



Path of the Sage:

an Introduction to
Stoic Philosophy

∞ 4th Edition

by

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The symbol on the cover was designed by Erik Wiegardt for the original website, The Stoic Registry. The symbols at the center represent four conditions necessary for life on Earth: sun, rock, water, plant. The Roman numerals are 2296, the date following Zeno's the establishment of our school at the Stoa Poikile in Athens.

Introduction to the 4th Edition

The story of this book began long before it was written. And, it began in frustration, a feeling of dissatisfaction with the world as it was when I was 19 years old and a private in the US Army. I had recently discovered the *Discourses of Epictetus*, and after reading it I remember saying to myself, “I’m a Stoic.” I wanted to be a Stoic not only in theory and in practice, but also on paper, officially. I wanted to raise my right hand and register my name as a Stoic. In 1964 such a place where I could do that didn’t exist.

Thirty-two years later, on 8 MAY 1996, I founded a website called the Stoic Registry. Until that day, I had never met another person who was interested in Stoicism. I was sure there must be someone out there somewhere, and I was determined to find him, or her. But just in case I couldn’t find anyone who was already a Stoic, maybe I could get people interested. I decided to write a book about Stoicism, one that was comprehensible to the average reader, and I would publish it and give it away.

First I had to create a web site, and to do that I had to have a computer. I’d never owned a computer and didn’t know how to use one. In 1995, when I first started working on this project the home computer was still a new phenomenon. At the time, a decent computer started at around \$2500, and I paid for mine by working overtime – after my 12-hour shift as a Correctional Deputy at Camp Barrett, an honor camp for adult male felons. I didn’t really like working overtime, so I kept a record of exactly how much money I needed to buy a computer, and I took my name off the overtime list, about six months later, as soon as much as I figured I needed.

The good thing about this job at the honor camp was that although I worked 12 hours a day, seven days in a row, at the end of my full week on duty I got seven days off. Seven on and seven off. In the week off, I studied academic tomes on Stoicism I found at the local university library, taking notes hour after hour because I wasn’t a student and couldn’t take the books home. From these notes I wrote *The Path of the Sage: An Introduction to Stoic Philosophy*.

I self-published 100 copies of *The Path* and hired a webmaster to create my original website, The Stoic Registry. Publishing the books and paying the webmaster cost me about \$1000, total. As soon as the Registry was up and running I gave all the books away. They were offered free to anyone who came to the website and asked for one. I even paid the postage. Then in 2009, following up on a suggestion from one of the members, we changed the name of the website by a vote of the members. With a 3:1 majority, the *Stoic Registry* became the cybercity, *New Stoa*.

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Between 1996 and 2009, I added, deleted, and modified *The Path* so many times I needed to write a new edition, then another, and now the 4th edition. This edition has evolved so much I recommend those who have read the original to forget it and read this version. You will find so much that is new. The History section is mostly the same, but Physics, Logic, Ethics, and especially Metaphysics all have important additions and modifications.

The 4th Edition is written for the general reader. If you are a scholar, you may be disappointed to find that footnotes, the obsession of scholarly writing, are missing. For those who think such an approach could be liberating, let me assure you that it too has its difficulties. To quote Professor Colin Wells in his preface to *The Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (Harvard, 1992), “...the professional scholar, writing in a field which has seen so much scholarly activity, feels his colleagues looking over his shoulder, and is obsessed with the need to justify himself, to reassure them that he realizes when he is oversimplifying, or when he has passed over in silence a topic generally deemed to be fascinatingly controversial, which generally means hopelessly obscure.”

The Path was not written for scholarly colleagues, but for the rest of us who want to know once and for all how to acquire the consciousness of a Stoic in our own lifetime. We will not be arguing over the differences between tart and sour. We are going to pass over the hopelessly obscure and focus on the essentials of what it means to be a Stoic today, right now. By the time you finish this book you will know whether or not you have the right stuff to be a new Stoic. How can I be sure you will know? Because, if you finish this book, even at the rapid pace at which you will be transported, both your reasoning mind and your intuitive mind will know that you too can have the one thing in this world that money can't buy: a noble character.

* *

The gender pronoun: Although I appreciate the literary liberation of women in my lifetime, I still dislike the tedium and broken rhythm of always including *he* and *she* and *him* and *her* with every passage that requires a gender reference. I try to be fair, but I'm not always “politically correct.” The attempts by some authors to compensate for millenia of gender one-sidedness can be extreme. I'm reminded of a book I read recently written by a woman who was at one time assigned as a lecturer to a US Military Academy. Although she was writing a book about the lives and hardships of all soldiers, she had a rather perverse determination to exclude men from her literary conversation. Although it is illegal for US military women to be sent into combat, as of this writing, she wrote one long passage about the emotional hardship of killing in close-up, hand-to-hand combat exclusively using the feminine pronouns *she* or *her*—as if no men were ever engaged in this aspect of war.

Personally, I found that effort to redress her gender grievance unreasonable and just plain silly. And, despite the lesson it provided for fairness in my own use of gender pronouns, I am guilty at times of exclusionary practices. *Mea culpa*. For that I apologize. My only defense is that this is an unpleasantly awkward time in the evolution of language in these matters, and I find our prose often suffering because of it. To put this suffering prose out of its misery, I will occasionally use my own gender exclusively when I really mean to include both. If you find more *he* and *him* than *she* and *her* when I am referring to Stoics, let me assure you that there is no question in my mind that many women are Stoics. First rate. And, if you are a Stoic and a woman, I'm confident you will be above all a reasonable person, and forgive me.

* * *

I would like to quote a passage from Professor Margaret Graver's work, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago, 2007). “Central to Stoic thought is the claim that a rational creature must follow nature, that 'nature leads us toward virtue.' *This foundational assertion implies that the best philosophical understanding of how a person should*

live will be grounded in observation of the way nature has created us; that is, in the corporeal and psychological characteristics of our species [this author's emphasis]. Nature does not pass out characteristics at random: if members of a species regularly exhibit some significant structural or behavioral feature, then there must be some way that feature promotes the interests of those species' members or of their biological community. Birds have feathers because they have a use for feathers; foxes hunt because hunting enables them to survive. The same is true in human beings.”

Please allow me to add my own concluding comments to Professor Graver's passage. We are what we are because Nature has given us certain attributes, and chief among them is our ability to reason. As a species, our ability to reason, even to reason about reason itself, brings us back to Nature time and again. For more than 2300 years Stoics have been searching Nature for instruction on how we can best live in this phenomenon of existence. Nature is first, foremost, and always our guide. This is what it means to be a Stoic. This is the meaning in our motto: *live according to Nature*. Nothing is more important to a Stoic than this gift from Nature to be reasonable. It defines our beliefs and the nobility of our character. And, when we fail to live up to these ideals, we are the ones who suffer.

This book is about finding Nature's certain remedy when we do suffer and how we can best transform ignorance and unhappiness into living our lives with excellence. Nature does not demand devotion to dessicated and outdated dogma; it does expect effort, but it is an effort that will be rewarded time and again throughout our lives. I know this from personal experience and from the experience of so many Stoics that I know. Join me now as I introduce you to the greatest wisdom philosophy in the history of the world.

* * * *

Dedicated to my wife and editor Amielle Moyer.

THE STOIC TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

Stoicism is a living philosophy. What that means is that Stoic philosophy is more than just great thoughts organized into a complete and coherent vision of reality. It is first and foremost a philosophy to live by, a practical application of ancient wisdom, a way of life and a guide to the choices one makes in this life. And from its beginnings, it was the only philosophy addressed to all – regardless of sex, race, or social class. Even women and slaves were welcome to follow this path, to be treated as sisters and brothers, a notion considered laughable by other philosophers who, along with Aristotle, classified them somewhere above brute beasts and below free men.

The Stoa is alive. The reason it is still alive after more than 2300 years is because it is universally adaptable and available to people of every color, class, and culture. And something else: it evolves. As the human race learns and grows, so does the Stoa. It evolves because of the strength and conviction of the Stoics themselves. Stoics have a tradition of independent thought, and we like it that way. We of the Stoic school do not follow a tyrant, as Seneca said.

This is not to say that the Stoa is an eclectic hodgepodge of assorted ideas collected here and there. It is not. Its inner core of orthodoxy moves very slowly, glacially, expanding and refining with the ages. Its foundation is secure because it is built upon the power of a single idea:

Live in agreement with Nature.

That is our motto: live in agreement with Nature, live according to Nature, live in harmony with Nature, or *kata phusin zen* – as the ancient Greeks may have said it. The founder of our school, Zeno, coined the phrase *The goal of life is to live in agreement with Nature*, but he wasn't working alone. He was following a path already begun by two of the greatest thinkers in history, Heraclitus and Socrates. Zeno is the Father of the Stoa, but Heraclitus and Socrates can rightly be called its Grandfathers. They are the deepest roots of our philosophy, and that is where our story begins.

Heraclitus (c.535-c.475 BCE)

There are a number of centuries in history when human beings rose to the challenge of greatness. One of these was in the sixth century BCE, a time when we crossed the bridge from animism to natural philosophy and Western Civilization was born. It happened in Ionia, a rich culture made up of twelve principle cities located along the southwestern coast of Turkey and on the nearby Aegean Islands in the Mediterranean.

Ionian history began when colonists from mainland Greece fled their homeland around 1000 BCE to escape the conquering Dorians of southwest Macedonia. The Grecian refugees married the native Carians to produce a new culture and a new people, the Ionians. The Ionians became merchant seamen and builders, creating great cities and temples that were renowned throughout the ancient world. Today, these cities and temples are largely forgotten, buried in the silt and dust of time. But

it's only an empire that was lost, a small matter compared to the civilization that was won, a civilization that first formed in the philosopher's mind. For the Stoa, that mind belonged to Heraclitus.

He was a nobleman of Ephesus. Some say he was a hereditary king who set aside his crown to study philosophy. He was undoubtedly a sage, a mystic genius, and the first cosmologist of the Stoa. Heraclitus has fascinated thinkers from Socrates to Goethe and from Aristotle to contemporary quantum physicists. He is the greatest of the Ionian sages, a Founding Father of Western Civilization, a creator of philosophy, and a diviner of the fundamental essence of the cosmos. He is also known as the Obscure One, a reputation acquired in his own time for a vague and riddling style that some believe he deliberately adopted to elude even the most erudite scholars.

God, he called the Logos, Reason, Intelligence, a Whole made up of the sum total of all opposites, constantly in motion, birthing, living, dying, and being born again. The Heraclitean universe is a place where all parts are related to the whole, and its symbol is fire, a rarefied fire that permeates, consumes, destroys, creates, and lights the cosmos as one single organism of life.

Unfortunately, what he wrote, in its original form, has been lost in antiquity by the systematic attempts of early Christians, such as Theodosius I (4th century CE), the last emperor of a unified Rome who set out to destroy all remnants of pagan civilizations during the years of his reign, 375-395 CE. What the Christians didn't destroy, many others attempted. In the 7th century CE, the last of the early Stoic works were likely destroyed in the willful destruction of the great library of Alexandria. Caliph Omar, the Muslim general who conquered Egypt, gave the edict that all books except the Koran were to be burned. The contents of the library, all the greatest works of antiquity, were carted off to be burned as fuel for the public baths of Alexandria, keeping their fires lit, it was said, for more than six months.

All that remains are fragmentary references from many sources, some reliable, some unreliable, from Plato to Medieval monastic scholars. And from these fragments we discover remarkable parallels between the observations of Heraclitus and modern physicists 2500 years later. His cosmology and ours describe a universe that is a unified whole; an eternal becoming, perpetual and cyclical; unity and paradox in pairs of opposites; and a dynamic living organism of movement, flow, and change. In all of these attributes of Nature, Heraclitus would include a rational consciousness and providence.

Shortly after the death of Heraclitus, another extraordinary man was born, a sculptor by trade, a man who he himself said resembled a frog, but who had been told by the Oracle at Delphi that he was the wisest of all the Greeks. That man, of course, was Socrates.

Socrates (469-399 BCE) and The Lines of Descent

Socrates was frankly puzzled over the Oracle's judgment, and so he set out to the marketplace of Athens to discover how it could be that he was the wisest of the Greeks. What he found was that while others professed wisdom without being aware of their ignorance, he, at least, was aware that he knew nothing. With this knowledge came the conviction that he must search for wisdom about right conduct, the right way to live, that he might lead the citizens of Athens in their moral and intellectual development. And so it was that every day, Socrates set out to find such wisdom wherever he went, questioning whomever he met, until he began to acquire

a following of young men who admired his brilliant and irreverent attitude, his dialectical method of questioning, and a simple yet honest lifestyle.

Socrates came to be viewed as a pest and a troublemaker by the city elders, partly because of numerous troubles the city had endured by the tyranny of some of his former students. He was sentenced to death by poisoning, drinking hemlock, and became the first martyr of philosophy. Of his disciples who were with him to the end, two went on to establish their own schools of philosophy based upon two profoundly different interpretations of his teachings. Plato, the aristocrat, admired Socrates as a thinker and established an academy just outside the city for the sons of wealth and ease to ponder the meaning of wisdom. Antisthenes, a poor and common man, admired Socrates as a man of principle who lived and died by what he believed. From him the school of the Cynics was born.

Zeno, the Father of the Stoa, was for a time a student in both schools.

THE GREEK STOA

That which contains us is endowed with reason.

Heraclitus

Nearly a century after the death of Socrates, a young merchant from the Mediterranean island of Cyprus was going about his father's business with a shipload of purple dye when his boat was caught in a storm near Athens. While he put in for repairs, and with time on his hands, he stopped in a book shop and discovered some writings on the life of Socrates. Impressed by what he read, he asked the bookseller if there were any fellows like this Socrates still living in Athens. At that moment, as fate would have it, Crates the Cynic happened by and the bookseller said, "Follow that man." And Zeno did.

Zeno (c.333-262 BCE), The Founder

Crates, the Good Genius, as he was known in Athens, was one of the most popular teachers and personalities of his day. Unlike his teacher, the intense and provocative Diogenes, Crates was said to live each day as if he were on holiday. He was the third in line of descent from Socrates. This is the lineage: the writings of Socrates' oldest student and follower, Antisthenes, inspired the zealous Diogenes, who later denied his teacher's influence and claimed he learned everything he knew about philosophy from a mouse. Diogenes preached an ascetic lifestyle, and he practiced what he preached.

He himself lived in a discarded bathtub, going about the Athenian markets with a lighted lantern in broad daylight searching for an honest man. He soon found a few, and he and his followers were convinced they were the true disciples of Socrates. It was a living ethical school whose practitioners became known as Cynics, the Greek word for *dogs*, because they forsook all material possessions and lived in the streets in their single-minded pursuit of virtue. Crates, who took over this school of ragged nonconformists from Diogenes, was Zeno's first teacher in philosophy. And for a time, Zeno was one of them.

Zeno the Cynic became Crates' heir apparent and never returned to the family business. He lived in Athens for the rest of his life, supporting himself by underwriting and insuring ships that came and went across the Mediterranean, an

early version of Lloyds of London. He remained with Crates and the Cynics for some years, then became impatient with their limited focus and lack of decorum, and he moved on. He studied with the Megarians, in their day the greatest logicians in the world, then he studied at Plato's Academy. Plato was dead, of course, and Polemo was the head of the Academy then.

About 300 BCE, Zeno finished his studies and went to the central market in Athens to discuss his philosophy with anyone who happened by. He stood on a porch known as the Stoa Poikile, the painted porch, a long colonnade facing the market. It was called the painted porch because of the murals painted along the back wall depicting real and mythological scenes from Athenian history, including the Battle at Marathon. It was here that he first began teaching a system of philosophy that was to dominate intellectual thought for more than five hundred years. The power of his discourse attracted a daily following of young men who came to the Stoa to discuss philosophy with him.

This following of students became known in Athens as the Men of the Stoa, or Stoics. Zeno taught a unified system of thought in three parts: natural philosophy (what we now call physics), logic, and ethics. He integrated an understanding of man's relationship to the universe (physics) that followed from a careful and accurate method of reasoning and rhetoric (logic) to further establish principles of conduct for one's life (ethics).

Cleanthes (331-232 BCE) and Chrysippus (c.280-c.206 BCE)

Zeno had one student who had earlier acquired some renown as an athlete, a boxer, but who was otherwise entirely without inheritance or financial assistance. It was said that when Cleanthes studied with Zeno he was so poor he couldn't afford paper and had to save his notes on clam shells and ox bones. He studied with Zeno by day and carried water as a common laborer by night.

Unlike the aristocratic students at the Academy, the Stoa, true to its founder's Cynic roots, never turned a student away. Cleanthes went on to become the second Head of the Stoic school after Zeno and also became a poet of some merit. His *Hymn To Zeus* is still commonly included in anthologies of world literature. His contribution to the Stoa, beyond his loyalty to the principles of its founder, was to add theology, the study of man's relation to God, to the traditional three branches of philosophy.

Cleanthes' successor, Chrysippus, reformulated and expanded the teachings of the founder, drawing up what would become the orthodoxy of Stoicism. It was said that without Chrysippus there would have been no Stoa, so far-reaching and profound was his influence both in his day and beyond. It was also said that if the gods performed logic then they must use Chrysippus' methods. He was a man whose voluminous writings and intellectual brilliance intimidated everyone but Cleanthes himself, which was the more remarkable because Cleanthes was never considered an original or exceptional thinker. Chrysippus admitted that around Cleanthes he was often at a loss for words.

There were numerous other students, some of them achieving renown as teachers and advisors. When the king of Macedon, Antigonus Gonatas, asked Zeno to teach at his court, he sent Philonides and Persaeus instead. Persaeus later became the governor of Corinth. Another student, Sphaerus, went to the court of Cleomenes of Sparta and later to the court of Ptolemy in Egypt. And so the philosophy of Zeno and the Stoa began to be heard farther from its home. But it wasn't until Panaetius,

the sixth Head of the Stoic school of Athens, that the Stoa found its greatest voice abroad.

Panaetius (c.185-c.110 BCE) and Posidonius (c.135-c.55 BCE)

When the old and distinguished Scipio family of Rome befriended the Head of the Stoic school in Athens, Stoicism began a new life in the heart of the Empire. Scipio Africanus, as you may recall, was the general who saved the city of Rome from the conquest of Hannibal. It was his family that introduced Panaetius and the Stoa to the Romans. Panaetius had just the right philosophy for the worldly and practical Romans, one that emphasized ethics, right conduct for an active life, that only made passing reference to physics and almost none at all to the study of logic. He was an innovator. The rigidity of the single ideal of the imaginary sage became more accepting of the many ideals of real individuals.

According to Panaetius, each person has an ideal that differs from all others and is based on and suited to his own capacity. For both Panaetius and Posidonius, living in agreement with Nature included one's own nature. By adding individual talents and capacities, Panaetius proposed that the individual has four roles he plays in society: human nature, social nature (heredity and environment), individual nature (intellect and talents), and his willed nature—how he defines and develops his character from that which he was given. It was a strong and persuasive philosophy we know mostly from Cicero, who adapted it for several of his own great writings.

The aging Panaetius' most distinguished pupil was the wealthy young aristocrat, Posidonius of Rhodes. Posidonius has been called the most scientific of the Stoics, because he spent much of his life traveling, observing, recording, and calculating natural phenomena all around the Mediterranean. His observations led him to emphasize the Stoic doctrine of the interdependence of all parts of the whole. He also concluded from his studies that many animals had a lot more intelligence than had been previously suspected and that humans were more like these animals than we had ever realized. But still, he decided, our intelligence was more closely akin to the intelligence of Nature, and that our reasoning faculty was our special link to the Logos.

