



# Death by Gangrene and Other Essays

by

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Cover photo: The author and his mother in Walla Walla, Washington, 2014, one year before she died.

## Introduction

At first glance this book of essays may appear to be a collection of old and new essays cobbled together to make a book. But it is more than that. Much more. It is a link or bridge between traditional Stoic thought and new ideas. If the Modern Stoics can throw Stoic Physics and Logic away and still call themselves Stoics, then they have shown it is possible to keep the Stoa alive while still examining other ways of seeing the world. In fact, this is our tradition. A number of Stoics of antiquity—Seneca, Panaetius, Posidonius, and even Marcus Aurelius—all looked around at other beliefs and ways of understanding life. This is as it should be. We are a school of philosophy not a straitjacket of conformity. If the Stoa is incapable of evolution, then it will be confined to the academic world of cultural curiosities of interest only to those scholars who are afraid to leave the library and face the light of day. But the Stoa is capable of evolution. Therefore . . . .

## Part One: The Dark Side

# Death by Gangrene

## Part One: Theory

In keeping with our tradition, this essay examines Stoic concepts of death, suicide, and what lies beyond the grave in both theory and practice. To philosophers the subject of death is profoundly important and can often appear to be the only thing that really matters. It is as true today as it ever was.

"Man laughs and plays and gallops and dances without thinking at all of death. Nonetheless, when it comes to them by surprise, or to their wives, children, or friends, what torment and outcries, what madness and despair! Have you ever seen anyone so changed, confused, and subdued? Therefore, man must prepare in advance for it...Let us disarm death of all novelty and strangeness. Let us converse and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent in our thoughts (Montaigne, Book 1, Chapter 19: *That To Study Philosophy Is To Learn To Die*)."

I emphasized the title of Montaigne's essay in italics above to draw attention to it. "That to study philosophy is to learn to die," is a line borrowed from Cicero's *Tusculun Disputations*. Cicero likely got the idea from Socrates who made a similar comment in his discussion with Simmias and Cebes in *Phaedo*: "Ordinary people seem not to realize that those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death. If this is true, and they have actually been looking forward to death all their lives, it would of course be absurd to be troubled when the thing comes for which they have so long been preparing and looking forward."

Do Stoic philosophers also emphasize this study of death? In the final passage of Book III, chapter 26, of the *Discourses*, Epictetus says, "Why, do you not know, then, that the origin of all human evils, and of baseness and cowardice, is not death, but rather the fear of death? Fortify yourself, therefore, against this. Hither let all your discourses, readings, exercises, tend. And then you will know that only in this way are men made free." Let all your discourses, readings, exercises, tend? Well, getting away from the rather formal language of the translator, I think we can readily see that this is the same or similar to what Montaigne, Cicero, and Socrates also said.

Unlike most religious philosophies, Stoics have no *fixed* orthodoxy and make no promises about what lies beyond the grave. Here is a brief review of what we know about the various possibilities:

**On what lies beyond the grave:** "And the soul is a nature capable of perception. And they [the Stoics] regard it as the breath of life, congenital with us; from which they infer first that it is a body and secondly that it survives death. Yet it is perishable, though the soul of the universe, of which the individual souls of animals are parts, is indestructible....Cleanthes indeed holds that all souls continue to exist until the general conflagration [*ekpyrosis*]; but Chrysippus says that only the souls of the wise men do (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, book VII, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, pp. 156-7)."

**On daemons and heroes:** "Also they hold that there are daemons who are in sympathy with mankind and watch over human affairs. They believe too in heroes, that is, the souls of the righteous that have survived their bodies (ibid., p. 151)."

**On suicide:** "They [the Stoics] tell us that the wise man will for reasonable cause make his own exit from life, on his country's behalf or for the sake of his friends, or if he suffers intolerable pain, mutilation, or incurable disease (ibid., p. 130)."

**On the soul:** "...the soul is conceived by Zeno as a warm breath or sentient exhalation....It permeates the whole body and death is its separation therefrom. However, the soul is not eternal, though it does endure for a time after its departure from the body (Josiah B. Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*, SUNY, 1970, p. 33)."

**On the corporeal soul:** "Like Cleanthes, Chrysippus, too, held that the soul is a body, and his argument, somewhat similar to those of his teacher, is derived from the phenomenon of death and a consideration of the relation between the incorporeal and the corporeal. Death, he maintains, comes about when soul and body separate. But nothing incorporeal can be separated from something corporeal, because it never could have been attached to it. Therefore, the soul is a body (ibid., p. 129)."

**Marcus Aurelius:** As Pierre Hadot points out, the *Meditations* are dominated by Marcus Aurelius's obsession with death. They are also a preparation for death as a liberation and great equalizer for all, from the highest to the lowest members of society (*The Inner Citadel*, trans. Michael Chase, Harvard, 2001, p. 275). "To see things of the present moment is to see all that is now, all that has been since time began, and all that shall be unto the world's end; for all things are of one kind and one form (*Meditations*, book 6, 37)."

Pierre Hadot said, "When we view things from the perspective of death, it is impossible to let a single one of life's instants pass by lightly....The thought of

death confers seriousness, infinite value, and splendor to every present instant of life (*The Inner Citadel*, p. 135)."

Diogenes Laertius said the early Stoics believed there is life after death, but they disagreed about who got it and how long it continued. The individual soul was thought to be perishable, but not so the soul of the universe, or God. Here's what we can summarize about the beliefs of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus according to DL:

**Zeno:** "...the soul is not eternal, though it does endure for a time after its departure from the body."

**Cleanthes:** "...holds that all souls continue to exist until the general conflagration [*ekpyrosis*]"

**Chrysippus:** "...says that only the souls of the wise men do."

**Seneca**, in Letter XCI, 21, said: "And yet one thing you do know and that is this, to how many people [death] is a blessing, how many people it frees from torture, want, maladies, suffering, weariness. And no one has power over us when death is within our own power."

**Epictetus** doesn't refer to death as a blessing, but as a curse upon us when we fear it. "...the origin of all human evils, and of baseness and cowardice, is not death, but rather the fear of death? Fortify yourself, therefore, against this. Hither let all your discourses, readings, exercises, tend."

**Marcus Aurelius**, the emperor is willing to face the three possible futures of the soul: "Happy the soul which, at whatever moment the call comes for release from the body, is equally ready to face extinction, dispersion, or survival. Such preparedness, however, must be the outcome of its own decision; a decision not prompted by mere rebelliousness, as with the Christians, but formed with deliberation and gravity and, if it is to be convincing to others, with an absence of all heroics (*Meditations*, book 11, 3)." Whether we face *extinction*, *dispersion*, or *survival* is the Stoic philosopher's study, and remaining strong and serene in the face of any eventuality is our practice.

Stoics don't agree with Socrates' condemnation of suicide (he said we were given life by Nature and did not have the right to take it away). We would likely agree with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, who questioned what kind of god would give one of its creations the ability to commit suicide, the only creature capable of rationally committing such an act, then punish it if it did? This is not the Stoic god.

Cato the Younger committed suicide because he so disliked Julius Caesar that he was unwilling to live defeated in the same world as this man he so hated. Really?

That's reason enough for a Stoic to commit suicide? Hmm. (As to Cato's reason for suicide, I'm reminded of one poll in the 2016 US election that claimed 13% of those polled said they would rather the planet was destroyed by an asteroid than have either Hilary Clinton or Donald Trump as President.) Seneca committed suicide when given the choice between death by his own hand or by one of Nero's guards. Epictetus said the door is always open.

We don't have an orthodoxy on death, and as Marcus said, if the continuation of human existence is to the advantage to the Whole, then it will be done. That seems reasonable on the face of it, but does it really give one a lot of confidence in the continuation of life beyond the grave? This requires considerable faith in the providence of Nature to believe that the divine finds our souls, or at least some of our souls, so impressive as to wish to continue their existence. Could happen, but I'm reminded of Professor Keith Campbell, my old mentor's advice on death: "Find reconciliation to a finite life."

Christians say fear is the beginning of wisdom. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalms 111:10)." Augustine wrote of this fear when he points out that it is the fear of God that motivates us to know what he wills, and thus avoid the horrors of everlasting hell fire. But, Stoics have traditionally held the position of eliminating fear from our lives. Those who are wise are without fear. Unlike the Christians, we don't fear our god as if it's some frightful tyrant that looks to punish us when we have failed to live up to its standards. Unfortunately, that actually makes Stoicism a rather difficult religion to sell. If you don't make people afraid of their god and of certain punishment when they disobey it, then why should they obey?

\*

## Part Two: Practice

My mother, a Christian, died of gangrene last week. She was 95 years old. She died on Thanksgiving Day. The circulation in her lower right leg was so bad that she got "dry" gangrene, beginning in her right toe. It started as a dark spot and gradually spread over most of her foot until it became black, rotting flesh that stank. Mother had a choice between amputating that leg above the knee, which would have probably killed her on the operating table because of her frail condition; or, she could go back home and do nothing. If she survived the surgery, she would have become a helpless invalid. She chose to go home and do nothing, choosing death by gangrene.

Did mother choose suicide? Perhaps. Would a Stoic condemn this choice? No. If there's any doubt, reread the DL passage and Seneca's counsel above. At her advanced age, mother's body, her organs, and circulation were beginning to shut



down. I spoke to her on the phone at least twice a week, and it was clear that she was not comfortable. She hardly ate anything and quickly lost about a third of her weight. She was in considerable pain despite the medication available. When I knew the end was near, I made the journey from my home to where she was dying, about a thousand miles, to be with her. I was in time. She slept most of the three days I was there, but she was conscious occasionally. Mother knew she was dying, and said so. We talked about it.

Mother believed that when she died, she would be dead and have no consciousness of any kind until the Second Coming of Christ. And with his coming, she believed the dead would arise, both the righteous and the wicked, and all would be judged. The righteous would go to heaven; the wicked would go to hell. She believed this with all her heart all her life. What was I to tell her? I told her that very soon she would take a nap, and when she awakened she would be ready to go to heaven. She also made me promise that I would be with her in heaven. Could I promise such a thing? I could, and I did.

How could I do such a thing? Stoics don't believe in heaven or hell. Did I actually lie to my mother? Can we Stoics ever justify lying, or even half-truths, when someone is suffering and dying and looking to us for comfort? This is very hard. No, we should not lie. But, we can believe with the Hindus that there is not one path to the divine but many. I *do* believe this. And, I believe we should show respect to all paths to God, including the one my mother was on. Mother was a Seventh-Day Adventist.

I was raised in that faith and know that her beliefs centered around living a virtuous, humanitarian life. She was a vegetarian and a pacifist. There's a great deal more about mother and her beliefs that I could include here, but there was only one thing that really mattered right then and there. She knew that her life was ending and death could arrive at any moment to place her in a state of nothingness until the day when Jesus would return. Would a Stoic deny her the right of this hope, this firm belief that some day she would rise up again and go to heaven? Would a Stoic try to convince one who is only occasionally conscious and in great pain that her beliefs are wrong, that Stoic beliefs are best and that there is no time like the present to become one of us? No.

Do we know with certainty what comes after death? No. Do we know with certainty that there is no Jesus and no Second Coming and no heaven for the righteous? No. It may be just a fanciful story to us, as so many religious beliefs are, but until we Stoics have irrefutable proof about these things, then what right have we to sow seeds of doubt at a time like this? Certainly, I prefer the Stoic version, and I'm always glad to share it, but is it the only theory and practice that uplifts humanity? No. Who are we to define or confine Nature's God exclusively to our version of the story?

There is another matter to consider: piety. Epictetus is one of our best sources for an understanding of a Stoic's duty to be pious. Does piety only apply to our particular version of the phenomenon of existence? No. Here is a quote from the *Enchiridion*, the final sentence of #31, where Epictetus said, "But it also becomes incumbent on everyone to offer libations and sacrifices and first-fruits, *according to the customs of his country*, purely, and not heedlessly nor negligently..." I emphasized with italics the phrase most relevant to this situation. In that foul room where my mother was actively dying, I was not just following the customs of her country, I was deeply immersed in the end of her world.

We are not lying if we are tolerant and accepting of other beliefs as being real in the moment we are comforting one who is on the threshold of death. It's not the details of our piety that matter most at such times; it is the essence. We would not say to a Christian, "I don't believe in Jesus." We would not say to a Muslim, "I don't believe in Mohammad." We would not say to a Hindu, "I don't believe in reincarnation." What kind of cold, pedantic person would say such a thing at a time like that? Are we going to argue with a dying person about this? Really? If the dying person says to us, "I see Jesus!" We say, "Glory hallelujah!" We say it, and we mean it. Joy is a Stoic emotion.

\* \* \* \*

## The Tarantula and the Wasp

This is a story about pain and cruelty and evil. In this story, we examine what the Stoics say about the specific and exclusive location of evil—in the human will. The human will alone is capable of evil. Stoicism tells us that all of nature and all of the other animals combined are without evil; only the human animal has the knowledge of good and evil, and is therefore able to do evil. And, further, that evil doesn't really exist except as the absence of virtue. Is this true? Here's the story.

In the American Southwest there is a desert called the Mohave. One of the creatures who lives in the Mohave Desert is a very hairy tarantula who grows up to eight inches in length, the span of a man's hand. Even though tarantulas are spiders they don't build a web, they run down and catch their prey, such as grasshoppers, lizards, and small mammals. Then they inject a paralyzing venom that has an enzyme that can liquefy internal organs. Once the organs are soft and drinkable the tarantula sucks them out of a hole it makes in the skin of the creature. The tarantula is a greatly fearsome looking thing, but if it were to bite a human the venom would hurt hardly more than the sting of a bee.

The tarantula has an enemy, a wasp called the Tarantula Hawk. The wasp is attracted to the tarantula as a source of food for its babies. And, although the wasp is only two inches long, the spider appears to have little defense against it. So, the wasp stings its tarantula victim with a paralyzing venom, then drags and shoves it into its den, a hole burrowed into the desert dirt. After laying its eggs in the tarantula, the wasp kicks dirt into the burrow and seals the hole. Inside its grave, the paralyzed spider lies in the dark—immobile, and presumably aware of the wasps eggs growing, then hatching inside of it. The tarantula lives through all this while the baby wasps rather cleverly eat first only the body parts that are useful and healthful, but not vital. The vital organs they save for last, and at last the tarantula dies.

**Heraclitus:** "To God all things are fair and good and right, but men hold some things wrong and some right (Burnet, frag. 60)."

**Commentary:** To me, this is one of the most interesting and difficult passages in all literature; not just Heraclitus, *all* literature. I have thought about this single sentence many times over a period of years, and it never ceases to stop me in my tracks. Every time. And, no matter how many times I think about it and try manfully to agree with it, I still struggle. It appears I still have a ways to go before I can see the world as a god does. I wonder how Heraclitus managed it?

When I heard this story about the tarantula and the wasp, I first felt compassion for the victims of the tarantula, then I felt compassion for the tarantula itself. I recently heard compassion defined as a combination of love and sadness. That's how I would describe the character of Jesus of Nazareth, but not Heraclitus's god. I can conceptually understand the Heraclitus fragment #60, but I can't feel it. How is it possible that God does not feel? If we can feel, then God feels. Maybe feeling sadness is not something to be avoided, but is a gift from Nature, not unlike so many other gifts, such as beauty, truth, and love. What an amazing lesson we have been given.

\* \* \* \*

# Things that Go Bump in the Night: A New Theory regarding Spectral Apparitions also known as Ghosts

*This is a true story about psychopomp work, guiding the souls of the dead to the Spirit World. The story is told as it unfolded over a period of four weeks in May, 2020. Following the conclusion, there is a brief summation of what was learned in the process of investigating and living this story. A new theory regarding the nature of what are commonly called ghosts has been proposed. It is based upon the experience of attempting to remove a troublesome ghost from a neighbor's house, plus shamanic journeying information received from a female daimon who lives in the Upper World of the Axis Mundi. The names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.*

## Part One

This past week, Charlotte, a neighbor and retired school teacher who lives about four doors away from me, spoke of her great fear of a ghost who lives in her house. Having recently taken a shaman workshop that explored the subject, and having learned a little about psychopomp work, I was immediately interested in her situation. (Psychopomp is from the Greek word *psychopompos*, which means a conductor of souls.) However, if the teacher had given letter grades, he probably would have given me an 'F' for failure. Bottom of the class. I was a conscientious student but a very poor performer.

Humbled by my poor performance, I contacted my instructor, a shaman and psychic, and asked him if he might want to look into the matter. This was not a common garden variety ghost; it had already frightened one Native American shaman away. "He ran out, white as a sheet!" is the way Charlotte put it. After my email, my instructor contacted Charlotte and told her his fee. She was even more frightened by that cost (\$450 USD), apparently, than she was by the ghost. And, as a renter she thought her landlord should pay. After all, it was his house that was haunted.

But Charlotte didn't want to talk to her landlord, because they had not been getting along recently, and she knew he would only laugh at her. She was convinced the spirit had nearly killed her and one of her cats. When I asked how she thought the ghost had tried to kill her, she said, "The heavy metal heater vent in the living room, fastened into the wall with big screws, was ripped out of the wall with accompanying screeching of torn metal, then thrown across the living room. It missed my cat, who had been sleeping in the sun, [and although]

it was thrown over him, probably a distance of 10-15 feet or so... I've always felt that if it wanted to hit the cat or me, it could have."

This incident happened years earlier, but it still worried her. She knew he (she was certain the ghost was a man) was still there. When I asked my instructor if he thought I should try to remove the ghost. He didn't say yes or no, but he did say that it sounded like a particularly nasty and aggressive spirit, and he didn't really want to do it, because he was more interested in his work as a healer.

By this time, my wife had become worried and didn't want me to get involved. She was especially afraid the ghost might follow me home. I asked my instructor if there was any possibility this "nasty and aggressive spirit" could follow me home. "Of course," he said. "And, there could be more than one!" Then he spent the next 10 or 15 minutes talking about the different experiences he had doing psychopomp work. One house required several long sessions, 9 hours total, and he guided about 60 lost souls from Middle World to the Spirit World. He then said that Charlotte's ghost may not just be angry and aggressive, it could be pure evil.

That night, like every night, I had to answer the call of my old prostate and get up numerous times to pee. Each time I got up I felt fear and started at every little sound, but by morning I was OK. It would be lunacy to be involved with the ghost or ghosts at Charlotte's house any longer. If a professional shaman with years of experience was reluctant to deal with this spirit, then it would be ridiculous for me to even consider it. But, then, in the middle of my morning meditations, right in the middle of Stick Action Meditation, an idea came to me suddenly, and just as suddenly, I had a plan.

