

THE PATH OF THE SAGE:

A PLAIN ENGLISH INTRODUCTION
TO STOIC PHILOSOPHY TODAY

The e-Book, Condensed Version

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by

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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.

It also means something more. The Stoa is alive. The reason it is still alive after 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 unassailable power of a single idea:

Live according to nature.

That is our motto. Live according to nature. Zeno said it first, and he is the founder of our school, but he wasn't working alone. He was following a path already begun by two of the greatest thinkers in history. 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.

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Because this is an introduction to Stoicism, I have avoided the use of footnotes except for quotations and original thoughts and insights that deserve recognition. I am not an academician, neither do I pretend to have assembled an original body of research. Many of the ideas presented are my own, but many more are based upon the hard work of others. I wish to give special credit to Dr. Keith Campbell, Professor Emeritus, Department of Philosophy, University of Sydney, whose patience in the years of our email correspondence deserves a special award instead of this simple and sincere word of thanks.

THE STOIC TRADITION

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, that 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 belongs to Heraclitus.

Heraclitus (c.535-c.475 BCE)

Nobleman of Ephesus, sage, mystic genius, and 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. What the Christians didn't destroy many others attempted. In the seventh century, the last of the early Stoic works were likely destroyed in the willful destruction of the great library of Alexandria. Caliph Omar, the fundamentalist 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 for 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 with modern physicists 2500 years later. His cosmology and ours describe a universe that is a unified, organic view of the cosmos; eternal becoming, perpetual and cyclical change; unity in pairs of opposites; paradox; and a dynamic view of the universe that emphasizes movement, flow and change.

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 what it meant, 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. And 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 the 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 the man of principle who lived and died by what he believed. And 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 island of Cypress was going about his father's business with a shipload of purple 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 picked up a book 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 pointed him out. Follow that man, Zeno was told. And he 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 predecessor, the intense and provocative Diogenes, the actual founder of the Cynic school, Crates was said to live each day as if he were on holiday. He was the third in line of descent from Socrates. The writings of Socrates' oldest student, Antisthenes, inspired the zealous Diogenes, who later claimed he learned everything he knew about philosophy from a mouse. Diogenes preached an ascetic lifestyle, a living ethical school whose practitioners became known as Cynics, *dogs*, because they forsook all material possessions to live in the streets in their single-minded pursuit of virtue. He himself lived in a discarded bathtub, going about the Athenian market with a lighted lantern in broad daylight in search of an honest man. He soon found many, and he and his followers were convinced they were the true disciples of Socrates. Crates, who took over this school of ragged nonconformists from Diogenes, was Zeno's first teacher in philosophy.

Zeno 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 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 the Stoa Poikile, the painted stoa, a long porch or colonnade facing the market. It was called the painted stoa because of its painted murals along the back 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. Before long he attracted a daily following of young men who came to the stoa to study with him. This following of students became known in Athens as the Men of the Stoa, or Stoics.

Zeno taught a unified system of philosophy in three parts: ethics, physics, and logic. He established principles of conduct for one's life (ethics) based not just on what he said they should be but on an understanding of man's relationship to the universe (physics) that followed from a careful and accurate method of reasoning and rhetoric (logic) to confirm the truth of these principles.

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

Zeno had one student who had 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. Panaetius had just the right philosophy for the worldly and practical Romans, one that emphasized ethics, 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 centered on the individual.

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 works.

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 and to conclude 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 admitted. But still, he decided, our intelligence was more closely akin to the intelligence that ruled nature, and that our reason was our special link to the Logos.

Posidonius is sometimes accused of being a Platonist and Aristotelian who 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 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 edition, 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, Platonist, Epicureans, and others, but except for the Cynics who still lived like dogs in the street, they appealed to only a handful, to those devoted to esoteric thought who desired and could afford the ease and serenity of a retired lifestyle. The Stoa spoke to the practical, action-oriented Roman who knew how to make things work and get the job done. 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, a notion considered laughable by other philosophies that, along with the Aristotelian, considered them to be biologically classified somewhere above brute beasts and below free men.

Stoicism was more than just the leading philosophy of the day; for many it served the place of religion as well. The Roman gods were largely viewed with skepticism, and religious activities were limited to formal ceremonies carried out by State officials that had little meaning to an individual's daily life. The Stoa, on the other hand, 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 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 the Greek era. 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. Thraesea Paetus, Senator, was executed by Nero for his refusal to celebrate the murder of 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 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 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 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 he was. 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 be killed outright by the emperor's assassins.

Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic* and other writings are among the most researched and best remembered writings of antiquity. There will always be those who question his commitment to the Stoa 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.

Epictetus (60-120), teacher

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. But despite these difficult circumstance he was allowed to study with Musonius Rufus, one of the most popular and highly regarded Stoic teachers in Rome, and Epictetus became a convert. 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 flatly 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 was God, one that would return soon to rescue his chosen people, who would destroy the wicked and create a new heaven and a new earth for the righteous, a safe haven in which they would dwell forever. All they needed to do was believe, and all these things would come to pass. It was a powerful message, and the people wanted it to be true, and the Stoa faltered and became a 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. Thus it was that the early Christian writers, called apologists, commonly fleshed out their belief in Jesus as the son of God with Stoic cosmology and ethics.