Posidonius is sometimes accused of being a Platonist and Aristotelian, who only called himself a Stoic, because of his introduction of a psychological dualism to explain the source of evil in the world. Previously, Stoic thought had concluded that our attraction to pleasure and power, et cetera, was the result of external influences and ignorance that came from the environment. Posidonius admitted this factor but also felt that there was something within us that made us attracted to such things. He proposed that humans had both an irrational and a rational nature, and this is the source of the suggestion that he was more Platonist than Stoic. Unlike the dualism of Plato and Aristotle, however, these two natures were not between body and soul or matter and spirit, but were a duality that was within.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. This is not the forum to discuss whether Posidonius' dualism was or was not a dynamic continuum. That's a matter we can examine after we've spent some time with physics. For now, it is interesting to note how he thought we should deal with our irrational natures. It's a Stoic technique of fighting fire with fire. In short, he recommended the individual devote himself to constructive pleasures to manage the destructive ones. He was especially fond of aesthetics for this purpose. Music, drama, and poetry were examples of what he thought were uplifting pleasures that could overpower our attraction to the irrational

ones. Substitute a good habit for a bad habit. Practical advice we use even today without realizing that it was Posidonius who first suggested it.

THE ROMAN STOA

He [Cato the Younger] had one of the greatest reputations for honesty and incorruptibility of any man in ancient times, and his Stoicism put him above the graft and bribery of his day.

Columbia Encyclopedia, 5th ed., 1993

When we think of the Roman Empire, we all too often remember debauchery and brutality and murderous intrigue while forgetting that this was at the same time one of the greatest and most enduring empires the world has ever known. The cult of Hedonism and the emperors who hated philosophy is the Rome that Hollywood celebrates, and without a classical education there's little else that most of us know or remember. But there was another Rome, the real city, that knew greatness and honor, and Stoicism, more than any other philosophy, can be credited with promoting its highest ideals.

There were numerous philosophies vying for attention in this empire: neo-Platonists, Sceptics, Epicureans, and Cynics, who still lived like dogs in the street. But these appealed mostly to those who were divorced from active citizenry, or to those who were devoted to abstract thought and could afford the ease and serenity of a retired lifestyle. Stoicism spoke to the practical, action-oriented Roman who knew how to make things work and get the job done. Their primary interest was ethics, and their ideal was much less absolute than that of the Greeks. The Romans emphasized the concept of *gradual progress* and ignored the infallible perfection of the Stoic sage—who was viewed as theoretical and probably a myth.

Stoicism was more than just the leading philosophy of the day; for many it served the place of religion, as well. The all-encompassing Stoic god was a pantheistic deity, the conscious and providential processes in Nature, while the many Roman gods were widely viewed with skepticism. Religious activities were limited to formal ceremonies carried out by State officials that had little meaning to an individual's daily life. Stoicism showed the right way to live each day, provided counsel for the hard decisions that had to be made, and promised a direct and personal identity with the god of all creation, of Nature, and of reason.

Frequently, Stoic teachers lived on the estates of the wealthy and powerful, retained as moral advisors on matters of state and as counselors and comrades in times of calamity and bereavement. Often the wealthy and powerful were leading Stoics themselves. Cato the Younger, described above, was a devout and pious follower of the Stoa. Cicero was a lifelong student of Stoic philosophy and one of our primary sources for Stoic thought from antiquity. And, because they were so conspicuously exceptional, a number of leading Stoics became, like Socrates of Athens, martyrs to their ideals and way of life.

Barea Soranus, governor of Asia minor, was executed for treason for insisting on justice for all in his administration. Thraesae Paetus, Senator, was executed for refusing to celebrate when Nero murdered his mother Agrippina and for attracting followers who lived simply and honestly in the midst of treachery and excess. Helvidius Priscus, Magistrate of Rome, was executed by Vespasian for openly promoting equality and democracy.

It could be fairly said that this was both the best and the worst time for the ancient Stoa. Best in that Stoicism was the leading philosophy of the western world, and worst when the emperor was corrupt and corrupting—an all too common occurrence.

Seneca (c.3 BCE-65), Statesman

Seneca was the precocious son of a noble Spanish family whose influence, plus his own remarkable skill as an orator, gave him access to the inner circle of Roman power at an early age. He was also a serious student of philosophy and a prolific writer even while accumulating one of the greatest fortunes in the ancient world. When he was questioned about how he could be a Stoic and attract such great wealth, he simply replied that a wise man used money while a fool was used by it.

So renowned was he for wisdom and statesmanship that Nero's mother Agrippina asked him to be a tutor to her troublesome child. Sadly, the exhortations of even such a man as Seneca were largely ignored, and Nero became the coward and fool the world still knows him to be. At the end of their relationship, Seneca was accused of treason based on false charges brought against him by politicians who were envious of his reputation, charges that Nero was always ready to hear and believe. Out of deference to his old teacher, however, Seneca, now retired and in feeble health, was allowed the honor of killing himself rather than being killed outright by the emperor's soldiers.

Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic* and his many other literary efforts are among the most researched and best remembered writings of antiquity. There will always be those who question his commitment to Stoic principles because of his ability to prosper at a time of such brutality and widespread corruption, but anyone who has read Tacitus' account of his death knows he died a Stoic. And that's the final and ultimate test for us all.

Musonius Rufus (c. 30-100 CE), the Roman Socrates

Scion of Roman aristocracy, member of the Equestrian Order, and teacher of teachers, Musonius Rufus was the center of Stoic ideas in Rome and regarded with such respect that he is sometimes referred to as a Stoic sage. Some academics today suggest that his influence was so great he should be considered the Third Founder of the Stoa, after Zeno and Chrysippus.

As did Socrates and others before him, he published nothing, preferring to transmit his teachings orally. We know something of his lectures from anecdotes and fragments of notes preserved by various students. His tenure as teacher to the Romans was interrupted several times when he was banished and exiled by the emperors Nero and Vespasian. The Stoic philosophy he taught was never popular with self-indulgent tyrants.

Epictetus (60-120), Slave

Next, we descend from the pinnacle of power to the underbelly of Roman society where we find Epictetus, the crippled slave of a slave. Epictetus' master, one of Nero's freed slaves, in a fit of temper deliberately broke his legs so severely that he remained a cripple for the rest of his life. Despite these difficult circumstances, he was allowed to study with Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus became his protégé. Eventually he was given his freedom, and as a freed man became a teacher of philosophy in the heart of the empire.

About the year 92, the emperor Domitian, who disliked philosophy, banished all philosophers from Rome. Epictetus moved to Nicopolis on the eastern shore of the Adriatic where he opened another school, living and teaching in exile for the rest of his life. It was here that he made his greatest contribution to the Stoa. One of his devoted pupils, Arrian, who later became a historian and administrator of some renown, published eight volumes of lecture notes, four of which have survived and are collected into one volume known as *The Discourses of Epictetus*.

These discourses are more notable for their oratorical power than for their intellectual insight. Epictetus' style was that of a teacher and a preacher with a fervor Arrian claimed was irresistible. His recurrent theme of freedom, certainly one he knew deeply, emphasized that the body may be enslaved, it may be broken, but the mind was forever free. The gods themselves could not restrain it. This was man's power, his alone, and the only power truly within his control. The circumstances of his death are unknown.

Marcus Aurelius (121-180), Emperor

The last ten years of Marcus Aurelius' life were spent almost continually with his armies driving back the barbarians on the Danube frontier. This was an emperor who genuinely disliked warfare and the sight of blood, who even decreed that the gladiators back in Rome should fight only with blunt swords, but who also lived and died by his duty, mortally spent in combat. This was a great Stoic, humane and noble, meticulously just, the first ruler to wear the philosopher's beard.

It is truly an honor to know the intimate thoughts of such a man. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, written alone in these last ten years of his life, are clearly the notes of a man writing thoughts that fortified him through each day. No one knows how they were preserved. The first the world heard of them was from an obscure Medieval scholar who mentions them more than 700 years after the emperor's death. The basic themes of these meditations, repeated many times and many ways, are that we should not be deceived by the things others value, that we should cooperate with the divine flow of destiny, and we should always perform our duty to family, friends, and country with honor and charity for all.

They were the words of one of the last and greatest of the Roman Stoics. After his death, the empire was battered by a hundred years of plague, civil wars, and barbarian conquest. It was a time when people needed and wanted a savior to rescue them from almost constant grief and fear. Christianity offered that promise, a savior who they claimed was God, one who promised he would return soon to rescue his chosen people, and one who would destroy the wicked and create a safe haven, a heaven in which his followers would dwell forever. All they needed to do was believe, and all these things would come to pass, even in their lifetime. It was a powerful message, and the people yearned for it to be true, and the Stoa faltered and became Christian.

THE CHRISTIAN STOA

At no particular moment of the Christian era did Stoicism suddenly burst upon the scene. It rather exercised its influence in a permanent way without provoking any major reaction or crisis.

G. Verbeke, from *The Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought*, p. 5.

In the beginning, the sudden rise in fortunes of the Christian cult presented a new opportunity and responsibility to explain what these new beliefs were all about. Most of the early articulate leaders of the faith were well schooled in the classics in which Stoicism was, more often than not, the central focus of their education. This Stoic influence was found among a number of the early Christian writers, called apologists, who fleshed out their belief in Jesus as the son of God with Stoic cosmology and ethics. Some even borrowed from the Stoic's cosmologist, Heraclitus, in naming their god Logos, which is translated into English as *Word* (see the biblical Gospel of John 1.1-3).

Tertullian (c.160-c.230), a well born Roman and the most formidable apologist in his day, assimilated much of both Stoic natural and moral philosophy into his writings. The scholar, St. Jerome (c.347-c.420), ever the opportunist, alternately attacked or adopted Stoic themes depending on the circumstances and audience at hand. Meanwhile, John Cassian (c.360-435), the greatest monastic literary figure, frequently applied Stoic solutions to Christian questions giving the new monastic communities some of their most important and lasting foundations.

But the details of Stoic philosophy have not been discussed, and to make a list of themes that were adopted or reformulated by the Christian fathers wouldn't be appropriate here. In short, Stoic doctrine was gradually absorbed into Western intellectual history with the help of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Jerome, John Cassian, St. Augustine, Peter Abelard, Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart, to name a few. There was no common agreement about which of its themes were correct, incorrect, or irrelevant. Even today, Christian writers disagree on many things. But whether they agreed or disagreed, Stoicism was permanently impressed into the traditions laid down by the Christian thinkers of the early Middle Ages to be taken up again and again, studied, argued, accepted, and rejected through the later Middle Ages.

By the time of the Renaissance, Stoic philosophy became even more central to Western thought. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) based the heroic ideal of his tragedies upon the Stoic. Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) personally translated the *Discourses of Epictetus* from Latin into the English of her day. Montaigne (1533-92) was an early convert to Stoicism but later embraced Pyrrhonian skepticism in his disillusionment with human reason. His arguments about natural theology and natural law were taken directly from the Stoic categories (discussed later).

Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) considered by Montaigne to be the greatest scholar of the Age, was the father of a neostoicism movement that inspired Renaissance philosophers and essayists in their creation of the new humanism of that era that is still a powerful force in the world today. Economic philosopher Adam Smith (1723-90), father of modern capitalism and author of *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was a student and admirer of Stoic principles. (For a more complete account of the Stoics of the Renaissance, see John Sellars' excellent work in the Bibliography.)

Recent History: the American Founding Fathers

Most of the primary architects of the new nation and American democracy were sons of an early colonial aristocracy. Jefferson, Washington, Adams, et al, were men of means who acquired a classical education that invariably included an emphasis on Greek and Roman history and philosophy. To them, the classical ideals were

alive and meaningful and as fresh as the Renaissance in Western consciousness. President George Washington read Seneca from his youth and quoted lines from a play on the life of Cato all his life. Jefferson, the sage of Monticello, considered himself a Stoic as a young man, but despite a lifelong admiration of Epictetus, he admitted to becoming an Epicurean in his later years.

Much more research needs to be done on the influence of the Stoa in the transition from the Renaissance to the Modern Era. What we do know is that Stoic philosophy realized its own renaissance in mid-twentieth century academia and has returned to the general populace via a new kind of force in the world today.

THE FOURTH STOA

Unlike Epicureanism, which quickly froze into a fixed dogma, Stoicism developed, and became more complex, comprehensive, and plausible. It forms a system of interconnected doctrines confirming and supporting each other. Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus never managed as much; and the Stoics' successors in the history of philosophy have produced nothing more comprehensive and systematic.

Professor Terence Irwin, *Classical Thought*
(Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 181.

The age of the Fourth Stoa gradually began in the middle of the twentieth century when Stoicism was given new life by a scientific and academic community reexamining its roots in Western thought. After centuries of neglect, ignorance, and indifference, a few scholars were beginning to grow weary of the endless footnotes and investigations following Plato and Aristotle. At last they “discovered” the brilliance of Stoic thought. There are now more books and scholarly articles written on our philosophy than there have been in any other time in its history.

Today, Stoics are alive and well and living as world citizens at New Stoa, a cybercity located at: www.newstoa.com. We are the Fourth Founder of the Stoa, after Zeno, Chrysippus, and Musonius Rufus. We collectively, all of us at the international Stoic community, are the Fourth Founder, working together and organized as Stoics have never been organized before.

Stoics of the 21st century are “planning for the next 1000 years” with a *Registry* of the people of the community, a monthly eMagazine written to keep the members informed, a Stoic Council preparing for the leadership of the future, the College of Stoic Philosophers providing a free education for all, and much more. There is no cost or obligation. If you have not already visited New Stoa, you should do so now. Go to:

www.newstoa.com

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PHYSICS

The sage who does the right thing does it because he believes he follows nature. Nature as he understands it in his investigations of truth is his guiding star.

Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism*, p. 18

INTRODUCTION

At the outset it is important to know that what we currently call physics, Stoics in antiquity would have called natural philosophy. Regardless of the name, what we are talking about is Nature. For the sake of modern readers we will use the modern terminology. Stoic physics was developed over a period of six centuries, giving some of the greatest minds in antiquity time to define and clarify a Stoic world view. It was more important in the Greek Stoa than it was for the Romans who focused chiefly on ethics, but for all Stoics physics is a valuable subject for two reasons: to acquire wisdom, the first of the four cardinal virtues; and, to enable us to *live in agreement with Nature*, the Stoic motto. It is intrinsically worthwhile to understand the world, its origins and processes, which is also our first and ultimate reference for living well while living in it.

Today, of course, explanations and descriptions of Nature are primarily the domain of science and the scientists who investigate its numerous branches with an ever deeper and narrower focus. They must be our resource. The amount of knowledge required to give even a barely adequate description of Nature must be encyclopedic. In antiquity this was not the case, and physics was not a subject too big for a philosopher to master. According to Sambursky in *Physics of the Stoics*, classical Stoic physics, although entirely theoretical, more closely resembled modern physics than any other early science. Even so, much of it is dated.

All of which brings me to my own methods of presenting this introduction to the physics of the Stoics. The problem is that in six centuries of development it was expanded, refined, and channeled in so many different directions that it has been necessary to limit this presentation to a small core of ideas. That core was made even smaller by limiting it to a hard core that has withstood the brutal test of time. Four concepts were chosen, beginning with the whole of the cosmos, then gradually narrowing down to the single part, that which is of greatest interest to us, the human being. The classical Stoic concept is presented, followed by a brief examination of its relationship and validity to contemporary thought.

GOD, THE WHOLE: THE FIRST GRAND THEME

The Stoic conception of God is clearly a philosophical God, a conception based upon arguments and not the product of myth, superstition, or faith.

John Sellars, *Stoicism*, p.92

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a Spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe - a Spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we, with our modest powers, must feel humble.

Albert Einstein, *The Humble Side*, p. 33

For more than two thousand years, our greatest minds have offered innumerable proofs for the existence of God – a god, any god – and they have all failed. The most popular “proof” is also one of the oldest, having reappeared in many incarnations throughout history. It goes something like this: because there is a complex, cosmic order that’s far beyond our own intellectual achievements, it couldn’t have just happened by accident. Therefore, there must be an intelligent designer. That intelligent designer is what we call God. Unfortunately, the argument from complexity is undermined by what we know of mutation and natural selection. The spontaneous organization of simple to complex systems is an empirical fact. So, even though we are left without *positive* evidence for a designer of a complex cosmic order, there is evidence.

Big Bang

Paul Davies points out in his book, *God and the New Physics*, that in the beginning, what we currently call the Big Bang, the amount of explosive force needed to create the universe had to be calibrated very carefully with only the minutest fraction of error allowable between too much and too little. If there was too much explosion matter would have shot out too far too fast for the galaxies to form. No galaxies, no solar systems, no Earth, no one here. If the explosion was too weak, the whole business would have fallen back into itself and the universe wouldn’t and couldn’t exist except as a black hole.

How much is the difference between too much and too little? One part in ten to the 60th power. That’s like firing a rifle at a one-inch target placed at a distance of twenty billion light years (twenty billion times six trillion miles) and hitting it!

Fundamental Constants

All of the forces of Nature can be translated into numbers denoting their weight, size, energy, et cetera. Pythagoras said the forces of Nature *were* numbers, and these numbers are constant regardless of when or where they may be found. For example, an atom of hydrogen will have the same mass and electrical energy operating today as it did in another galaxy a million years ago. The Stoics said it first. It was Stoic physical theory, over two thousand years ago, that revolutionized the thinking of their day and has been confirmed in ours.

They were the first to propose that physical laws on earth were the same everywhere, even though they didn’t have experimental proof or the language of modern mathematics. What we know today is that even the minutest change in these numbers, as we saw in the Big Bang, and the whole of existence would be impossible or radically altered. Fundamental constants provide us with evidence of complex cosmic design from the beginning, even before mutation and natural selection began. From this we learn that each part is crucial to the integrity of the whole.

Designing a Designer

No matter what our belief or point of view, we still have trouble answering the first and most fundamental question: who created God? We can go on and on all we want, postulating proofs for a god’s existence or non-existence, but where did this god come from? Short of divine revelation, which is always suspect, there is no way this question can be answered with certainty. If you are one of those who have little or no faith and don’t plan to get any in this life, you may find this answer of interest.

Let's say it *was* an accident. There are those, Stoics among them, who view the whole universe as a fortuitous accident. Even with this view, however, the probability that such an event did occur or could occur is so remote, so minute, that it is simply stupendous beyond reasoning, infinitely impossible, colossal beyond imagining. And such an event in all its evolving glory and unfolding magnificence can still be given that one name, God. Cold comfort, admittedly, but more than enough for some.

The Whole

When we contemplate the existence of God, it's important to avoid visualizing a Judeo-Christian or other anthropomorphic god. According to Diogenes Laertius (Book VII 147), the early Stoics had a clear definition of their god. "The deity, say they [the Stoics], is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil, taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape. He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all, both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading, and which is called many names according to its various powers....The substance of God is declared by Zeno to be the whole world and the heaven...."

In our present state of understanding, it may be more reasonable to appreciate the god Einstein referred to when he wanted to express wonder and awe at the natural order in the universe. It doesn't have to be a supernatural being. It can be a perfectly natural phenomenon, one that we can reach back to Heraclitus and call the Logos. (By the way, this word 'logos' is a word that does not translate well regardless of what your dictionary says.) In short, the following is a fair representation of the Logos based upon classical Stoic physics:

The Logos is a force endowed with reason, continuous in space and time, pervading, defining, and uniting the cosmos. A world soul.

When the Greek Stoa began, other philosophies were teaching dualism, a separation of god and matter, where the spirit was alive and matter was dead, and where each phenomena occupied two entirely separate realms of existence. This dualistic belief has been characteristic of most of Western civilization, except for the Stoics, all the way back to Plato. Dualism says there is a god out there somewhere who designed the universe and maintains a separate residence apart from us. The Stoics flatly disagree. God is in here with us and *is* us.

A Pantheistic Thought Continuum

Today, you can divide the world into two camps, dualists and monists. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the Semitic faiths, are dualists who believe God is out there somewhere; the Hindus, Buddhists, and Stoics are monists who believe God is in here with us. We have already stated that Stoics believe in God as Nature, we are pantheists, so we can ignore the Semitic faiths and all the other dualists. Since this is a book about Stoic beliefs, we can also leave the Hindus and Buddhists alone for the time being and divide the Stoics themselves into three positions found on a continuum of thought.