## Part Two

I'm a Stoic. I don't believe there is such a thing as "pure evil." Evil does not exist in Nature; it only exists in the human will. And even there, it is simply the lack of virtue. In addition, I was keenly aware of responsibilities to the Stoic community. I couldn't be running off and trying to do something dangerous for which I have no talent and no experience at all (except in a weekend class that in my own mind I clearly failed). On the other hand, Charlotte, my neighbor, had to live with this ghost, or angry and lost soul, or whatever it is, all the time, every night and day. That's just not right. To ignore a neighbor in distress is certainly not Stoic; but, what could I do?

I was in the middle of my morning practice of Stick Action Meditation when the thought came to me: "If I were an atheist, ghosts wouldn't bother me at all." To someone who believes death is extinction, ghosts and lost souls are complete nonsense, and maybe that's the greatest immunity there is. Immediately after that thought, I remembered two of my neighbors had mentioned they were

atheists—one was a retired lawyer, and the other had once been a Navy Seal. While I was trying to decide who would be better to invite to go with me, an old lawyer or an old Navy Seal, something else happened.

A very large hawk swooped down and flew just a few feet above my head. The only reason I knew it was just above my head, despite the half-light of early dawn and the silence of its wings, is because just before it flew over me it made a kind of gentle clucking sound, causing me to look up. I've never heard a hawk make that sound; I've only heard them screech. And another thing, it flew just above my head while I was doing the most active part of Stick Action Meditation, where I'm rowing with the stick. It was amazing to see it silently gliding six feet or less above my head.

I didn't think too much more about it until I told my wife later that day. She got out one of her books on messages from the universe, then she looked up an Internet website on hawk symbolism. Here is a brief summation of what it said.

"When Hawk swoops into your life, be ready for a whole new level of awareness developing in your mind and spirit. Hawk bears observation skills and broad perspectives on his wings.... It is not unusual for Hawk to inspire a time when you begin working heavily with new divination methods. Effectively, you're learning to trust your inner guidance and Higher Self. Do not simply brush off gut instincts as being happenstance."

But, first, I had to arrange a time when I could meet this angry, aggressive ghost. I wrote another email to Charlotte explaining what I wanted to do. Once I got her agreement, I would contact Brad, the former Navy Seal and atheist, to see if he would go along. Intuitively, he was my first choice. No rational reason; it's not like he can fight a ghost with his fists. My theory is that having an atheist with me would weaken the spirit's power. I haven't read this anywhere, it's only an untested theory. And, I can only hope I'm right, because the atheist would be there for my protection.

Charlotte wrote back. She was afraid. The ghost had not been active lately, and she was worried I might rile it up. Maybe we should wait, she said. I wrote and explained what I would attempt to do, but agreed it may be wise to let sleeping dogs lie—at least for a while.

### Part Three

A couple of years ago, before I understood psychopomp at all, I had a situation with a "ghost" who let me feel the pain that caused her suicide. That may be why I wanted to take the shamanic psychopomp class when I happened to see that a workshop was available. I won't discuss the details of why I was meditating on

the life and death of this woman, I hardly knew her, but later that day I began to feel pain in my teeth and jaw on the left side of my face. After about a week of this pain, I told my wife I was going to see a dentist. When she asked why, I told her about this pain and where it was. She was surprised and said it was exactly how her friend had described the pain she had endured for years before giving up and committing suicide. It was my wife's friend and she knew details. I did not.

I had no idea when Charlotte might need my help, if ever, but if she did, I wanted to be ready. I definitely wanted an atheist with me. The suicide ghost who earlier shared her pain with me was a nice person, generally, and I was beginning to wonder what might happen if I made contact with one who had not been a nice person and who did not wish me well. I've had experience with living people like that, criminals I've worked with at an honor camp, and they commonly don't reason readily or well. If my theory worked, the atheist may deflect some of their anger simply by not being frightened of them. Or, wait! Would it make an angry ghost even angrier? Oops. I hadn't thought of that.

First thing in the morning I phoned Brad and asked if I could talk to him in person about a private matter. He told me to come over at 2 pm. I was planning to tell him that my theory was he would be like a lightning rod, that the ghost would hit him and the anger would be deflected. How could it affect someone who didn't believe in angry ghosts? But, just to be fair, I was going to tell him his indifference may have the opposite effect. I really didn't know, but if the ghost actually got through to him, would that prove there was life after death? Wouldn't that be worth this experiment?

When we met up, I first confirmed that he was an atheist, then hastened to tell him I wasn't there to change his mind. In fact, I was counting on it. Then I told him the reason why and gave it my best pitch. Certainly, a frightened neighbor, a retired school teacher living alone, deserved our help to calm her fears. He wouldn't have to do anything, just sit there. I would do all the work. I explained a little about the nature of psychopomp work, that people had been doing this since ancient Greece, and so on. He said no. No discussion. Just, no. No! So, I changed the subject.

Well, now what? Should I talk to the old lawyer, the other known atheist on our street? He once suggested we have coffee together, and "if I had an open mind" he would convince me he was right. He was quite confident in his powers of persuasion and in his Nihilistic point of view. At the time, I agreed that we should do that, but I didn't tell him I would have to *close* my mind, not open it, to be an atheist. I thought about it and thought about it and decided he would be even harder to sell on the idea than the old Navy Seal. If anything happened to upset his empty but comfortably settled world view, he was a lawyer after all, and lawyers like to sue.



I decided to go through my psychopomp workshop notes. It was a bit of a mess—typical class notes hastily written, half sentences, words missing, shabbily organized. I remembered the work Arrian must have had to do to rewrite his notes taken in Epictetus's class. When I was done it felt good to see that by working through the scribbled mess I had very explicit instructions. I knew exactly what I could and should do. At least, I thought I did.

## Part IV, the Conclusion

Charlotte came to our house on a Sunday afternoon. She had a bag of cat goodies and toys for the three cats belonging to my wife's parents. They had just moved here from Florida, and they were also cat lovers. Charlotte knew that. We didn't invite her in because of the coronavirus thing at the time, so she stood in the doorway and talked to us through her face mask. She told us the ghost was active again; it scared one of her cats, chasing it around the house, and causing it to cower in fear behind the couch. She said she yelled at it, calling it bad names, and telling it to get out once and for all. "Get out!" she said. She was really mad.

I told her that one day this week, I would send an ally to her house to see if there was anything we could learn. I had a plan. I wouldn't go to her house at all; the ally would go and check it out. (An ally is what shamans call a compassionate spirit from the spirit world who agrees to help.) But, to send an ally I had to have her permission to send it into her house. She agreed, then said she didn't want the ghost to follow me and come to my house. I assured her it would not, that my ally wouldn't let that happen. (At least, I hoped it wouldn't.)

I had already made a plan—even though I didn't know if the ghost was going to get active and bother Charlotte again. Regardless of whether or not it became active I already had enough information to outline what I would do if or when it ever came back. Now that it was back, the next day, a Monday, shortly after 5 am, while I was in my monastery room I journeyed to the neighbor's house. I wasn't there in person, I was journeying as shamans do. Here's what I did.<sup>1</sup>

- I journeyed to Lower World (LW) to get two Power Animals and an Ally and bring them back to my monastery room in my house in Middle World (MW) with me. I told them about the psychopomp work that we were going to do, and they agreed to help.
- When we came to MW, I left them in the monastery then went to Upper World (UW) to get a daimon ally. After explaining the situation and our intention, I merged with her when I brought her back to MW. By merging with her I knew I would become stronger.

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<sup>1</sup> The nature of journeying to upper and lower worlds, allies, and power animals is detailed in the book, *A Monastery of One*, freely available on the Eternal Questions website. What is presented here is the barest outline of the shamanic worlds and practices needed to understand this psychopomp experiment.

- Still journeying. We all stood in the cull-d-sac in front of Charlotte's house.
- One power animal growled so loudly (I didn't know he was going to do this) it was as if we were within a protective bubble. Having merged with my daimon ally on my way down from Upper World I was faintly glowing. I didn't know that was going to happen either.
- My flying Power Animal (PA) left us in the bubble and went inside Charlotte's house. She came out a short time later with a small rodent in her beak—a mouse or a rat. We followed her to LW where she put the thing on the ground and we all stood around. It did nothing. I was told by my Power Animals that they would stay with it and I could leave.
- I thanked them and returned to MW, then UW, leaving my daimon and ending the journey.

That's all. Did it work? Was it real? Would Charlotte have any more difficulty with this ghost? I didn't know. I had questions. A couple of days later I ran into her and she had questions, but I only told her that the ghost would be gone. That Friday, I journeyed again to LW to speak alone with the PA, that went inside Charlotte's house. I asked, who was this person, this ghost? The PA told me all it knew was that the apparition was a man who enjoyed being a bully when he was alive, that he actually took pleasure in intimidating others and felt power when they were afraid. Charlotte had the perfect place for his foolishness—scaring an old lady and her cats.

I asked the PA if it tried to intimidate her, and she laughed. His power was nothing compared to hers. She handled him the same way you handle any bully. She puffed herself up to a very large size then made a fierce face at him. She compared it to what we do as children making scary faces in the mirror for fun—but it worked. He shrunk in fear, just as he caused others to shrink in fear, and she simply picked him up to take with her. I saw it as a mouse or rodent, because it's what I would expect to see in her beak. We talked more, but I won't discuss that here. I thanked her and returned to MW, opened my eyes and I was home.

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## A New Theory

*The following is information that was both reasoned and revealed. As a Stoic, I do not believe in the revealed truths given to religious leaders by their gods. However, I do believe in Daimones and in our ability to communicate with them. Daimon information follows a belief by traditional Stoics as handed down to us by Plato's Socrates and by the head of the Stoic School, Posidonius. Posidonius believed in daimones and contacted them. As you can see by this essay, I have experience in conversations with my own daimon.*

1. Before examining the matter further, one must either believe or be open to the possibility that there is some form of continued existence of the human soul beyond death of the physical body. Without this foundational belief or intellectual openness, regardless of its origin or description, any further steps in examining a new theory of spectral apparitions, ghosts, are entirely meaningless. One whose mind is closed to the possibility of life after death will also be closed to the very existence of ghosts and the work of those who would contact and attempt to guide them.
2. Among the many beliefs of an afterlife—Valhalla, heaven and hell, Happy Hunting Ground, and Spirit World—I have chosen the one that seems to me to be most reasonable. After many years of exploring primary and secondary anecdotal evidence from many sources—reading, hypnotism, deep meditation Insights, and shamanic journeying—I have chosen to believe there is a Spirit World (SW) that exists beyond the grave. When I say it is to me the most reasonable belief, I mean that it is the most likely and the least offensive concept that my intellectual and moral sense can comprehend. This will become clearer as we proceed.
3. The SW I envision is consistent with all the leading evidence of researchers into Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) as well as the experiences of such extraordinary people as Anita Morjani, *Dying To Be Me*, whose accounts of that world are consistent with my own beliefs and understanding. That is, the SW does NOT participate in the very human ideas and emotional drives of anger, hatred, and revenge that is so common among other afterlife beliefs prevalent among the Abrahamic faiths as well as and especially pronounced in Tibetan Buddhism. In the SW I expect and prefer to be a part of, *everyone* is accepted.
4. Also consistent with the SW afterlife is the existence of Spirit Guides, also known as Daimones. As a Stoic, I call them daimones, and I have personally consciously interacted with my own daimon many times. The Spirit Guide, the most common name given to those who care for us and greet us upon death, is our first and primary contact with the SW. To one who does not believe in Daimones or Spirit Guides, nothing that I say beyond this point will have any value or even make sense.
5. Spirit Guide (SG) is the most common term used in the world today, and that is what I will use. It is the same as the daimon of Stoic philosophy, but I bow to the larger world's expectations. And, if one believes in the SG, then what is the point of psychopomp work? Some tribal peoples believed in ancestors of the recently dead coming to greet them, but sometimes the ancestor(s) didn't come or the shaman didn't perform the correct procedure, thereby leaving the lost soul to wander indefinitely and unseen

or with vapor-like appearance to the place where they died. And there they remained until a shaman could take them to their proper home.

6. But, if one believes in a reasonable, just, and merciful afterlife, which I do, then lost souls wandering lost and forgotten in MW is both inconsistent and untenable. *Of course* the recently dead will be greeted by their SG and their family, even if they were so bad in this life that their ancestors may be less than enthusiastic about their arrival. Regardless of all that, they will be greeted and welcomed home, because they *are* home. To believe that anyone dies and is ignored or forgotten is unacceptable, and I reject it out of hand. It's absurd and unconscionable if one believes in reason, justice, and mercy. I do not respect and will not worship mean-spirited gods.
7. What about free will? The question remains, does the recently dead have free will? Could they not choose to remain attached to MW if they choose to do so? I was unsure about this, so I journeyed to Upper World (UW) and asked my daimon if free will was a condition of being human in MW, or did it also exist in the SW? She said that it did, then asked, "How could Spirit World be any less than Middle World?"
8. I thought about this for a few days, but I didn't want to *assume* that the ghost was a Recently Dead (RD) person who chose to remain here, for whatever reason, so I journeyed again with that question in mind. My daimon explained it this way:
  - a. The spirit of the RD is already in the SW when it dies; it doesn't have to go anywhere.
  - b. Ghosts are not lost and wandering souls. Everything is energy, and what we perceive as ghosts are packets or pieces of the RD that are ATTACHED to Middle World. All intense emotional attachments to our existence on Earth may stay behind. The energy of the soul that is attached by grief, anger, lust, greed, even pain. The living can be attached to their possessions and even to their pain, and this attachment is left when the soul enters SW.
  - c. But, the essential soul of the RD, what some call the Oversoul, is at home in SW and is welcomed directly by the SG that has been with us all our lives. No souls are lost or forgotten.
  - d. The energy packet that is attached and left behind in MW will remain there until the soul reincarnates. When they do, they are united with that energy which preserves its dark energy to become fears, phobias, or other physical or psychological conditions that must be confronted in that next life.

There is nothing that I can add to this information that I received, except to note that when I was on this journey to UW speaking with my daimon, I was in the

deepest shamanic trance I ever experienced. Even while I was in this trance, I knew I was in a deep trance—kind of like knowing you're dreaming while your dreaming.

So, the new theory referred to in the title of this essay is what I took with me to the psychopomp work I did with Charlotte and her ghost. It lessened my fear of this work by knowing beforehand what I was dealing with, and by enlisting a Power Animal to actually contact the energy packet left behind by this person who was attached to being a bully in his life. It was also new information to me in that I had never heard of or considered the possibility that ghosts are not complete entities but fragments of dark energy attached to this world. It is for me a new theory that is acceptable to my reasoning faculty and compassion as a Stoic.

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## Epilogue

In December, 2022, two and a half years after my psychopomp work with Charlotte's ghost, I needed a ride to the hospital to get cataract surgery. My wife had the Corona Virus and was in quarantine at her parent's house. I asked Charlotte if she would drive me to and from the hospital for my surgery. In the 2 ½ years since I exorcised the ghost in her house neither of us had mentioned the experience. On the way home after surgery, as I was getting out of her car in front of my house, she thanked me for getting rid of her ghost and that it had never returned.

\* \* \* \*

## Part Two: Pedagogy

## Arnold and I

I don't like to exercise. Arnold Schwarzenegger does. Or did. I once saw a documentary of Arnold that compiled film clips taken when he was in his late twenties and going for his fourth or fifth title of Mr. Universe. I remember one statement he made about how he feels when he works out in the gym. "It feels better than orgasm," he said in his famous Austrian accent.

I don't like to exercise. It does NOT feel orgasmic to me when I work out in the gym. It hardly ever feels good at all. And, it's boring. In fact, the only reason I exercise is because of how I feel when I don't. After I get my exercise, usually in the morning, I feel healthy, strong, and psychologically fit for the rest of the day. I feel just the opposite when I've missed a few days.

I like to drink and smoke. I always have. It DOES feel good to me—maybe not orgasmic, but pretty good. A big black cigar and a couple of shots of ice cold vodka? Love it. When I say it feels good, I mean that it feels good WHILE I'm doing it. Afterwards, it does NOT feel so good. I feel weak and tired, sometimes anxious. It causes me serious heart arrhythmia. That's why I quit both.

For several years after I quit using alcohol and tobacco I occasionally felt sorry for myself because I knew I could never again enjoy the pleasure of drinking and smoking. I missed it. I rarely miss it now, it's been many years since I quit, but once in awhile I remember how good it used to feel. And when I do, I wish I didn't have to be so pure all the time.

Then, I got to thinking about it from the perspective of comparing my life then and now. For an average 16-hour day, this is what I came up with:

**Drinking:** feeling good for 3-4 hours, max.

[The rest of the day: not so good, sometimes bad\_\_\_\_\_]

**Exercise:** boring, not feeling good for 1 hour, max.

[The rest of the Day - feeling great!\_\_\_\_\_]

Whenever I'm feeling sorry for myself because I can no longer drink and smoke I remember my WHOLE day. I don't try to convince myself that I will live longer or that I'm saving money or that everybody seems to prefer being around me now. That doesn't impress me nearly as much as seeing my day as a whole. I like feeling great most of the day; and voluntarily being miserable for a short time is better than being involuntarily miserable for a long time. It's simple arithmetic.

## The Pleasure of Tea

**T**o acquire an understanding of and appreciation for fine teas is not just a self-indulgent pleasure. It is a cultivation of the genius and bounty of nature as we strive for perfection in craftsmanship and in practicing the fundamental Stoic attitude *prosochē*, attention, focusing with full mental and sensory awareness in the present moment.

The most expensive tea is cheaper than a decent table wine. To be a connoisseur of fine teas requires many of the same skills and experience in refined judgment, but at a small fraction of the cost. Among those who know, being an expert on even one group of teas, such as the oolong, can be the work of a lifetime and can enjoy the same prestige in the tea community as the connoisseur of rare wine has in his. But, does this make it a Stoic thing to do? Understanding excellence in tea doesn't require one to be as wealthy as one must be to enjoy fine wines, it's true, but does that make it acceptable as a Stoic pleasure? Is there such a thing as an acceptable Stoic pleasure?

As far as the nervous system is concerned, both tea and alcohol have some effect, but in the opposite direction. Tea is a stimulant; alcohol is a depressant. Tea clears the mind; alcohol clouds it. Both, when taken to excess, can be deleterious to one's health, although I know of no outer limit in excessive tea drinking that can cause one to get wasted, plastered, blotto, blind drunk, comatose, or dead. People don't injure, maim, or kill from the effects of tea. Homes are not wrecked, baby's milk money is not stolen, spouses are not beaten, and the fabric of society is not undermined.