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 circumstance 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. Christian writers still 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. The heroic ideal of the Shakespearean tragedy is a Stoic. Arguments about natural theology and natural law were taken directly from the Stoic categories (discussed later). And the ethics of the Stoa predominated and 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.

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 life long 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 CYBERSTOA

The word cybernetics is from the Greek *kubernetes*, to govern, and was coined by the American mathematician Norbert Wiener in 1948 as the study of communication and control processes in biological, mechanical, and electronic systems, especially used today to describe the computer. Now, with the term attached to everything that has anything to do with the union of the world, linked together

by computers on the Internet, there's some danger it will sink into oblivion from the weight of its popular use and misuse. Still, it describes this age begun in the middle of the twentieth century better than any other, and it's just at this time that the Stoa was given new life by a scientific and academic community reexamining its roots in Western thought. There are now more books and scholarly articles written on Stoic philosophy than there has been in any other time in its history. The academic community breathed new life and meaning into the Stoa, and a new age began.

Today, the Stoic community is alive and well at: www.thestoicregistry.org

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NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

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.

At the outset it is important to know that Stoic natural philosophy, or what we currently call 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 according to 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.

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 one must have to give even a barely adequate description of nature must be encyclopedic. In antiquity this was not the case, and physics, what used to be called natural philosophy, was not a subject too big for a philosopher to master. 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 was necessary to limit this presentation to a small core of ideas. Then, 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 part that 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

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’re 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 or size or 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 mathematicians. 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.

Set's say it *was* an accident. There are those, Stoics among them, who view the whole universe as a fortuitous accident. But even with this view, the probability that such an event did occur, 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 enfolding 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, 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 & 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.

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 whom 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 top of the food chain, the predatory animal, including us, consuming parts that consume other parts all the way down to the inorganic compounds in the soil that gets back what it lost at the beginning of the whole process, receiving what all the multitude of biotic life forms return to it as they settle back into the earth.

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 this century: one, fundamental unity and inter-relatedness of the whole; and, two, the intrinsically dynamic nature of this phenomenon. These two themes he and other contemporary writers return to time and again.

Now we know something of the unity and inter relatedness 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 present century and Grand Theme number one. But what is the meaning of Grand Theme number two?

THE DYNAMIC CONTINUUM: THE SECOND 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.

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: the *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 live in a world of change dynamically interrelated, 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 - 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 are - on this planet and inside our own skins.

The Four Categories

Remember the dynamic continuum? 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 cruder 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 the man leaning against the tree.

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 continuum, 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
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
5. Noetic

In these categories we begin with particles before the formation of specific inorganic compounds, the Chemical. 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 categories preceding it 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's 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 (thank you, Professor Campbell). If it's spring time 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?

Are you still with me? Good. Well, we're not going to answer the question just posed, because what is more important is to be aware of what we've just been through, that confusing muddle we almost got ourselves into while trying to communicate thoughts about intelligence. And that's why the early Stoics gave such emphasis to the study of logic. After death, the next section of the book not the afterlife, we will study logic.

DEATH

There await men after death such things as they neither expect nor have any conception of.

Heraclitus

The survival of individual consciousness was and still is a matter of debate in the Stoa. The speculations of the earliest Stoics is best explained by the concept of *Ekpyrosis* and was symbolized by the myth of the phoenix. The later Stoics rejected the cyclical cosmology of the early Stoa and adopted the myth of Hercules to explain their preference. Roman Stoics considered several options without settling on any one of them. What follows are classical Stoic theories of death.

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, the creator and destroyer, and the fire is God, the Logos. It was both a real and a symbolic fire, although in its physical reality as the Logos, it was thought to exist in the most rarefied form of all matter, more like a divine light than a burning flame. In cyclical cosmology, the Logos takes the form of the universe in creation and destroys itself in an act of purification in regular cycles, thought by some to be 20,000 years in duration. After destruction and before regeneration, the Logos is Pure Soul before becoming World Soul once again.

In the myth of the phoenix, as you'll recall, approximately every 500 years this remarkably beautiful bird, said to resemble a large eagle, went through its own cycle. This was said to take place in the Middle Eastern desert, the home of the phoenix, where from the ashes of its death it would rise again, renewed in strength and beauty for another 500 years. The first theory of death followed this story. With the cosmic cycle resembling the regenerating cycle of the phoenix, the phoenix myth came to symbolize the life and death of the human soul where the individual soul was thought to survive the body until the end of the cosmic cycle, whereupon it would be assimilated into Pure Soul, the One (without empirical content).

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, expands for some billions of years then contracts back into itself. The 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 was called

Pure Soul, the rarefied and divine fire of the Logos, but there is a rather remarkable similarity. Heraclitus *was* a mystic, and what he knew and what were merely coincidental guesses we will, unfortunately, never know.