Central to the issue of defining the Stoic God is the polarity between two very opposite ideas about the nature of that god. Both sides agree that the idea of god is made manifest in the processes of Nature, but here is where we part company, philosophically speaking. Is the Stoic God an *unconscious* manifestation of nature, or is it a *conscious* manifestation of Nature? There is a middle position between

these two extremes, making our polarity a continuum. The third position is one occupied by the skeptic, also known as the agnostic. The skeptic believes we *don't* know, and maybe we *can't* know. Or maybe we can. When it comes to the god question, the new Stoic can be found anywhere on the pantheistic continuum. We pitch a large tent.

The atheist or reductionist might say, “There is simply no way theists can prove cosmic consciousness in any form, and until it is a proven fact I cannot have faith that such a thing exists.” Further, those who take such a position, the pantheist as atheist, may prefer not to include a god in nature at all, maintaining that it is misleading and disingenuous to even say they believe in such a god. What they do believe in is unconscious processes of nature whereby the whole is the sum of its parts, and no more. As beautiful and remarkable as nature is, there is no reason to call it God. Call it what it is: nature. To be a child of nature is enough.

The Stoic pantheist as theist, actually a panentheist, might propose any number of the usual arguments for believing in a divine providence – Big Bang, Fundamental Constants, Creation by Design – but in the end, he or she is probably aware that the atheist is not likely to be impressed. The only one who is agreeable to their point of view is already inclined to believe as they do, so they are just preaching to the choir. It's an intuitive thing, this belief in a conscious and providential deity, a yearning that never seems to go away. If they are stung by the contempt of the atheists, they don't need to be. They are in good company.

The agnostic or skeptic might say, “Both atheists and theists have good points but presume too much. I'm not convinced either position is true. I'm not even sure it's possible to know the answer to such a question, anymore than ants can know if elephants have pheromones. Or maybe they can. How can I believe in something I can neither prove nor disprove? The position of both the atheists and theists requires faith: one requires faith in the unproven, and the other requires faith in our ability to prove matters that may not even be provable.”

Is there an orthodox Stoic position? Yes. The majority of ancient Stoics, from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius, believed in the processes of Nature as being *conscious* and that God was providential. It is the orthodox position, but some Stoics have always disagreed. Stoics are allowed to disagree. Most importantly, all three Stoics on the pantheistic thought continuum would agree on one thing, we are what we are as a creation of Nature. We have absolutely no evidence to the contrary. We are all sons and daughters of Nature, regardless of our labels or definitions.

The Super-conscious

Speaking of ants and elephants, our greatest difficulty in comprehending whether or not Nature is conscious or unconscious may be in our current reductionist orientation to life, essentially atheistic in concept. If the atheists among us will excuse me, perhaps instead of reducing we should be expanding the possibilities. First of all, let's agree that consciousness as we know and use it in common parlance is being self-aware, awareness of one's own existence. With that in mind, we can see that *unconscious* may be the wrong description of the Logos or any other form of divinity. Unconscious means that someone or thing is not conscious and is without awareness, sensation or cognition. *Subconscious*, on the other hand, means existing within the mind beneath or beyond consciousness.

If we can accept that there is an intelligence in Nature (to deny it would be either

obtuse or obstructionist), then it cannot be terribly difficult to accept that something exists beyond consciousness. To make such an acceptance is, for all practical purposes, an excellent definition of super-consciousness. Rather than think of the intelligence in Nature as unconscious or subconscious, we could conceive of it as super-conscious. If that is the case, then the realms of consciousness would be: unconscious, subconscious, conscious, and super-conscious – with the awareness of one's own existence graduating from least to greatest, respectively. If you conceive of the phenomena of consciousness in these four realms, then the consciousness of human beings may be a part of the subconsciousness of God.

Just as the idea that the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts can accurately describe the relationship of human consciousness to the parts of the brain, so too can human consciousness be a part of the whole that is the cosmic consciousness. Human consciousness could be part of the subconsciousness of a super-conscious whole. The Logos is in all likelihood as far beyond human comprehension as our consciousness is beyond the comprehension of a single part of the brain that it and a billion other parts have formed.

Or has it? Before one can approach such a matter, one must first resolve whether consciousness or the parts of the brain came first. Does cosmic consciousness use the biological brain to impart mind, or does the biological brain create consciousness? And now the argument returns, because we are back to dividing the world into camps once again: the atheists say one thing, the theists say another, and the agnostics shrug.

Theist or Deist

All Stoics believe that God is the life and processes of Nature, but there is disagreement over whether these processes are conscious or unconscious. Stoics in antiquity and in the present day can and do hold to both positions, although the majority of early Stoics were theists believing in the consciousness of Nature, not atheists believing only in unconscious processes. But the definition of the theist itself has changed. In 17th and 18th century England there was a movement within the Anglican church that proposed a god of nature, or natural theology, that existed on the evidence of reason but rejected the *supernatural revelation* commonly held by theists. They called themselves deists.

In the main, were classical Stoics theists or deists? It's important to be clear about this Christian argument. Both Anglican theists and deists were talking about a god *of* nature, not God *as* Nature. Stoics, on the other hand, are monists who believe that Nature is literally the body of God, regardless of whether that body is conscious or unconscious. We only discuss such philosophical labels as theist and deist in order to make our position clear. The Stoic as atheist would not believe the god of nature was even conscious, let alone a party to divine or supernatural revelation. The Stoic as theist would believe the God of Nature was conscious and the author of divine revelation (but not *supernatural* revelation because we don't believe *anything* is supernatural). The Stoic as deist would believe the God of Nature was conscious and providential without the addition of divine revelation.

There is further confusion on the use of the terminology itself, because one scholar may say Stoics were theists and another deists. A.A. Long said in an interview with the *Registry Report* that they were theists, then in *The Cambridge Companion* (p. 391) he said that they were deists. John Sellars in *Stoicism* (p. 94) says they are theists. So, which are we? Do we Stoics who believe the God of Nature is conscious

also believe in divine revelation?

After much searching in the literature I was unable to find a resolution to this question, so I emailed Anthony Long and asked which view is the more accurate. He didn't reply. So, I contacted John Sellars, author of *Stoicism*, and ask how he would resolve this issue. His response was clear and definitive, and I will quote it here. "Etymologically speaking, of course, theist and deist mean more or less the same, one with a Greek root, the other with a Latin root, and that's probably what was in my mind when writing the book.

The distinction between theist and deist as you articulate it is really an 18th century division and so it seems a bit anachronistic to impose it on ancient philosophers. However, if we define the two terms following [the] dictionary then yes, I would agree with you that on those terms the Stoics should be called deists, for I take it that their belief in their god is the product of rational argument rather than faith."

The majority of classical Stoics may more properly be called rational theists. But the new Stoics, those who believe in the conscious and providential processes in Nature, are not being anachronistic if they call themselves deists. In terms of *present* understanding, orthodox Stoics have always been deists, but this is a comparatively new term that a classical Stoic would not have used. Should we use such a term if the Stoics of 2000 years ago didn't? We can, and I believe we should. After all, we speak of Stoic physics even though they would have preferred to call this section Natural Philosophy.

The Whole Again

The first and ultimate principle of Stoic physics is that the Logos and matter are one on a continuum. Logos is the active principle and matter is passive, not dead. Both are material and each is contained in the other. We see the cosmos as a single, rational organism shining in the emptiness of the void, and that which makes it active pervades, defines, and unites each part of the whole. The Logos, God, the Natural Order is one whole made up of interrelated parts, and such a One is by our reckoning self-contained and self-sustaining.

I'm reminded of when I first realized that we all had to eat to stay alive. Specifically, like it or not, we all have to eat *each other* to survive on this planet, which I considered barbaric and rather poorly conceived by whomever or whatever designed such unpleasantness. In time, when I came to understand that we live in a closed system that survives and regenerates itself by exchanging parts, I came to view our situation with awe. The never ending drama of the hunt, the kill, and feast represents the predatory animal, the top of the food chain, including us, consuming parts that consume other parts all the way down to the inorganic compounds in the soil. These compounds then get back what they lost at the beginning of the whole process when they nourished the herbs that nourished the herbivores that nourished the carnivores and omnivores. When we the multitude of biotic life forms die and settle back into the earth, the cycle is complete and begun again.

Now the question is, how does this idea, the unity of the whole, which actually began with the Stoic's cosmologist Heraclitus, how does this idea square with contemporary physics? In Fritjof Capra's book, *The Tao of Physics*, he speaks of two Grand Themes in the physics of the twentieth century: (1) fundamental unity and interrelatedness of the whole; and (2), the intrinsically dynamic nature of this phenomenon. These two themes he and other contemporary writers return to time

and time again.

Now we know something of the unity and interrelatedness of all parts of the whole; we've seen that the best evidence for the existence of a god comes from the Fundamental Constants in Nature where even the smallest change in any one of these interrelated parts drastically alters the conditions of the whole; and, we've seen that the Stoics were virtually alone in Western civilization in their description of the One until the twentieth century and Grand Theme number one. But what is the meaning of Grand Theme number two?

THE DYNAMIC CONTINUUM: THE 2nd GRAND THEME

The essential feature of their theory is the dynamic notion of the concept of continuity which makes the Stoic doctrine one of the great original contributions in the history of physical systems.

S. Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics*, p. vii

First, we need to understand the idea of the continuum before we can discuss what makes a continuum dynamic, and to do that we have to go back once again to Heraclitus. While we're at it, we can go back to China in the same 6th century BCE, and, using one concept, one symbol, we can understand both the dynamic continuum and what is sometimes described as the basis of Chinese thought: *yin/yang*.

Yin/Yang, one of the truly great symbols in history is from the *Tao Te Ching* where all change in Nature is seen by the Taoist as created by the dynamics of polar opposites. Heraclitus came to the same conclusion at approximately the same time thousands of miles away in the Mediterranean. Because of the dynamic interplay along a continuum, all opposites are united. Remember the Ultimate Principle: Logos and matter, active and passive are united into one. All polar opposites – hot and cold, black and white, et cetera – are united on a continuum, and the cosmos is the sum of all opposites, unified.

Is this really true? Do physicists and cosmologists agree today? Yes. It is especially apparent at the subatomic level where it can be shown that particles are both destructible and indestructible. At the atomic level, matter can appear as both particles and waves. This can be explained by probability waves, which lead to a new concept, that atomic particles both exist and are nonexistent. In the fourth dimension of relativity theory, space and time are unified, as are force and matter. And so on. In physics such a unification was examined at length and given the name “complementarity” by Niels Bohr, who, incidentally, has the *yin/yang* symbol centered in the coat of arms he designed upon being knighted for his contributions to the science of the twentieth century.

The Dynamic Continuum

Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed. You cannot step twice into the same river, other waters are continually flowing on. Heraclitus

So now we explore the second of the two Grand Themes of modern physics: the intrinsically dynamic Nature of physical phenomena – flux, motion, change, all from the interplay of opposites. What Heraclitus began, Zeno, Chrysippus, and Posidonius adopted and developed and modern physics confirms. Chrysippus explains the continuum as something that has neither finite nor infinite parts. It

doesn't have parts at all. It's not static but ever incomplete and fluid, "...a dynamic whole which is always in the state of becoming (Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics*, p. 98)."

Quantum theory demonstrates that the most fundamental stuff of existence are particles that are not tiny bits of matter, but are dynamic patterns of energy, interconnected in a world of rhythmic movement and change. We are not separated from these rhythmic patterns of energy; this is what we are. We, along with all other phenomena, live in a dynamically interrelated world of polar opposites, the Dynamic Continuum.

CATEGORIES

We started with God, the Natural Order, described the classical Stoic god, the Logos, and briefly examined the fundamental unity and interrelatedness of the Whole, the First Grand Theme of modern physics. Then we saw how the idea of a continuum unifying polar opposites went as far back as 2500 years to Heraclitus in Western Civilization and the *Tao Te Ching* in China. Physicists have discovered the unity of opposites from the subatomic level to the fourth dimension of relativity, which they call complementarity. All of this is in a constant state of change, and the fundamental matter underlying the phenomenon of existence is a dynamic pattern of particles of energy in rhythmic movement, the Second Grand Theme.

Perhaps this seems like esoteric information, very nice for general knowledge of the world in which we live, but how does it relate to living according to Nature? Well, I'm not going to answer that question just yet, and I only brought it up to ask for your patience a little longer. It will become clear. For now, we're going to take the next step closer to where you and I reside—on this planet and inside our own skins.

The Four Categories

The Stoics worked out a physical continuum from the whole to the individual parts of the cosmos, which includes us. This they called "The Four Categories," an important construct analogous to the conceptual structure of continuum existence that Professor Sambursky discusses exhaustively in *Physics of the Stoics*. It is to his work that I am largely indebted for the following.

There were those in the past who dismissed the Stoic categories as nothing more than a crude version of Aristotle's Ten Categories he proposed not long before. They are fundamentally different, however, in a very important way. Aristotle tried to fit every kind of being (substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, affection) *horizontally* into ten different categories or groupings without regard to ranking or hierarchy.

The Stoics, in only four categories, identified every kind of being *vertically*. That is, each kind of existence belongs to four successive steps, which are increasingly specific, with each category including all of the category that preceded it. This will be more comprehensible as we go along. The Four Categories are:

1. Substratum
2. Quality
3. State
4. Relative State
 - a. external (extrinsic)
 - b. internal (intrinsic)

The Substratum is shapeless and passive matter, the passive principle at the other side of the continuum with Logos, the active principle. The active and passive principles are united, as we know by what we've just been through with continuum, and this we call a Quality, because the two combined now take up a certain amount of space with their mass which is now in motion. When we analyze the quality, we see that each has a unique mixture of the active and passive principles which shows up as a rhythmic pattern, which is its State.

Now we come to an understanding of the interrelatedness of the parts to the whole when we look at the two kinds of Relative states, external and internal. In one, we are going to define the state by what is outside and next to it. For example, when someone is defined as a father, they are being defined by what's outside of the father, namely a son and/or daughter. Every state or part of existence can be defined by its relationship to what is outside of it, not just personal relations, but any relation that tells you more about a state's location and/or action, such as a man leaning against the tree, for example.

The internal kind is that which is defined by change that takes place internally. For example, the man leaning against the tree may be in a perfect state of health, he may be dead, or he may just be tired and need a rest. The fact that he is leaning against a tree doesn't tell us anything about his internal health. Let's say he is just tired. After resting awhile, he may become reinvigorated and be ready to stand erect and move on. All change took place internally. It did, at least, until he was strong enough to walk away. Then, his relationship to the tree, the external object changed.

Another example: take an apple and bite in to it. Was it sour? Was it sweet? It's sweetness may depend upon the length of time it was exposed to sunshine while attached to the tree, but the degree of sweetness was an internal matter defining its relationship to the two extremes of a continuum between sweet and sour. Because we know that all continua are in a constant state of flux, we know that the degree of sweetness is capable of change, and will.

When the internal relationship changes, according to any number of possible continua, the external relationships will also undergo change. If the man leaning against the tree is having a fatal heart attack, he will eventually topple over and the relation between the tree and the man changes. If the man is allowed to remain dead at the foot of the tree for any length of time, various creatures will have a snack or a feast depending on the relationship they have to the dominance of the other creatures feeding, and pretty soon all that will be left are the bones. In time, these will settle into the earth and the calcium will be absorbed by the soil, a new relationship again, and the roots of the tree will feed on the new supply of nutrients, and the man who was leaning against the tree is now feeding it, a whole new relation.

All things are capable of change, will change, and will bring about a change in the relation between the physical states of the two bodies. When we consider that the new relation just created will undergo yet another change with the other body on a new continuum of states, we ultimately have all the kinds of physical changes that are possible going on all the time in this cosmos of dynamic and interrelated parts. This relationship of all physical bodies in the universe is the Stoic's single, unified Whole.

Here is the most important point. We can now see how the continuum concept out there in the cosmos is brought down to earth right up to who and what we are here and now. Each one of these categories is increasingly specific and complex, and includes the category before it. That means, category four builds upon category three which builds upon category two, and so on, which also means that category four has all categories before it within it, a physical continuum. This defines our relationship to Nature.

Let's move on to Chrysippus' use of this kind of categorizing in yet another conceptual bridge from Nature. Even though the following was probably adopted from Aristotle, such matters should not deter us any more than it did him. If it works, use it. The Chrysippus' account can be found in Diogenes Laertius' chapter on Zeno, book seven of his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, and this one involves the relationship of what we call biotic life. First Chrysippus points out that Nature made self-preservation possible by endearing each thing to itself, by causing it to seek to avoid anything that is injurious, and by approaching anything that is useful. Then he goes on to describe these categories: 1) plant life, 2) animal life, and 3) rational life. This is, once again, a continuum where category three, human beings, contains that which precedes us, category two and one.

Plutarch quotes Chrysippus as saying, "Man does not consist of more parts than his finger, nor the cosmos of more parts than man." Chrysippus discusses our relationship to the preceding categories, then identifies the difference. From plant life to animals, impulse and greater mobility is added, allowing animals to follow impulse in order to seek whatever may be useful for its self-preservation. From animal life to rational creatures, the reasoning faculty has been added to regulate and direct the animal impulse. Reason, Chrysippus said, was located between sensory impression and impulse, allowing us, unlike the less rational animals, to check impulse, making choices on whether or not to act, and how.

Before we proceed on this bridge, let's compare these categories with contemporary thought as examined by the philosopher, Errol Harris, in *Cosmos and Anthropos*, what he calls the World Concept, a world continuous and indivisible, a continuum. These are his categories: 1) physical, 2) chemical, 3) biotic, 4) sentient, and 5) noetic. In these categories we begin with particles before the formation of specific inorganic compounds, chemistry. From these chemicals are built biotic life, for Chrysippus, plant life. With sentient life we have animals with their own unique sense of consciousness or awareness. Finally, there are humans, the noetic stage, a special category with all the preceding categories within it plus the additional dimension of the human consciousness we know as reflective awareness, reason.

REASON

The ability to recognize order seems to be an essential aspect of the rational mind; every perception of a pattern is, in a sense, a perception of order.

F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, 3rd ed., p. 318

As Stoic writers are always fond of pointing out, we have a unique relationship to the Logos. We can observe, appreciate, calculate, and build with the intelligence of reasoning because we are living manifestations of this god. Christians worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but we Stoics believe we are *all* sons and daughters of God. Our consciousness, our reflective awareness, our reason that we use is our

evidence for this relationship.

The Tree and the Stoic Doctrine of Seminal Reasons

In brief, this doctrine states that everything is present in potential at the beginning of creation – just as a seed becomes a tree. All the characteristics of any tree we view in the present were in the seed from which this tree grew. This tree was a favorite metaphor of St. Augustine, the teacher of the Middle Ages, who borrowed it from the Stoics to explain the six-day creation of the Old Testament. That short period of time he knew could not account for all that there was in the present, but that the seed of creation, containing all that has subsequently transpired, was already there in potential from the beginning.

Today, one of the most interesting developments to arise from quantum physics is the theory philosophers call the Anthropic Principle. This is really an updated version of the Stoic Doctrine of Seminal Reasons which states that the universe as created would necessarily allow for the development of humanoid types, the Noetic category in the World Concept, with their self-reflecting awareness coming into being at some time in the process of evolution. In other words, even if the creation of the universe were an accident, human evolution was not an accident, but would necessarily follow from the conditions of the beginning.

Reflect for a moment on the growth of a tree. Let's use an apple tree, because I like apple trees, and consider what information is stored in the seed of that tree. A small, dark brown seed the size of a petite pea falls to the ground with its seed pod, the apple. If all conditions are appropriate – temperature, soil, and moisture – the seed knows from the beginning just how and when it can grow. A tiny root digs down into the earth to find food and water, while a green tendril pushes up in the other direction to absorb the energy of the sun.

Now if the seed didn't do anything more, it should still be considered a most amazing, complex, and sophisticated form of intelligence, far beyond anything we can create. We can't even create life in its crudest forms of algae. But that's just the beginning of the seed's potential. It goes on to become a sapling with little branches that grow and grow and pretty soon it is hundreds, thousands of times bigger than it was. And still it's not even an apple tree.