Stupid behavior is not commonly exhibited when tea is consumed, even when consumed to "excess," if there is such a thing. The stimulating effect of most teas is very mild, usually unnoticeable, and doesn't have the same urge alcohol gives to keep drinking more and more until the threshold of complete inebriation has been crossed. The numerous health benefits of regular tea consumption are readily and profusely documented. Rehabilitation programs for tea drinkers is nonexistent, and Teetotalers Anonymous is only an Internet blog written by a man who is looking for friends to chat about the pleasure of tea.

The most expensive tea is cheaper than a decent table wine in every possible way—from individual to social costs. However, that still does not necessarily mean that the pleasure of being a connoisseur of fine teas is an acceptable Stoic pleasure. What is it about pleasure that is so suspect to Stoics regardless of all the positive attributes that can be associated with some forms of it? Or, could it



be that we have misread the characterization of pleasure in Stoic literature? This is a profoundly important question to anyone who aspires to become a Stoic philosopher. How *do* we define good and bad pleasures; or, are all pleasures bad? Are we to avoid anything and everything our physical senses tell us is enjoyable? To read Diogenes Laertius and the Roman Stoics one would certainly think so.

### What They Said

#### **Diogenes Laertius:**

*...they [the Stoics] tell us that all good men are austere and harsh, because they neither have dealings with pleasure themselves nor tolerate those who have (Lives of Eminent Philosophers, v.II, bk VII, Zeno, 117).*

#### **Seneca:**

"Virtue is something lofty, elevated, regal, unconquerable, and untiring: pleasure is something lowly and slavish, weak and destructible, whose haunt and living-quarters are brothels and taverns. Virtue you will find in a temple, in the forum, in the senate house...pleasure you will find more often lurking out of sight and searching for darkness around the baths and sweating-rooms and places that fear the aedile [a Roman board of magistrates], soft and drained of strength, soaked with wine and perfume, with features that are pale or painted and tricked out with cosmetics like a corpse [*Seneca, Dialogues and Essays*, trans. By John Davie (Oxford, 2007), from the essay, "On the Happy Life," p. 90-91]."

#### **Musonius Rufus:**

"...although there are many pleasures which persuade human beings to do wrong and compel them to act against their own interests, the pleasure connected with food is undoubtedly the most difficult of all pleasures to combat....the god who made human kind provided us with food and drink to keep us alive rather than give us pleasure....[*Musonius Rufus: Lectures and Sayings*, trans. Cynthia King (Creative Space, 2011) Lectures 18, Part B (3,6), p.74-5]."

#### **Marcus Aurelius:**

"We should also observe the nature of all objects of sense – particularly such as allure us with pleasure, or frighten us with pain, or are clamorously urged upon us by the voice of self-conceit – the cheapness and contemptibility of them, how sordid they are, and how quickly fading and dead [*Meditations*, by Marcus Aurelius, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (Penguin Books, 1964), book two, 12]."

#### **Diogenes Laertius (again):**

*Pleasure is an irrational elation at the accruing of what seems to be choiceworthy; and under it are ranged ravishment, malevolent joy, delight, transport. Ravishment is pleasure which charms the ear. Malevolent joy is pleasure at another's ills. Delight is the mind's propulsion to weakness....To be in*

*transports of delight is the melting away of virtue (Lives of Eminent Philosophers, v.II, bk VII, Zeno, 114).*

\*

This is very strange. Ravishment is pleasure that charms the ear? Really? DL was either mad or drunk when he wrote this. Could any philosophy actively survive for 500 years if it were to be as harsh as this and the earlier DL quotes describe us? No. And, if it did I don't think we would have more than a handful, if any 21<sup>st</sup> century Stoics attempting to keep the flame alive. How many people are attracted to living life with only a crust of dry bread, a jug of ditch water, and a hair shirt?

Certainly a Stoic can choose an ascetic attitude and lifestyle for a short time or a lifetime, but that doesn't mean one must be an ascetic to be a Stoic. The Pantheon of the Greek gods are the many faces of the One god, Zeus. Among us humans, I believe there are, or should be, as many faces of Stoics as there are of Zeus, or maybe more. To call *all* Stoics ascetic is to limit our community to a single kind of individual. That's just wrong. We are many.

\*

## **This is what we need to know and remember about pleasure and pain**

**PLEASURE:** There are pleasures which help the body (e.g., nutritious and delicious foods). We call them "preferred indifferents." And, there are pleasures which harm the body (e.g., drug drunkenness or gluttonous eating), which we call "non-preferred indifferents." Everything else is neutral.

**PAIN:** There are pains which help the body (e.g., dental care or physical training). We call them "preferred indifferents." And, there are pains which harm the body (falling out of a tree and breaking your neck), which we call "non-preferred indifferents." Everything else is neutral.

\* \*

### **Diogenes Laertius (yet again)**

*[Describing Stoic physics]: "Nature is defined as a force moving of itself, producing and preserving in being its offspring in accordance with seminal principles....Nature, [the Stoics] hold, aims both at utility and at pleasure, as is clear from the analogy of human craftsmanship (Lives of Eminent Philosophers, vol. II, bk. VII, Zeno, 149)."*

Nature aims at both utility *and* at pleasure? This is a Stoic idea of nature? How

can we believe this and at the same time believe all good men are austere and harsh and do not tolerate pleasure in themselves or others? Stoics live what they believe. How can we believe one thing and practice another? If we believe that nature aims at both utility and pleasure, then how can we also believe that we are good men only when we are austere and harsh and abstain from all pleasures?

Consider your life as a human being. Our *lives* are made up of utility and pleasure, and when we manage that rightly we are living in agreement with nature. Nature has designed and made provision for all things. "The One is made up of all things, and all things issue from the One (frag. 58, *Heraclitus*, Barnet trans.)." Is nature harsh and austere? No. It is the very definition of awesome and almost unbearably beautiful, an amazing admixture of utility and pleasure. That includes food, clothing, and your home.

***There are pleasures which help the body... preferred indifferents, and pleasures which harm the body... non-preferred indifferents. Everything else is neutral.***

\* \*

I enjoy a good quality of green tea, such as the Chinese Long Jing (Dragon Well), one of China's top ten teas. Dragon Well is the one with two or three flattened budding leaves. I drink three or four cups a day most days—as of this writing. But on days when I seek to rekindle my ascetic nature I enjoy a Japanese green tea, a common, nameless sencha of lesser quality and price, and one with an astringency that could be called harsh and austere. The pleasure that I derive from both of these green teas is one which is an acceptable appropriate preferred indifferent, because this pleasure is one that brings physical and mental strength and health.

I invite you to join me in the very Stoic pleasure of tea.

\* \* \* \*

## Epexegetical Matters

Today, we are uncertain about the Stoic conception of causes, but it is helpful to understand what we do know by identifying proper causes versus merely contributing factors. In their conception, we find that the cause is a body that is actively engaged in some process or responsible for some state. The difference between the Stoic concept of cause and effect and all others is that effect is a change or difference in the state of the body but not a body in itself. Thus, 'effect' is incorporeal.

Cause is corporeal; effect is incorporeal. For example, a knife is a body and becomes a cause when it cuts another body, because it is *actively engaged in some process or responsible for some state* (see above) when it cuts off an ear. Fate is a body, and therefore it becomes an eternal, causal evolution of the cosmos as a chain of causes – not as cause and effect. Causes give rise to causes, and only causes, and therefore becomes a network of causes, not a *linear* development of the universe, as some would have it, because all bodies in the universe are One.

We know that 'co-causes' are a special subclass of principal causes and exist when more than one body is required to produce a change. For example, this subclass exists when a community of farmers are required to raise a barn in a day. No one farmer would be a 'principal' or complete cause of the barn raising. The containing or sustaining cause refers to the inner tension of a body (the *pneuma*) and has nothing to do with 'co-causes.' Finally, then, 'perfect' causes can be understood as those causes that require no other factors, such as the heat from the sun; whereas 'principal' causes require contributing factors.

It is useful to distinguish between 'proximate' and 'auxiliary', and can be done so by recognizing that the proximate cause has no remote or ancestral cause, and is thus not an antecedent cause. 'Auxiliary' or 'initiating' causes, on the other hand, are preceding causes, but not the only ones. In such cases, we have terminology problems, because some sources in antiquity limit antecedent causes to those that initiate the process of change, whereas some sources say the antecedent is the leading or decisive factor in change. In other words, we don't *really know* if 'principle' was added to explain 'complete' or if it was another subdivision. It is clearly an epexegetical problem that has not yet been resolved.

\*

If you enjoyed this little introduction to one of the many faces of determinism and free will, then you are either now or should consider becoming an academic

philosopher, that is, a scholar. However, if your eyes glazed over somewhere near the end of the second paragraph, or earlier, then you are probably here in the back row with the rest of us, the 90% who cannot think of a single reason why spending one more minute on exegetical matters matters.

\* \* \* \*

## Touching Beauty

It's really fortunate that we don't get old all at once. Bang! I mean, how would you like to go to bed looking 30 years old one day and wake up looking 70 the next? Ouch. I mean it's bad enough as it is.

When my mother was in her 90s she was horrified every time she passed a mirror. She wasn't a Stoic. That might have helped. Being a Stoic may have encouraged her to see the beauty in her silver white hair. Only with years of insistence would she finally let her dyed hair grow out to let the silver shine.

We are given 40 years to get used to looking old. Gradually. Gently. Not all at once. Another kindness, another benevolence of nature. A little one, I suppose, but it's related to a really big one:

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Aristotle Onassis, the great shipping magnate of the 20<sup>th</sup> century used to say his son's face was his sword. His son was very handsome, or so his father thought. Regardless of whether beauty is Apollonian or Aphroditian it is powerful and attracts like a magnet. It's also skin deep.

My grandmother was a classic example of that old adage about beauty being skin deep. She was beautiful, but she also had a verbally and physically violent temper. She thought men were weaklings and fools, and around her I'm sure they were. She didn't like me much either, even though I was just a boy. She was a very good Christian, however, and went to church every week and sang loudly from her Protestant hymnal.

I've never known or heard of anyone without some appreciation for and attraction to beauty—some more than others. This is one of Nature's gifts. *Everyone* is born with some ability to see, feel, touch, taste, hear, and know beauty. You don't have to be rich or famous or intellectually gifted or even a good person. You can be an absolute scoundrel, and you will still have this precious gift.

"I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like." Have you heard that one? Maybe not. It used to be a lot more popular when people actually talked about art. A little. I don't think I've heard anyone say that in 30 years. OK, forget that one.

Is the appreciation of beauty some kind of survival mechanism that evolved with us? What for, to attract a mate, for procreation? That is certainly a common phenomenon among birds, from the singing repertoire of a mockingbird to the remarkable tail-feather display of the male peacock, beauty is very much a part of their world. Or is it? Or is it that we humans alone have this wonderful ability to see beauty everywhere?

If you start looking for beauty it won't take long before you realize that you are surrounded by it, immersed in it. We are in beauty as a fishes are in the sea. We swim in it, see it, hear it, smell it, taste it, touch it, breathe it.

Don't you ever talk to me about the Buddha's first noble truth about all is suffering. Rubbish! All is **not** suffering; all is beauty, and we're too busy feeling sorry for ourselves to realize it. Get over yourself. Look around you. It's everywhere.

One day, many years ago, I was sitting on a bench outside the entrance to a hospital, waiting for my father to finish his shift as a chaplain. My job was to drive him home. It had rained recently but the sun was shining, and I noticed a puddle by the curb in front of me. Rainwater. And in the rainwater was oil that had collected from the road. And the oil in the rainwater reflected by the sun was one of the most beautiful displays of color I had ever seen. Every color in the rainbow, and then some, flashing in the sun in that nasty, little mud puddle.

Was that combination of rainwater and oil and sunshine really beautiful; or was it beautiful because you and me and everyone we know has the ability to see and know beauty? This is an elementary question about the philosophy of aesthetics, and we can argue all day about whether the beauty is actual there or in the eye of the beholder. But it doesn't really matter, because either way Nature created it for us. How do I know that? Because we have it. Period. Beauty. Isn't that amazing?

Don't talk to me about the cruelty of Nature. Don't talk to me about how life is so hard on this planet. If it's hard and miserable and all suffering, as the Buddha said, then it's because of the misery inside your head.

Whenever you feel as if life has got you down, ignore the rest of us and go look at something beautiful. Stop the misery inside your head by gazing upon the beauty everywhere just waiting to be noticed. Even if you're a dirty rotten scoundrel

Nature will still gladden your heart with the beauty all around. And if you become a Stoic, a real practicing Stoic, then you can also enjoy the beauty within.

[A more detailed discussion of the origins, meaning and purpose of beauty as an organizing principle of Nature can be found in the author's book, *A Monastery of One.*]

\* \* \* \*

## Giving and Receiving

Giving and receiving are like breathing: exhaling is giving; inhaling is receiving. This analogy is so obvious as to be trite, but some of the most common things, like breathing, are also the most wonderful and profound. Just ask anyone who can't breathe for about one minute. When we exhale we give our carbon dioxide refuse to the atmosphere for our old friends, the plant world. In return, they sip carbon dioxide through their tiny, 2-celled mouths, the stomata, and along with water and energy from the sun they make their food and exhale a precious waste product we call oxygen through their leaves.

This ancient symbiosis has been going on for so long that I doubt most people, other than botanists, even think about it. After a quick study of the subject when we were school children most of us forget the source of this essential, life-or-death relationship for the rest of our lives. And, although we now know that plants think a lot more than the ancients knew, it seems likely that plants think about our relationship even less than we do. They just do it—as Marcus Aurelius and the Nike slogan say. But that's not the end of the story. There is so much more that can be said if we use the breathing relationship between the animal and plant worlds as a metaphor to understand giving and receiving within the world of people.

In the world of people, think of giving and receiving as activities lying on a continuum. There are those who give much and receive little on one end of this continuum; and, there are those who receive much and give little on the other. People who give and give we call saints and martyrs. We love them and build monuments to them—usually many years after we ignored them and they died; or, we didn't ignore them and they were burned at the stake. People who receive and receive, giving little, we used to call jet-setters. Now we just say they are narcissistic, lazy, arrogant, entitled, and mean-spirited. We envy them, while they find us little people disgusting and untouchable. They spend fortunes to keep us away from them by building walled estates like fortress prisons—with uniformed

guards, attack dogs, sophisticated alarm systems, and bullet-proof glass. But all in good taste.

Most often, saints and martyrs are poor—living with little or nothing and asking for little or nothing. They are focused and blinded by their calling, their mission. The idle rich give nothing more than what is required to guard and preserve their wealth and support a luxurious lifestyle while indulgently immersed in the sweat and creative genius of others. They can pay for it and believe they're entitled to it. They are blinded by their contempt for all but their own class.

The souls of saints and martyrs are grand and perfumed blossoms. The souls of the idle rich are small, hard buds learning to soften, to open, to flower. Both occupy stages of growth in the moral evolution of human soul. All are teachers and students in the school of the world. Some learn their lessons quickly while some take 17 lifetimes to break one bad habit. We all know better in the end.

\* \* \* \*

## Conscious & Providential Logic

### Introduction

Stoics have always questioned their philosophy. For more than 2000 years Stoics have disagreed with each other. Chrysippus disagreed with Cleanthes' description of impressions on the soul as a signet pressing into sealing wax. He said that such a metaphor was entirely inappropriate because each earlier impression would be lost every time a new impression was made. There are those who agree with Seneca that Stoic logic, for example, is a complete waste of time. Of course there are some scholars who question whether Seneca was a Stoic at all, or if he simply used our philosophy as a literary device to bolster his political ambitions. I've noticed that the Modern Stoics tend agree with Seneca and would happily toss Stoic Logic *and* Physics into the rubbish bin.

However, such disagreements in classical times tended to question details, not the very foundations of Stoic thought. If you throw out Stoic logic and physics, as the so-called Modern Stoics are eager to do, can you even call yourself a Stoic? I wonder. The real Stoics of antiquity believed that the relationship of all three parts of Stoicism were complementary and essential. They used three ways of describing that relationship: the orchard, the egg, and the animal's body. My favorite is the animal body. In this simile, the bones and sinews represented logic,



the fleshy parts were ethics, and the physics was the soul. In the following we are going to use the bones and sinew to discuss the soul.

There are important differences and disagreements going on today between the atheist Stoic, the one who thinks our logic and physics are unnecessary, and the traditional or classical Stoic who still believes in their value. However, much of the difference and disagreement between the two can be summed up in one idea: the atheist believes that the cosmos is basically a vegetative, unconscious, and random event that just happened by accident and by billions of years of trial and error. The classical Stoic believes the Cosmos is conscious and providential.

The former group has not one speck of evidence to prove their point of view. Many, if not most, are simply angry at and rebelling against the Abrahamic god that dominates so many minds through faith in the unseen and unheard and unreasonable. I join them in their disagreement, but this is not to address the belief in reason that inspires Stoic philosophy.

We have reasons for believing that the cosmos is conscious and providential, not by revelations of the prophets. For those who agree with the classical Stoic statement that the cosmos is conscious and providential, logic is how the Stoic goes about examining the truth of such a statement as this. As a Stoic who does value our physics and logic that's what I will attempt to do in the following. But, first, a word about the legacy of Stoic logic.

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

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

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

We are not going to prove the historical value of Stoic logic; that's already been done by scholars who study such things. It's important to realize we do not need to be scholarly logicians to recognize the value of logic and to include it in our lives. If both correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning are possible, then we should learn how to distinguish between them. Both correct reasoning and

incorrect reasoning are possible. Therefore, we should learn how to distinguish between them. Is that a small and insignificant matter? How can the so-called Modern Stoic disregard logic when it can be used as a tool to examine the kind of reasoning we have seen, heard, and done?

Within the above paragraph is a Stoic syllogism, one of the five forms Stoics developed, probably by Chrysippus. Can you find it? Chrysippus was the true genius of our logic. In antiquity it was said that if the gods did logic it must be the logic of Chrysippus. The above syllogism I used is referred today as the form, *modus ponendo ponens*. It can also be written in a shorthand that modern logicians use to substitute letters for phrases: if p then q; p; therefore q. In antiquity, Stoics used ordinal numbers rather than letters. Their representation of the above syllogism would look like this: if the first, the second; the first, therefore the second. Because I am a Stoic and have never seen a good reason for changing our method I will use ordinal numbers.