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 which they came. In other words, the consciousness of the individual would become extinct. There was one exception, according to Posidonius and others. That is, it was thought that the souls of sages, the most virtuous among us, might achieve immortality to live among the gods. 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 frustration out on the young Hercules, who was consigned to perform twelve arduous labors before he could reclaim his rightful place among the immortals. In the end 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 on the path of the sage assures us of a place with the immortals of all time.

This earned reward idea 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 the theist notions of heaven and hell, but the idea itself is, of course, pure fantasy.

Uncertainty

Marcus Aurelius considered a Herculean future on some occasions and extinction of individual consciousness on others. He admits he isn't certain. Seneca isn't either, and according to Professor Marcia Colish, he even considers the possibility of metempsychosis, transmigration of souls, a Western version of reincarnation. 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 helps the righteous with their lust for immortality.

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

* * * *

LOGIC

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

I. M. Bochinski, *Ancient Formal Logic* (Amsterdam, 1951) 77

For nearly two thousand years Stoic logic was ignored, disrespected, or forgotten altogether. Aristotle's logic ruled the day. Typical of the 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 Bochinski's statement leading this chapter reflects the current opinion, giving our school the preeminence it deserves.

In the Athens, Stoic logic begun by Zeno but chiefly developed by Chrysippus was considered to be as important as the study of physics and ethics, one of the three classical branches of philosophy. One studied physics to know the operations of nature, logic to be able to organize and communicate thoughts accurately in one's search for truth, 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. Because this is an introduction to the Stoicism, we won't be examining the development of Stoic formal logic in any detail, only as an outline of the two principle areas of interest.

DIALECTIC

Logic to the Greeks principally meant two things: formal logic, or dialectic, expressed in the construction of syllogisms as a means of discovering truth; and, rhetoric, the study of the written and spoken word as a means of communicating persuasively. The syllogism (deductive logic with a major and minor premise followed by a conclusion that must be true if the premises are true) was the most popular form used. A syllogism most have heard, and one of the oldest, is as follows:

All men are mortal (major premise).

Socrates is a man (minor premise).

Therefore, Socrates is mortal (conclusion).

It's actually kind of fun to play with syllogisms, and you may want to take a break and try a few before going on. The example *looks like* an Aristotelian form of deductive logic, but isn't. He worked only with universal concepts and categories, not specific instances, such as Socrates, a particular man. Stoics worked with both universal and particular instances and they were the first to formalize such logic, called *modus ponens*, which it would look like this:

If Socrates is a man, then he is mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Therefore, he is mortal.

It looks nearly the same, but it isn't. Stoic logic is what we call a propositional logic, which just means that it emphasized the study of statements, their truth value and connections to each other, in the construction of arguments. If this, then that.

Why did the Stoics even bother with this abstract kind of information when there is so much practice in our day-to-day world that needs to be done? The short answer is that in order to live well we must follow the natural world as it is given, living according to Nature, and how we understand the world with our reason tells us how to practice. Stoic ethical philosophy is based upon the natural philosophy of the world as it is and the logic processes of the rational mind, which is our part in that world. For example, you are feeling anger because your boss just ridiculed your performance. Why are you angry? Have you examined the truth value of the premises you've assumed? You made certain assumptions in order to come to the conclusion you are experiencing right now, anger. Let's see the rational process of the angry employee:

If I am [verbally] attacked, I have a reason to be angry;

The boss has just [verbally] attacked me;

Therefore, I have a reason to be angry.

Stoics use ordinal numbers to express their operations in formal logic instead of the (if p then q) system used in logic today. The syllogism above as written by a Stoic would look like this:

If the first, the second;

The first;

Therefore, the second.

All well and good, but take a look at the premises leading to the conclusion giving you permission to be angry. In fact, most people in the world today would say that this premise (called a compound sayable) of the first line, is correct. When attacked you have a right to be angry. Would a Stoic agree?

We will have to wait for the ethics chapter to know for sure, but the point is that by examining the process of our reasoning, by actually thinking our way through a negative feeling, we can find out a great deal about how we have arrived at certain attitudes and conclusions we live with habitually every day. Some may be the result of correct reasoning, and some may not.

RHETORIC

Rhetoric, the written and spoken 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 for some of the earliest formulations of the parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adverbs, the tenses, et cetera. 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 change, 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, logic has been taken over by specialists. Beyond the most elementary work in deductive and inductive methods, very 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.

These verbal contests are older than you might think. In letter CVIII of *Letters from a Stoic*, Seneca is writing about the enthusiasm of beginning students of philosophy and how it can turn to disillusionment. "Things tend, in fact to go wrong; part of the blame lies on the teachers of philosophy, who today teach us how to argue instead of how to live, part on their students, who come to the teachers in the first place with a view to developing not their character but their intellect. The result has been the transformation of philosophy, the study of wisdom, into philology, the study of words."

* * * *

ETHICS

Ethical behavior? Doing what you know is right. . . . even when no one is looking.