If we continue with the apple tree as metaphor for the universe, the Big Bang is the explosive growth of the seed reaching out into the space/time manifold. If it is springtime in the life of the cosmos, then from every twig on every branch a little bud grows. If we look at the flowering of the apple tree as the flowering of consciousness in the universe, then Seminal Reasons and the Anthropic Principle say it was inevitable that such an occurrence would eventually take place from the cosmic seed that was born.

With our Logos-given reason, then, let us now consider the two apparent kinds of orientation that we can have to the universe. Either the great intelligence was always there and we are just now realizing it, the Doctrine of Seminal Reasons, or we are the great intelligence of the universe recently evolving our rational faculty. I said "apparent kinds of orientation," because it is important that we clear up this matter with a little more certainty before we go on. If there is any confusion, then it is between our meaning of intelligence and consciousness.

An apple seed has intelligence in its design, its program. It does not, so far as we

know, have any form of consciousness. Seminal Reasons and the Anthropic Principle suggest an evolutionary unfolding. The Noetic stage, the one we are in, is the development of self-reflective consciousness, the reasoning “awareness” of the Logos. Thus, the intelligent design we recognize, we are able to recognize *because* of our noetic consciousness. So, then, the question may more accurately be asked: did the cosmos, the Logos, have a self-reflective awareness *before* the development of noetic consciousness here and elsewhere in the universe; or, is its consciousness only now awakening to itself?

The atheists say *no*, the deists say *yes*, and the agnostics say *we don't know*.

* * * *

LOGIC

The development of formal logic in antiquity reached its peak in the works of the thinkers belonging to the Megaric and Stoic schools.

Bochinski, *Ancient Formal Logic* (Amsterdam, 1951) 77

INTRODUCTION

Let me start off with an analogy to describe what we are going to attempt in this chapter. If logic is the foundation or essence of mathematics, then what we are going to study here is basic arithmetic. The advanced work, the trigonometry and calculus of logic, we're going leave for the scholars and logicians who are inspired by this subject and want to approach the extremes in this form of thought. But don't feel bad or left out. Basic arithmetic is all that 90% of us need to live well, and, by learning the basic arithmetic of logic we will become more knowledgeable than the vast majority in terms of logical reasoning and argument.

As Cannavo points out in *Think to Win: The Power of Logic in Everyday Life* (Prometheus Books, 1998), there are hundreds, if not thousands of books available today, usually written by psychologists or religion gurus, that purport to tell us how to improve the quality of our relationships to others and to ourselves. There are few books available that can tell us how to improve the quality of our reasoning. Why? Well, publishers are in the business of making money, and selling books is how they do that. The more books they sell, the more money they make. Reading a self-help book written by a psychologist or other guru is easy compared to reading a self-help book on how to think and argue well. Easy reading sells more books than hard reading. I promise that if you take the time and trouble to digest the “hard” subject of basic logic, your *self* will be helped immeasurably more than it would by feeding on the pabulum of pop psychology.

Rhetoric

Most of this chapter is devoted to logical argument and fallacies, but in antiquity a student of logic at a Stoic school would be expected to master the two branches of logic taught there: dialectic and rhetoric. Dialectic, or logical argument, was deductive logic, the Stoic syllogism. We will explore that subject next, but before we do, allow me to say a few words about rhetoric. It is an important subject, but for our purposes here a few words should suffice.

Rhetoric, the language side of Stoic logic, is thought to be our direct link to the Logos, defined among numerous definitions, as *word*. With their profound appreciation of the word, perhaps it's not surprising that the Stoics are credited with some of the earliest formulations of the parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adverbs, the tenses, et cetera. However, unlike other schools, notably the grammarians of Alexandria, they did not think that these rules were fixed. Language, like Nature, is in a constant state of flux, and the Logos of the word is the same Logos of the physical world.

Today, as is the case with so many fields of study, the two branches of logic have divided into many, and all of them have been taken over by specialists. Beyond the most elementary work in deductive and inductive methods, few of us are knowledgeable in formal logic. Language, on the other hand, has received a much

more extensive emphasis at all levels of education. For most of us, such an education is adequate providing we always remember our responsibility to communicate plainly and clearly. We need not be overly impressed or intimidated by the esoteric sparring matches of professional semanticists, the one percent flailing away with the one percent. We have more important work to do.

Dialectic

If both correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning are possible, then we should learn how to distinguish between them. Both correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning are possible. Therefore, we should learn how to distinguish between them.

The above paragraph is a Stoic syllogism. It can also be written in a form of shorthand that modern logicians might use to substitute letters for phrases: if p then q; p; therefore q. Stoics preferred to use ordinal numbers rather than letters. Their representation of the above syllogism would look like this: if the first, the second; the first, therefore the second.

That's not so hard is it? Here's another one. If the study of logic helps us to distinguish between correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning, then we should study logic. The study of logic *does* help us to distinguish between correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning. Therefore, we should study logic.

Although logic has often been referred to as the science of the laws of thought, that is a bit overreaching. It's enough that we recognize the value of logic in helping us know the difference between correct and incorrect reasoning, which arguments are valid and which are invalid. This is no small matter today any more than it was when the Stoics developed what Aristotle first conceived millenniums ago. As a field of thinking about the correct and incorrect methods of reasoning, it has developed a terminology all of its own. That is the hardest part about logic, learning the terminology, which requires a great deal more effort and motivation than most of us are going to give it, especially in an introductory text on Stoicism. We will be brief and summarizing.

Stoic logic is a propositional logic. What is that? This and the next two paragraphs will explain. But first, relax, take a deep breath, and be patient. It will be worth the effort. We have the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008) to thank for the valuable quotation that follows:

The term proposition is sometimes used synonymously with statement....[and] is that branch of logic that studies ways of combining or altering statements or propositions to form more complicated statements or propositions....Joining two simpler propositions with the word "and" is one common way of combining statements....Propositional logic also studies ways of modifying statements, such as the addition of the word 'not' that is used to change an affirmative statement into a negative statement. Here, the fundamental logical principle involved is that if a given affirmative statement is true, the negation of that statement is false, and if a given affirmative statement is false, the negation of that statement is true....

Propositional logic can be thought of as primarily the study of logical operators. A logical operator is any word or phrase used either to modify one statement to make a different statement, or join multiple statements together to form a more complicated statement. In English, words such as 'and', 'or', 'not', 'if ... then...', 'because', and 'necessarily', are all operators....More serious attempts to study such

statement operators such as 'and', 'or' and 'if... then...' were conducted by the Stoic philosophers in the late 3rd century BCE. Since most of their original works – if indeed, many writings were even produced -- are lost....The Stoic philosopher Chrysippus (roughly 280-205 BCE) perhaps did the most in advancing Stoic propositional logic, by marking out a number of different ways of forming complex premises for arguments, and for each, listing valid inference schemata.

Chrysippus suggested that the following inference schemata are to be considered the most basic:

1. If the first, then the second; but the first; therefore, the second.
2. If the first, then the second; but not the second; therefore, not the first.
3. Not both the first and the second; but the first; therefore, not the second.
4. Either the first or the second [and not both]; but the first; therefore, not the second.
5. Either the first or the second; but not the second; therefore, the first.

Inference rules such as the above correspond very closely with the basic principles in a contemporary system of natural deduction for propositional logic. For example, the first two rules correspond to the rules of modus ponens and modus tollens, respectively. These basic inference schemata were expanded upon by Chrysippus himself and other Stoics, and are preserved in the work of Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus and later, in the work of Cicero....Advances on the work of the Stoics were undertaken in small steps in the centuries that followed....The next major step forward in the development of propositional logic came only much later with the advent of symbolic logic in the work of logicians such as Augustus DeMorgan (1806-1871) and, especially, George Boole (1815-1864) in the mid-19th century.”

INDUCTIVE & DEDUCTIVE LOGIC

For nearly two thousand years Stoic logic was ignored, disrespected, or forgotten altogether. Aristotle's logic ruled the day. The typical attitude of logicians in the mid-nineteenth century was expressed by C. Prantl in the first complete history of Western logic ever written. He called Stoic logic “dull” and “trivial,” demonstrating once again how easily and arrogantly we dismiss that which we do not understand. Finally, in 1934, the Polish logician, Lukasiewicz, comprehended what the Stoics had done and had the courage to publish his opinion in the *History of the Logic of Propositions*. By the middle of the twentieth century, another logician by the name of Bochinski, who's quotation leads this chapter, stated what is now the current opinion of preeminence Stoic logic deserves.

To begin with, both Aristotle and the Stoics used deductive logic. As you may know, there are basically two kinds of dialectic: deductive and inductive. A deductive argument is one in which the conclusion *follows necessarily* from the premises given. The two syllogisms about learning logic that were used above were deductive. Syllogisms are deductive arguments. An inductive argument is one in which the conclusion, although supported by the premises, *does not necessarily* follow from the premises given. Here's an inductive argument:

*Caligula was a Roman emperor and disliked philosophy;
Nero was a Roman emperor and disliked philosophy;
Domitian was a Roman emperor and disliked philosophy;
Therefore, Roman emperors disliked philosophy.*

Of course, we know that the conclusion is incorrect because Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor and was himself a Stoic philosopher. Deductive arguments follow strict rules between the premises and conclusion to arrive at a conclusion that necessarily follows, but inductive arguments do not. Even so, inductive reasoning can be useful. In fact, we use it all the time in our attempts to generalize about a person, place, or thing in real life.

*In America, most medical doctors are politically conservative;
My doctor is an American;
Therefore, he's probably politically conservative.*

Inductive arguments, unlike deductive, are not considered valid or invalid, but better or worse depending on how much support the premises give the conclusion. What we're dealing with here are probabilities, which is another matter and not applicable to Stoic logic. And so we leave induction and return to deduction, which is our main business.

In deductive arguments the connection between an argument's validity and the truth of its premises and conclusion are not as simple as it would at first appear. An argument may still be valid even when one or both of its premises are false. Validity refers to the *form* of the argument, not the truth of its premises or conclusion. For example:

*All cows are purple.
All purple animals have fins.
Therefore, all cows have fins.*

This is a valid deductive argument because the *form* is valid (All A is B; All B is C; Therefore, all A is C), and IF the premises were true, the conclusion would be also. Here's another one. Is it valid or invalid?

*All birds are insects.
All beetles are birds.
Therefore all beetles are insects.*

Valid. Even though the premises are untrue, the conclusion is true.

How about this one?

*All cats can fly.
All lions can fly.
Therefore all lions are cats.*

Invalid. The premises are false, and even though the conclusion is true, the form of the argument is invalid.

By rearranging the *form* we can make this a valid argument – even though the conclusion is untrue.

*All cats can fly.
All lions are cats.
Therefore all lions can fly.*

One could easily spend an entire chapter on analyzing and finding the validity and truth of deductive arguments, but it's unnecessary for an introductory text. It is important to show the difficulty of the connections between the premises and the conclusion in order to understand some of the prejudice that arose against such efforts when the more practical Romans inherited the Stoa and preferred to focus on ethics instead. We will too, in a minute, but first we will look at the essential form of the Stoic syllogism in comparison with and contrast to the Aristotelian.

THE SYLLOGISM

The syllogism is a deductive argument that has two premises and a conclusion. That's what we've mostly been doing so far.

All animals are mortal; (major premise)
All dogs are animals; (minor premise)
Therefore all dogs are mortal. (conclusion)

That's how Aristotle would present a syllogism. We only need to know how he did it because he is the father of logic and because his form of syllogism is a good way to compare and contrast with the Stoic form. The chief difference between Aristotelian and Stoic logic is that Aristotle always dealt only with universals, while Stoics were less interested in universals, which they considered mental constructs and less useful for practical purposes than individual cases. (It should be noted, however, that although the individual was paramount in Stoic logic, there was no prohibition against working with universals, and they did.)

Although Aristotle only allowed two premises before his conclusion, the Stoics claimed there could be many – even though only examples using three premises have been found. Finally, Aristotle created four forms while the Stoics used five kinds of syllogisms as we saw in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* above.

A Stoic syllogism about the mortal dogs above would have not taken that form but would have followed their *modus ponens* form as follows:

If all dogs are animals, then they are mortal;
All dogs are animals;
Therefore, all dogs are mortal.

It looks practically the same, but it isn't. Remember, the Stoic syllogism is propositional logic, or statements emphasizing the connection of one thing to another, the interconnectedness of all things. If this, then that.

In the Greek Stoa, these syllogisms were what dialectic was all about. And dialectic, along with rhetoric, was their logic, which was considered to be as important as the study of physics and ethics. One studied physics to know the operations of Nature, logic to be able to organize and communicate thoughts accurately, and ethics to know the right action to take based upon this accurate understanding. By the time Panaetius was introducing the Stoa to the Romans, the study of formal logic had diminished in importance. In fact, he seldom discussed physics and virtually ignored logic, much to the preference of the practical Romans who were more interested in action.

If you are inclined to agree with the Romans and consider all such intellectual efforts little more than games not worth your time or trouble, you are in good company. Listen to what Seneca has to say about such matters in his *Letters from a Stoic*, #48:

One is led to believe that unless one has constructed syllogisms of the craftiest kind, and reduced fallacies to a compact form in which a false conclusion is derived from a true premise, one will not be in a position to distinguish what one should aim at and what one should avoid. It makes one ashamed that men of our advanced years should turn a thing as serious as this into a game.

Mouse is a syllable,
and a mouse nibbles cheese;
therefore, a syllable nibbles cheese.

Suppose for the moment I can't detect the fallacy in that. What danger am I placed in by such a lack of insight?... What childish fatuities these are!...Shall I tell you what philosophy holds out to humanity? Counsel. One person is facing death, another is vexed by poverty, while another is tormented by wealth....What's the point of concocting whimsies for me of the sort I've just been mentioning: This isn't the place for fun—you're called in to help the unhappy. You're pledged to bring succor to the shipwrecked, to those in captivity, to the sick, the needy and men who are just placing their heads beneath the executioner's uplifted ax.

Such exercises in syllogistic logic are unlikely to be encountered any time or place in your life. You can get up in the morning and see the news in the paper or on your computer screen or on the television and never have any reason to examine what you see with a syllogism. You can go to work, buy, sell, administer, build, play, plant and harvest without syllogisms. You can raise a family without them. But, you cannot go through life without frequently being exposed to and coerced by reasoning that we currently know as logical fallacies. The ancient Stoics did not, so far as we know, teach and study these kinds of fallacies, but we will today. This is the kind of logic you really need to know and refer to so many times in your life that to be entirely ignorant of them would be inexcusable. That's why they are presented here in a text on Stoic logic. The new Stoic should know them.

COMMON LOGICAL FALLACIES

*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so,
little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me – the Bible tells me so.*

“Jesus Loves Me,” a Christian children's song

Long before I could read or reason, this was the first song I learned by heart. Sixty years later, I still remember it word-for-word. Beginning as toddlers, we were told to stand up and sing this song at the beginning of every sabbath school class. Can you spot the logical fallacy? It's repeated twice. Jesus loves me, and I know this because the *Bible* tells me so. How do I know Jesus loves me? The *Bible* tells me so.

Here's how we continue with that kind of reasoning: Jesus is the Son of God. How do I know? The *Bible* tells me so. My God is the only God and the Ruler of the universe. How do I know? The *Bible* tells me so. Mohamed is the prophet of Allah. How do I know? The *Koran* tells me so. And why should I believe what the *Bible/Koran* tells me? Because the *Bible/Koran* is the divinely inspired word of God/Allah. How do I know? The *Bible/Koran* tells me so.

It is possible to learn to recognize bad reasoning in all forms of discourse, from nursery songs to advertisements and political debates. Anyone familiar with logical fallacies will quickly come to realize that bad reasoning is so frequent as to be commonplace. That does not make it right, and the reason it is so common is that so few of us are schooled and skilled in correct reasoning. Religious and political leaders can make their harangues seem plausible to thousands, even millions of us,

because we don't know any better. We are not schooled in how to spot faulty reasoning, and that oversight in our education will be corrected someday. In the meantime, many of us, probably most of us, routinely and unknowingly commit logical fallacies with abandon.

According to S. Cannavo in *Think to Win*, there are nearly two dozen common fallacies that people abuse every day. We are only going to examine four. This is not a book of logic, and it isn't necessary to exhaustively examine each and every fallacy to gain both an appreciation for the value of such study and to significantly improve in your ability to reason logically. Those who want more should take it as a sign they may be budding logicians. For the rest of us, what follows should be sufficient. If you learn these well and commit them to memory, you will stand head and shoulders above the majority of your fellow citizens. You will not only avoid committing these reasoning mistakes, you will not be fooled by those who insist upon their point of view with fallacious argument.

1. Red Herring Fallacy

All those who enjoy detective stories are probably familiar with the red herring, but they may not know where the term came from. It comes from the literary idea, if not the practical reality, of dragging a smelly herring behind you to throw off any tracking dogs from following your own scent. The much more powerful smell of the herring confuses the dogs into believing they have lost your own. The red herring in the detective story is a person, the character that often has both the means and the motive to perpetrate the crime, but is actually innocent. That's essentially what this fallacy does. It *misleads*.

How does it do that? By changing the issue and thereby sidetracking you from your pursuit of the truth of any matter. It's not the same as changing the subject, a favorite ploy of the debater who doesn't know the answer to a given question (e.g., Sarah Palin in the vice-presidential debate of 2008). In the red herring fallacy, you superficially stay on subject, but shift away from dealing with the real point of the discussion. Here's an example:

John: *Detective films are excellent examples of the morality play. The bad guy always gets caught and loses to the good guy in the end. They teach that crime doesn't pay.*

Mary: *I think detective films are just glorifications of violence that always follow some stupid formula. Sometimes I don't know which one is the bad guy, the criminal or the cop.*

So, we go from John's assertion that detective films are instructions on the subject of good and evil to Mary's discomfort with the whole cops-and-robbers genre. She stayed on the subject, but shifted from morality play to glorification of violence without even attempting to address what John said in the first place. Here's another one.

Mary: *Global warming is an issue the United States has not seriously addressed and is going to make it impossible for many species, such as the polar bear, to survive in the wild.*

John: *Global warming, if it exists at all, may be the best thing that ever happened to Canadians and Russians. Imagine the beauty of springtime in Moscow.*

Mary wants to talk about the serious matter of global warming while John ignores

the dangers and spins out on a fantasy about flowers and warm showers in northern climes. Notice, neither John nor Mary can be accused of falsehood or ignorance or changing the subject. Each is simply seeing the same issue from a different point of view. A red herring isn't necessarily a bad thing, it's just not an instructive or constructive way to examine the issue at hand. The second example could also be called a Straw Man Fallacy, because there is certainly an element of foolishness going on here (on the part of John), but that will have to wait. One more example should suffice:

George: *Stoic philosophy is the greatest wisdom philosophy in the history of the world.*

Fred: *When it comes to philosophy I leave that to the Church; it's enough that I try to be a good person, pay my tithe, and raise my children to know the difference between right and wrong.*

The third example is the primary reason that Stoic philosophy is also the *last* wisdom philosophy in the history of the world, at least in the western world. Confucianism holds that position in the East. After the Christian era, philosophers became academicians, scholars who were no longer looked to as a source of wisdom on how to live well. The faiths took over that responsibility and based their information on divine revelation and church doctrine. The philosophers changed the subject entirely.

2. Begging the Question Fallacy

When searching for answers, we can go from being sidetracked by red herrings to not even leaving the front gate of the ranch. *Begging the question* is an odd phrase, but it describes a situation in which the heart of the discussion, the question at hand, is evaded entirely. Instead of using a reasoned argument to come to a conclusion, the author *begs* the question by either restating it or avoiding it altogether. In other words, you've gone nowhere and solved nothing.