Here's another syllogism to say what I already said above—you can think of this as an adjoining bone in the logical skeleton: If the study of logic helps us to distinguish between correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning, then we should study logic. The study of logic *does* help us to distinguish between correct reasoning and incorrect reasoning. Therefore, we should study logic. How can anyone disagree? Yes, for some of us it can be difficult to study the bones of logic, but how can the flesh stand up without them? Can a physicist do physics today without mathematics?

### Syllogism: the Cosmos is Conscious

Now, we will attempt to show that the cosmos is conscious and providential. Can this be done with logic, or is it a belief that can only be founded on faith? Are Stoics even allowed to have faith? For us, reason is more useful than faith. But, in order for a syllogism to prove anything we must agree on the premises before we can make our deduction. That is essential. If you disagree with my two premises, then you will not logically agree with my conclusions. Please bear this in mind as we proceed.

*modus tollendo ponens*:

Either the first or the second;  
not the second;  
therefore, the first

Either the Cosmos created consciousness or human beings created consciousness;  
human beings did *not* create consciousness;  
therefore, the Cosmos created consciousness.

With that syllogism behind us we see that the Cosmos has a creating power that humans do not have, and if it has a creative power beyond anything humans can manage, then we can devise another syllogism to show respect for that extraordinary ability:

*modus ponendo ponens:*

If the first, the second;  
the first;  
therefore, the second.

If the Cosmos created consciousness, then the Cosmos is more highly evolved than humans;  
the Cosmos created consciousness;  
therefore, the Cosmos is more highly evolved than humans.

We know that the Cosmos is more highly evolved than human beings because humans cannot create consciousness. But is that an unwarranted assumption? Not at this time in our understanding. At present we struggle to even know what consciousness is, and even if we had the exact materials of a living creature we could not give it the breath of life, what Stoics call *Pneuma*, let alone consciousness. It is my belief that anything capable of creating life and consciousness can reasonably be called a god.

When we have learned how to create life and consciousness from its various elements, then we can call ourselves gods. But for now, we must defer to Nature. Nature created consciousness, and it doesn't really matter how it happened or how long it took in linear time to happen; it happened, and for that reason, among others, we call Nature, the Cosmos, our god.

*modus ponendo tollens:*

Either the first or the second;  
the first;  
therefore, not the second.

Either consciousness is necessary to create consciousness or consciousness can be created by unconsciousness;  
consciousness is necessary to create consciousness;  
therefore, consciousness cannot be created by unconsciousness;

*modus ponendo ponens:*

If the first, the second;  
the first;  
therefore, the second.

If consciousness is necessary to create consciousness, then the cosmos is conscious;  
consciousness is necessary to create consciousness;  
therefore, the cosmos is conscious.

### Evidence

Yes, the second premise of the *modus ponendo ponens* on the previous page could be seen as an article of faith. Atheists would therefore conditionally and reluctantly agree with our conclusion and may prefer to believe the brain creates its own consciousness. But, then, of course, who created the brain? Despite all the evidence we have that demonstrates the brilliance of nature—it's evolutionary powers, it's healing powers, and the creation of something as amazing as consciousness—there are those who believe it's only a matter of time until all the stuff of nature will be measured and the work of science will be done.

Again, it is unlikely that atheist Stoics would accept the second premise of the *modus ponendo tollens* syllogism. I expect that they would consider the belief that "consciousness is necessary to create consciousness" an article of faith. But, to me it is really an article of reason. My *reason* cannot conceive of a cosmos that is inferior to its very creation, and until the atheists can prove we humans are superior to the nature that created us I will follow what seems most reasonable.

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### Syllogism: the Cosmos is Providential

It seems reasonable to me that any complex system that has existed and flourished for billions of years was well-designed, created, and administered. Let's make that another *modus ponendo ponens* syllogism.

*modus ponendo ponens*:

If the first, the second;  
the first;  
therefore, the second.

If a complex system has existed and flourished for billions of years, then it was well-designed, created, and administered;  
the cosmos has existed and flourished for billions of years;  
therefore, it is well-designed, created and administered.

If this were the only and exclusively the definition of providence, then we might even get some of the atheists, and certainly a lot of the agnostics, to agree with

this fundamental tenet of Stoic philosophy. But, we have to be true to the dictionary definition in its entirety; My Big dictionary defines providence this way:

**providence**, n. **1.** the foreseeing care and guidance of God or nature over the creatures of the earth. **2.** God, esp. when conceived as omnisciently directing the universe and the affairs of humankind with wise benevolence.

If we squeeze the Abrahamic faith out of this definition, we can easily dispense with the god word altogether and stick to nature and cosmos, both capitalized. In fact, our statement is "The Cosmos is conscious and providential, which shows an added element or reality one step beyond the vegetative, unconscious stuff. But to make it seem more up close and personal I'm going to keep Nature in the definition. Here's how I would define providence in the Stoic dictionary:

**providence**, n. **1.** the foreseeing care and guidance of Nature for the creatures of the earth. **2.** the Cosmos, esp. when conceived as omnisciently directing the universe and the affairs of humankind with wise benevolence.

Not a lot of change. We got rid of the external, dominating god who cares and guides "over" the creatures of earth, because we Stoics believe the providence is not *over* but *within* all creatures of earth—and the rest of the Cosmos. It IS the Cosmos. But how do we get there? Let's start with the first definition as listed in the Stoic dictionary: the foreseeing care and guidance of Nature for the creatures of the earth.

*modus ponendo ponens:*

If the first, the second;  
the first;  
therefore, the second.

If Nature has foreseeing care and guidance for the creatures of the earth,  
then it is providential;  
Nature has foreseeing care and guidance for the creatures of the earth;  
therefore, Nature is providential.

Well, that's pretty simple, but where is the truth in a premise that only a traditional Stoic would believe? Why do we not automatically believe it on the face of the evidence we have every morning when the sun rises and all of the creatures of the earth rise or go to sleep—according to their Nature-given orientation to life? I hear some object, "But what if we humans become extinct as other species have done in the past?"

What of it? Does providence mean *all* creatures must live forever? No. It means we examine the past and present, then extrapolate into the future and recognize

that life is an extremely fine-tuned reality with billions of parts, each playing its part in the Whole. Are we going to condemn the Whole because one of the parts is no longer essential or has even become a detriment to the phenomenon of existence? No. All parts contribute to the Whole for a given period of time, then change. Change is as essential to existence as the dynamic continuum.

*modus tollendo ponens:*

Either the first or the second;  
not the second;  
therefore, the first.

Either Nature is foreseeing and caring for the creatures of earth or we know a better way;  
we do not know a better way;  
therefore, Nature is foreseeing and caring for the creatures of the earth.

Ignorance can be both presumptive and arrogant.

*the unnamed syllogism:*

Not the first and the second;  
the first;  
therefore, not the second.

There are many facets of life that are treasured by us. They frankly make life itself a preferred indifferent. Some of the most obvious are beauty, truth, love, and even such amazing qualities of healing as can be found in going into shock and the release of endorphins upon the experience of great pain. Again, the doubters among us will likely point to the millions of years of human evolution, but so what? Nature created these things, and it doesn't really matter how it happened or how long it took in linear time to happen; it happened. These are more reasons, these extraordinary acts of benevolence, that are in fact quite ordinary parts of human existence that were given to us by Nature, the Cosmos, our god.

*modus tollendo ponens:*

Either the first or the second;  
not the second;  
therefore, the first

Either Nature created the phenomena of beauty, truth, and love or humans created these things;  
Humans did not create beauty, truth, and love;  
therefore Nature created them.

It's a small step from viewing the Cosmos as providential to embracing Nature as a god, the Stoic god. There are so many ways we can see the wonder of life, just as there are many ways we can see the dark side. But that's what Epictetus and so many Stoics give us: a clear view of the beauty of life as well as the tools to weather the hard times. If you contemplate the providence of the Cosmos and see how we are part of that great organism, then it is difficult for me to imagine how anyone cannot feel the joy of life. Nature, the Cosmos, conscious and providential, has created a world so wondrous as to inspire so many ways to feel gratitude and awe.

*modus ponendo ponens:*

If the first, the second;  
the first;  
therefore, the second.

If the Cosmos created beauty, truth, and love, then it is a god.  
The Cosmos created beauty, truth, and love;  
therefore it is a god.

\* \* \* \*

## Puppets: A Thought Experiment

You may not know this, but a substantial segment of those people we call philosophers, past and present, think you are a puppet. Not just you, but everyone – including me. When I first made this discovery I wasn't especially offended, I've been called a lot worse, but I was intrigued. OK, maybe I was also a little indignant.

I made this discovery about people as puppets when I was studying the subject of freedom – as in freedom of choice and free will. I had already gone beyond freedom from slavery and all the other more common constraints, such as being prevented from leaving the bank lobby by the masked robber who is pointing a gun at you. I was way beyond that and into the more subtle intellectual territory of free will when I discovered there is a rather convincing argument philosophers have known for many years that declares all freedom is just an illusion. In short, every single decision and act you and I have ever had and done was already programmed by the Law of Cause and Effect from the beginning of time.

Speaking of time, I'm not going to waste your time and mine by discussing every free will argument and counter-argument ever conceived in the past 2000 years. There are whole books full of them, even 4-volume sets of books devoted to this subject alone. Instead, I'm going to get right to the point. Most of those arguments end up right where we began this essay: we are all puppets, and here's how some philosophers can prove it.

"I am what I am cause I am what I am"

Whoever wrote the lyrics for the old "Popeye" cartoon may have been one of these philosophers: "I am what I am cause I am what I am. I'm Popeye the sailor man" basically says it all. However, there is a more careful way of laying out this kind of reasoning,<sup>2</sup> and it goes like this:

1. Heredity and the early experiences of my environment (nature *and* nurture) created the person I have become. Whether I was born and grew up rich or poor, smart or dumb, hardworking or lazy, good-looking or ugly, happy or quick to anger in a life affirming or dysfunctional home and neighborhood my character was set by others and became what it is because of what I was given in this life.
2. I cannot be responsible for the physical body and character formed by my heredity and early experiences.
3. I *may* try to change myself in the future, but my success at doing so and how I go about it will also be determined by the kind of person I have become as a result of heredity and early experiences.
4. Any future experiences that happen to me, even if I win the lottery, will not change who I am. If I was born on the dark side of life it will still be part of my character. I may not be poor any more, but I will still be a dumb, lazy, ugly, angry person with a dysfunctional family.

In other words, I am what I am, because I am what I am. And if you believe along with the Stoics that Fate is God, then all of these factors that go into making who I am came about as a result of fate, a fate over which I had no responsibility, and I'm nothing more than a miserable or happily dancing puppet connected by strings of fate. And, of course, there is ever so much more that can be said on the subject, but again I remind the reader that we are attempting to get to the heart of the matter without including the seemingly endless disputations of more than 2000 years.

Thus, happy or miserable, it doesn't matter. Either way I'm tied as securely to the cart of Fate as a puppet is tied by its strings to its master. If I'm a saint working

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<sup>2</sup> These points were based upon the free will argument of STRAWSON, GALEN (1998, 2011). Free will. In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/V014SECT1>]



in a soup kitchen or a serial rapist working in the same part of town, what I am is the result of DNA and all the other factors in the causal nexus that was part of a plan designed by Fate. And if this is so, then how can I be morally responsible for anything I do, good or bad. And if this is so, then why should I even try?

If I accept this theory, and many of the greatest minds in history enthusiastically do, does this mean my life as a puppet is not worth living, that nothing matters, and that nihilism or hedonism is the only philosophy worthy of the puppet I became—a person whose life was already determined before I was born? No. Life is still incredibly interesting and worth living to the full. Regardless of what you do right or wrong, good or bad, you still learn something. Even serial murderers and rapists that die on the gallows learn something from the experiences of his or her life. If we each have life lessons to learn we will learn them, or we won't. Even when we fail we learn about failure.

Years ago, I worked with a man whose wife was an alcoholic. He told me she went on binges that would last for days and often ended up in the hospital. After one of these binges, a really bad one, her doctor took the usual battery of tests checking her liver, et cetera, then came to her with the bad news. She had sobered up by this time and was fully aware when he told her that if she didn't stop drinking she would be dead in six months. She checked out of the hospital, stopped at a liquor store on the way home, bought a large supply of her favorite vodka, stayed drunk for six months, and died. The husband, my colleague, also an alcoholic at the time, became a teetotaling fundamentalist Christian.

Stoics have their own point of view, of course, and there are ways to argue with the hard determinists who believe the worst. That is, freedom is an illusion and we are all puppets of a fate that determines everything, every detail of the phenomenon of existence, and has done so and will do so from the beginning to the end of time. However, this is neither the time nor the place for a rebuttal. The point of this thought experiment is to accept their point of view and see where it leads.

### And now, the Afterlife

As William James would say, it all comes down to choice.<sup>3</sup> The hard determinists have chosen their point of view (POV) without certain proof, and I will work with what they find most plausible. If I can accept their POV, then I would hope they can give me the same right to choose for my thought experiment a POV that is equally uncertain, but does have considerable evidence in its favor. That is, (1)

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3. William James, *Principles of Psychology*, from *Great Books of the Western World*, Robert Hutchins, editor in chief (Chicago, 1952). The quote best remembered on this matter of choice is, "But when scientific and moral postulates war thus with each other and objective proof is not to be had, the only course is voluntary choice, for scepticism itself, if systematic, is also voluntary choice (p. 823)."

there is an afterlife, and (2) we can make certain rational speculations about it based upon two sources of information: NDEs and LBL hypnosis.

The Near Death Experience, a term coined in 1975 by the philosopher/medical doctor, Raymond Moody, who established the foundation for the extensive amount of research that has been subsequently accomplished. We won't need to spend a lot of time here, because it is likely the reader will be very familiar with the concept of the NDE, but there is an additional factor that may not be as well known.

All of the objections by those who scoff at the idea of NDEs have been systematically ruled out except one: that it may be the result of an internally generated vision of reality based upon carbon dioxide level increases as the subject approaches death. However, even that objection has been answered by a new and surprising source,<sup>4</sup> perfectly healthy companions of the individual having the same NDE. This phenomenon Moody calls the Shared Death Experience (SDE). According to Moody, "It's quite common that the people around a dying loved one seem to leave their bodies and accompany the loved one partway to a heavenly realm."

These incidents have been reported by numerous close relatives, both at the deathbed of the dying person and at a distance, as well as one case reported by a physician making his round in a hospital who intuitively changed his routine to be with another doctor's patient as he was dying. As he approached the dying man's bedside he too was caught up in the NDE with the patient who did in fact die. The doctor had never seen this patient before and only knew him by the chart at the foot of his bed.

The mounting evidence for the NDE is fast approaching an avalanche of information, and all of this material has long since gone beyond the possibility of hoax or charlatanism, and the books and references to the NDE include so many reputable researchers, especially within the medical establishment, that to deny all credibility to this phenomenon is to preserve a stubbornness that marks a closed mind. Thus, for the sake of the thought experiment, and in lieu of absolute certainty, we will *choose* to include this evidence that there is an afterlife, which includes some kind of spirit world and occupants as we are so often asked to believe by hundreds, if not thousands of anecdotal, life-changing experiences of those who have "been there."

Next, we turn to a new field of information, Life Between Life (LBL) hypnosis. There is very little information about this subject and only a few researchers in the field, but the information itself is so reasonable, if you accept the NDE as real, that it must also be included in our thought experiment. Remember, we are not

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4. Raymond Moody, MD, *Glimpses of Eternity* (Guideposts, 2010).

attempting to prove that the LBL is scientific truth, there is none, we are *choosing* to use this information.

The hard determinists who have made their choice to be hard determinists may be uncomfortable with what follows, which is why I wish to point out in advance that the *reason* I am including LBL hypnosis in this experiment is because it clearly gives the best explanation for *why* we are nothing more than puppets and how it is not only how things are but that it couldn't possibly be any other way. In other words, *they are on your side*. And, being a puppet is not only OK it is the best possible kind of life we can live.

### Life Between Lives Hypnosis

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

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

This is a doctor who over the course of that career treated thousands of psychiatric patients and directed inpatient units at four major medical schools. Did this doctor, who had all his life considered himself to be a man of science, suddenly become delusional and lose all control of his skeptical faculties? It doesn't seem likely in view of the fact he is still in positions of responsibility as a practicing physician. But, to base a hypothesis, even in a thought experiment, on the interactions of one doctor and his one patient may not be a very rational choice even in this situation. Dr Weiss is not alone in his discovery.

Michael Newton, Ph.D., a psychotherapist in California made this subject of the afterlife his current life's work. Over the course of his career, Dr. Newton used deep hypnosis to regress over 4,000 clients to a past life, then brought them

forward to the death in that life—and beyond. According to these many deeply hypnotized subjects, shortly after death the spirit of the individual returns to a spirit world before reincarnating again. This time between incarnated lives became Newton's specialty, which he calls Life Between Lives (LBL) hypnosis. The accounts of his experiences with LBL hypnosis he wrote in several books. He summarized the principles of these discoveries in the Appendix of *Life Between Lives* (Llewellyn Publications, 2006), several of which are included here:

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

## Being God

In other words, to become god. That's the goal, and to get there we have to learn many lessons. To learn these lessons we have to be born into a given family and environment that will make these lessons available. Sound familiar? It should. What do the hard determinists say about our illusion of free will? Heredity and early experiences created the person I have become. Whether I was born and grew up rich or poor, smart or dumb, hardworking or lazy, good-looking or ugly, happy or quick to anger in a life affirming or dysfunctional home and neighborhood my character set was by others and became what it is because of what I was given in this life.

And why would I be given a life with exactly these characteristics over which I have no control? To learn the lesson of the life I will most certainly live. It's important to note that no one is held responsible for bad behavior in Newton's spirit world. And, before being born here we can choose or refuse to accept the life we will live on the basis of having the ability to see it in advance. The elders in the spirit world think this would be a life where you can learn whatever it is you need to learn in the next stage of your evolution on becoming one with god, but you do not have to live the life that will be shown to you.

I like the idea of becoming God. I guess most people in deep hypnosis like this idea as well. It's interesting to realize that in survey by Scientific American, 60% believe that we actually do have free will.<sup>5</sup> Apparently this number would not include those who were placed in deep hypnosis, regressed to a past life where they die, then move forward to their life between reincarnated lives. Perhaps the intuition of free will has survival value in our evolution as a species. As Stoics we believe we are already a part of the One. But to actually see with the eyes of the Whole would be a goal worthy of effort and the unpleasantness of being a puppet learning how to see existence from *every* point of view.