Detective Sergeant Robb Hurt, San Diego Police Department

At last we are able to focus directly on living according to nature. For the Stoic, that is the meaning and purpose of philosophy. While the Christian has hope of happiness in the future by way of salvation, the Stoic believes it is possible to achieve happiness in this life by his own efforts. In this section we will begin with the Treasures and how they give rise to the Four Cardinal Virtues. We won't discuss all possible virtues and how they relate to the four cardinal ones, because that's a book in itself. For those who want a good book, a more detailed and contemporary ethical philosophy based on the Stoa, I highly recommend *A Stoic Philosophy of Life*, by Professor Keith Campbell.

After the virtues, we will jump right in to the middle of an ancient argument about fate versus free will and see how this matter is related to the whole and its interrelated parts. We will learn how to identify what we know to be good, bad, and indifferent, and how they relate to both the cosmic whole and the continuum. Finally, we're going to lay to rest the incorrect idea that the Stoic feels no emotion, and how that misunderstanding comes from classical ideas of passion and evil.

THE CARDINAL VIRTUES

The Treasures. Over time, special human traits have evolved, traits that are in and of themselves our greatest treasures: Beauty, Truth, and Love. How they were born is a matter of continuing debate, one we will take up later. For now, we will consider these treasures briefly before we go on to see how they come to inspire the virtues. Panaetius was the first to identify them and their special relationship to virtue over 2000 years ago. Why do we call them "treasures"? Imagine, if you can, a life without them.

The Treasures are a feeling, an instinct, an inherent part of our program as human beings, if you will, just as the apple tree is programmed to bear fruit. What does it feel like and how does it work? That's a little like trying to describe the color blue, but not quite as difficult. It's an attraction. We are attracted to beauty, truth, and love. We idealize it, romanticize it, and pursue it. As a feeling, it is local and specific in its scope. In other words, our appreciation of these treasures operates in our immediate environment. That may be easier to understand if we compare feeling with reason.

Feeling is local; reason is universal. I wish to thank the late Walter Stace, the Princeton philosopher, for this insight. Panaetius must have also understood the difference, but we can only infer that he did

from a similar conclusion.

Let's consider love. We first feel love for the self. This happens at an early age and is quite natural. As Chrysippus said, each creature, not just humans, was created to naturally hold its own life dear. That's why we and all other living beings struggle to survive. The survival instinct. From self love most of us eventually include love for others, a small circle of family, then friends, then the community in which we live. To actually feel anything for all of the human race requires the use of the mind, reason, that faculty that tells me that if I as a father love my son and daughter and wish them well, then fathers everywhere love their sons and daughters and wish them well.

The expanded version of this feeling of love is brought about by a reason which, true to its universal nature, analyzes and classifies its meaning to include an ever-larger circle until the whole of humanity is embraced. It is from human reason applied to the Treasures that the virtues are born. From our attraction to beauty, truth and love in our personal world comes duty to the world at large.

1. Wisdom. Stoics traditionally define wisdom as knowledge of things human and divine. It comes from our instinct to seek and honor truth, and is acquired through study and practical experience, which is then 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 seen that our truths are really 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 make.

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 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 sub-atomic 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.

The danger or negative side of wisdom happens when we become obsessed with thought and remain fixed in the realm of ideas, never getting around to living what we know. This may be acceptable for an Epicurean or Platonist, but not a Stoic. For us, there is a two-part process in our philosophy: theory, then practice, the *akesis* stage of the Stoic education.

2. Justice. Justice is a practical virtue that arises from the instinct of love for one's other self, the social instinct. It is our conduct towards others. We are undeniably a social animal and the love we feel for family and friends is extended to all humanity in the form of justice. 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 include the legal and legislative dispensation of justice in an equitable fashion. Equal justice under law is a Stoic principle which eventually became the cornerstone of Roman law.

The negative potential of this virtue occurs when we encourage the weakness of an individual or class of individuals through dependency that results from over-protectiveness or indulgence. Another danger stems from our love of a race, country, or social group turning to fanaticism and a potentially violent hatred of ideas and people "not like us" From its earliest days Stoics have always promoted natural law as higher than local law, which makes it imperative that a Stoic treat the enemies of his people humanely with equal justice for all.

3. Courage. Bravery: freedom from fear and the will to act despite fear. Courage comes from not just our instinct to survive, but also from our desire for preeminence, for greatness, for mastery. Courage arises from the instinct for self love, which is a powerful and primary drive for both protection and promotion. But it's important to note that one who is naturally fearless cannot claim courage as a virtue. Doing what you know needs to be done despite your fear is the virtue of courage, and when that is done you conquer fear.

The positive aspect of such a virtue is that one acquires the strength of character necessary to actively take part in the drama of the market, the chambers of power, the battlefield, or any chosen enterprise. That also includes the endurance and stamina demanded of those who nurture and educate the young.

Courage and a brave heart can become arrogance and disdain on the negative side of this ideal. The desire for greatness or preeminence can push some to become excessively competitive, uncooperative,

and demanding. It can also make them a slave to anyone or anything that holds the key to fame and fortune if the internal striving for greatness is distorted into an external focus.