Circular reasoning

Circular Reasoning is a common form of question begging. It is circular in that the conclusion is just another way of beginning. If you tell me that I should believe in Mohamed because he is the prophet of God, all you are saying is that I should believe in the prophet of God because he is the prophet of God. You haven't proved anything, and your conclusion is the same as your premise. Remember the sabbath school song quoted above? If you claim that the Bible is the word of God, and I ask how you know, and you tell me because it says so in the *Bible*. What have you proved? Nothing. All you have said is the *Bible* is the word of God, because the *Bible* says it is the word of God. The whole idea of an argument is to provide additional evidence for the premise. In this case we have provided nothing new to support our claim. Here are some more examples:

- Why is it illegal for people to smoke marijuana? Because it's against the law.
- Should gay marriage be legalized? No, marriage is the legal union of a man and a woman.
- Why do Christians go to Heaven and Jews go to Hell? Because Christians believe in Jesus and Jews don't. If a Jew would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, he would be saved.
- How do I know this is Bigfoot's track? What else could make a footprint this big?

3. *Ad hominem* Fallacy

Attacking a person rather than an issue. This tactic is a favorite of politicians and was used extensively by members of the U.S. Republican Party during the cold war of the 1950s. It began with Senator Joseph McCarthy and Congressman Richard Nixon, who cleverly shifted from addressing issues to addressing the suspicious, even subversive character of opposing members of the Democratic Party. It's still in use today by politicians of all persuasions, and perhaps it always will. In short, the whole point is to avoid examining the issue by attacking the person or some group of persons *related* to the issue. This is so common in all areas of life and discourse as to be almost unnoticeable, and it's even possible that you have done it yourself. Not on purpose, of course. It's also a favorite tactic of the criminal mind. In this case, shift the blame of one's malfeasance onto the victim.

District Attorney: *Why did you steal the car?*

Car Thief: *I needed a ride. Besides, anybody stupid enough to leave their keys in the ignition deserves to have their car stolen.*

In this case, I'm sure the car thief could see his motivation was a bit lame, so he abused the victim to justify his reasons.

Moderator: *If elected President, how will your health plan address the health care crisis in America, and in what way does you plan differ from that of your opponent?*

Politician: *I believe in freedom of choice and responsibility of the individual. My opponent believes health care is a right. He wants to tax and spend, tax and spend, take away your freedom of choice very much like the Socialist. As a matter of fact, If you elect my opponent creeping socialism will be the order of the day. As they say in the desert, "Never let the camel get its nose under the tent."*

The politician never described her health plan. She went directly to attacking the opponent as a tax and spend socialist, which in a socialist country may not be heaping personal abuse on anyone, but in the U.S.A. today, it is tantamount to calling him a subversive criminal.

4. Straw Man Fallacy

In this case, rather than attack the character of the speaker you attack or ridicule the seriousness of the issue and thereby turn it into a *straw man*. Once the argument is weakened by being made to look ridiculous, it becomes a straw man who no longer has strength and falls. That's the whole point of using this fallacy. There are a number of ways of transforming an opponent's argument into a straw man: over-simplifying, over-complicating, exaggerated literalness, or just plain silliness. This fallacy almost doesn't need examples, you could probably provide your own, but here are a couple.

Mary: *Global warming is an issue the United States has not seriously addressed and is going to make it impossible for many species, such as the polar bear, to survive in the wild.*

John: *So, if it gets too warm for the polar bears they can adapt like the rest of us, get a haircut, stay in the shade, drink a cold one.*

This is an example of making Mary's statement appear ridiculous by substituting outright silliness for a serious discussion. John obviously doesn't know or doesn't care about global warming and the catastrophic implications. Furthermore, it's equally obvious he doesn't want to know or care.

Vegetarian: *Eating animals is unnecessary. Killing when unnecessary is murder. Therefore, eating animals is murder.*

Carnivore: *Everything dies sooner or later. Do you think animals care about living to old age? Shall we build rest homes for the aging Angus?*

The syllogism presented by the Vegetarian could have been dismantled with serious argument, but the Carnivore either didn't know how or didn't want to bother. How would you have answered the Vegetarian?

Memory Work

Remember these fallacies:

1. **Red Herring:** It *misleads*. How does it do that? By changing the issue and thereby sidetracking you from your pursuit of the truth of any matter.
2. **Begging the Question:** The heart of the discussion, the question at hand, is *evaded* entirely. Instead of using a reasoned argument to come to a conclusion, the author *begs* the question by either restating it with circular reasoning or avoiding it altogether.
3. **Ad hominem:** Attacking a person rather than an issue.
4. **Straw Man:** Attack or ridicule the seriousness of the issue and thereby turn it into a *straw man*. Once the argument is weakened by being made to look ridiculous, it becomes a straw man who no longer has strength and falls.

* * * *

ETHICS

Ethical behavior? Doing what you know is right. . . . even when no one is looking.
Detective Sergeant Robb Hurt,
San Diego Police Department

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago when I was young man, a color TV was a highly desired possession. They were a bit expensive, and most couldn't afford them. At that time I knew a guy about my age who had been in and out of trouble since he was a teenager, small time stuff, a punk. He had no remorse for his chosen lifestyle. He once said, "If you could steal a color TV, and you knew, absolutely knew there was no way you would get caught, you'd take it too, wouldn't you?"

I didn't have an answer then, except some comment that you could never know that you wouldn't get caught. "Well, whenever I steal something, I *know* I won't get caught," he said. "Sometimes I do, but that's not the point. My point is, if you *knew* you wouldn't get caught, you'd take the TV, wouldn't you?" I didn't have an answer. Now I do. Many years later when I was living and working in Japan as a conversational English teacher, I had an experience that clarified and answered this question.

I was working on a teaching contract in a small village isolated far from any city and was one of only two foreigners, *gaijin*, for many miles around. The boss, a Japanese man who spoke very little English, had managed to enroll quite a number of students in his one-room school house and an even greater number attending classes in offices and factories all over the prefecture. Most of his success was based on the fact that it was the only English language school in that region and learning English was in the height of fashion. There was such a demand for these classes that the teachers who actually taught them, an Englishman and I, worked from 8 AM to 10 PM, six days a week. He gave us Sunday off. Despite this very full schedule, we lived like paupers.

We slept on the floor in small rooms of the owner's estate on old, worn-thin tatami mats and only earned enough to eat rice, cucumbers, and mackerel—a fish that the poorest locals ate. No time or money for recreation or entertainment, let alone other necessities like clothes or furnishings for our room. In contrast, the owner of the school lived like a feudal lord.

He was also a drunk. Every night and day he drank his favorite brew, Kirin beer, and threw the bottles out the kitchen window onto a great heap of empties accumulating in the back yard. He also kept a mistress on the premises, drove a luxury sedan, and was sending his son to one of Japan's most expensive private colleges – all on the wages brought in by the two English teachers in his employ. His wife had left him long ago, and his shrill mistress, whom the villagers rumored was an aging mafia moll, did all the scheduling and transportation arrangements. The owner only spoke pidgin English, so his contribution to the enterprise was to collect the money, spend it, and drink.

One hot and rainy evening around dusk when the boss and his mistress were vacationing on a neighboring island, I looked out the window of my room and saw a hole in the wall of a two-story, concrete building nearby. I had never seen a hole there before. This building was part of the estate. It had no windows, only one door, and gave the appearance of having very thick walls. Neither the Englishmen nor I knew what the building was for, and the owner wouldn't talk about it when asked, so we guessed, half facetiously, that it was some kind of treasure house for all his money. Rather, our money. Whatever it was, it was an old building, and apparently the rain had eroded a fairly large hole just about waist-high in the side of one wall. I decided to investigate, found a flashlight, and as soon as it was really dark I opened the hole a little larger and crawled in.

It *was* a treasure house. I didn't measure it, but in the dark the floor may have had an area of about 25X25 feet (8x8 meters) with wooden steps leading upstairs. Everywhere you looked there were Japanese works of art—*sumi e* (ink brush paintings rolled up into scrolls), lacquered chests, pottery, carved *suzuri* (ink stones), and samurai swords. I was dumbfounded. Not only were we living and working like dogs to support the owner's luxurious lifestyle, the boss had enough left over to fill a treasure house with works of art. Despite this abundance, there was no indication he had any interest in art except as a collector. There wasn't a single work of art in any part of the house, the school buildings, or in the shabby rooms we teachers occupied. Apparently, it was exclusively desired for speculation, not for the love of beauty.

I looked back outside the hole to make sure I had not been observed, then shined my flashlight around. There was a light switch, but I didn't turn it on. Just inside the door was a disorderly pile of *akama suzuri*, ink stones carved by a master, a National Living Treasure whose work I recognized. Apparently after purchase they were just tossed inside to land wherever they would. I went upstairs and randomly examined *sumi e* scrolls stacked perpendicular to the wall like loaves of bread in a French bakery. I unrolled one after another and couldn't believe it, any one of them would likely fetch at least two or three months' wages. Then I stopped. This was the one. This was the one I would take to compensate for my unprofessional situation. I had a graduate degree and experience as a Teaching Fellow at a good university. With these credentials I signed a contract describing a reality entirely different from the one I was living. I looked back at the image. It was an eagle perched on the limb of a tree. No tree visible, just the eagle perched on a limb, looking directly at the viewer. I heard it speaking to me. "I'm yours," it said.

There was no way I would get caught. I could take the painting, wrap it, and mail it out of the country before the boss even got back from his vacation. It was unlikely he remembered the painting. It was only one of the many, many paintings there, and he didn't show any aesthetic appreciation for any of them. I carefully wiped my fingerprints and crawled back out the hole. I decided to wait until midnight, then go back and take it. I deserved it, didn't I? I had already earned its value many times over in wages the boss kept for himself. At the very least, it would make me feel a whole lot better about the time I had spent here. When my contract expired I could leave the country with one small treasure for my trouble.

I laid down on my mat, but couldn't sleep. I rolled and tossed and argued with myself. The cop and the thief. The thief wanted it, believed he deserved it, and the cop said it was wrong to steal regardless. This went on hour after hour,

rationalization after rationalization. Midnight came and went, and the argument continued. Just before dawn, it was finally resolved when I saw the painting in my mind's eye taken from the treasure house, mailed out of the country, and hanging on the wall of my future home back in the USA. All rationalizations were set aside, because I knew that every time I looked at the painting hanging there I would remember how I got it—by theft. I would be a thief. The cop had won.

*

That night I learned one of the most essential lessons of Stoic ethical philosophy. Regardless of whether or not you are caught in the act of any form of malfeasance, the only one you hurt is yourself. Even if the owner of the color TV or *sumi e* painting never knew of the loss, the thief knows it. And the thief knows he is a thief. Anyway he rationalizes dishonesty, even if the person from whom he steals is a truly bad man, the thief is still a thief. Even if he tells himself and others that he is a really good man who just did a bad thing, he has been compromised by the very act he committed. He is not a good man, he is not a noble man, he is a thief, and until restitution is made, that is the best he will ever be. But he can change. He can choose to become a good man and create a noble character no matter in what circumstance he finds himself. While members of religions base their ethical behavior on hope for heaven and fear of hell, Stoics believe we create our own heaven or hell in this life, right here, right now, as a direct result of our acts. But, let us begin with the beginning, *oikeiosis* and the Primary Impulse, Nature's gift to life and the starting point for Stoic ethics.

OIKEIOSIS: FROM PRIMARY IMPULSE TO VIRTUE

At birth, the Primary Impulse of all living things is the care of itself. This is true of all living things, plants and animals, but it is the sentient creatures that exhibit this in a way we can best understand. *Oikeiosis* is a difficult word to remember, and even more difficult to define, but it is so important as a concept that we need to learn it. It is the beginning and the end of Stoic ethics. It makes the ethics of our philosophy unique and greater than all other ancient philosophies, and it quickly and easily disposes of a great rival in antiquity and today, the Epicurean. For that reason alone this is a concept that must be carefully learned and firmly understood.

Oikeiosis

Oikeiosis is Greek and means well-disposed. It also means affinity and as a concept is referred to as the Doctrine of Appropriations. From birth, we are well-disposed towards or have an affinity for pleasure and an aversion to pain and discomfort. All animals do, and we are no exception. Even plants reach out to the sun as their roots search for moisture and nourishment and attempt to avoid what is harmful. The Primary Impulse is what the Epicureans point to as the rock hard foundation of their beliefs, the impulse to pleasure and avoidance of pain, and it would be a difficult philosophy to deny if human beings always stopped evolving at that stage. Plants, unreasoning animals, and Epicureans may stop there; Stoics do not.

The Primary Impulse of *oikeiosis* given to us by Nature could also be called the prime directive: take care of yourself. Each of us has an affinity for our self that can rightly be called self-love, and this self-love is stronger than any other aspect of our being. This is how we survive as individuals. This Primary Impulse is what motivates us to act in caring for the self and all its needs. When we were infants, this impulse was seen as cooing when we were content and crying when we were

not. What we wanted was comfort and pleasure, a warm blanket and a full tummy. What we didn't want was to be hungry and feel the discomfort of a messy diaper. This is appropriate for human infants and is true of all life forms according to what is appropriate for their species. The wildebeest of the African plains also has the Primary Impulse, but it has an affinity for the milk of its mother's teat and a pace of travel along-side her that it can follow. Seeking to maximize pleasure and to minimize displeasure is the beginning and end of Epicurean philosophy. It is just the beginning of our own.

Human beings have the potential to evolve in stages beyond the Primary Impulse. As we mature and the rational mind (*hegemonikon*) develops, we have a new *oikeiosis*, an affinity for the rational thought so appropriate to our species. In antiquity, it was believed that the reasoning mind was fully developed at the age of fourteen, which is probably correct for many. Some may take a little longer. Regardless of the exact age, the rational faculty given to us by Nature affords each individual an opportunity to be transformed. The reasoning mind can recognize this potential for ethical evolution, but it is our power of choice and will that make it so.

Stages of Ethical Evolution

The ethical evolution that is possible in our lifetime is available to all but is realized by only a few. We have Cicero to thank for preserving this Stoic teaching on *oikeiosis* (De finibus, iii 20-I), which I will paraphrase as follows:

1. The first appropriate function of every creature is to care for itself [the Primary Impulse].
2. The second, the realization that we *should* follow what is in accord with Nature and avoid the opposite.
3. Once this is understood, one evolves by choosing to live conformably with Nature.
4. The final stage is achieved when with practice one consistently chooses and acts in complete agreement with Nature.

Each stage rightly retains the stage before it. In other words, when we mature and evolve beyond the first stage, we continue to care for the self, because the Primary Impulse of self-love never goes away. For most, that impulse is soon extended to include the mother or infant caregiver. With growing rational awareness the child learns about external love, and the self-love that became mother-love now becomes a love for other members of the family. With maturity, he feels affection for friends and loved ones outside the home and in the community. This feeling is expanded to include his city, country, and finally planet Earth and the human family as a whole.

Thus we see that what begins as self-love paradoxically has the seeds of its opposite, other love. The affinity for one's self and all its needs can ultimately evolve to become an affinity for duty and justice and even altruism, the sacrificing of one's own well-being, even one's life, for another or a cause or belief firmly held.

Although the four stages present a natural *oikeiosis* for ethical evolution in one's life, the majority do not *naturally* evolve in ethical behavior as they get older. Otherwise, all would become wise and virtuous. Some people are stuck in the Primary Impulse stage their entire lives. Those who mature in rational ability but not in ethical ability represent the so-called bad people, the sinful or evil doers of the world. Even of those who move on to stage two, many if not most do not continue on to stage three. They do not gain in wisdom; they only gain in weight. For example, one who is trapped in the second stage of ethical evolution will realize

that excessive drinking causes a hangover and the possibility of dire health consequences, but they don't modify their behavior or stop.

I had a friend whose ex-wife was an alcoholic. She drank to excess routinely despite her rapidly deteriorating health. After one especially grievous bout of binge drinking she was hospitalized and given a battery of laboratory tests. The results indicated, among other things, that her liver was seriously enlarged and barely functioning. In an attempt to get her to change her ways, the doctor told her that if she didn't stop drinking she would be dead within six months. The next day she was discharged from the hospital. On the way home she stopped at a liquor store and crawled into her bottle until she died—six months later. This woman was intelligent enough to understand the consequences of her choice, but apparently didn't have the desire or will power to change. She preferred death over living in agreement with Nature.

It takes reason, practice, and an effort of will to evolve to the next stage. Stoics have always taught that the perfection of virtue is in our power, but it is something that we must choose. With effort, the ethically evolving person chooses to live each day in agreement with Nature. By doing so he is perfecting his virtue. Once he has achieved the fourth stage of evolution, once he is consistently in complete agreement, he then comes to realize that the perfection of virtue is higher than all previous stages of his earlier existence and is the highest good. As the highest good, virtue has become desirable for its own sake, and he now realizes that his earlier self, the one that was so dependent upon externals, is no more. He has become a sage.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

Wisdom. Stoics traditionally define wisdom as knowledge of all things human and divine. It is appropriate for the rational faculty of human beings to seek and honor truth. Wisdom, acquired by thought and study and reinforced by practical experience, can then be deliberately applied to the decisions and directions we take in life. Zeno and the early Stoics were certain that truth was an absolute and could be known. That may be, but since their time we've often seen that what we believed to be truths were only temporary approximations of truth. Science and scientists have held certain ideas sacred for centuries only to have them overturned by new discoveries. Perhaps some day we will know absolute truth in all things, which would produce a terrible case of intellectual ennui, but for now we fortunately have much more to explore and many refinements to be made.

We've discovered, for example, that classical physics, Newtonian physics, is an accurate way of seeing the world of the senses, but that it breaks down at both extremes of the very large and the very small. Einstein's relativity theory, exploring the fourth dimension of the space-time continuum, shows that what time it is depends upon where you are, and that it's not flat but curved by the distribution of mass and energy in it. In quantum physics, on the other hand, the invisible world of the very small, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, and the experimental work that verifies this principle, has shown us that the subatomic world is a web of relations unifying the whole. When we try to explain the position or momentum of a given entity, we find that these concepts pair up into a continuum that cannot be precisely located or defined.

What all this has to do with our instinct to seek truth is that as we progress in our search we acquire a clearer vision of reality as it is. Knowing our world, its seasons

and cycles and laws, is how we can best determine our actions and expectations. We are not exempt from natural law. We are in it, and it is in us. This is why the Stoic motto is what it is: live according to Nature. We will always be happier when we do.

Justice. Justice is a practical virtue that arises from love for one's other self, the affinity we feel for cultivating human companionship and society. We are more like a pride of lions than the solitary tiger. We are a social animal. Justice represents fairness in our conduct towards others, and the love we feel for family and friends is ultimately extended to all humanity. When we act justly and promote this virtue, we strengthen the bonds of society, and through justice, acts of benevolence and cooperation with one another, create a society in which each has a greater opportunity to live well. Justice can also be viewed as fairness in legal and legislative dispensation. Equal justice under the law is a Stoic concept which eventually became the cornerstone of Roman jurisprudence.

Courage. Bravery: freedom from fear or the will to act despite that fear. Courage is required by and follows from our primary impulse of self-love, a powerful internal drive given to us by Nature for both self-protection and promotion. At maturity, the Primary Impulse evolves into a desire for preeminence, for greatness, and/or for excellence in a subject, a skill, or in the art of living itself. It is important to note, however, that one who is naturally fearless cannot claim courage as a virtue. Courage is doing what you know needs to be done despite your fear, and when that is done you have conquered it.

Decorum is graciousness and propriety. Decorum arose with evolution when Nature gave human beings the ability to perceive and appreciate beauty, along with the order and elegance that surrounds, permeates, and follows it. This virtue assumes many names and titles, including civility, proportion, nobility of character, even temperance—a good word that has acquired unpleasant connotations ranging from prissiness to health fanaticism. This is unfortunate, because temperance really means the moderation of desire, but that is not what many think of when they hear that word.

So, we will use the word 'moderation', which describes one who shows propriety, proportion or decorum. Such a one does not get blind drunk and oafish or vicious or sloppy with false sentiment. If this behavior describes you when you drink, it's time to give some thought to the nobility of your character. It doesn't mean that Stoics can't drink or enjoy festivities and celebrations. To paraphrase Seneca, a wise man manages his desires while a fool is managed by them. It's not enough to be wise, just, and courageous if one is also hard, gruff, crude, and drunk. Decorum is the beauty we feel inside that is inevitably made manifest in our manner and bearing on all occasions.