I also believe in free will, because I am a Stoic, and without free will it would be pointless to be one. We believe it's possible to improve in virtue, and when we do so the soul evolves. If free will were never possible we would never learn our life lessons. All the effort that goes into soul evolution is freely chosen when we have learned, usually the hard way, what we need to know to advance. It's called practice, Stoics do this all their lives, and we can create a noble character even when we begin without one. I've seen it and experienced repeatedly.

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## *Sophrosyne*, the word

PRONUNCIATION: (suh-FROZ-uh-nee)

MEANING: *noun*: Soundness of mind, as expressed in moderation, self-control, and prudence.

ETYMOLOGY: From Greek *sophrosyne*, from *sophon* (of sound mind, prudent). Earliest documented [English] use: 1889

Cambridge Professor of Classics, F. H. Sandbach, is the only scholar I've read that didn't follow all the other translators by calling our fourth cardinal virtue, *temperance*. He said, "The fourth cardinal virtue was in Greek called *sophrosyne*, a word for which there is notoriously no English equivalent....the Greeks themselves found the word easier to use than to explain. Panaetius thought it was closely associated with the notion of 'propriety' (to *prepon*, Latin *decorum*)...it is improper, that is contrary to what we expect from a man who is, unlike a brute beast, a rational being, for them to be out of hand...Propriety requires therefore regard not only for general human nature but also for our own capacities; only thus will a man be able to live a consistent life, and avoid the absurdity of attempting the impossible (*The Stoics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pp. 125-6)."

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<sup>5</sup> <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/talking-back/site-survey-shows-60-percent-think-free-will-exists-read-why/>

When Zeno, our founder, was still a Cynic he attended his master Crates at the confirmation of his marriage with Hipparchia. As was common of dogs, the Cynics (Greek for dog) were comfortable having coitus in the streets, and after Crates took Hipparchia as his wife he proceeded to bed her down by the side of the road. It may be apocryphal, but legend has it that Zeno covered them while in the act of coitus with his cloak. If that is true, then it is clear he was not a true Cynic at heart, and obviously it was only a matter of time before he would have had to break with them. Sophrosyne, (aka propriety and decorum) may have been the reason Zeno had to leave Crates and study at the Academy and with the Megarians before he felt his education was complete enough to begin his own school.

A more contemporary example of Sophrosyne made the BBC News on 12 JUN 15, when four tourists posed naked on the Malay mountain, Mount Kinabalu. This is a place considered sacred by the locals who believe their souls go to rest there when they die. The tourists—two Canadians, a Briton, and a Dutchman—were accused of stripping off their clothes at the peak, urinating, and ignoring, even cursing at the guides who tried to get them to stop. The tourists were given a 3-day jail sentence, fined, and deported from the country. The locals were furious at the disrespect of their sacred mountain.

This act by the tourists would not concern a Cynic of antiquity, of course, but it would certainly be lacking in propriety or decorum if performed by a Stoic. But, where in this act do we find temperance? Translating sophrosyne as temperance takes a big and important Greek concept and squeezes it into a goody-goody-two-shoes accommodation that is four sizes too small. Yes, temperance is subset of decorum, but it is only one part of it. To truly be a *cardinal* virtue, a primary virtue, you need to be temperate *and* behave with modesty, grace and dignity. Being mindful of the sensitivities of other peoples is part of that word.

In addition, one needs to know himself well in order to act consistently appropriate. Epictetus said, "If you have assumed any character beyond your strength, you have both demeaned yourself ill in that, and neglected one which you might have filled with success (Enchiridion #37)." However, knowing oneself can take quite a repeated effort spanning much of one's life. If you know yourself well enough to follow this sage advice you have probably already suffered many failures and setbacks. Overcoming ignorance is part of being alive, and knowing how to show skill at this virtue is not easy for most. Just look around at many old people of your acquaintance you will see that the virtue of sophrosyne in one or more of its forms was apparently beyond them.

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## Seeking Wisdom

I was out working in the garden this morning when I heard a couple of crows cawing. I don't know the crow language well, but I knew something was going on. I looked up. Sure enough, two crows were cawing incessantly and flying around in all directions—the way they do when first spotting a hawk. In a minute, the rest of the flock had joined them. I looked up higher in the sky and saw not one but two red-tailed hawks circling far above; too far for pursuit, actually, and before long the ruckus of eight or nine annoyed crows all cawing at once died down.

Crows don't like to fly high, and these red-tails were circling high enough to be nonthreatening. One hawk was a large adult and the other appeared to be a juvenile, maybe half the size. I watched awhile. The adult circled again and again without once flapping its wings. The juvenile flying above it attempted to match its movements with the same effortless ease, but it just couldn't. After almost every turn the young one had to flap its wings a number of times before catching the updraft. I watched them until they were out of sight, then went back to my gardening.

The Ancients were interested in wisdom—much more than we are. They would be unlikely to attribute wisdom to creatures other than humans, but what both of these crows and hawks demonstrated was a kind of wisdom, a practical application of knowledge plus experience. Is that really wisdom? As soon as we contemplate the parameters of wisdom we begin to have difficulty. If I go to my big Random House Dictionary I see that “wisdom is the quality of being wise; discernment of what is true or right coupled with just judgments as to action.” Trying to comprehend what the dictionary is saying about wisdom requires a bit of wisdom.

Heraclitus speaks to the matter in a number of his fragments:

*Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things are steered through all things* (frag. 19, Burnet trans.). *The wise is one only. It is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus* (ibid., 65).

The Stoic sage is said to be perfect in wisdom, which Heraclitus says is impossible for all but Zeus—or whatever name you choose for your god. Nevertheless, that is exactly what we Stoics are asked to be. Margaret Graver says in *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago, 2007, p. 51), “The perfected human would resemble Zeus in goodness, though not in comprehensiveness....” Pierre Hadot takes this thought even further in *The Inner Citadel* (Harvard, 2001, p. 76) when he writes “...the Stoic sage is the equal of God, since God is nothing other than universal Reason,

producing in self-coherence all the events of the universe." And, again we find the same god-like description of the Stoic sage by Edelstein in *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Harvard, 1966, p. 9), "Like God the sage has the power to will and not to will, to desire and to reject, in short to master his thoughts. He has in his possession the true nature of good and evil. The sage is like God and distinguished from Him only by his mortality...."

Most of us are not god-like, of course, and at best we may only soar as high as the Stoic philosopher. That in itself is no mean accomplishment. And it is an accomplishment, an *individual* effort. We have little reason to believe that the human race as a whole has gotten wiser, but individuals *can* increase in wisdom, and some do. Wisdom can be taught and practiced. It must be practiced in order for us to consider someone wise. This is easy to overlook when reading what Diogenes Laertius says about the Stoic definition of wisdom. "And wisdom they [the Stoics] define as the knowledge of things good and evil and of what is neither good nor evil....(*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, book VII, ch. 89 (Harvard, 1991)."

But, *knowledge* is not enough. Wisdom implies more than knowing. It includes acting upon what one knows. Thus, Stoic wisdom should be defined not as DL says it is but as knowledge of things good and evil and indifferent, and a life based upon this knowledge. If knowledge alone were the criteria of wisdom then an alcoholic who *knows* she should not get drunk everyday and abuse her children could be called wise. Knowledge *must* be followed by action and incorporated into a way of life in order for a person to be wise.

We have accumulated considerable knowledge in every field of inquiry *except* wisdom. In addition, it's important to recognize that the knowledge we have accumulated can and has been misused repeatedly. Every terrorist misuses knowledge every time a bomb is detonated. Every white collar crime, every malfeasance, every abuse of power is a nefarious use of knowledge. One of the chief characteristics of wisdom, that which makes it a cardinal virtue, is that it cannot be misused.

British philosopher Nicholas Maxwell states that "academia ought to alter its focus from the acquisition of knowledge to seeking and promoting wisdom, which he defines as the capacity to realize what is of value in life, for oneself and others.... [and] the application of knowledge to attain a positive goal by receiving instruction in governing oneself (Wikipedia, *wisdom*, 2014)." This is and always has been our focus at the College of Stoic Philosophers. We want our graduates to practice the theory they acquire here as it relates to the experience of living. This is why we call Stoic philosophy a *wisdom* philosophy.

Aristotle would *not* agree with us. He thought that wisdom and knowledge were



more nearly synonymous. Unlike Stoics, and others, who consider wisdom and prudence interchangeable as one of the four cardinal virtues, Aristotle believed that wisdom entailed knowing the *cause* of things. He thought wisdom was a virtue only in the manner of intellectual, not moral, excellence. Because prudence was a moral virtue, wisdom in practice, he believed that this would necessarily place it below cerebral speculation. Aristotle considered speculation regarding the causes of things the highest form of knowledge, and therefore the only subject worthy of the name, wisdom. Philosophy departments in the academic world would agree with him.

Be that as it may, there is one thing upon which all philosophers can agree. Wisdom to the philosopher is quite different from the wisdom of theologians, especially of the Abrahamic faiths. The wisdom of theologians begins with articles of faith, whereas the wisdom of philosophers begins with axioms of inquiry. Theologians know, whereas philosophers want to know, which means the wisdom of theologians begins with fear while the wisdom of philosophers begins with wonder. My reference for making this comparison and contrast is from the *Great Books of the Western World, A Syntopicon II, Wisdom* (Chicago, 1952).

(The theologians spoken of in the above reference specifically referred to the Abrahamic faiths, the followers of the Bible, but the same can be said for other religions as well. If you substitute reincarnation for heaven and hell, as would be appropriate for various Asian theologies, then wisdom still begins with fear; in this case, the fear of incarnating down.)

The Psalmist plainly states that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalms 111:10)." Augustine wrote of this fear when he points out that it is the fear of God that motivates us to know what He wills, and thus avoid the horrors of everlasting hell fire. Aquinas wrote (*Great Books, ibid.*, pp. 1106-7), "The wisdom of the philosopher and the wisdom of the religious both consist in knowledge of divine things, but wisdom as we look at it is considered not only as being cognizant of God, as it is with philosophers, but also as directing human conduct.... and in this way fear is the beginning of wisdom, yet servile fear is one way and filial fear is another." Apparently Aquinas was unaware that wisdom for Stoic philosophers *also* directs human conduct.

Aquinas identifies the two kinds of fear the religious must know in order to be wise. Servile fear causes us to seek wisdom on how to avoid sin so that we will not be punished by God, and in so doing we are "thus fashioned for the *effect* of wisdom." Filial fear is what he calls the first effect of wisdom, which a man experiences when he fears God and submits to Him. He then goes on to discuss three types of worldly wisdom that are to be avoided. When we become wise in externals we acquire *worldly* wisdom; when we gain wisdom in the way of the

senses we know *sensual* wisdom; finally, when we acquire skills of excellence in any art or craft we have *devilish* wisdom, "because it imitates the devil's pride (ibid., p. 1107)."

Wisdom can be found in other ways and perspectives. Wikipedia states that "A basic definition of wisdom is the judicious application of knowledge." Confucius said that we can learn wisdom in one of three ways: reflection, which he thought was the noblest; imitation, which was the easiest; and, by experience, which was the most painful. In Taoism, the wise follow charity, simplicity, and humility. According to the Inuit, native Americans commonly referred to as Eskimos, the wise Elder sees what needs to be done and does it without being told. There's beauty in the simplicity of this perspective.

Margaret Graver often refers to the wisdom of the Stoic sage in *Stoicism and Emotion*. One key passage describes our infallible sage in this way:

*Consistency of belief is an essential requirement for knowledge and is what guarantees the infallibility and impassivity of the wise. If asked to state in just a few words the difference between the ordinary person and the person of perfect understanding, the answer one should give is that the person of perfect understanding has established relations of logical harmony among all his or her judgments and beliefs, while the ordinary person has not (pp. 134-5).*

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Crows do not like hawks and will chase them either alone or as a flock (commonly referred to as a "murder" of crows, which I consider a strange term when used to describe a community of the most intelligent of all known birds). They are fearless except when the hawk flies too high. Crows apparently do not like great heights and seem to have the "power of discerning and judging properly as to what is true or right" when they know a hawk is higher than they want to go. They are in all other respects fast and agile wind walkers.

Hawks do not like crows and will avoid them by either flying away or flying higher. If what I saw this morning is typical, young red-tailed hawks learn to soar to great heights by observing the adult directly beneath it lifting and turning on the invisible currents of the air. Practice. The juvenile who learned the basics of flying when it was a fledgling, must now learn to soar. Can we call this "the judicious application of knowledge?" Is this wisdom? Is there wisdom in nature in all the living things we can see and know? Are we the only creatures that can be wise?

*Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things are steered through all things. The wise is one only. It is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus (ibid., frag. 65).*

God is Nature, and nature is God. Every act, every movement, every change in the cosmos is the unfolding of Nature's wisdom, "the thought by which all things are steered through all things." Only humans question it, because that is our wisdom. We discern and we practice in our way just as all the other creatures do in theirs. The wise is "unwilling and willing to called by the name of Zeus," or any other name you wish to give it. It doesn't care. Wisdom is in the air, the sea, the earth, the stars, the cosmos. Wisdom is in all things everywhere.

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## This is what I Am

Stoics are vitalists. As Berkeley professor, A.A Long said in *Hellenistic Philosophy* (California, 1986, p. 154): "'Matter' in Stoicism is ... not equivalent to corporeality: it is rather one aspect of corporeality which in any particular body is conjoined with the active component ... It is misleading to describe the Stoics as 'materialists'. Bodies, in the Stoic system, are compounds of 'matter' and 'mind' (God or *logos*). Mind is not something other than body but a necessary constituent of it, the 'reason' in matter. The Stoics are better described as vitalists."

Atheists dislike vitalists and have struggled mightily to destroy what they believe is foolish nonsense, aka magical thinking. At the funeral of the famous chemist Francis Crick his son said that the last paper his father completed the day before he died (2004) was the culmination of his life-long desire to "knock the final nail into the coffin of vitalism."<sup>6</sup>

He failed. Vitalism just won't die. But, ask any atheist in or out of the scientific community, and they will insist that vitalism has been dead for a long time. It hasn't. Read the Wikipedia article on vitalism, obviously written by one of those who reject vitalist thinking, and in the last paragraph of a rather lengthy article the author confines vitalism to "the naive biological theories of children."<sup>7</sup> It's also found in books and articles of some of the greatest minds of the scientific age.

**Francis Bacon**, English Renaissance philosopher, scientist, and statesman, best known for his promotion of the scientific method that became the foundation of modern scientific inquiry wrote the following in "Atheism" in 1601: "A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion."

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<sup>6</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, *Science Set free*, Crown Publishing, 2012

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitalism>

**Werner Heisenberg**, Noble prize winner for Physics and recognized as the Father of Quantum Mechanics wrote this in "Scientific and Religious Truth" (1974): "In the history of science, ever since the famous trial of Galileo, it has repeatedly been claimed that scientific truth cannot be reconciled with the religious interpretation of the world. Although I am now convinced that scientific truth is unassailable in its own field, I have never found it possible to dismiss the content of religious thinking as simply part of an outmoded phase in the consciousness of mankind, a part we shall have to give up from now on. Thus in the course of my life I have repeatedly been compelled to ponder on the relationship of these two regions of thought, for I have never been able to doubt the reality of that to which they point."

**Bernard Haisch**, *The God Theory* (Weiser Books, 2006, pp. 151-2) UC Berkeley and Max-Planck-Institute astrophysicist and author of over 130 scientific publications wrote this: "In the physics laboratories today, we acknowledge an enigmatic, but undeniable, relationship between consciousness and the outcome of quantum experiments ... to claim that investigation of the physical world rules out inquiry into anything spiritual is both irrational and dogmatic. To reject evidence simply on the grounds that it cannot be yet be measured with instruments in a laboratory is contrary to the scientific spirit of inquiry. It is time to move beyond this fundamentalist science model."

**Rupert Sheldrake**, biologist and Fellow at the Royal Society and Cambridge University has written over 80 scientific papers and 10 books. He wrote this in *Science Set Free* (Deepak Chopra Books, 2012, pp.44-5, 163-4): "Vitalists thought that organisms were more than machines: they were truly vital or alive ... In many ways, vitalism was a survival of the older worldview that living organisms were organized by souls ... Vitalism was and is the ultimate heresy within mechanistic biology ... The mechanistic approach is essentially reductionist: it tries to explain wholes in terms of their parts."

Within the current Stoic community this war also rages. The so-called Modern Stoics who reject the physics and logic of antiquity disagree with the traditionalists on one key point: nature. When you consider that the Stoic motto, live in agreement with nature, is just about the only thing that unites all of us, you can see that this is no small matter. And that matter is the division between the Stoics who capitalize the 'N' and those who do not. Those of us who believe that God as Nature is conscious and providential are dismissed by those who believe nature is nothing more than an accidental and vegetative process. Why would these Stoics even care about living in agreement with nature? If life is only an accidental and vegetative process, then we can just as well pave it all over and forget about it. Who cares? What does it matter?

All these high priests of existential nihilism who try to "explain wholes in terms of

their parts" have closed their minds to all but the bleakest version of reality, one that doesn't acknowledge mystery, awe, or the amazing and transcending power of love. They do this because they are afraid. Afraid. Afraid of being hurt; afraid of being wrong; afraid of being laughed at; afraid of their own right cerebral hemisphere. If it can't be measured, analyzed, and dissected it doesn't exist. They close their eyes, put their fingers in their ears until they become blind, deaf, and dumb.

*Sapere aude*, dare to be wise. None of them have the courage to be true explorers of the cosmos by searching both the seen and unseen. None of them are capable of suspending judgment long enough to see and know what is really out there. They live lives of numbers and nonfiction prose. The price they pay for the safety of this mental straight jacket is crushing soul poverty and angst. Why would anyone want to live like that? If you can choose, why would you choose to confine yourself to only one narrow view of reality? You *can* choose, but it takes courage. It takes courage to fully engage both sides of life: night and day, right and left, unknown and known, the magic and the mundane.

We who choose to live *all* of life are accused of harboring magical thinking. Yes! The world needs more magical thinking, and it needs to be free of the arrogant dictators who define what we are allowed to learn and know. We must ignore those who contemptuously dismiss the heart because they want to live *exclusively* in the life of the mind. As Blaise Pascale said, "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing." We are endowed by the creator, whomever or whatever you want to make of that, with both the right brain and the left brain, the heart and the reason, poetry and prose. Why would anyone want to go through life out of balance and only being halfway here?