4. Decorum. Graciousness, propriety, decorum arises from our instinctive appreciation of beauty and the order and elegance that follow. 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 fascism. This is unfortunate, because temperance really means the moderation of desire, but that's not what we think of when we hear the word. So, let's use the word moderation.

Regarding moderation, one who shows propriety, proportion or decorum, doesn't get blind drunk and oafish or vicious or sloppy with false sentiment. 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.

One who becomes excessively preoccupied with this virtue risks the danger of becoming obsessively fastidious, self-righteous, hypercritical, affected and prudish. As with all continua, the ugly side of beauty through decorum is thoroughly unpleasant for those of us who have to see and hear it in our midst.

Note: the original Greek name 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 discussing 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 original translation, 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.

Discourses of 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'm 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 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 we may meet and overcome the difficulties that are thrust upon us every day. We need to know how to deal with grief, a wayward child, a brutal neighbor, a sadistic employer, with economic catastrophe, illness and death, with critical decisions that form the foundation of a life we try to live with dignity and grace. We need a philosophy that knows the world and how to negotiate through the turbulence and how to rise above fatigue and despair.

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 the Greek Stoa, gradually it came to be accepted by other philosophies that fate represented the whole causal nexus of the cosmos. That is, the working 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 in the universe. Even the currently 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 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 present, how is

free will even possible? Is it possible, or are we all just infinitesimal parts of a gigantic organism, some would call it a machine, that goes its own way with a precision that doesn't allow for the meddling of free will by such insignificant creatures as us?

To the strict determinist, the materialist, et cetera, 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 free choice. The culture you live in may favor one over the other, your family's preference when you were growing up, the price of one may be much higher, availability, a doctor's recommendation, 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 it nearly every day. I've found it's easier on my nervous system than coffee - which has a flavor and aroma I 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 determinist. 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 mystical position. We are the Logos. Remember, our cosmologist was Heraclitus, sometimes called the Greek Taoist, who was and still is called a mystical genius. Chrysippus described our relationship to fate as a dog tied to a wagon rumbling down the road. It can either struggle and pull one way or the other as hard as it will or it can walk contentedly along. 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 idea just yet.

Determinism

Remember, 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 in this present we've

been led up to.

An example frequently used in ancient times discusses the character or nature of a stick of wood which, among other things, has a propensity to burn. Whether or not it does burn will depend on antecedent causes, such as whether it's wet or dry, floating in the ocean or in a fireplace next to another stick already burning.

These same causes, external and internal, also apply to animals, including people. Animals with limited rational faculties are directed primarily by instinct. 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 from the external world and overrule impulse with reason. Such a reasoning creature as ourselves, then, would have free choice and moral responsibility with regard to the operative or internal cause. In Stoic determinism, the operative or internal causes are within our power; the antecedent or external ones are not. And because these external matters are not within our control, they are deemed matters of indifference.

Stoics concede that the nature of one's character is largely determined in the present by heredity and early environment - which is why we have always placed such emphasis on education. By training our faculty of reason, our character, our natural inclination, our instinctive idealization of beauty, truth, and love will be guided to virtue. Antecedent causes and operative causes may define our fate, but when we choose a noble character, this choice appears to our consciousness as participation in the direction of fate, what we can call free will.

Free Will in a Word

If this examination of determinism versus free will made you bored and restless, then read the following and forget the above. John Cassian, the fifth century Christian monk and scholar, examined the Stoic concept of free will and adapted it to his writings with a clarity and simplicity that I doubt has ever been rivaled. 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. I've never seen a better illustration for the teachings of the Stoa in action than I found in a passage that was written by a Jewish physician, the late Victor Frankl, who 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.

“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 (Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, pp. 104-6).”

GOOD, BAD, AND INDIFFERENT

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

From a very early age we quickly learn what things we consider good, what things we consider bad, and what things we don’t care about, what the Stoics call indifferent. As a child we associate these with a continuum between pleasure and pain, with things we don’t care about somewhere in between, but as we get older we gradually learn that this is a limited view. Some things that are pleasurable turn out to be not so good, such as the third piece of birthday cake that gave us a stomach ache. On the other hand, the pain of the stomach ache experience ended well if we learned something from it. Many people never progress beyond this point, living their lives with only a dim awareness that things aren’t always what they seem. The Stoic, ever in pursuit of truth, takes another step and looks to nature to find out why this is so.

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.

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. If we do this, then those things we formerly thought of as good, bad, or indifferent will take on a different meaning.

Remember determinism? What did John Cassian say? Dr. Frankl? Epictetus? It's what we make of a situation, our internal *attitude* that is capable of change. And it is this attitude that we Stoics deem good or bad, that which we control. The rest, the externals which we do not control are matters of indifference. But here we need to stop a moment and reflect on what we mean. Externals, even while they are indifferent, can still have value.