Note: the ancient Greek word for the fourth cardinal virtue was *sophrosyne*, which has no equivalent in English. It had none in Latin either, and the Greeks always had difficulty defining it. Panaetius suggested that the Latin word *decorum*, the origin of our word, was similar. Today, the most common and misleading translation of this virtue is temperance. But temperance doesn't mean what it once did. Moderation is closer to the Stoic ideal – not abstinence and denial. In any case, even moderation, a more acceptable translation, is still only a part of the Roman translation of the same word we use today, decorum.

FATE AND FREE WILL

And yet God has not only granted us these faculties by which we may bear every event without being broken by it, but...has placed their exercise above restraint...and wholly within our control.

Epictetus

We are about to embark upon a two-thousand-year-old argument, one that we are no closer to resolving to everyone's satisfaction than we were when it began. Do we have free will? I am not going to present an ultimate intellectual conclusion to this debate. Rather, I'm going to examine the Stoic position and leave it there for you to adapt and adopt as you will. In addition, I'm going to present a kind of solution, a way to become more comfortable with this uncertainty, and then you can stop or continue on your own.

In attempting to resolve this question, I've discovered that beyond a certain point I lose my way. I have a contemporary philosophy book in my library right now devoted entirely to this question. Attempting to understand this collection of essays reminds me of Socrates' comment when Euripides asked him what he thought of the writings of Heraclitus. He said he thought it would be most excellent if he could understand it.

This is not the Stoa most of us need. We need to know how to meet and overcome the difficulties that are thrust upon us every day. We need to know how to cope with grief, a wayward child, an obnoxious neighbor, an insecure employer, economic catastrophe, illness, and death. We need to know how to face these circumstances with decisions that give us a life of dignity and grace. We need a philosophy that knows our world and how to travel through that world without fatigue and despair. This is the Stoa we need.

No philosophy, and no religion either, can protect you from the devastating misfortunes which destroy health, freedom, or companionship. The best they can do is to provide means for coping with both prosperity and adversity: the Stoic philosophy does this better than any other.

K. Campbell, *A Stoic Philosophy of Life*, pp. 80-1.

Before the Stoics, fate was a concept used mainly to describe human fate. From the teachings of early Greek Stoics, gradually it came to be accepted by other philosophies that fate represented the whole causal nexus of the cosmos. That is, the work of fate could then be seen as the cause-and-effect relationship of all these interrelated parts in motion, acting upon each other as the natural law and order of the universe. Even the recently popular study of chaos has shown that beneath the apparent disorder in such phenomena as weather patterns, et cetera, there is still order at work. As Errol Harris says in *Cosmos and Anthropos*, disorder is a parasite on order.

So what we have is an order in the universe where one thing causes another, and the effect that is produced by this cause is the cause of something else. This is called determinism. To put it more succinctly, determinism means that the present is the effect of the past and the cause of the future. The question then becomes: if all parts are interrelated and all the actions of the past have created the conditions of the present, and the present is the cause of the future, how is free will even possible? Is

it possible, or are we all just infinitesimal parts of a gigantic organism that goes its own way with a determination that doesn't allow for the meddling of free will by us?

To the strict determinist, free will is nonexistent. Everything that happens today, including the decision you made to have tea instead of coffee, can be predicted on the basis of a great number of factors that occurred before you made what you thought was a choice of free will. The culture in which you live may favor one beverage over the other, your family's preference, price and availability, a doctor's recommendation, or even the taste buds you were born with may all be causal factors. Personally, it has taken me years to appreciate the taste of green tea, which I drink nearly every day. I've found it's easier on my nervous system than coffee, which has a flavor and aroma I have always preferred. Taste bud preference. Not a free choice. Nervous system preference. Not a free choice.

There are even those who can be called super-determinists. To the mystical philosophies of the East, free will is meaningless and entirely an illusion. If all is unified as an interrelated whole and we are inseparable from that whole, then to speak of free will is illogical and impossible. What the whole does, we do. What the whole is, we are. The fate of all is our fate, and the appearance of separate individuals is an illusion of the ego, part of the game Nature plays with itself.

Actually, the Stoa isn't that far away from the super-determinist's position. We are the Logos, remember. Our cosmologist was Heraclitus, sometimes called the Greek Taoist, who was and still is called a mystical sage. Chrysippus described our relationship to fate as a dog tied to the back of a wagon rumbling down the road. The dog can either struggle and pull one way or the other as hard as it is able or it can walk contentedly along behind. Either way, it goes where the wagon goes. For you free will enthusiasts, don't despair. There is a solution, a way of viewing the situation that may make you more comfortable. This solution can be summed up in a single word, an idea that was reformulated from the Stoa by the Christian scholar monk, John Cassian. But we're not ready for that word just yet.

Determinism

As stated above, determinism says the present is the effect of the past and the cause of the future. Are all causes in this chain of causes, the causal nexus, interrelating with everything in the same way? No. For our purposes, there are two primary types of causes: antecedent and operating, also known as external and internal cause. The antecedent, or external cause, is the chain of events leading to the present. The operating, or internal cause, is the character or nature of a person, place, or thing. An example frequently used in ancient times discusses the character or nature of a stick of wood, the operating cause, which, among other things, has a propensity to burn. Whether or not it does burn will depend on antecedent causes, such as whether it is wet or dry, floating in the ocean or resting in the fireplace next to another stick already burning.

These same causes, external and internal, apply to all animals, including human beings. Those with limited rational faculties are directed by instinct, their Primary Impulse. When they receive a sensory impression from the external world, antecedent cause, they are impelled to act by impulse, not by reasoned choice. Humans, on the other hand, can judge and reflect upon the same sensory information and modify or overrule the Primary Impulse with reason. Because we have this ability, we have free will and moral responsibility for our ethical evolution

with regard to the operating or internal cause. *In Stoic determinism, the internal causes are within our power; the external causes are not. And because these external causes are not within our power, they are deemed matters of indifference.*

This brings us back to the first section of this chapter where we discussed *oikeiosis* from Primary Impulse to virtue. As stated, the majority do not *naturally* evolve in ethical behavior as they get older, despite their possession of a reasoning faculty. If they did, all would become wise and virtuous. We are given the Primary Impulse at birth, but our ethical evolution from this point onward does not take place *without effort*. It requires reason, then practice and an effort of will to evolve to a state of virtue. Stoics have always taught that the perfection of virtue is within everyone's power, but it is something that must be chosen. With effort, the ethically evolving person chooses to live in agreement with Nature and thereby transcends the very determinism that is inherent in Nature.

Free Will in a Word

As promised, we can offer an easier thought solution to the fate and free will conundrum. John Cassian, the fifth century Christian monk and scholar, examined the Stoic concept of free will and adapted it to his writings with the clarity and simplicity of a single word. He taught that all virtues and all vices arise from one source: our inner *attitude* directing the choices we make. Therefore, all virtues are one and all vices are one, because they all come from one source: attitude.

So far, we've just been using words to talk about words. How does this translate to the real world? What about those who have difficult and unfortunate experiences that are real. We are unlikely to see a better illustration for the teachings of the Stoa in action than can be found in a passage of *Man's Search for Meaning* (pp. 104-6), written by the Jewish physician and Stoic, the late Victor Frankl. Dr. Frankl was incarcerated in Auschwitz and other death camps in Nazi Germany where he experienced first-hand one of the hardest fates of any people in the twentieth century. This is his insight about attitude.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer proof that everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way....in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influence alone....It is this spiritual freedom – which cannot be taken away – that makes life meaningful and purposeful .

GOOD, BAD, AND INDIFFERENT

Where lies good? In the will. Where evil? In the will. Where lies that which is neither good nor evil? In things inevitable.

Epictetus

From an early age, following the Primary Impulse, all of us quickly learn to associate good things with pleasure and bad things with pain. Those things we see as inevitable – accidents, sickness, decrepitude in old age, death, sudden reversal of fortune, natural catastrophes, and so on – we also lump in with the bad things, because they so often cause great physical and/or psychological pain. Many people never progress beyond this belief, but others gradually learn that this is a limited

view. Stoics are among them. We believe that although the inevitable may cause pain, such events are neither good nor bad. How can this be so? There are many examples of difficulties that cause us to learn and grow, to evolve as human beings, and this we cannot deny is a good thing. The following story should illustrate what I'm talking about.

Years ago, I represented the San Diego County Probation Department in Superior Court. One year, I was privileged to serve in the court of a judge who had previously experienced what had to be one of the most painful life lessons most of us will ever know. As a young man he was a city motorcycle cop, happy in his profession, embracing this work as his role in life, his career. On a day like so many others, he was riding his bike through an intersection downtown when he was broadsided at a high rate of speed by a drunk who had run a red light. He very nearly died. I'm sure there were times when he wished he had. His body was broken in many places, and he would never be able to walk straight again, let alone be a policeman or ride a motorcycle. He was 100% disabled.

He had a lot of time to think about what to do with his life and his disability pension while enduring the numerous surgical operations required to put the pieces back together. He could have taken his pension and spent the rest of his life feeling sorry for himself in front of the TV or at the beach, but he didn't. His body may be a mess, but he still had his will power left. He went back to college, then law school, took the Bar exam, passed it, and became a practicing attorney. Eventually, he became a Superior Court judge – all because he had once been hit so hard he only had two choices left in life. He could either spiral down in depression and self pity, or he could get a grip on adversity and make it pay. He choose the latter.

Let's take a step back and look to Nature to find the truth beneath appearances. We must learn to see further than our own noses. What we discover is that, whereas the Whole in space and time may be perfect, and Stoics say that it is, we parts are not. We are in a state of becoming. And as a part, as is the case with all partial systems, we are open to influences from other parts that sometimes appear as obstacles.

There are many obstacles and impediments for partial entities and movements, but none for the whole.

Chrysippus

Did any obstacle oppose you in your effort towards an object? If indeed you were making this effort without any reservation, this obstacle is at once injurious to you as a reasonable being. But if you take into consideration the common lot, you are not hurt nor hindered.

Marcus Aurelius

What did he say? In a phrase, we must take the larger view. When Marcus Aurelius says we are not hurt or hindered when we consider the *common lot*, he is asking us to see ourselves from the perspective of all humanity and of Nature. If we do this, then those things we formerly thought of as good, bad, or indifferent will take on a new meaning, a different meaning. Remember determinism? What did John Cassian say? Dr. Frankl? It's what we make of a situation, our internal *attitude* that is capable of change. As Shakespeare said in Hamlet, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." We control our attitude. Nothing else. All the rest are matters of indifference. Even so, matters of indifference can still have varying values.

It's the Aim; not the Target

All externals, as Epictetus would say, are matters of indifference, and yet we pursue them every day. We go to work to provide food for ourselves and/or our families. We save money to buy a new car, because the old one “is on it's last legs.” We carefully evaluate our stock market investments to have an adequate resource for our children's college education and our retirement. We work hard and refrain from whacking the boss even when we think he or she deserves it, because we need a promotion to pay for all these present and future needs in our lives. All these things we do even as Stoics knowing full well that they are matters of indifference. Is it wrong to try to achieve success in our careers, in the raising of our family, in the achievement of higher office?

If you recall our outline of the history of the Greek Stoa, you may remember that Zeno began his philosophical studies with the Cynics. Their position on this question represented a divided contrast between opposites with everything either good or bad, black or white. Anything that wasn't one extreme or the other was nothing. No shades of gray. For them, the practice of virtue was good, the neglect of virtue was bad, and the rest was of no consequence. Their ideas of virtue were not the same as what the Stoa defined, either. To them, whatever was natural was good. Health and prosperity were of no consequence.

Decorum was not considered natural, because it could easily be mistaken for refinement or civility, which they considered unnatural and a degenerate condition into which human beings had fallen from their natural state. Politically, they could be called anarchists. Socially, they were street people who approved of nakedness, public defecation and copulation with whomever, whenever the urge arose. The word *cynic* means shameless dog, which they considered an honorific.

Eventually, Zeno left the Cynics for two reasons that we know. Socially, he was uncomfortable with their lack of decorum. (It was said that on one occasion when Zeno saw his master Crates copulating publicly with a woman he covered them both with a cloak.) Philosophically, he disagreed with their definition of good. He saw good and bad as a unified continuum. He went on to accept a reality between good and bad and felt it would be disingenuous to pretend that all matters of indifference are the same. They could still be preferred or not preferred.

Stoics never encouraged *total* indifference. Being healthy and having the means to provide food, clothing, and shelter for your family and yourself is preferable to being sick and destitute, and therefore it has value. Value, incidentally, is a term the Stoics invented to describe those things preferred but not in and of themselves a good. Values are neither good nor bad, because a Stoic rises above both prosperity and adversity. He knows that in the larger view, when he is prosperous and things are going well, he can feel gratitude for the Providence that has provided them. He also knows that when his life is a trial of adversity, he can again thank Providence for the opportunity to show his mettle, his strength, and his skill in rising to the challenge of great contests.

Success to a Stoic means something different than it does to the common lot. He knows that rich or poor, win or lose, it is the struggle in the achievement of these worldly goals, these preferred matters of indifference, that makes all the difference. To a Stoic, it is all in how you play the game. Success is not in achieving the goal but in how you attempt it. Adam Smith, a sincere admirer of Stoicism, says it best in

his great work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (p. 409):

Human life the Stoics appear to have considered as a game of great skill.... In such games the stake is commonly a trifle, and the whole pleasure of the game arises from playing well, from playing fairly, and playing skillfully. If, notwithstanding all his skill, however, the good player should, by the influence of chance, happen to lose, the loss ought to be a matter rather of merriment than of serious sorrow. He has made no false stroke; he has done nothing which he ought to be ashamed of; he has enjoyed completely the pleasure of the game.

The Passions, *Pathos*

There is no evil in Nature, yet we see it around us every day. What is it and where does it come from? Evil is limited to activities of human beings. Stoics do not believe in the fanciful tale of the Semitic faiths about the fallen angel Lucifer that becomes the incarnation of evil, devoting himself with his host of demonic assistants to making humans misbehave and bringing misfortune to the world. We prefer a more reasoned answer. Specifically, it can be summarized as follows: *There is no evil in Nature; evil only comes from human vice; vice only comes from one source, the passions; the passions we identify as pleasure, distress, appetite, and fear.*

Now wait a minute, do we have some conflict here? Earlier, I made the claim that evil doers were those who had matured rationally but not evolved ethically. They were grown people who were still stuck in the Primary Impulse stage of the child. OK, maybe they were aware of the possibility of living in agreement with Nature (stage 2), but had no interest in doing so (stage 3). If they abused themselves with excess, for example, they could always get fixed by their doctor. If they abused others, they could always try to be clever enough to not get caught and brought to justice. So, is this the evil, or is it in the one source stated above, the passions? What about the Epictetus quote that began this section? He said it was in the will. Not only that, he later says in Book III, chapter 26 of *The Discourses*, “Why, do you not know, then, the origin of all human evils, and of baseness and cowardice, is not death, but rather the fear of death?” So, if evil is not in Nature, where is it – failure to evolve ethically, in the will, the passions, or in the fear of death?

All of the above. They are just different ways of saying the same thing. Evolving ethically requires an effort of the will. We either use the power of the will to choose the good, ethical evolution, or the evil that flows out from the passions. Our fear of death is another way of saying we are stuck in the Primary Impulse stage and all reality is viewed as either good or bad depending on whether it affords pleasure or pain. Fear of death is the belief that it is a bad thing. If we identify pleasure as the good and pain as the bad, then, we use our rational faculty not for wisdom, not for virtue but for the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain. Evil grows whenever and wherever we become addicted to the passions of *pleasure, distress, appetite, and fear.*

Notice that it is the passions, *pathos*, not the emotions, that are the source of all our trouble. But before we go on we need to mention a translation problem. Actually, two problems. Neither 'passion' nor 'pathos' as defined in antiquity has the same meaning to us today and can be a source of confusion. A typical dictionary today will define passion as “1. any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, as love or hate. 2. strong amorous feeling or desire; love; ardor. 3. strong sexual desire; lust.” It isn't until we come to the third definition that we approach the original meaning.

(We saw a similar problem in translating *sophrosyne* as 'temperance'.) Pathos, defined in a dictionary of today, is even further from the mark and more closely resembles a feeling of compassion or pity.

This is not our meaning here. Pleasure as a passion is self-explanatory, but the meanings of distress, appetite and fear may be less obvious. Distress is any mental pain that becomes a disturbance; appetite includes lust – and even anger, which is considered a lust or appetite for revenge; and fear includes fear of the present and of the future—what we call anxiety, another mental pain or distress. Passion we define with Cicero as a *mental disturbance*. We do not confuse passion with love or affection. The love of one's wife, father, or daughter is an emotion thought to be given to us by Nature, and therefore entirely proper. The same is true for friendship for others and affection for one's community and humanity as a whole. From these examples, then, it can be seen that a Stoic can be affectionate even while he is passionless. Forget the contemporary dictionary definition. Affection is *not* a mental disturbance.

So, what does a Stoic mean when he or she speaks of *pleasure, distress, appetite, and fear* as the passions? Does it mean we are not allowed pleasure, for example? No, that's not what it means. Pleasure, or any of the passions, as a mental disturbance means that when yearning for or shrinking away from a thing is *excessive* it has become a passion. Such excess is contrary to reason. When a rational creature is presented with some information or stimulus from its environment, the Primary Impulse is to either seek it or avoid it according to whether it is beneficial or harmful to our existence as an organism. Unlike the animals that do not follow reason, we can use our rational faculty to choose our response to that stimulus. If our judgment is clouded by passion, however, the rational faculty is weakened and a reasonable response is more difficult. We do things and say things that can often be regrettable.

On this subject, Chrysippus compared a man who was walking with one who was running down a hill. The walking man could check himself at any moment and stop. The man running down the hill was like a man in the throws of passion, and it was only with great difficulty that such a man could check himself and come to a halt.

But what about these passions – *pleasure, distress, appetite, and fear*? What if they are not excessive? Is that possible? They only become passions when they have gripped our minds and caused the *mental disturbance* Cicero spoke of. When that happens, when one is gripped by his passion to behave without the calm of reason, he is running downhill. He is propelled into the creation of vice when enslaved to his passion, and once this is done the evil that we know in this world is born. In and of themselves those things that give rise to the passions are neither good nor bad. They are matters of indifference. It is the exaggeration, the distortion of *pleasure, distress, appetite, and fear* that becomes the bad that truly harms us. Only we are harmed, no one else. It is the very nobility of our character that has been compromised and destroyed.

The Stoic's Emotions

So, if Stoics are allowed to have emotions, what emotions are we allowed to have? To answer that, we will have to look a bit more carefully at the phenomenon of emotion. Human emotions have two parts: the physiological activity of the brain and the belief system of the mind. Aristotle was the first to note there appeared to be some difference between the two, but it was the Stoics who first adopted and

developed this understanding as part of their ethical philosophy. Even the Stoic sage has natural, physiological reactions to incoming data. If a sage is driving his car down the road and a cat suddenly darts under the wheels and thump-thump-thump is killed, does the sage feel nothing as he merrily goes on his way? No. That's not a sage; that's a robot. Any Stoic, even the Stoic sage, is likely to be as startled as anyone, maybe holler out loud with surprise, then feel a sickening in the stomach. But he does not feel rage at the cat or himself or fate. He quickly recovers from his surprise with the understanding that this is the nature of things in our familiar world. Accidents happen.

So, what's the difference between a Stoic and any other traveler on this road? It can be found in the second part of human emotions. Part one is the immediate activity of the physiology of emotion: incoming sensory data followed by the realization you just ran over a cat. Part two, the belief system, kicks in, and that makes all the difference. A Stoic knows that in the grand scheme of things no one and nothing is being punished by a vindictive god, and that he is not required to be haunted by guilt for this accident or any other over which he had no control. We Stoics are the same as other people. We are not without feeling, but at the same time we have a belief system that knows what is in our power and what is not in our power. That's why we can rejoice with Epictetus with the realization that Nature has only made us accountable for that over which we have complete control, a rational faculty to perceive the good and a will to choose the good above all else. That alone is our responsibility.