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## Part Three: Erik's Republic

# The Good Old Days

I wrote this essay in 2015 before Donald Trump became President of the United States. That was back when Americans were often laughed at by the more cynical citizens of older countries for being hopelessly optimistic, idealistic, and naïve. I suppose that in some circles they still think we are. But when Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton became the best candidates for president that America could offer, suddenly the snickers became exclamations of high anxiety. Yes, life was simpler back then—just as it was before 9/11, and before the Vietnam War, and before President Kennedy was assassinated, and before indoor plumbing, and so on.

Speaking of indoor plumbing, the toilet in particular would be hard for some of us to give up. I had to call a plumber today to address a clog somewhere in the system. He came out and worked on it a couple of hours ago, but it still isn't fixed, and it's times like these when you realize that the toilet is one of the truly great inventions of all time. I'm really glad we no longer have to wade through streets overflowing with raw sewage. Maybe I've gotten too soft. Apparently tribal people didn't need indoor toilets. I guess it didn't occur to them how much more convenient it would be to do their toilet business inside the tepee or thatched hut instead of outside in the bushes.

This brief essay was written at a time when I was thinking about how tribal people of the past were so often destroyed by those whose only claim to superiority was based on technology, not virtue. Unlike people living in nature, "civilized" individuals and cultures were more frequently discontent with their tools and methods, so they invented things, all kinds of things to make work easier and killing even easier. But those individuals and cultures who were content to just accept what Nature gave them, failed to invent much or advance. Primitive weapons of war left technologically primitive people at the mercy of the merciless. Both American continents North and South, were "civilized" in this way.

It made me wonder if contentment was a good thing; that is, when you're about to become the victim of slavery or genocide, or both, is contentment the right feeling for such a time? Of course these ignorant tribal people didn't know that in order for the rich and powerful to become even more rich and more powerful it was necessary for them and their tribesmen to be killed or enslaved or worked to death. Those people living in nature didn't know that even the humble bank clerks would be ready and willing to kill them so that they could escape their drudgery to pan for gold or have a bit of dirt to farm. They didn't know that in so-called civilized countries it has always been thus. They had never heard of Machiavelli, and so they were unprepared.

Stoics believe that if we are content with the way things happen as ordained by Fate, we will never be upset or disappointed. Hmm. Yes, but we may be killed for our contentment, not just individually killed but also members of our families and indeed our entire culture as a people. Should we be forever and on all occasions content with whatever happens? Does a Stoic have enough faith in Fate, our providential God, to be happy regardless of who gets killed or elected President of the United States? Can a Stoic remain calmly equanimous with either The Donald or Hilary as their president?

That's like asking if Stoics of ancient Rome were able to be happy when Nero was emperor. Of course they were. Don't forget, Epictetus was the crippled slave of one of Nero's former slaves. But, let's be realistic, contentment can be a double-edged sword.

### Contentment and the Old Ways

I've been thinking about contentment lately and wondering if there's another side to this story. I mean, what's the difference between contentment and stagnation? If we had known more contentment in human history wouldn't we all still be hunter-gatherers, or at most agrarian cultures?

Where have all the hunter-gatherers gone? The Amish are here and apparently content with their self-imposed eternal Agrarian Age, preferring buttons to zippers, which they consider too technical. When I get frustrated with my computer I'm inclined to agree with their resistance to technology. There are currently about 273,000 Amish here in North America, and they always have the most beautiful farms wherever they settle. The hunters and gatherers—who were also content with the way things used to be—are mostly gone now. We've killed them off to get their land or their gold, or both. I guess there are a few hundred left in the Amazon region. Why didn't they want to make progress the way the rest of us have? Was it because they were content with the old ways?

For the Hunter-gatherer the "old ways" were living not just in agreement with Nature but actually immersed in it. Nature was both mother and father, nurturer and taskmaster; and, despite what the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) said, living in a state of nature does not condemn one to a life that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." That's only the opinion of one, so-called civilized man, and one that freely admitted he lived entirely apart from nature due to an overwhelming fear of it. Hobbes was *afraid* of nature.

Philosophers today may consider Hobbes to be a second-rate intellectual, but hunter-gatherers would consider him to be a complete fool. Listen to what Chief Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939), Oglala Sioux, said on the subject of living in harmony with nature:



"Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild animals and savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families that we loved was it 'wild' for us (*Land of the Spotted Eagle* [1933]).

"Nothing the Great Mystery placed in the land of the Indian pleased the white man, and nothing escaped his transforming hand...But because for the Lakota there was no wilderness, because nature was not dangerous but hospitable, not forbidding but friendly, Lakota philosophy was healthy—free from fear and dogmatism. And here I find the great distinction between the faith of the Indian and the white man. Indian faith sought the harmony of man with his surroundings; the other sought the dominance of surroundings...For one man the world was full of beauty; for the other it was a place of sin and ugliness to be endured until he went to another world, there to become a creature of wings [angels], half-man and half-bird...But the old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart, away from nature, becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans, too. So he kept his children close to nature's softening influence (*The Wisdom of Native Americans*, MJF Books, 1999, pp. 39-40)."

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## Mount Fuji

24 August 2015: Tokyo. The first time I flew to Tokyo the year was 1980. I flew in from Rome, and I was alone. I had a small, red backpack with a single change of clothes and a few toiletries. Packing took about 5 minutes for a journey that was going to last six months. Today, half of my lifetime later, packing and preparation filled several large suitcases and took hours when you include the careful decisions and inspection of climbing clothes and equipment. This time I was with my wife, Amielle, and we were only staying in Japan 11 days. Our first stop was an Airbnb in Tokyo before going on to the town of Fujiyoshida as our base for climbing Mount Fuji.

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"Libertarians are morally bankrupt," he said. The young man saying this was our Airbnb host in Tokyo. I will abbreviate his name by the initials, DR, to protect his privacy. So, DR and I were talking about political philosophy while sitting and drinking green tea in his kitchen, which was surprisingly roomy for a Tokyo

apartment. The young man, an English teacher, maybe 28 or 29, was from Louisiana, United States, a very Deep South state in both geography and conservative philosophy. DR was talking about his own conversion from being a hard-core Libertarian to an entirely different point of view. It happened in Japan.

In Japan, equality is more important than freedom, and the group is more important than the individual. You would expect a Louisiana Libertarian to find such a country virtually uninhabitable, but, in fact, DR had lived and worked in Tokyo for three years and had decided he would never return to America again. He would visit his family living in Louisiana, as he did a couple of times a year, but when he was there he could hardly wait to leave and return to Japan. DR first became a Libertarian in college, he said, and he was still registered as a Libertarian in Louisiana, but he was not that kind of person anymore, and he repeated several times, "Libertarians are morally bankrupt."

Was he right? Are Libertarians morally bankrupt? DR didn't have much more to say about the subject. He didn't offer any proofs. He wasn't a philosopher. His idea of moral bankruptcy focused on what he perceived as a callous indifference to the welfare of others. Indifference. That word rang a bell. We changed the subject because I could see he didn't really like talking about it and preferred to talk about his travels around Asia. I wasn't as interested in his travels as I was in his philosophy, but I could see it made him uncomfortable to say any more about Libertarians, and I let it go.

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27 August 2015: Fujiyoshida. After yesterday's scramble to get here to Fujiyoshida from Tokyo by train, taking two hours to go about 60 miles, we were both knackered when we got to Michael's Fuji Hostel, but decided to walk the length of the town to the Shinto shrine, Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen Jinja, the Yoshida Trail portal to the mountain. They were having an annual Fire Festival, regarded as one of the three most unique festivals in Japan. It was quite extraordinary, but this is really not a travel book, so I'll not mention any details, except to say that this is the most beautiful Shinto shrine I've ever seen, including the Meiji shrine in Tokyo.

28 August 2015: after a good night's sleep, today we will mostly loaf, eat, carefully pack our backpacks, do some laundry, and get everything in readiness for the climb tomorrow. A quiet day, long silences. I am thinking about something our Airbnb host, DR said about dividing religions into two types: hierarchical or congregational. Hierarchical religions determine all beliefs and practices for all parts of the organization (e.g., the Catholic church). The congregational churches *tend* to be more flexible, and the example is supposed to be the protestants, but I know better. I was raised in a protestant religion that was as inflexible as an infallible pope.

29 August 2015: 4:00 am: I woke up and went through my fragments of Heraclitus mneme while waiting for it to get lighter. By 4:30 am, I was up writing in my journal. Something occurred to me that I wanted to remember. Namely, the key to Japanese culture, the uniqueness of it, may be their insistence upon the value of form *balanced* with content. In Western cultures, especially the US, content is far greater in importance. In Japan, perhaps the best example of their appreciation for form is the tea ceremony: beauty in the simplest action. This reverence for aesthetic perfection pervades all of their culture.

Breakfasted on black tea, plain yogurt, small banana, raw almonds and walnuts. On our way by first light.

3:30 pm: Sixth Station: resting on my futon at the mountain hut, Seikanso. Got here about 2:30 pm – average time considering Amielle and I made numerous stops to take photos of both natural scenes and Japanese calligraphy carved into ancient, mossy stones along the way. This was the Pilgrim Trail, which only about 10% of the climbers take now after the highway to the Fifth Station was put in. Unquestionably the most beautiful climb I've ever made. It was misty, with an occasional light rain, and everything was green, cool and quiet. We only met a few other hikers on the way.

30 August 2015: Mount Fuji: It was hard. Time and again it was hard, but the last 200 meters were the hardest: climbing with hands and feet over lava rock in sleet and fiercely gusting winds. Soaked to the bone, wet and cold for so long I no longer thought about it. The last 200 meters, so steep, pulling with my arms, pushing with my feet, I could no longer feel my hands and could not close them to make a fist, but they were still there pulling me up through the blinding freezing rain, blinking wildly to see the next handhold through the gushing waterfalls streaming down in every direction, pulling myself up against the wind that was pushing me right, pushing me left, pushing and freezing me in every direction except the way up and up. Looking for handholds, looking for footholds, and remembering every movie scene I had ever seen where the hero was inching his way to the finish line, safety, escape, crawling at the end of the world, yelling, grunting, groaning, commanding, angrily demanding this leg, then that one to lift and push once more: Push! Pull up! Push! Pull! Then standing upright and feebly walking the last steps. Was it five? Was it 25? Sliding open the wooden door to the wooden summit hut where it was dry, cold and dry, no angry wind or freezing rain. Other climbers. A wooden bench to sit on. Then the shaking.

I still had four more hours to go down the mountain, but first I had to get dry. There was no heat in the summit hut, freezing, and I had no dry clothes to put on, and I couldn't have taken off my wet clothes and put on dry ones even if I did, because I was shaking too hard all over my body to function. My head, my hands, my arms and feet and legs and torso and stomach. The other climbers,

maybe 8 or 10 of them, Japanese, nearly all young men, looking away, talking, laughing, congratulating themselves, each other. They were happy. I was shaking and shaking, and there was nothing else I could do. Nothing else to think about.

One Japanese man, maybe he was an attendant at the hut, his name may have been Yamada, came up to me with a warm dry coat, old, used, tattered at the ends of the sleeves, and he ordered me in Japanese, then in English, to "put on coat!" Amielle helped me take off my wet shirts and I put on the coat, still shaking. She bought two bowls of warm miso shiro (soup) and 2 small Styrofoam cups of lukewarm green tea. \$26.00. Even in my condition I noticed the cost and the quality. I couldn't hold either the plastic bowl of soup or cup of tea, so Amielle helped me, kept urging me to eat, drink, but it was nasty, tasted oily, awful, and I wanted to vomit.

Earlier, we had been warned three separate times by different groups of climbers descending the mountain that we couldn't go on. Conditions at the top were too treacherous and we would be turned back between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Stations. Three times between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> stations we were told by one member of a group of Japanese climbers who could speak enough English to explain why we couldn't go on, and each time we thanked them for their kindness and went on.

Personally, although I didn't say so, deep down I was glad when I heard we had to turn back, and I kept looking for someone, some official to forbid us to go on, By the 7<sup>th</sup> station I was already cold and wet and tired, exhausted, and there was at least two or three more hours to go. I wanted it to be over. I wanted to turn back, but no one told us we had to stop, so we kept going up and up through the storm, the rain hard straight down, then sideways, then horizontally full in my face, stinging like a thousand needles, then the wind blowing so hard you couldn't move, just hunker down until the blast subsided, then inching forward.

And it was like that all the way down the mountain, too, but I had a warm coat, and it was dry. Down and down on the descending route of endless switchbacks and the pain in my legs and calves and knees, but I had a warm coat, and it was dry—most of the way down. By the time I was once again thoroughly wet and cold and couldn't take another step we were sitting in a warm bus on our way back to Michael's Fuji hostel and a hot shower.

Monday, 31 August 2015: Fujiyoshida: Michael's Fuji Hostel. Any philosophy where in order to be consistent you must be cruelly indifferent is not a good philosophy to live by. On the summit of Mount Fuji was a kindhearted man who saw a 70-year-old stranger suffering from hypothermia and went out of his way to attempt to relieve his suffering by giving him, *giving him*, a warm dry coat. Was this the act of a Stoic?

In a room full of “indifferent” people, one man took action to help out a stranger who was shaking violently. It wasn't a new coat, but it was thick and warm. I don't know who owned the coat, the man didn't speak English well, and I don't speak Japanese at all, but it was warm and very possibly saved my life—how could I have survived the climb down the mountain? It was 3-4 more hours in that storm of blinding rain and sleet and ferocious gusts of wind, the kind where you can no longer walk but must hunker down wherever you are until it briefly subsides, then starts up again.

No one else did anything to help in that summit hut. Amielle tried to help by getting something warm in my stomach over my protestations, trying to dry me, giving me a small sweater of hers that was much too small but was still dry. But aside from Yamada and her what were the others thinking about this stranger? Were they all thinking like Stoics, that health, wealth, and even life itself is a matter of indifference—so why bother to help? That's one of the image problems Stoics have always had. It *appears* to be a philosophy without a heart, pitiless, indifferent. The license to be indifferent is so strong that I wonder how many Yamadas there are among us. Stoicism seems to be attracting people without a heart who believe they have a philosophy that supports their coldness inside.

01 September 2015: Tokyo. Kachidoki on the Tokyo Bay, a few blocks from the great fish market, on the 34<sup>th</sup> floor of a 43-floor high rise apartment building. The night lights of the city are awesome. Spacious 2-bedroom apartment owned by our Airbnb host, a middle-aged Turk named Mete. I haven't spoken to him except to get instructions on what, how, and where things are in the apartment. Most beautiful city view I've ever seen. I don't know what Mete does to afford an apartment like this. In Tokyo, New York City, Paris, or other cities of this type an apartment like this would cost more in monthly rent than I have ever earned in wages. Apartment so nice I'm reluctant to go down to the streets below. Why should I go down there? All the noise, cars, buses, people, exhaust, stench. I know what's it's like walking on city streets, why should I go down there?

It turns out our Airbnb host is a commercial attache to the Turkish Tokyo Embassy. He has lived and worked here for two years. First impression: piercing black eyes that stare without blinking while talking to you, remains in complete control. Gravitas. The kind of man who could gut you like a fish and watch without expression as you flopped on the floor. Fortunately, he's seldom around. Second impression: he can smile and does so easily when relaxed, an unhappy man who doesn't like his work, doesn't like Japan, and can hardly wait to go home, but with the increasingly conservative political situation there he is anxious about returning home. There was no joy in him.

In Mete's home and world the conservative increase in power means greater political influence by Islamic State; in my home and world it means economics. I

have no knowledge or right to pass judgment on his world, Turkey, but I can and will pass judgment on my own. I am not an economist, it's true, and although it is patently absurd for me to pass judgment on economic matters in any way, shape, or form, I will anyway because as every keen observer of human nature knows, it's much easier to apologize than it is to get permission.

Some people prefer to minimize or eliminate taxes and let the philanthropic instincts of the wealthy decide how society should care for the rest of us. Some prefer to use taxes and the collective wisdom of legislators to make that decision. Who is right about our political economics, the Libertarian or the Socialist? In some ways they are both wrong. Freedom, the Libertarian's dream, guarantees that those who are born rich, strong, and/or ruthless will become the mighty and make all the rules in their favor. They already do that now in America, and there's no reason to believe that will change. Equality, the Socialist's dream, is an "affirmative action" nightmare where bureaucrats rule and freedom dies from a thousand paper cuts.

There is a war between this diverging polarity of freedom and equality. But how can a Stoic philosopher choose sides in this war? We can't. It is a conflict that can never be resolved, only transcended. We *know* what is greater than appropriate action. We *know* that only completely correct actions make us reach for something that is higher, *aretē*, excellence of the soul, and that is so much more than simply being appropriate. We know that private property, capitalism, and the accumulation of wealth are not sacred; they are a preferred indifferent to some and not preferred by others.

Only virtue, *aretē*, is sacred, the only good and always good, because the pursuit of all other human activities – including private property, capitalism, and the accumulation of wealth – can be used for good or evil. When we live in an oligarchy, as those of us in the United States do today, then might makes right and the only freedom we, the little people, have is the freedom to do as we're told and keep our opinions to ourselves, because they don't matter anyway. We Stoics must recognize that we do *not* share the same economic values as the rest of the world. Wealth is *not* our highest good. Our highest good is virtue, and our economics, Stoic economics, follows from the cardinal virtue of justice, and that includes economic justice for all, because we care for all.

It is our *duty* to care. As Marcus Aurelius said, "Chief in all features in a man's constitution, there, is his duty to his kind (*Meditations*, 7.55)." He didn't say it's a good idea to give some thought to the welfare of humanity; he said it was *chief* in all features of a man's constitution. In other passages he emphasizes that we are made for one another as the upper teeth fit the lower and the right hand works with the left. This is Stoic. This is what a Stoic is; not the man of indifference who claims preeminence of his personal liberty and freedom to do whatever he damn

well pleases. It is wrong when a Stoic uses our principles of indifference to isolate himself from the rest of humanity and has no care or concern for them. And not just humanity but all of nature and all of life.

As Stoics we must know this is wrong! Our *reason* for being a Stoic is *not* to be indifferent, independent, and self-sufficient but to ethically evolve, to build a noble character; and our *duty* as a Stoic is to all humanity. As Marcus said, it is *chief* in our constitution as a man. We *know* it is our duty, because Stoic philosophy tells us so, and our reason tells us so, and the longer we practice what our philosophy tells us and our reason tells us the more we will know it, not just in our heads but also in our hearts and in our gut. We must never forget that the fragment of Pneuma planted in each of us not only fills our soul with reason but also with brotherly love, the primal instinct of the social animal. *We live not for ourselves but for one another.*

\* \* \* \*

## The Aspen Dinner Party

*To God all things are fair and good and right, but men hold some things wrong and some right.*

Heraclitus (fragment #60, Burnet)

It wasn't all that painful when the very rich lady called me a loser to my face. Twice. She didn't just mutter the loser comment under her breath, she sat there at the dinner table with all of us, looked me in the eye, and said it right out loud. Oh, well. Her accusation wasn't new, or even surprising. I've heard it before. I've failed so many times in my life that by the time I was 50 years old I came to the conclusion it was the only thing I was good at—losing. Here's one of many examples: despite three years of graduate school, I spent my fortieth birthday working as a busboy in a restaurant in Hawaii. Well, anyway, it *was* the rich lady's house, one of several, and it *was* her dinner party, so apparently she felt entitled to say whatever came to mind. She wasn't trying to be funny or anything. Her contempt for me and my life was clearly obvious the whole time.