Zeno and the Cynics

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 same matter represented the typical, disunified contrast between opposites with everything either good or bad, black or white, and anything that wasn't either good or bad was nothing. Sounds almost the same, doesn't it. It's not. They left out shades of gray.

For the Cynics, only 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. In the area of no consequence were matters of health and prosperity, and also decorum which was not considered natural because it could easily be mistaken for civility or civilization, which they considered unnatural and a degenerate condition into which human beings had fallen from their natural state of grace. 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. Cynic means shameless dog, which they considered honorific.

Eventually Zeno left the Cynics because socially he was uncomfortable with their lack of decorum and 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, as they could still be preferred or not preferred.

The Stoa never encourages indifference. Being healthy and having the means to provide food, clothing, and shelter for your family and yourself were preferable to being sick and destitute, and therefore they have 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 considering the common lot, these external things happen, they come and go, and that the only certain refuge is inside, in the attitude he has taken toward them.

EMOTIONS AND EVIL

Stoic: 1. one who suffers silently and without complaining. **Stoic or stoical:** 2. not affected by passion or feeling; esp: showing indifference to pain....

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1974.

One of the most common responses I get when I tell people I'm a Stoic goes something like, "Oh, you guys don't believe in emotions," or, "You don't think people should show emotion." The dictionary is the source of this gross generalization. If this were the true definition of a Stoic, I don't know about you, but I wouldn't be one. This caricature of our philosophy is an old one and stems from a misunderstanding of what the Stoics idealize as a state of *apatheia*. But let's start at the beginning to make this matter clear.

Because we believe there is no evil in nature, that evil is limited to human vice, it then follows that we must examine vice where it comes from and how we avoid it. Where does it come from? The Judeo-Christian story of a fallen angel that becomes Satan and devotes himself and his demonic assistants to making humans misbehave is just that, a story. In contrast to this interesting but fanciful idea, the Stoics have always had a reasoned, common sense answer. Specifically, it can be summarized as follows:

There is no evil in nature; evil only comes from human vice; vice comes from only one source, the passions; the passions we identify as pleasure, pain, fear, and desire.

Does that mean we are not allowed these things? No. What it means is we must work to avoid, what Epictetus cautions over and over, to avoid becoming slaves to these passions. What about pleasure? What if some activity brings us pleasure, must we avoid it? Only if we find we can't regulate it, moderate it to our own benefit. Pleasure in and of itself is not bad.

When Seneca and Epictetus launch into diatribes against pleasure it's important to put them into perspective. These men lived in a society that was rife with debauchery and excess in every form. This was an age when sex and violence in the theater meant bestiality and slaughter in the coliseum. It was an age when special wheelbarrows were invented to hold obese men's distended stomachs. It is this hedonistic creed of living for pleasure that is as foolish and ultimately unsatisfying as a diet exclusively of dessert.

Substance abuse

Let's consider drinking, an old and hotly contested example. When does drinking become a vice? Do

you control your desire to drink, or does it control you? Has it become an obstacle to reason and subsequently to the practice of virtue? If yes, then it's a vice and a source of evil in the world. Stoics traditionally encourage drinking in moderation and shun drunkenness. In chapter 12 of the *Discourses*, Epictetus says, "Train yourself to make but a moderate use of wine - not to drink a great deal, to which some are so foolish.."

Can those who drink a great deal be living conformably with nature? No. Why not? Let's examine what alcohol does: it distorts reality. When a person is drunk, the natural states of emotion are transformed. Irritation escalates into anger, anger to rage, disappointment descends into depression, sadness begets weeping, courage becomes recklessness, friendliness gushes maudlin sentiment, and joy expands to giddy euphoria.

When a person is drunk, emotions are exaggerated beyond what nature has given, And, thus, they have become false. How can a Stoic live according to nature and subject himself and others to the foolishness of false emotion? The same is true for all substance abuse.

In a study conducted in a jail in the Southwest, each person arrested and booked was subject to drug testing. More than 85 per cent were legally drunk or under the influence of some other drug. Another study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University placed the figure at 80 per cent and showed that alcohol was related to violent crime more often than illegal drugs. The study also outlined what this costs the United States. By 1997, more than 1.7 million adults were behind bars, costing \$3 billion for federal prisons and \$35 billion for state prisons. The annual cost of drug treatment, education, job training, and health care costs an average of \$6500 for each inmate, which does not include all other expenses such as housing, food, clothes, and supervision.

The problem with any discussion of vice arising from the passions is that it's so easy to say that all pleasure, pain, fear, and desire in any amount applied to anything is evil. This clearly is not the case. Do we even have a choice about feeling pain, for example? Sometimes. Usually we don't. If I cut off a Stoic's hand without the use of an anesthetic, is he going to feel pain? Of course. Is he going to feel the psychological pain of grief for the missing hand? Probably for a time. Certainly he's going to miss its usefulness.