Why do not you rather thank the gods that they have made you superior to those events which they have not placed within your own control, and have rendered you accountable for that only which is within you own control? They discharge you from all responsibility for your parents, for your brothers, for your body, possessions, death, life. For what, then, have they made you responsible? For that which is alone in your own power—a right use of things as they appear. Why, then, should you draw those cares upon yourself for which you are not responsible? This is giving oneself needless trouble.

Discourses of Epictetus Book I: Chapter twelve

* * * *

METAPHYSICS

All men by nature desire to know.
Aristotle *Metaphysics*

INTRODUCTION

Do the Stoics have a metaphysics? Yes and no. In antiquity, Stoics did not consider another reality beyond or after physics, such as Aristotle's metaphysics. Classical Stoics followed the tripartite division of logic, ethics, and natural philosophy common in Greece at that time. Cleanthes added theology, but that study was included as a part of the physical world, not as something separate. To a Stoic, everything, including God, was corporeal. Even today, the Stoic God permeates all reality from the macrocosm to the microcosm, and everything we see and don't see is a manifestation of this rational, creative, and physical presence. Our physics includes the visible and invisible alike. The Logos and the human soul, a spark of the Logos, are bodies that can act upon other bodies. Still, it's important to note that unlike other materialists, the Stoic version of the physical world doesn't *reduce* all reality to the furniture of the universe; it *expands* reality to embrace both the visible and the invisible and normally imperceptible.

What we are going to explore, then, is the *expanded* reality of the invisible and imperceptible, what is commonly referred to as metaphysics. This is not the same metaphysics that academicians discuss in universities today. We will not be offering a scholarly essay examining the Stoic vitalist-teleological version of materialism versus the mechanistic-antiteleological version of contemporary reductionists. We are going to explore the metaphysics that asks questions and speculates answers about the evidence and validity of the mystical experience (ME), the Near Death Experience (NDE), and the survival of human consciousness in a spirit world. Why? Because I believe that this is what at least 90% of us really want to know. Are these Stoic subjects? Of course. The pursuit of wisdom includes all things in heaven and Earth. And, as Seneca said, we do not follow a tyrant. More truths will be revealed to us in future ages. Learning never ends.

Classical Theories of Death

“There await men after death such things as they neither expect nor have any conception of,” Heraclitus said. The survival of individual consciousness was and still is a matter of debate in the Stoa. The speculations of the earliest Stoics are best explained by the concept of *Ekpyrosis* and symbolized by the myth of the phoenix. Many later Stoics rejected the cyclical cosmology of the early Stoa and embraced the myth of Hercules that promises immortality as a reward for effort. Only those who, like Hercules, overcame great obstacles in life were fit to become immortal gods in the afterlife. From the writings of the Roman Stoics we know they considered several options without settling on any one of them. What immediately follows are classical Stoic theories of death, beginning with the early Stoics.

Ekpyrosis

According to the earliest Stoics, some credit Cleanthes' interpretation of Heraclitus with this theory, the cosmos is created and destroyed over and over. This is

accomplished by a divine fire, which is both creator and destroyer, and the fire is God, the Logos. It was thought to be both a real and symbolic fire, although in its physical reality as the Logos, it was thought to exist in the most rarefied form of all matter. In cyclical cosmology, the Logos takes the form of the universe in creation and destroys itself in an act of purification in regular cycles, speculated by some early Stoics to be 20,000 years in duration. After destruction of the present cosmos and before regeneration into the next, the Logos is Pure Soul, pure and alone. With rebirth it becomes the many attributes and faces of itself as World Soul once again.

According to the myth of the phoenix, this remarkably beautiful bird preserved its immortality in cycles of life, death, and resurrection. In the deserts of the Middle East, the phoenix was said to be a large gold and orange eagle that lived to the great age of about 500 years. Then, when overcome by weariness of life, it built a funeral pyre, lit a fire, and reduced itself to a pile of ashes. From these ashes it arose again, renewed in strength and beauty for another 500 years. The Stoic's first theory of death followed this story. The cosmic cycle was an expanded version of the regenerating cycle of the phoenix, which came to symbolize the life and death of the human being. The individual soul was thought to survive the human body until the end of the cosmic cycle, *ekpyrosis*, whereupon it would be assimilated and lose its individual self in Pure Soul.

As for the validity of *ekpyrosis* in contemporary thought, there is an interesting parallel that can be made. One of the leading theories regarding the universe is that it may be cyclical. With the Big Bang, the universe is born and expands for some billions of years before contracting back into itself. Astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, in *A Brief History of Time*, suggests that before creation the universe was of zero size and infinite temperature. We shouldn't be too quick to compare this to what the Stoics called Pure Soul, the rarefied and divine fire of the Logos alone, but there is a rather remarkable similarity.

In any event, Panaetius and Posidonius rejected *ekpyrosis* completely and maintained that the only immortality most of us could ever hope for was in the redistribution of our various chemical parts back into the elements from whence they came. In other words, the consciousness of the individual would become extinct. There was one exception, according to Posidonius and others. It was thought that the souls of sages, the most virtuous among us, might achieve immortality to live as new gods among the old. Immortality as reward. This idea followed the myth of Hercules.

Hercules

The story of Hercules was one of the most popular of the Greek hero myths. Hercules, renowned for strength and courage, was the child of the union of the ever-wayward Zeus and a mortal woman. Hera, Zeus' ever-jealous wife, took her anger out on the young Hercules, who was consigned to perform twelve arduous labors before he could reclaim his rightful place among the immortals. Ultimately, his triumph was duly rewarded and he earned the right to be a god. His arduous labors, of course, symbolize the personal struggles we all face in the conduct of our lives. In the end, our triumph in mastering the art of living assures us a place with the immortals of all time. This idea of immortality as an earned reward hardly warrants mention in a section on speculative philosophy except that it was widely believed by Stoics long ago. Perhaps it gave them an added incentive to acquire virtue, not unlike religion's heaven and hell, but the idea itself is only the stuff of myths and legends.

Uncertainty

Marcus Aurelius considered a Herculean future on some occasions and extinction of individual consciousness on others. He admits uncertainty. Seneca wasn't certain either, and, according to Professor Marcia Colish, he even considered the possibility of metempsychosis, transmigration of souls, a Western version of reincarnation probably first proposed by Pythagoras. Marked as it was by such uncertainty, it's little wonder the Stoa was threatened and eventually overwhelmed by Christianity with its absolute certainty about heaven and hell and a savior, another super hero, who is crucified to satisfy our lust for immortality.

For those of us content to live with uncertainty, the answer still waits.

After Death What survives?

IF we are only the sum total of our physical processes, the dynamic interaction of material molecules, then what is the self that routinely survives all these billions of bodily changes? Look at a photograph of a man or woman 20 years of age, then look again at the same person 50 years later – he or she is almost unrecognizable. The science of anatomy and physiology says that physical changes in each molecule creates an entirely new body every seven years. And yet, the conscious self that goes on living through all these changes appears more or less continuous. A 70-year-old has had ten new bodies in his or her lifetime, but the self is the same self through it all. If the I of who I am can survive all these gradual, molecular deaths and rebirths over the span of a normal lifetime, why is it so hard to imagine the possibility of that same self surviving the more sudden and final molecular death at the end of it?

For a Stoic, it is reasonable to believe that the self survives, because we believe that each of us is a spark or fragment of the World Soul, the universal consciousness. However, such a literal belief is not required. Some prefer to believe in total extinction, and that is their choice. At this point in our evolution as a philosophy, the Stoic position is akin to the Pyrrhonian skeptic, the classical skeptic, not the contemporary caricature of a skeptic. When someone says he is a skeptic today, this usually means he does *not* believe whatever he claims to be skeptical about, and stops there. The Pyrrhonian skeptic would say that he neither believes nor disbelieves, doesn't know or maybe he does, can't know or maybe he can, but he keeps on searching nonetheless.

Edelstein, and others, have criticized Stoicism as being two-dimensional, of not providing for the dynamics of the spirit. There is the suggestion that this is why the Stoa was so easily routed by the Christian cult. Perhaps, but the Stoa did not become extinct, and the new Stoic does not have to settle for two-dimensional beliefs. We have more than a right, we have a responsibility to investigate new ideas to all the old questions. Unfortunately, today, as always, there is such outright lunacy and base charlatanism seeking respectability by claiming kinship to metaphysics that many thoughtful people may be prejudiced against such studies. Nevertheless, our pending confrontation with death, the truth or illusion of mortality, compels many of us to search further and deeper than Stoics have ever done before. For some Stoics, reconciliation to a finite life is the answer; for others, the search goes on.

All philosophy is speculative, of course, and as soon as it ceases to be speculative it is science. Metaphysics is especially so. Despite this difficulty, we have considerable help with the first part of our study. The late Walter Stace, Princeton

philosopher, helps us to understand a remarkable human phenomenon that has existed for all of recorded history: the mystical experience of our oneness with the cosmos. In both East and West, this form of enlightenment has had a profound influence on the many who consistently and persistently report they have learned another way of knowing. If the phenomenon of the mystical experience is a real process of Nature, then it is of paramount importance that the Stoa be there.

THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 6.522

Who are mystics, and what is this experience they have? Is it all the same experience, or does it differ according to the religion or culture to which one belongs? Is it a real, objective experience, or is it a subjective hallucination of the subconscious? For the answer to many of these questions, I want to give credit to the work of Walter Stace found in his pioneering classic, *Mysticism and Philosophy*. Professor Stace sorted through mountains of thought and data to provide much of the intellectual organization of what we know of the mystical experience (ME). My references to Stace are from this book, which is high on my recommended reading list.

Who they are? Who are the mystics, and where do they come from? While it is true that the majority of the many mystics living and dead come from Asian cultures that traditionally encourage such pursuits, it can be fairly and accurately said that they are and have been everywhere. Muslims, Christians, Jews, as well as pagans, agnostics, and atheists, have had MEs. It is often interpreted as a religious experience because of the context in which it occurs, but it is independent of any organized religion. The experience can take place indoors or out, in meditation, on a walk in the woods, or in your local grocery store, and it can happen to men and women, young and old.

What is it? If you'll recall what we learned from the physics of the Stoics and from what Capra calls the two Grand Themes of the physics of the twentieth century, then we can more clearly intellectualize about the ME. That is, the whole, the One, is made up of interrelated parts, dynamic continua of polar opposites revealing a unified cosmos in constant motion. At no time did Stace associate the ME with quantum physics, but, if we were to make such an association, we could describe this experience as a physical phenomenon: *The mystical experience occurs when the continuum collapses. When the continuum collapses there is no longer any continuum between subject and object. I become that. I become the One.*

Becoming one with the One, or what Plotinus the neo-Platonist mystic referred to as the flight from the alone to the Alone, is a common notion of the ME. There are other insights, such as the many forms one can experience with the study of Zen koans. In any case, there are two primary kinds of experiences in merging with the One. You can experience the One made up of interrelated parts, or you can experience the One without any parts, without any divisions or boundaries, the infinite One without numerical content.

External and Internal

Although Stace calls these two kinds of mystical experiences “extrovertive” and

“introvertive,” I’ve taken liberties with his terminology and substituted “external” and “internal,” because I think his choice is too heavily loaded with decades of psychological jargon and prejudice for and against extrovertive and introvertive personalities having nothing whatever to do with the subject at hand. In short, *the external experience perceives the One outwardly* directly through the senses as a whole made up of interrelated parts, while *the internal experience perceives the One inwardly* without any parts, because all sensory information, thought, imagery, and any other empirical content of existence is excluded from consciousness. Usually the external experience is spontaneous. The internal experience is often the result of years of discipline in various forms of meditation. We will examine each in turn.

In the external experience the mystic perceives the same world or environment we see in normal waking consciousness but with a new kind of sight that “sees” through each person, place, and thing in view. This sight has been described as a kind of shimmering light that shows the underlying relationship of everything to everything. There is a feeling of joy, wonder, peace, and usually a profound certainty that the person and all other things present are united with God, the One. As mentioned, the experience is usually spontaneous and may only occur for a few minutes once in a lifetime. However, even a single experience is so significant that it is never forgotten and often redirects a person’s life path.

In the internal experience the mystic sees “nothing” or no thing. The senses are shut down, no thought or images are present, and all is pure silence, emptiness. It is in this very state of nothingness that the adept realizes that his true self, without all the illusions of the everyday world, is the Universal Self – pure soul without empirical content, undifferentiated unity, the One, the infinite without distinctions, boundaries or other. This experience, like the external experience, is also profoundly moving and presumably without equal. And, unlike the external experience, once the mystic has had such an experience, he or she may be able to repeat it a number of times.

What it isn’t

In order to better understand what the mystical experience is, we also need to examine what it is not. Visions and voices are not mystical experiences, but fall more accurately into the category of dreams, reveries, or hallucinations. As noted, the external experience is one of direct perception of actual objects in the viewer’s environment, and the internal experience is entirely devoid of imagery or other sensory content. There are no gods, angels, ghosts, demons, or disembodied voices commanding or demanding action or inaction. Mystics, both East and West, warn against such phenomena as trickery and illusion.

The same can be said for raptures, trances, and emotional frenzies. These have always been suspect by Stoics going all the way back to Heraclitus’ warning against them. Hyper-emotionalism in the religious celebrations of antiquity often resulted in bloody and brutal orgies of various kinds and have been considered, then and now, by more rational folk as suspect, if not downright contemptible. These hallucinations, raptures, and frenzies are still experienced widely today but are not considered by “true” mystics as related or comparable to their ME.

Common Characteristics

From many recorded instances of the true mystical experience, both external and internal, East and West, Stace has discovered seven essential characteristics that these experiences have in common. (pp. 131-2).

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
1. A unifying vision – all things are One	1. A unitary consciousness – the One, the Void
2. Appearance of the One in all things	2. Non-spatial, non-temporal
3. Sense of objective reality	3. same
4. Blessedness, peace, euphoria, et cetera	4. same
5. Feeling of the holy/divine	5. same
6. Paradox	6. same
7. Alleged to be ineffable	7. same

If you'll notice #6 above, you'll see that paradox is an important feature. Stace quotes one mystic's attempt to describe it this way: "Black does not cease to be black, nor white white. But black is white and white is black. The opposites coincide without ceasing to be what they are in themselves (p. 65)." This is reminiscent of the paradox we spoke of in the physics section where we learned that subatomic particles are destructible and indestructible, where atomic particles exist and are non-existent, what Niels Bohr called complementarity.

We also see how the internal experience itself can be viewed as paradoxical. The diminished self becomes the greater Self. Oddly enough, even though the experience is supposed to be one of undifferentiated unity, the One without content, the whole without parts or boundaries, the mystic experiences the self as the Self, existing and non-existing as a distinct entity. It's this very paradox that causes those who have had such an experience to claim that it is ineffable (#7), that there is no way the logical mind can comprehend the experience, and that explanations are useless. Yet, the experience is one of such magnitude that the mystic can't help trying to describe the indescribable.

Mysticism and Death

It [the soul] is unconscious of yesterday or the day before, and of tomorrow and the day after, for in eternity there is no yesterday nor any tomorrow, but only Now, as it was a thousand years ago and as it will be a thousand years hence, and is at this moment, and as it will be after death.

Meister Eckhart, 14th c. Christian mystic, Blakney, (p. 153)

Mystics commonly experience some sense of immortality during the mystical experience, but interpretations of that experience clearly separate East from West. In the West the individual maintains his individuality throughout eternity, while in the East the individual is thought to be assimilated into the One – generally after its final incarnation as an evolving human being. The Westerner is likely to protest that to be absorbed into the One is the same as annihilation, so where's the mystical sense of immortality some have promised? Once again we answer with paradox. Stace quotes the English poet laureate and mystic, Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-92), who had a number of the spontaneous, external MEs from youth onward, as an example of how the individual can be both one and the One by claiming that this is

“no extinction, but the only true life (p. 314).”

Apparently, after death we can know both ends of the dynamic continuum simultaneously, but is this promise true and real? Can we accept the mystical experience as a fact and a promise of future existence beyond the grave? No, not really. Even the Buddha, the so-called permanently enlightened one, offered cold comfort. When he was asked whether we continue to exist or become extinct after death, he was reported to answer, “neither.”

If we examine the physiological evidence for the possible survival of individual consciousness, we have two seemingly insurmountable problems to contend with. First, the only thing we know about consciousness, surprisingly little actually, is that it appears to be directly related to the living operation of our nervous system. When the nervous system ceases to function, contemporary physiology assumes that all consciousness as we know it also ceases to function. How and in what form could it survive the extinction of that system, no one can answer.

The second problem is perhaps more closely related to cosmic fairness than anything, and that has to do with the immortality of other animals. At what point in the evolutionary scale would the intelligent animal’s individual consciousness be *worthy* of survival? You can ask the same question about the human being. At what point in our evolution as a species was our consciousness capable of immortality? To reiterate, if consciousness is capable of immortality, how and in what form is such a feat possible? We’ve barely begun our work here. And, as for cosmic fairness, if there were such a thing, the good would never die young. Or would they?

What’s it worth?

According to mystics, the ME universally takes place in a timeless moment. This is a primary feature of that experience. That moment, then, when time stands still is a moment of eternity, the *now* of which Meister Eckhart speaks. To experience eternity is to know immortality. Even if this experience lasts three minutes or six minutes or four hours, none of that matters. During this time, there is the experience of timelessness. Thus, if you can know such an experience, immortality is guaranteed. But, is it the *real* eternity that the mystic is experiencing in that moment?

That we cannot know, because it appears to be the only eternity living people have experienced. We have nothing else to compare it to. All we can go by is what the experience itself says it is. For those who have experienced it, there’s no doubt in their minds, but for the rest of us there is. Can we empirically prove that these people know what immortality really feels like? No. We don’t need to. Whether the experience of immortality really feels the way mystics say it does, or whether it is something else, isn’t known. The experience is its own proof, and we have no way of either affirming or denying that the timeless moment really happened.

Here's the deal. If you have a mystical experience, you will know the timeless moment. By knowing the timeless moment, you will have an experience so incredible you will have difficulty speaking of it. It will be ineffable. In that experience, you are assured of knowing our only living representation of immortality. For a moment, while you were alive, you knew eternity. You were an immortal.

What's that worth to you? Are you willing to make a substantial effort in time, money, and energy in order to experience that one guaranteed moment of eternity? Are you willing to give up things: home, family, a nice car, new clothes? Are you willing to make your life a sacrifice, to embrace pain, cold, heat, poverty, and other discomforts? What about celibacy, abstinence from all pleasures, vegetarian diet, countless hours of leg-cramping meditation? Many paths to the ME expect you to immerse yourself in all of the above. Are you willing to trade virtually all of this life for the experience of immortality for a moment? Is that, in fact, really necessary, or is it just an accumulation of forms added over the centuries by devoted disciples?

Objectivity

Does the truth of the ME have an objective reality? That is, can we say that the One the mystic knows has the same actual existence as, for example, we might say of the human heart? I know I have a heart, even without looking at it, because I can feel my pulse. I know my pulse is from my beating heart, because this information was acquired long ago by repeated dissection, experimentation, and analysis. Can we have the same certainty and confidence about an experience that mystics say cannot be "analyzed and dissected?" Stace concludes it cannot be either an objective *or* a subjective experience. The experience itself is paradoxical and must be what he calls "transsubjective." Cosmic consciousness cannot be said to "exist" in the same way our heart exists because it does and doesn't have qualities. It is personal and impersonal. It is dynamic, inactive, creative, static, active, and motionless.

Fortunately, researchers are continuing to explore the issue of mysticism and objectivity. Two contemporary thinkers claim they *have* located the physical source of the mystical experience. The authors Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg were researcher associates for more than five years on the staff of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. d'Aquili is a Professor of Psychiatry, and Newberg is a Fellow of the Nuclear Medicine program there. d'Aquili is an anthropologist of religion, as well as a clinical therapist, and Newberg is a specialist in brain scan studies that identify parts of the brain stimulated by various thoughts, emotions, and tasks. Together, they have studied eight Tibetan Buddhists in meditation over a period of two years.

