stoicism is an outlook which calls people to concern themselves about those things in our lives over which we have control, while letting go of concerns for those things beyond our control. This attitude is in fact quite difficult to maintain. In particular, when my daughter was born and suffered medical difficulties, it inspired great sadness in me. I was not a strong stoic at first. At the same time, with practice and careful attention to my focus, directing it as often as possible to those things I can control and away from those things that I cannot, I have become a better stoic. This has enabled me to focus on doing what is best for my family, while maintaining energy and attention to my work in ways that were previously difficult to achieve.

Stoicism tends to present as a religious outlook, seeing the chance of life as directed by the will of God. Whether apparent chance represents God’s will or only accident, however, I find stoicism highly rewarding, since it strengthens one’s character and resolve to do what must be done in times

Philosophy inspires a life of careful thinking



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when we can be overcome with preoccupation about facts we cannot change. There is little benefit from obsession about matters that one cannot affect.

At the same time, I remain optimistic. Stoicism must never become an excuse not to try one’s best to ameliorate problems. After all, positive thinking may inspire people to act in the face of great challenges and to overcome what appeared at one time to be insurmountable. So, ultimately, stoicism plus pragmatic optimism, another valuable philosophical outlook from my field, can be combined to maximally helpful effect. A wonderful philosopher and teacher of mine, Dr. John Lachs

of Vanderbilt University (USA), has written about this mix of philosophical outlooks and their great value. Often philosophy can seem abstract. In this case, I can truly say that Lachs’s combination of important philosophical perspectives has had a profound and positive influence on my happiness.

In general, human and social sciences offer profound advantages for life. Tools for living better sometimes come in the form of technologies that require electricity or fuel, but many of the oldest and most important ones are found in the realm of ideas and philosophy. Logic, critical thinking, ethics, and positive thinking can make a great difference in people’s abilities to choose well for themselves. Fields like mine, philosophy, hold treasures like stoicism, which have deeply enriched my life and the well being of my family.

The human and social sciences can greatly benefit society at large as well, of course. Any society that respects its people enough to allow for freedom and self-government requires education and freedom of inquiry, such as in the realms of the humanities and social sciences. Without these, uneducated neighbors hurt each other out of simple ignorance or lack of sufficient consideration for the plight of others. The human and social sciences teach people to understand and appreciate the values of others and the various ways in which each individual might achieve his or her own flourishing. In short, the humanities and social sciences are vital for the happiness of free people.

Eric Thomas Weber is assistant professor of public policy leadership at the University of Mississippi, USA. He has published in human studies, review of policy research, Skepsis, William James Studies, Contemporary Pragmatism, and Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society. He is the author of Rawls, Dewey, and Constructivism (Continuum, 2010). His second book, Morality, Leadership, and Public Policy, will be published in the future.