What kind of grief are we talking about here? Is he complaining and feeling sorry for himself? Is he shaking his remaining fist in anger at some god for having been so mistreated? Not if he's a Stoic. It's true, Stoics don't see themselves as victims and whiners, and maybe that's the source of the dictionary's generalization. So be it. Perhaps it's just that we know better than to endlessly wallow in

self pity. As Epictetus said, “I must die; must I die groaning too? I must be exiled; does anyone keep me from going smiling and cheerful and serene?”

Let’s return to the Stoic’s idealization of *apatheia*. This is not to be translated as being without feeling or anesthetized. The Stoa is first and foremost a reasonable philosophy. Don’t forget our motto: live according to nature - which includes the obvious fact that we have feelings, given to us by nature, and to deny them is like asking a human being to be a tree or a machine. We are not plants, and we are not androids.

Of course we have emotions, we feel, but we make a distinction between the positive and negative among them. It is in a state of *apatheia* that one is freed from enslavement to the passions allowing the Stoic to follow his reason, to focus and cultivate positive emotions, feelings of benevolence, prudence, friendship, sympathy, and everyone’s favorite, joy. These are what we call rational passions and are highly respected and encouraged. And when these positive passions replace the negative and enslaving passions, good finally triumphs over evil.

Are you a Stoic?

A young man wrote to the Stoic Registry a while ago and said he was not sure whether or not he was a Stoic. Those of us who have considered ourselves to be Stoics for a long time may have forgotten that period of uncertainty, not unlike what this fellow honestly expressed, when we felt that either we did not have enough information or the conviction necessary to admit to ourselves or others that we were Stoics.

After all, it’s not such an easy thing to do, especially in light of the fact that most of us who made that decision some years back probably thought we were entirely alone, the only Stoics in the world. It’s hard to make a commitment to Stoicism without the support of family, friends, or community, and it would be perfectly reasonable to wonder if maybe we were becoming too weird for our own good.

For some of us, it was even more difficult when we finally got up the courage to speak of our philosophical convictions and found that our listener didn’t have the faintest idea what we were talking about. When we tried to explain, we usually got into even more trouble. It feels awkward trying to explain the Stoa in the quick and easy sound bites to which contemporary and restless minds have grown accustomed. This is the answer that was offered.

Do you believe that:

1. All existence in the universe is an interrelated Whole, and that it is all essentially good?
2. Human beings, regardless of race, gender, or social status are equal members of one great

family?

3. All existence is in a state of flux, and that fame and fortune, sickness and health, family, friends, and all our possessions are fleeting and transitory by nature, and that the only thing over which you have control is the nobility of you own character?
4. Living in harmony with nature is your most reliable guide in your search for meaning and happiness in this life?

The young man was told that if he could answer all four questions in the affirmative, then he was very likely a Stoic. He wrote back and said he could answer the first three without any difficulty, but had trouble understanding the fourth.

Living according to nature

And he was right. It's a catchy phrase coined by Zeno, the founder of our school, referred to by Seneca as the motto of our school, and called the rule of life by Epictetus, but what does it mean? How can this high minded generalization be applied to a real situation as a "rule of life?"

Diogenes Laertius in *Lives of eminent Philosophers*, Book VII, credits Zeno as the first to use that phrase, then goes on to say that what he meant was that this was the same as living a virtuous life inasmuch as virtue is "the goal towards which nature guides us." If Diogenes is correct, then, what Zeno meant by the phrase he created is that we should pursue virtue above all, and that it is nature itself that has so constituted us to seek and find our greatest happiness in that pursuit.

Diogenes also states that Cleanthes' description of virtue was as a harmonious disposition, an end in itself without other motive, and the source of our happiness. He said virtue was "the state of mind which tends to make the whole of life harmonious."

Cleanthes thought that living according to nature applied only to universal nature while Chrysippus added the nature of the individual to that injunction. According to Diogenes Laertius, Chrysippus said that the nature of each individual was also a part of the nature of the whole universe, so that life in accordance with nature meant we were to avoid anything that ran counter to reason, "...the right reason which pervades all things."

It's important to note that when we say we live comformably with nature, according to nature, or in harmony with nature we mean the same thing. Different authors, now and in antiquity, favor different forms of the same expression. Next, we must emphasize that living in harmony with nature does not mean we turn our backs on civilization and live as Cynics or dogs in the street. Stoics left this notion behind 2300 years ago.

What we do mean is that Stoicism is a philosophy that follows reason in nature, the reason we perceive in the natural world and all we can learn from it. The divine revelations of a Stoic are made in the laboratory and planetarium and botanical garden and ocean floor. Our god, the Logos, speaks to us, not in disembodied voices and burning bushes, but in the voices of reason, wisdom, and rational thought. This is how we find the harmonious in life.

Sometimes that rational thought can be applied even to matters of personal appearance. A Stoic, if a man, may prefer to let his beard grow as a traditional symbol of his commitment to appearing to the world as a man and not as a pre-pubescent boy. Such a man would probably not wear a toupee or spend money on cosmetic surgery for the express purpose of masking the wrinkles of old age.