The evidence they have accumulated in a collection of lectures and newspaper and journal articles published under the title, *Neurotheology*, indicates the serenity, calm and transcendence found in meditation can be seen as *increased* activity in the frontal lobes and *decreased* activity in the parietal lobes of the brain. In a recent lecture entitled, "Why God Won't Go Away," Newberg said, "The idea is that the brain is set up in ways to help us survive, [Religion] offers the reassurance that there is purpose and causal effect . . . Thus, religious and spiritual experiences are right in line with what the brain is trying to do for us."

After studying the Buddhists in meditation, the researchers propose that in the "unitary" meditative state, the amygdala, a small mass about the size of a walnut in the lateral ventricle of the brain, "generates a sense of religious awe." Such practices as meditation and certain religious rituals appear to stimulate the ergotropic and trophotropic subsystems of the autonomic nervous system. When one system is stimulated to a certain level of activity, the brain circuit of the related system simultaneously begins to "reverberate." In extreme cases, the one subsystem spills over to produce a "maximal discharge" of both systems and induce a state perceived by the mind as an "Absolute Unity of Being (AUB), the abolition of any discrete boundaries between beings, by the absence of time-flow, and by the

elimination of the self-other dichotomy.”

A dilemma remains. Does the brain scan data show that the ME is the result of the activity centers in the brain stimulated by meditation; or, are the changes in the brain activity the result of changes in the mystic’s consciousness? According to d’Aquili, “Western science says matter is primary, but if you flip it around and look at what the mystics report, you could say that it’s ultimately consciousness and awareness that are primary.” At this time, there can be no certainty regarding the objectivity of the mystical experience. We have only evidence, theory, and conjecture.

Whether this activity discovered in the brain is the *cause* or the *result* of the mystical experience is still unknown, but we must also remember the external experience. So far, there is no way the scientific method knows how to capture the truth of a spontaneous ME. Is it objectively real, or is it an aberration in the construction of the brain? Perhaps the brain of artists and poets, such as Tennyson, are what they are because of certain internal wiring defects. There’s much more to explore in our future.

THE NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE

Those before our time who gave an impetus to these things are not our masters, but our guides. The truth affords an open field for every man; it is not already occupied territory. Even for those who will come after us, much of it remains.

Seneca, Ep. XXXIII. 11. 2-7

Despite years of scoffing by the scientific community, the Near Death Experience (NDE) as a serious subject just won't go away. In 2008 a large study involving 25 United Kingdom and United States hospitals was launched to study 1,500 survivors for the out of body experiences commonly experienced in the NDE. This 3-year study will include placing images on shelves that can only be seen from the ceiling in hospital emergency room resuscitation areas. According to Dr. Sam Parnia, who heads the study, “If you can demonstrate that consciousness continues after the brain switches off, it allows for the possibility that the consciousness is a separate entity.”

Our increased awareness of the NDE is largely due to the increasing skill of medical technicians and their ability to resuscitate patients who are unconscious and physically near death. The experiences of a minority of these patients have generated a lot of interest in the medical community. The stories they tell of what happened to them while they were near death have been accumulating over the years to a rather impressive volume of data which researchers can and have been analyzing. One of the earlier and more carefully researched books on the subject was written by Michael Sabom, M.D., F.A.C.C., whose work, *Recollections of Death*, is a valuable resource for this chapter.

Sabom identifies three kinds of NDEs: autoscopic, transcendental, and a combination of the two. The autoscopic, which simply means self-visualization, is the experience where some part of the individual’s consciousness upon nearing death separates from his or her physical body and observes that body from a distance, usually from above looking down. Hearing, as well as vision, may be involved, and travel to other locations sometimes occurs. The transcendental

experience is one where the individual near death is surrounded by darkness that often appears as a tunnel with a light gradually getting brighter as he or she nears the end of the tunnel. The individual is attracted to the light, comes closer, and is drawn into some kind of reality, another plane of existence within it.

This transcendental experience may or may not include the phenomenon of one's life "flashing before his eyes" before or after encountering the tunnel light. The light itself can turn out to be a place where the individual is greeted by departed family members, religious figures, or simply a light that's alive with a communicating consciousness. The combination is when the individual sees himself as separated from his body, then encounters the tunnel and light.

So what? What does all this have to do with the Stoa? Is it a natural phenomenon? Is it objectively real, a natural process we will all experience some day? We don't know. There is still a great deal of skepticism in both the scientific and medical community about whether or not the NDE is real in the sense that it says anything significant about human consciousness. Those who don't like the implications of what this could mean have thrown up a number of explanations for what it could be and what could cause such an experience.

Some Explanations

The two most common explanations for the NDE are conscious and unconscious fabrication. As for conscious fabrication, the evidence is too wide and too consistent to account for deliberate fantasy. All ages, occupations, religious beliefs or non-beliefs are represented. Subconscious fabrication would entail an attempt by the subconscious to cope with the horror of imminent death, but such attempts, if they exist, are inconsistently realized. People who have had more than one experience where they were near death usually have only one NDE regardless of the number of times they have found themselves in this situation, and the one time it is experienced is not necessarily the most traumatic and certain threat of death.

Dr. Sabom carefully examined eleven possible explanations for the NDE and discounts all but one. In addition to the conscious and subconscious fabrication explanation, Sabom examines semi-consciousness, depersonalization, autoscopic hallucination, dreams, prior expectation, drug-induced hallucination, endorphin release, temporal lobe seizures, and oxygen deprivation. All are examined and rejected.

The only known possible medical explanation for the NDE comes from a study done with volunteers whose carbon dioxide level was increased to that approaching death. Such an increase is a condition commonly associated with physical trauma where the blood is unable to carry the carbon dioxide out of the brain to be exhaled by the lungs. Some of the volunteers experienced what could be called authentic NDEs. They had self-visualization, the light at the end of the tunnel, peaceful calm, all of it. So is that the explanation? Perhaps. Probably not. In one documented case a subject's carbon dioxide level was tested while he was in the midst of an NDE, *and the level was actually lower than normal*. For those whose carbon dioxide level was artificially increased, an important question must be asked: Did the increase of carbon dioxide cause the NDE, or was the NDE the effect of the near death physical trauma caused in the study?

Sound familiar? Yes, we appear to be right where we were with objectivity and the mystical experience. At this time, MEs and NDEs can be either objective or

subjective experiences depending on the point of view you wish to maintain. There is no certain proof yet, either way. What does the NDE tell us about life after death? Nothing. We don't know if this experience, either the autoscopic or transcendent kind, is a prelude to some form of consciousness surviving death, or if it is simply a natural part of the dying process and nothing more. It could be nothing more, but the fact that it is increasingly commonplace doesn't make it any less remarkable.

A cursory review of the NDE as reported throughout history, both in Asia and in Western experiences, shows that the NDE has changed with the ages. At the hunter-gatherer stage of human society, shaman studies indicate that one who experiences the NDE is immersed in Nature with many of the beliefs and animal spirits common in their culture. The NDE is a highly valued experience that can usher the individual into the calling of being a shaman. In the Middle Ages, both in Asia and in the West, when "civilization" was an ugly and harsh brutality for most of its citizens, the NDEs reported scenes from hell and damnation, with the individual sometimes instructed to return to their people and tell them to mend their ways or they would be subject to horrific tortures and torment. Today, the NDE usually shows a benign, heavenly, joyful encounter with beings of light and bountiful kindness.

What happened? How does essentially the same experience produce three entirely different versions of a future spirit life? It is here that we come to a new objection that is not explored in the literature of the NDE—at least I was unable to find it. If the experience tends to be what the cultural tradition and world view says about life after death, then what does that say about the NDE as an objective externally-based reality? Currently, on the face of the historical evidence, the NDE appears to be a subjective and internally generated vision of reality based upon carbon dioxide level increases at the approach of death. How else would one explain such discrepancies in the experiences of those on the threshold of the afterlife? Or, there may be new information coming from future studies, such as the three-year investigation currently being done by UK and US hospitals, that will challenge this skeptical point of view.

THE SPIRIT WORLD

Surely the soul survives the death of the body, for opposites are generated out of opposites, and life is the opposite of death.

Socrates, *Phaedo*

If academic and professional credentials are any assurance of understanding, then perhaps the most credible account of the so-called spirit world comes to us from Dr. Brian Weiss, M.D., psychiatrist, graduate Phi Beta Kappa, *magna cum laude*, from Columbia University, graduate of Yale University Medical School where he later did his Residency in Psychiatry, and Chairman of Psychiatry at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami, Florida. Are you impressed enough to be curious? I was.

With that kind of background you would expect him to be surprised when he stumbled into the spirit world in the course of his practice. He was. He wrote a book about it, *Many Lives, Many Masters* (Simon & Schuster, 1988). Quoting from the back of the jacket, "As a traditional psychotherapist, Dr. Brian Weiss was astonished and skeptical when one of his patients began recalling past-life traumas that seemed to hold the key to her recurring nightmares and anxiety attacks. His skepticism was eroded, however, when she began to channel messages from the 'space between lives,' which contained remarkable revelations about Dr. Weiss's

family and his dead son. Using past-life therapy, he was able to cure the patient and embark on a new, more meaningful phase of his own career.”

This is a doctor who over the course of that career treated thousands of psychiatric patients and directed inpatient units at four major medical schools. Did this doctor, who had all his life considered himself to be a man of science, suddenly become delusional and lose all control of his skeptical faculties? His patient mentioned above, Catherine, a young woman in her twenties, was a “relatively simple and honest person....not a scholar, and she could not have invented the facts, details.... [that were] beyond her capacity.”

Intrigued by all this, but still skeptical, I decided to do a little more research on the subject. That's when I discovered Michael Newton, Ph.D., a psychotherapist recently retired from practice in California who had made this subject his life's work. Over the course of his career, Dr. Newton used hypnosis to regress over 4000 clients to a past life, then brought them forward to the death in that life—and beyond. According to these many hypnotized subjects, shortly after death the spirit returns to a spirit world before reincarnating again. This time between incarnated lives became Newton's specialty, which he calls Life Between Lives (LBL) hypnosis. The accounts of his experiences with LBL hypnosis he wrote in several books. He summarized the principles of these discoveries in the Appendix of *Life Between Lives* (Llewellyn Publications, 2006), several of which are included here:

- *The most consistent reports of the soul's demonstrated essence is that it represents intelligent energy that is immortal and manifested by specific vibrational waves of light and color.*
- *Soul's reincarnate with human beings for countless lifetimes to advance through levels of development by addressing karmic tasks from former lifetimes.*
- *Our planet is one of an incalculable number of worlds that serve as training schools for the advancement of souls.*
- *Spiritual malevolence does not exist within the divine order of love and compassion that comprises our spiritual origins.*
- *Rather than being defined as a place of ultimate inaction, or nirvana, the spirit world appears to be a space of transition for souls who evolve into higher energy forms....*
- *The ultimate goal of all souls appears to be the desire to seek and find perfection, and finally conjoin with the Source who created them.*

As it happens, there are no licensing requirements to practice hypnosis in the United States at this time, so I secluded myself in the fully stocked hypnosis and hypnotherapy section of the nearby university library and learned how this work was done. After several weeks of study, I offered my services to family and friends and put up a notice on the bulletin board of another college a little farther away. My services were offered free of charge and specialized exclusively in past life regression and LBL hypnosis. About twenty clients later, I had all the material I needed to confirm Weiss and Newton's work.

I spoke to the spirit guides of a number of clients who were capable of going into deep hypnosis. For those who have read neither Weiss nor Newton, I will explain in briefest outline the methodology of my own LBL sessions. They began with past life regression hypnosis and generally took two and sometimes three sessions to reach the realm of life-between-lives. Newton's approach was somewhat different

and generally followed a marathon hypnosis session lasting from 4-6 hours. I didn't want to do that and usually confined my sessions to between 1 to 1½ hours, separated by a week or more.

In the first session, I found out if the individual was capable of deep hypnosis and comfortable with past life regression. I first hypnotized the client and moved them back to infancy, then back to a time before their birth. This was all done by a carefully worded script encouraging imagery and occasional verbal response from the subject once they showed signs of hypnotic trance. A place of safety was created in an imaginary garden to which the subject could return if there was too much stress and he or she was fearful of continuing. (Some past lives are *very* stressful, but usually the hypnotist can move beyond or around the most stressful moments without having to wake the subject.) When the subject relived a given past life and was guided to the end of that life, he or she was brought back to normal waking consciousness. And that was the end of the first session.

In the next session, I would again take the subject to a past life, preferably the most immediate past life (to help them address troubling issues that may be impinging on their current life), up to and *including* the death scene. When the death scene was fully relived, we next worked on coming to some understanding about that life's chief lesson. Every life has a principle lesson the incarnating individual was supposed to learn. Then, we went forward beyond that death. At this point, the subject was usually a bit disoriented, but invariably felt peace, even joy at having died. Occasionally, there was some residual angst about the nature of the death in the past life, but that was easily soothed away with a few kind words, and the time and distance traveled away from the body of that life and the earthly plane left the past life a dim memory.

Despite the peace and joy at having left the body behind, or perhaps because of it, the subject was not always focused or oriented enough to know where they were. If this was the case, I asked them to tell me how they felt and what they were thinking. (Hypnotic subjects, even in deep trance, are capable of talking while still hypnotized. This may come as a surprise to those unfamiliar with hypnosis, but it is common and can be done with the right words of hypnotic suggestion.) At this point, the goal was to find the subject's daimon, or spirit guide. I prefer the classical term made popular by Socrates and will use 'daimon' to describe the subject's spirit companion. Christians would call it a Guardian Angel.

Finding the daimon was seldom difficult to do, but usually required the suggestion that the subject look for a person or light that would never be far away. I explained that this was their daimon and would be their guide, and that I would simply stand by until the subject located him, her, or it, which rarely took more than a minute or two. When contact was made we had introductions all around, and I attempted to get the name and gender of the subject's daimon—if the gender wasn't immediately obvious. The daimon normally took a human form, or as a brightly lit spirit, and was only manifest as an animal on two occasions with boys, both too young to be useful for my study. After the introduction, I explain what we were doing, then gave the subject all the time s/he wished to converse silently with the daimon.

When they were finished, anywhere from 2-5 minutes, I asked the subject if s/he wished to tell me anything that was said. The conversation was invariably summarized as a happy reunion, and at that point the LBL session really began. I asked permission to speak directly to the daimon and record its answers. Permission

was always given. These answers were always spoken *by* the subject—who did *not* speak in otherworldly voices. It was nearly always the same voice the hypnotized person used in waking consciousness, although I've had subjects who uncharacteristically spoke so rapidly it was difficult to follow what they were saying until I slowed them down. Otherwise, there was no change in either the tone or modulation of the voice. They were simply saying the words the daimon put into their minds. Very often, when subjects were brought out of hypnosis, they were quite surprised at the answers to my questions. The hypnosis was so deep and the subject as participant was so passive that s/he was only dimly aware of the information given. After each session we always had a review.

I was able to confirm Newton's conclusion that this work should not be done with the very young. He refused LBL hypnosis with anyone under the age of thirty. Newton said he believed it had to do with not learning enough about the lessons the incarnated spirit, the subject, is here to learn. The daimon of every person is quite careful to avoid answering questions about lessons that the individual has yet to experience. In other words, we are here on Earth to learn certain lessons that cannot be understood by reading a book or being told the answer. They must be *experienced* to be learned. Commonly that experience is painful and difficult, but the individual only learns by going through it, and the daimon will not discuss these matters. They simply tell me they will not discuss that issue, but sometimes I'm able to get partial answers by asking if they could give the subjects a clue about how to best prepare themselves for the lesson at hand. The answer at this point is usually cryptic, such as pay more attention to your health or the bad company of so-and-so. That sort of thing.

For those who find LBL hypnosis interesting I'm going to disappoint you by not discussing any of my case histories. Instead, let me refer you to Weiss and Newton. I will mention a few matters in general. I can assure you that the answers to the big questions of life are often amazing! Profound. The subject later confesses to be as amazed by the words that came into his or her head as I am. Perhaps the most impressive part is that these answers often come immediately and are spoken so rapidly without any apparent effort or careful thought. The skeptical hypnotist can't help but think that if the subject is just making this all up then he or she must be a genius and at least a very deep thinker. None of the subjects hypnotized gave that appearance outside of deep hypnosis. None claimed backgrounds or interests in philosophy.

So, what is going on here? Well, one possibility is that there really are daimons assigned to each person on Earth, as the ancient Greeks claimed. You can further believe, if you want to, that there is some sort of spirit world beyond the grave to which we can communicate through hypnosis. On the other hand, you can refuse to be impressed by Weiss' case or Newton's 4000 cases, dismissing the lot as the anecdotal evidence of free-flowing imagination, or whatever. You can continue to steel yourself against hope and believe only in personal extinction at death, and no matter how amazing or astonishing the evidence, either in part or in accumulation, confine all of your thoughts to only those things that science has proven as fact. As you may have guessed, I personally believe that the latter point of view is bleak, rigid, and poverty-stricken. On the other hand, I am not ready to join a cult of spiritualists. There may be another possibility.

We have very little research on the power of the subconscious mind, but it's gradually getting the attention it deserves. In the December 2008 issue of *Current*

Biology, a study done by an international team of brain researchers, including neuroscientist Beatrice de Gelder of Harvard, experimented with so-called blindsight. (Blindsight is the ability to “see” things by sensing them in the brain's subcortical and therefore subconscious visual system.) One patient, a medical doctor in his 50s, had recently suffered two strokes that left his visual lobes completely destroyed. His brain and eyes were in all other respects completely normal, leaving him with the equipment necessary to process subconscious vision. The doctor was skeptical and initially refused to take part in the experiments. In the end, he was persuaded to zigzag down a hallway cluttered with a garbage can, a stack of papers, and several boxes, navigating the obstacles effortlessly.

There are those, especially hypnotists and hypnotherapists, who believe that our normal, waking conscious mind is, pardon the triteness, the tip of an iceberg. The subconscious, the subterranean consciousness is huge and largely unknown and ignored. What makes it so huge? There is very strong evidence that everything we ever see, hear, know, and experience is stored away in the subconscious. It is often recognized as the wellspring of great discoveries and creative genius. And still, we know so little about it. Everything in our culture is oriented to the conscious mind – all of life's punishments and rewards are focused on the tip of the iceberg, while the supporting structure is left alone.

The actual nature of the sub-consciousness may be the reason why a subject under the age of thirty is usually not advanced enough to be appropriate for LBL hypnosis. That is, the subconscious mind may simply not be developed enough to create an independent and alternate ego, which is exactly what I'm suggesting. A hypnotist in this kind of work may be tapping into a conversation with the subconscious mind. That mind may be a separate form of intelligence made up of all the individual has experienced in life and stored away out of sight and out of mind. Let's face it, 90% of it is of little or no known use in normal, daily survival. This would explain why the daimon believes it is a separate entity, because in a way it is. It would also explain why they are so eager to communicate, and they almost always are, about everything except life lessons that are yet to be learned. The reason they resist talking about these lessons may be because *they don't know* the answer – as in, the lesson has yet to be experienced and summarized. To suggest, however, that the subconscious has the ability to communicate in this manner implies that it is also a cognitive intelligence. How would you begin to measure that?

All speculation. That's metaphysics. I told you this was the section devoted to speculative philosophy, and clearly it is. These are difficult matters to study and know, and so we speculate. Do mystical experiences, near-death experiences, and communications with the spirit world offer authentic visions of invisible worlds beyond the grave? You must draw your own conclusions, but let me leave this chapter with one bit of advice I learned from the so-called spirit world. What I was told was spoken through the hypnotized subject directly to me for my benefit. One of seven elders in a Council of Elders, spirits more advanced than daimons or guides, said to me, “We understand that people are curious and want to know about life after death, and that is only natural, but isn't this work you are doing a little bit like cheating? [Pause] You are supposed to fully embrace your earthly existence and learn though that vehicle.”

Then the Council of Elders simply vanished.

* * * *

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