Let's look at it from the rich lady's point of view. She was the director of a successful Wall Street hedge fund company, while my life was a chronicle of one low-paying job after another. My current occupation as the unpaid Scholarch of an online college of philosophy was for her just another ridiculous foray into folly. Of course, my opinion was, and is, that what I do today is not a real job at all; it's a

calling. But, from her perspective, the fact that I had worked many years without a wage was plainly absurd, and so she had no difficulty seeing a clear pattern: a lifetime of low-paying, mostly dead-end jobs. And for that, I was nothing, a loser.

But, was she right? Yes and no. From the perspective of one who single-mindedly pursues wealth, what else could I be? I didn't get rich. I didn't even try! So, of course I was a loser. On the other hand, my most-revered grandfather, Judge O.S. Jones, told me when I was a boy that "a man should work no more than is needed to put beans on the table and a roof over his head." And, basically, that's just what I did. I got through my day job—sometimes just putting one foot in front of the other on my way to the time clock—the rest of the day I thought, meditated, studied, and created things. But who was right, my revered grandfather or the very rich lady? According to the god of Heraclitus, they were both right.

Heraclitus, the presocratic philosopher and Stoic cosmologist, was the first to divine that Nature exists as the whole of dynamic continua. Physicists agree with him today—2500 years later. To discover how it is that to God all things are fair and good and right, we will briefly look at reality on opposite ends of this one continuum: those who live for wealth and power at one end, and those who live for Aretē, also known as the Cardinal Virtues, on the other. Then, we will ask and attempt to answer where we Stoics stand on this continuum, and why.

*In general remember this, that unless we make our religion and our treasure to consist in the same thing, religion will always be sacrificed.*

Epictetus, (*Discourses*, Book 1, chapter 27)

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Jesus of Nazareth, (Matthew 6:21)

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## Draco and Solon

Draco (*circa* 7th c. BCE) was an Athenian aristocrat and legislator who replaced the prevailing system of oral law and blood feud with a written code enforced by a court. Draco's laws made no pretense of uniformity and favored his ruling class in all matters. Laws written for the lesser classes – merchants, farmers, tradesmen, and laborers – were extremely harsh. For example, any delinquent debtor whose social status was less than that of his creditor was forced into slavery. Convictions for disobedience to most of Draco's laws demanded slavery or death. Stealing a single vegetable, for example, required death. Before long, executions and new slaves became commonplace. Plutarch recorded that when Draco was asked why



most offenses required a penalty of death, he said even minor offenses deserved death, and there was nothing more severe that he could impose for great crimes.

Fortunately for ancient Greece, Solon (c. 630 – 560 BCE) soon brought relief from the overwhelming cruelty of Draco. When he acquired the power of office, Solon repealed all of Draco's laws except for the death penalty for homicide. As a man of moderation, it was his intent not to revolutionize but to reform *all* classes of society. His new constitution replaced the aristocracy with a government by the wealthy, a plutocracy. He also instituted a Council of Four Hundred made up of all but the poorest classes of society that prepared the business of an Assembly. These changes by Solon are widely considered the foundation of democracy in Athens. And in his honor, Solon came to be known as the first of the Seven Sages of Greece. The laws he wrote have been noted to this day for their fairness. Justice.

Solon gave birth to the essential Greek virtue of moderation. "Nothing in excess," he said. When he came to power, he introduced a revolutionary law, the *Seisachtheia*, "shaking off the burden." The punitive laws of Draco had driven a great number of the poorer classes into debt, which then required slavery. Solon began his term in office by "shaking off the burden." All debts were forgiven, and all who became slaves as a result of debt were given freedom. The sayings of Solon have survived the centuries, and to discover his wisdom we only need an Internet entry such as the "Sayings of Solon" to reawaken this sage. Here is one that could have been written by a Stoic: "Rich men without wisdom are but sheep with golden fleeces."

***Draconian***. A word in the dictionary that means, "characteristic of Draco or his code of laws...rigorous, unusually severe or cruel [as in] Draconian forms of punishment."

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## Niccolò Machiavelli and Roy Cohn

*Moreover, in the actions of all men, and most of all of Princes, where there is no tribunal to which we can appeal, we look to results. Wherefore if a Prince succeeds in establishing and maintaining his authority, the means will always be judged honorable and be approved by every one.*

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

*Exitus acta probat*. This Latin phrase, the end justifies the means, was first memorialized by Ovid in *Heroides* (c. 10 BCE). Ovid, born of the Roman aristocracy, was one of the three canonical poets of Latin literature, along with Horace and Virgil. He was a popular poet of love and love affairs, including the

arts of seduction. He was exiled to the Black Sea in Romania by Emperor Augustus from 9 C.E. until his death in 17-18 C.E. Whether or not we believe the end justifies the means is a fundamental and character-defining choice we must all make in life. Niccolò Machiavelli and Roy Cohn, either consciously or unconsciously, chose to live by *exitus acta probat*.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) was a senior bureaucrat of the Florentine Republic, an independent state with a radius of about 40 miles surrounding the city of Florence, Italy. This was the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Christianity had been the official religion of Italy for 1200 years. Torture was legal and commonplace in the investigation of *any* crime, and Machiavelli was arrested and tortured for plotting against the Medici family that controlled the Republic. We may have never heard of Machiavelli except that the brother of the head of the Medici family was elected Pope, and, in a gesture of magnanimity, Giovanni de' Medici, Pope Leo X,<sup>8</sup> released all Florentine prisoners to allow them to join in the celebration of his papal ascension. Machiavelli was 44 years old.

During the 14 years prior to his arrest, Machiavelli had been second chancellor, as well as a diplomat representing Florence's ruling body, the Great Council of 3000. In that position he was expected to raise taxes, create and preserve alliances, and prepare for war. Loyal to the Great Council, Machiavelli was accused of plotting against a new committee dominated by the wealthy Medici family. Within a year of his release from prison, he wrote the first draft of *The Prince*, a work of political theory, giving him the current title of Father of Political Philosophy. There is disagreement among scholars as to *why* he wrote it, the majority think the reason is simple: he was out of prison, unemployed, and he needed a job.

In his work, *The Prince*, Chapter IX, he wrote: "...a principality is obtained either by the favor of the people or by the favor of the nobles. Because in all cities these two distinct parties are found, and from this it arises that the people do not wish to be ruled nor oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles wish to rule and oppress the people; and from these two opposite desires there arises in cities one of three results, either a principality, self-government, or anarchy...one cannot by fair dealing, and without injury to others, satisfy the nobles, but you can satisfy the people, for their object is more righteous than that of the nobles, the latter wishing to oppress, while the former only desiring not to be oppressed...The worst that a prince may expect from a hostile people is to be abandoned by them; but from hostile nobles he has not only to fear abandonment, but also that they will rise against him...For this reason, the sole study of a prince is in the art of war, and regardless of one's inclinations it is necessary to resort to treachery and the exercise of deadly force."

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Leo X, the Medici Pope, was so corrupt that a young, idealistic monk by the name of Martin Luther was horrified when he saw the hedonistic debauchery of the Vatican, and upon his shoulders the Protestant Reformation was born.

Machiavelli is not included in our essay as one who personally represents one or the other side of the dynamic continuum we are studying. He is included because he so clearly portrayed the machinations of power and those who would gravitate to the philosophy, *exitus acta probat*. It is important to note that he repeatedly describes the difference between the needs and desires of the princes in diametrical contrast to the needs and desires of the common people.

***Machiavellian***. A word in the dictionary that means, "principles of government...in which political expediency is placed above morality and the use of craft and deceit to maintain the authority... characterized by subtle or unscrupulous cunning, deception, expediency or dishonesty."

The treachery of the wealthy and powerful was also recognized two centuries earlier by Genghis Khan (1162-1227) who understood the nature and necessity of realpolitik. When he first began his campaign as a conqueror, the greatest conqueror who ever lived, he attempted to work with the nobles and rulers but soon discovered exactly the same thing Machiavelli wrote about two centuries later. As soon as he and his armies rode away they plotted against him. Peace and prosperity was finally established when he adopted the policy to simply eliminate the rulers. As soon as he conquered any city or town he would ask the common people to bring out their overlords, which they did without hesitation. He then killed them. Quickly and mercifully. (He forbade torture.) To everyone's surprise it was found that their rulers were entirely unnecessary after all.<sup>9</sup>

*You knew when you were in Cohn's presence you were in the presence of pure evil.*

Victor A. Kovner, lawyer and Roy Cohn's colleague of many years

Roy Cohn (1927-1986) was born into a wealthy Jewish family in the Bronx, New York City. His great-uncle was founder and owner of Lionel toy trains. He was a brilliant student and attended the best private schools, graduating from Columbia Law School at the age of 20. He passed the bar exam at the age of 21, and due to family connections was able to obtain a position in the US Attorney's Office in Manhattan on the day he was admitted to the bar.

Cohn first came to prominence and the attention of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover due to his role in the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg who gave classified nuclear information to the Soviets. The Rosenbergs were found guilty and executed, but their trial was notoriously tainted by improper judicial and legal activities, many of which were later traced to Roy Cohn. When he was just 24, FBI Director Hoover recommended him to Senator Joseph McCarthy for his communist investigations.

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Weatherford, Genghis Khan: the Making of the Modern World (Three Rivers Press, 2004)

McCarthy made Roy Cohn his chief counsel for what became known as the "Red-scare" or "McCarthy witch hunts." During this era, hundreds of Americans were targeted as being communists or as communist sympathizers, especially those in government service and in the entertainment industry. It was at this time that Cohn became best known for his aggressive tactics and for holding many of these hearings in "executive" or "off-the-record" locations away from Washington DC and away from scrutiny of the press. Even without a trial or credible evidence, many of these citizens lost their jobs or careers. Some were imprisoned. Most of those who suffered through a trial and imprisonment later had their convictions overturned as illegal or unconstitutional.

With Cohn's rising fame he launched a 30-year career as a New York City attorney. His clients included mafia dons, such as Tony Salerno, Carmine Galante, and John Gotti, as well as the New York Yankees club owner George Steinbrenner, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, and businessman Donald Trump. Although he was registered as a Democrat, he invariably supported Republican presidents and eventually became a member of the ultra-right organization, the John Birch Society.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Cohn was investigated and charged three times with professional misconduct, including perjury, witness tampering, and financial improprieties. Each time, he was acquitted. In 1986, the New York State Supreme Court disbarred Cohn for ethical misconduct following a string of unprofessional activities, including one situation in 1975 when he forced a pen into the hand of a hospitalized multi-millionaire to change the dying man's will and make himself a beneficiary.

Roy Cohn died later in that year of complications from Aids. He was 59. Cohn was a homosexual, which he denied, and was the author of strong-arm tactics developed for Senator McCarthy in exposing innumerable gay men in what has been called the "Lavender Scare." According to Senator Alan Simpson, this lesser known search for homosexuals in the federal government was as brutal and harmed even more lives than the McCarthy witch hunts. Cohn died having achieved his life goal, which was, according to one associate, to die broke owing millions in taxes to the Internal Revenue Service.

**McCarthyism.** The practice of making accusations of subversion or treason without proper regard for evidence. The term is also used more generally to describe reckless, unsubstantiated accusations, as well as demagogic attacks on the character or patriotism of political adversaries.

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## Trump & Mueller

According to his enemies, and some of his friends and fellow Republicans, Donald Trump is, and I quote, a supreme narcissist, brash, licentious, crude, a pathological liar, a cheater, a braggart, a sleazeball, weak, unstable, disloyal, ignorant, semi-literate, infantile, bad-tempered, moody, bellicose, unhinged, a racist, a misogynist, a con man, a philistine, impulsive, undisciplined, inconsistent, cruel, immoral, a coward, a bully, a psychopath, a thug, intemperate, lazy, chaotic, schizophrenic, and, according to his recently fired Secretary of State who won't admit that he said it but won't deny that he did, "a moron." Yes, that pretty well covers it.

But let's take just one of these allegations, that Trump is a pathological liar. On this there can be little doubt. According to the Washington Post and other fact-checking organizations, Donald Trump lied or gave misleading information more than 2,000 times in his first 365 days in office.<sup>10</sup> One reason the number is so incredibly high is because they not only check the facts, they count how many times the lie or misleading exaggeration is made. Trump repeats himself a lot. Even when the lie has been caught and revealed to him he claims it's "fake news," and then he tells the lie again, and again. The following quote was repeated 57 times:<sup>11</sup>

"The tax cuts are the most significant tax cut -- most significant reform in American history, with tremendous tax relief for working families, for small businesses, for big businesses that produce jobs -- for just about everybody."

"FACT CHECK: Trump's tax cut is nearly 0.9 percent of the gross domestic product, meaning it would be far smaller than President Ronald Reagan's tax cut in 1981, which was 2.89 percent of GDP. Trump's tax cut is the *eighth* largest tax cut — and even *smaller* than two tax cuts passed by his arch nemesis, the former President, Barack Obama."

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To anyone living in the current era, the pairing of Donald Trump and Robert Mueller is not likely to arouse confusion or even curiosity. The former is the president and the latter is the man charged with investigating the election of this president. And, other than the time, place, and circumstance of their births, they couldn't be more different. Trump and Mueller were born less than two years apart in New York City into families of great wealth and power, which included family chefs and chauffeurs. Both went to expensive all-male, private schools before attending prestigious universities. And that's where the similarities end.

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10 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?hpid=hp\\_hp-visual-stories-desktop\\_no-name%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.4ab8163e03ca](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?hpid=hp_hp-visual-stories-desktop_no-name%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.4ab8163e03ca)

11 Ibid.

## School

Donald Trump was an incorrigible and lackluster student. He was combative, braggadocios, and frequently in trouble. It started at an early age, and in the second grade he punched his music teacher in the face. It continued until the eighth grade when his father finally took him out of his elite school and put him in a military academy, one with a reputation for having the strictest discipline. For the first time, he actually began to excel. He was promoted to a position of authority which he wielded with such zeal that he was on one occasion demoted for viciousness in his treatment of lower cadets. He denies the charge.

Mueller went to an Episcopal school in New Hampshire where he was captain of the soccer, hockey and lacrosse teams. Classmates remember him as being serious but likable. One friend from those days said Mueller was a role model for the other students. He recalled one incident when a group of the boys were hanging out at a snack shop making a disparaging comment about another boy who wasn't there. Mueller objected and said it wasn't right to say such things about a person behind their back, then he walked away.

## Military Service

Trump apparently had few friends in college and wanted it that way. He spent his spare time and weekends working with his father's real estate empire. After his first two years at Fordham University, he transferred to University of Pennsylvania where he scoured the area looking for apartments that could be bought and rented to other students. Despite an era of nearly constant anti-war demonstrations and sit-ins on American campuses Trump was only interested in the family business. He got four draft deferments for going to college and one deferment for bone spurs. When later asked which foot had the bones spurs, he confessed he had no idea. In the parlance of the day, Trump was a draft dodger. Trump is the only US president who has never had either government or military service.

Mueller joined the US Marines a few weeks after graduating from Princeton University—an enlistment quite rare among graduates of Ivy League schools. After Officer Candidate School he shipped out to Vietnam. By November of 1968 he was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Platoon Leader in the jungle. The very next month he led his platoon in an 8-hour battle against an extensive complex of North Vietnamese bunkers, earning a Bronze Star with a "V" for distinction. According to the account that led to his medal, "...with complete disregard for his own safety [he] fearlessly moved from one position to another, directing the accurate counter fire of his men and shouting words of encouragement to them." The casualty rate was terribly high.

Four months later he was in another fire fight. This time it was an ambush by the Viet Cong. His medal earned in that battle stated, "Although seriously wounded during the fire fight, he resolutely maintained his position and, ably directing the fire of his platoon, was instrumental in defeating the North Vietnamese Army force." After his experience in Vietnam, which he never speaks about, a lifelong friend and Washington lawyer, Thomas Wilner, said Mueller went from being an affable good guy to a man with a backbone of steel. He never brags about these experiences, Wilner says. It isn't his style.

## Career

"The key to the way I promote is bravado," Trump told the ghost writer of his best-selling book, "Trump: The Art of the Deal."<sup>12</sup> Unlike his older brother, the first born son Fred Jr., Donald never had any trouble "being a killer," as his father always demanded of his sons. Fred Jr., was too nice, too sensitive and accommodating to the tenants of the Trump apartment empire. Fred was a failure at the family business. He became an airline pilot and failed at that. He began drinking heavily until he died of heart failure at the age of 43 after many years of alcohol abuse. People liked Fred Jr. Donald liked Fred Jr., and he was so affected by his brother's death that he became a teetotaler shortly thereafter. "[I learned] To keep my guard up one hundred percent. . . Life is a series of battles ending in victory or defeat. You just can't let people make a sucker out of you."

In 1976, Trump began his real estate career on his own and away from his father's empire with a lie. Although this was the first hotel he was trying to get built he was able to persuade a New York Times reporter to describe him as an established and big builder even though he had never built anything in his life. Then he invented connections to important people as a way of intimidating anyone who stood in his way. He denies all this, of course. His education in muscling his way to the top had already begun under the careful tutelage of his true mentor, the master of self-promotion, lies, innuendo, and intimidation, Roy Cohn.

After his service in Vietnam, Robert Mueller spent the next 20 years as a prosecutor in San Francisco and Boston. In Washington DC, he became assistant attorney general in the Justice Department during the administration of George H.W. Bush. In 1995, Mueller left government service for a high-paying job in the private sector as a white collar litigator for a prestigious multi-state law firm. He hated it, because he did not want to defend people who he thought may be guilty.