But these are matters that can quickly become petty preoccupations if we become obsessed with details. Epictetus said that a beardless man was as unnatural as a male lion without a mane. Seneca, on the other hand, didn't bother with a beard. Regardless of the side we take in these arguments we must always remember that living according to nature also means there are times to strive for virtue, and there are times to immerse ourselves in joy.

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THE SAGE

The things within my power [God] has made incapable of hindrance or restraint. But how could he make a body of clay incapable of hindrance? Therefore he has subjected possessions, furniture, house, children, wife to the revolutions of the universe....Look everywhere around you, and be able to detach yourself from these things.

Epictetus

Not long ago I was watching a television program on happiness, what it was and how to get it. In his concluding remarks, the host said: whether you became a paraplegic or a multimillionaire lottery winner one year ago says nothing about your happiness today.

A well respected mathematics professor at a prominent American university inadvertently omitted a small step in a calculation included in a scholarly publication. Before the book was released the editors were notified of the error and printed corrections for book reviewers, but the professor, a perfectionist, became obsessed with his mistake. He lost weight, became withdrawn and paranoid and killed his wife, a woman he was devoted to for many years, by smashing her skull with a claw hammer thirty times.

Recently, the top admiral in the US Navy committed suicide, because it was discovered he had worn a commendation ribbon which he was not entitled to wear. He acted as his own judge, jury, and executioner for this mistake .

Zeno's caution

The Stoics have always taught that there are sages, and that these are men and women of exceptional understanding and virtue. To be a sage is to live in a state of enlightenment where, on all occasions and under every circumstance, what others may consider good or bad, the sage, this one who has mastered the art of living according to nature, can remain calm, serene, and detached from the perturbations and vexations of ordinary mortals. The figure of the sage is an ideal, what a human can and should become, a standard by which the rest of us can measure our progress.

The sage lives in a world that is a unified whole made up of interrelated parts, a dynamic continuum of ceaseless change and flux. Therefore, the sage knows there is nothing to hold on to, that he *can* hold on to, and so he remains detached from externals. He knows that the only good comes from himself, within himself, and that the only true good in life can never be restrained or taken away. A sage feels emotions, understands emotions, but he is not possessed by them; they come and go, leaving him joyful

and serene as before.

This is the state of enlightenment of the classical Stoic sage which no Stoic has ever claimed himself to be. This is a heroic ideal. When asked he always points to another. Who is a sage today, and how do we begin to walk the path of the sage? This is what we, you and I, are in the process of defining now in the real world, in real time, and we begin by simply beginning. You can't expect to immediately become a sage, but you can immediately begin to live as one seeking to be a sage. If you've read this far, you've already begun. You can turn back and quit any time, or you can go on.

Do not confuse the sage with one who is a bitter, cold, stern, and rigid perfectionist. Zeno was concerned that his philosophy might be interpreted that way, and many times it has, but that's not what it's meant to be. The Stoics have always spoken of life as art, the art of living, living as an art the artist as craftsman has mastered.

Sometimes the Stoic refers to the drama of life as if it were a play. As Shakespeare said, "All the World's a stage..." and that has been misinterpreted by those who wish to do so as indicating the Stoic sage is merely playing at life, that when he shows sympathy or joy he doesn't really mean it. Such a thing is impossible. The sympathy and joy the sage feels and demonstrates is genuine, because one who honors truth cannot lie or pretend to be feeling something he does not.

Sometimes the Stoic refers to the competition of life as if it were a sport, an athletic contest. But win or lose, he always plays the game cheerfully and with good sportsmanship. That's because a sage is never defeated by defeat. This doesn't mean he perseveres to the point of unreasonable obsession. It does mean that he can accept defeat with grace and good humor. It does mean that he can let go of his family, fortune, and fame, even to life itself when it is his time to go.

A Stoic doesn't have possessions. This ancient idea was not based upon some early communist ideal. It was based on living according to nature. Wife, husband, children, goods, even money cannot be a possession if all life is in a state of flux. These are matters of trust and stewardship and wealth of the human family and the cycles of nature, not the sole possession of one man. Even in the days when wives and slaves were widely regarded as chattels, the Stoic held and taught the revolutionary idea that a wife was a man's partner, his equal, and a slave was his employee - with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto.

Throughout history, the Stoic has been a revolutionary because he followed a natural law that was higher than man made law, a concept the Stoics invented. What we know of nature teaches us how to live well. The Stoa is a philosophy of liberation, liberation from the foolishness of those who are slaves

to externals: money, power, fame, and debilitating pleasures. Throughout history, the Stoic has been a revolutionary because he declared himself to be a citizen of the world. Love, as he understands it, encompasses the whole human family regardless of race, creed, sex, or national origin. Throughout history, the Stoic has been a revolutionary because he knew that the path to happiness was the path of reason, the reason that transforms beauty, truth, and love into virtue, and that the virtue in a man or woman's character was the only true possession, the only true wealth that could never be taken away.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Professor Margaret Graver, Dartmouth College, in her great book, *Stoicism and Emotion*. "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* [my emphasis]. Nature does not pass our 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."

This is the meaning of living according to nature. This is who we are and why we do what we do.

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