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<sup>12</sup> Background information comparing the lives of Trump and Mueller is based upon Internet research, but I am especially indebted to the Washington Post article listed here:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/mueller-and-trump-born-to-wealth-raised-to-lead-then-sharply-different-choices/2018/02/22/ad50b7bc-0a99-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_trumpmueller-740a%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.82042803a092](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/mueller-and-trump-born-to-wealth-raised-to-lead-then-sharply-different-choices/2018/02/22/ad50b7bc-0a99-11e8-8b0d-891602206fb7_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_trumpmueller-740a%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.82042803a092)

He quit and went to the U.S. Attorney's office in Washington, DC, and asked for a job prosecuting homicides in what was then the murder capital of America. He got the job, took a 75% pay cut, and loved it.

In 2013, Mueller gave the commencement address at the College of William and Mary, Thomas Jefferson's Alma Mater. (This address can be seen on YouTube.) In it he said essentially what Stoics believe: it's the aim not the target. That is, the outcome is less important than how the work is done. "You are only as good as your word. You can be smart, aggressive, articulate, and indeed persuasive, but if you are not honest, your reputation will suffer, and once lost, a good reputation can never be regained."

For more than 10 years, Roy Cohn took the young Donald under his wing. They were so close that there was a time when word among his friends was that if you wanted to talk to Donald, find Roy; if you want to talk to Roy, find Donald. By 1980, Trump was calling Cohn 15-20 times a day for advice on avoiding taxes and zoning ordinances, as well as "sweetheart deals" and intimidation tactics. From his mentor, the man who brought McCarthyism to America, Trump learned three foundational rules: "Roy was a master of situational immorality....He worked with a three-dimensional strategy, which was: 1. Never settle, never surrender. 2. Counter-attack, counter-sue immediately. 3. No matter what happens, no matter how deeply into the muck you get, claim victory and never admit defeat."<sup>13</sup>

Two brief examples show Roy Cohn rules in action beginning in Trump's career down to the present. In 1973, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division filed a suit of discrimination against Trump's company for using codes (Code 9 represented black applicants)<sup>14</sup> and other methods to prevent blacks from renting his apartments in New York. The 27-year-old Donald, on the advice of Roy Cohn, countersued the government for false allegations of discrimination, asking for \$100 million in damages. The result of that case, which dragged on for 2 years, ended in a consent decree admitting no wrong doing. Both the government and Trump declared victory.

The second example is current (March 2018), and as anyone who pays attention to the news is aware, President Trump's attorney Michael Cohen is suing the pornography actress, Stormy Daniels, for \$20 million in damages for breach of contract. Cohen claims that in 2016 he paid \$130,000 ("out of his own pocket" to Daniels) to remain silent about a 2006 affair Trump had with Ms. Daniels while his wife, currently First Lady Melania Trump, was pregnant. Trump never signed the agreement, so Daniels is suing to void the contract. Trump claims he knows nothing, and it never happened. Attorney Cohen says he wants \$1 million every

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<sup>13</sup> There are numerous Internet resources for investigating the relationship of Trump and Cohn, but one of the best I found was from Vanity Fair: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/06/donald-trump-roy-cohn-relationship>

<sup>14</sup> <http://thehill.com/homenews/news/319788-fbi-releases-documents-related-to-trump-apartment-discrimination-case>



time she talks about the affair, which he says she has done 20 times, and the sordid matter goes on and on. As a footnote, there are currently two other women suing Trump for egregious sexual misbehavior.

On Trump's first big project, the 1980 renovation of the Grand Hyatt, he became embroiled in several controversies, including fighting City Hall on tax abatement and cheating his own partner, Jay Pritzker, by changing the terms of their deal while Pritzker was in Nepal without access to a phone. When building Trump Tower, he ignored appeals by city officials and art patrons by destroying the Art Deco friezes on the 1929 building he was replacing. When the papers published the story, Trump said, "Who cares? Let's say that I had given that junk to the Met. They would have just put them in their basement."<sup>15</sup> Trump kept an 8x10 inch photo of Roy Cohn on his desk positioned in such a way that it was clearly visible to intimidate the contractors who came to his office.

One week before the terrorist planes hit the Twin Towers, Robert Mueller was sworn in as Director of the FBI. Under his administration, the FBI went from domestic law enforcement to an international intelligence agency. He was nominated for this position by George W. Bush and served under both Bush and Obama for twelve years—longer than any FBI Director except J. Edgar Hoover. Although a lifelong Republican, Mueller never questioned his duty regardless of the party of the president. As Director, he always crossed out the word, "I," in his staff-prepared speeches. He said the FBI was not about him. It was about the men and women who served with him.<sup>16</sup>

On December 28, 2017, President Trump gave a half hour, impromptu interview with the *New York Times*. In that 30 minutes, he made 24 false or misleading claims, almost one a minute, according to their fact checkers. But maybe Trump isn't a pathological liar. Maybe he has a new mentor, Vladimir Putin. In 2016, the nonpartisan research RAND organization in a study unrelated to Trump or his candidacy for president, published a study of the Putin propaganda machine. They called this media technique a "Firehose of Falsehood."<sup>17</sup> It's similar to Soviet Cold War propaganda that obscures information in such a way that the recipient does what they are told without knowing they have been manipulated.

Today, there are many other forms of media available that were unknown in the Soviet era, and the new technique takes advantage of these new outlets. (Putin was an agent of the Soviet KGB who became Director of the Federal Security

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-vs-mueller-is-a-battle-for-americas-soul/2018/02/26/0979904c-1b19-11e8-9de1-147dd2df3829\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_no-name\\_opinion-card-e%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.16787828b48b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-vs-mueller-is-a-battle-for-americas-soul/2018/02/26/0979904c-1b19-11e8-9de1-147dd2df3829_story.html?hpid=hp_no-name_opinion-card-e%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.16787828b48b)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE198/RAND\\_PE198.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE198/RAND_PE198.pdf)

Service that replaced it.) RAND calls this new propaganda technique a firehose of falsehood because they use numerous media sources or channels to entertain, confuse, and overwhelm. These lies come in a firehose of misinformation that is rapid, continuous, repetitive, and lacks commitment to consistency. According to RAND, this propaganda technique effectively undercuts our perception of reality because:<sup>18</sup>

- People are poor judges of true versus false information—and they do not necessarily remember that particular information was false.
- Information overload leads people to take shortcuts in determining the trustworthiness of messages.
- Familiar themes or messages can be appealing even if they are false.
- Statements are more likely to be accepted if backed by evidence, even if that evidence is false.
- Peripheral cues—such as an appearance of objectivity—can increase the credibility of propaganda.

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## Right and Wrong

*Amour-propre [self love] is... a relative feeling, factitious and born in society, which inclines each individual to be preoccupied with himself more than with anyone else, which inspires in men all the evils they do to each other.*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*

According to Stoics, Rousseau is clearly wrong about self love, which we call *oikeiosis*. It is *not* born in society; it is born throughout Nature, from flora to fauna. It is a given fact of all life from the moment of birth. But he may not be wrong about this as an inspiration to do evil as a way to satisfy that natural drive. Stoics believe that evil, which is nothing more than a lack of virtue, may be inspired by *oikeiosis* for those to whom the ends justify the means, *exitus acta probat*. But, *oikeiosis* is also the beginning of virtue—a personal effort that evolves from self love to love of others to altruism, sacrificing oneself on behalf of another, the highest form of ethical expression. *Oikeiosis* is only appropriate to infants and toddlers, and soon after that time most of us learn to *expand* our love of self through the education of parents, teachers, and sound reasoning. Even people born into the lofty heights of aristocratic entitlement can learn that lesson; Solon and Mueller did, but some do not. The noble man or woman has learned; the narcissist refuses to learn and evolve. So many of our leaders are creating dystopias.

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18 Ibid. Quoted directly from the Rand study

The human species experiment may come to an abrupt end; or, the end may be slow and painfully long; or, we may become immortal as a computer program. That technology is available now.<sup>19</sup> If that is our goal, who will be the customers of this technology? It is impossible to know with perfect certainty, but it's likely that only the very rich will be able to afford to have their brains turned into a computer simulation. Such fantastic technology would likely be fantastically expensive, and for the sake of argument let's say that it is. Well, then, wouldn't it behoove each and everyone of us to end our physical aches and pains and extend the length of our mental lives tenfold, or more? What are we waiting for? Wouldn't we feel justified in lying, cheating, and stealing, maybe even murdering our way into such great wealth and privilege? *Exitus acta probat.*

Here would be one more reason to get rich, one more of so many that we already know: the best medical care, only work when we feel like it, play all the time if we want to, only the most luxurious of everything, beautiful homes in all our favorite places, the finest foods prepared by the greatest chefs, and being served and pampered and surrounded by sycophants who are well paid to tell us how wonderful we are every day no matter what we do or say. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to give each of our sons and daughters a new Porsche or Maserati as they head off to the most prestigious universities that only the very rich can afford? What better way for them to make connections with their kind of people that will serve them well in any career or dream they may have for the rest of their lives? Why would anyone in their right mind NOT want to live by the motto *exitus acta probat*?

Stoics are in their right minds, and they do NOT want to live by such a motto. We live by a virtue ethic, and we believe that in all we say and do it is the aim, not the target. How we draw the bow and position the arrow is what matters. To what end the arrow flies is not the true meaning of our lives.

In 1983, when walking through a large public park in Tokyo, I was drawn to the sight of a young man with a bow and arrow. He was clad in the traditional Japanese archer's costume and long bow, the real bow without all the gadgets Olympic archers need to get their medals. Beside him, to the left, there was a simple wooden stand with a single pottery bowl holding incense—the kind they burn in temples. In front of him, the bull's-eye target was a maximum of four meters, ten or twelve feet away. Every movement was performed in graceful slow motion and effortless perfection: removing the arrow from the quiver, putting it into place on the string, raising the bow, and releasing the arrow at exactly the moment of absolute stillness. I don't remember where the arrows landed on the target, because that was entirely irrelevant, a matter of indifference, both to him

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<sup>19</sup> The startup called Nectome, founded by MIT computer scientists, has been created to embalm and preserve every detail of the brain, so that it can be scanned someday in the future to be placed in a computer simulation (The Week, March 30, 2018, page 18, "What's new in Tech").

as the archer and to me as the observer. It was the aim, the performance; not the target.

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As those of students who have taken the second term of the Marcus Aurelius School program already know, Stoics are compatibilists. That is, in the ancient argument of determinism versus free will we say that a free will is *compatible* with determinism, because there are both internal and external causes to all matters in our lives. Fate is the external cause; free will is the internal cause. Inside our mind there is our will, and we can choose to live a life guided by *aretē* or by *Exitus acta probat*. If we consistently choose one path in preference to the other, we become the person we have chosen to be. And both the internal and the external together equal the outcome.

Stoic traditionalists believe that Fate is God, and the consciousness of God orders the universe in the best possible way, but it is our internal will, our free will, that contributes to the outcome in those matters in which we are personally involved. So, as Stoics we choose to do our best and let Fate do the rest. It's the aim, not the target. Whether or not our aim yields the target bull's eye is up to Fate or Moira, the daimon spinner of destiny. Some people call it luck, but we are not going to attempt to prove that Fate=luck today. That will require another essay.

If you as a Stoic are good, strong, just, and wise and have decided that your preferred indifferent is to start a widget company, then after using your wisdom to determine there is a need and value for your brand of widgets, you can choose to found such a business with the motto, *Exitus acta probat*, the end justifies the means; or, you can do your best to preserve your noble character and let luck, aka destiny, Fate, the external cause, work for or against your business. If it works for you, no one can keep you from success. If it works against you, then your only recourse is to lie, cheat, steal, murder, sell drugs, do whatever you have to do to force the world to do your bidding. It may work, and in the process you have destroyed your soul, your *hedgemonikon*, your good name and noble character. You may choose. That is your free will.

Our philosopher-king was the emperor Marcus Aurelius. He is the role model for one who would be a Stoic leader, a servant of the people, and a steward of the land. Even Machiavelli speaks of him admiringly in *The Prince*. But who cares? Why don't we all just give up and go over to the Dark Side? Why don't we all focus our lives on doing and saying whatever we have to do to increase our wealth and power—wealthy enough to have whatever we want and powerful enough to be the perpetrator of humiliation rather than the victim? Shout down any twinge of empathy. Consciously regress back to the infantile stage of caring for no one and nothing but the gratification of all our wants and needs. *Exitus acta probat!*

Today, the world is dominated once again by a Prince of Darkness. He has been here before in many guises, and he lacks all appearance of virtue in his soul. He inspires others to join him in making malfeasance almost respectable—and what a time they're having winking and nudging one another with knowing glances. After all, if there are so *many* duplicitous carrion hereabouts feeding on the body politic, then it must be normal, and they can gleefully be what they really are and want to be. In America, the current political rulers have formed a kakistocracy, a nation ruled by the worst members of its society. It's certainly not the *only* kakistocracy in the world, just the most visible and powerful.

I don't really believe there is such an entity as a Prince of Darkness. I believe with the Stoics that there is no evil except in the absence of virtue in the soul, and that only the will is in our power. I also believe along with Heraclitus and contemporary physicists that existence is only possible when there is a dynamic continuum of opposites.<sup>20</sup> There really are living and working among us psychopaths and other human beings who only pretend to be pious and decent—and only when it is to their advantage. They have no shame. They have no empathy. They only live for the accumulation of wealth and power and the joy of intimidating others. They place no moral boundaries upon what they will do to achieve their ends, and they think anyone who does not do the same is naive and irrelevant. Losers.

If it is true that “To God all things are fair and good and right, but men hold some things wrong and some right,” then what is the point of all this effort and discipline practicing the Cardinal Virtues? Why don't we all just focus on wealth and power and taking whatever we can steal, sweet talk, connive, and bully away from others? Why? Because some of us know that virtue is the highest reward and that the only path to real and lasting happiness is by cultivating and preserving a noble character. We *want* to be Good, Strong, Just, and Wise above all else. We are not those who have consciously or unconsciously chosen the Dark Side. We are not those who never know empathy and mistake lust for love. We are not those who mistake wealth and power for success. We know there is another, a better way.

We who practice Stoic philosophy can be the saints and sages of history. Stoics are those who insist on rational order and goodness and justice with mercy. We are the Solons, not the Dracos or princes described by Machiavelli. We are the Robert Muellers, not the Roy Cohns or Donald Trumps. We are those who stand firmly against the chaos and corruption that surround us and pollute the world. We do NOT believe the end justifies the means. We are an anchor on the good, the virtuous side of the human being continuum.

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<sup>20</sup> “Homer was wrong in saying, 'Would that strife might perish from among gods and men.' He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe... (Heraclitus fragment 42, Burnet).”

But, trust is the key. We who are the Stoics of this century must have trust in the providence of the divine. We who are cosmic optimists must have trust that our cosmos is rational and therefore works for the good of all. We who are able to take the emperor's view from above will see and know that all is fair and good and right. The world needs us. Yes, the world needs us. But the world needs all of us.

All of us are working together for the same end; some of us knowingly and purposefully, others unconsciously...to one man falls this share of the task, to another that; indeed, no small part is performed by that very malcontent who does all he can to hinder and undo the course of events. The universe has need even of such as he."

Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations*, bk six, 42)

Men would not have known the name of justice if these unjust things were not.

Heraclitus (fragment 59, Burnet)

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## Position Paper: Stoic Economics

### Introduction

*My question is: which system, Libertarian or Socialist, is more just? Can a Stoic be either; or, is one or the other more compatible with the philosophy of Stoicism?*

[Excerpt from an email to a fellow Stoic, October, 2015]

Although it is patently absurd that I would pass judgment on economic matters in any way, shape, or form, it is equally absurd that economic matters have come to the state they are in where bosses are paid hundreds of times more than the average wage of the actual worker, and where one single family, the Walton heirs, have more wealth than 42% of the rest of Americans combined—despite the fact that Sam, the creator of this wealth, has long been dead and his descendants have nothing better to do but spend all this money, or try to, and because of this absurd economic world in which we live, I will simply proceed to pass judgment on it as if I had a right to, because as every keen observer of human nature knows it's easier to apologize than it is to get permission.

Is it naïve for a Stoic philosopher, even one who is not an economist, to want to have an economic system he or she can confidently live by? I don't think it is, anymore than it is naïve for any reasonable person to want economic justice. Are we supposed to just be quiet, look the other way, and do what we are told without question? That may work well for cattle, but it doesn't sit well with most human beings.

It's true, we are social animals, but we are also *thinking* social animals, and it's only natural to wonder why a few people control most of the planet's power and wealth while millions starve. But, you may ask, isn't that what it means to be a Stoic? To buck up, keep a stiff upper lip and carry on? No. Focusing *exclusively* on one's own virtue as a guide to happiness may have been sufficient for classical Stoics, but times change, understanding increases, cultures evolve, and if Stoics can't evolve with new realities, then we deserve to be as dead as the Stoics of antiquity.

We have a right to some reasonable explanation for the way things are here; and, so far, after living more than 70 years, and after searching for more than a year and a half to find an answer to this conundrum, I am unsatisfied. I am unsatisfied with the lies and excuses of our rulers who run things in the oligarchy in which I live; I am unsatisfied with the lies and excuses of the communists who want another chance to impose their totalitarian failures upon the world; I am unsatisfied with the lies and excuses of the American right wing, our very own Taliban; and, I am tired of the lies and excuses of the sophists who use pop culture to prop up and camouflage this dystopian economic absurdity.

The eminent economist, E.F. Schumacher, had much to say about all this, but one thing in particular has stayed with me. In his final work, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 123-4), he talks about one of the great polarities of human life, freedom and equality. This pair of opposites dividing our country and indeed our world, led by the Libertarian right and Socialist left, has created a conundrum for modern people everywhere, and it is as loudly argued today as it ever was. Even more.

This *divergent* polarity of freedom and equality has been a theme throughout all of my examination of justice, and it is resolved to my satisfaction at last. I really have Schumacher to thank for his insight into the essence of the problem, this polarity, and without it I'm not sure I would have finally found the Stoic philosophy in all this jumble. The present essay provides the key to the cardinal virtue of justice I have been seeking.

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*Justice prescribes two basic principles: First, do no injury to another man. Second, see that the public interest is maintained.*

Panaetius<sup>21</sup>

Are Panaetius's principles of justice all the information we need to know how to construct Stoic economics? I don't think so. He may have had a lot more to say on the matter, we don't know, but by themselves these two principles are vague and open to interpretation; and, I'm sure the interpretations will vary significantly depending on whether they're done by a Libertarian or by a Socialist. That was likely the same or a similar situation in ancient Rome when Panaetius said it; and, I assume the overwhelming majority of patricians and plebeians would perceive and define justice as differently then as they do today.

But things have changed. Today, unlike the past, there are legions of people who are barely surviving financially who have bought the intensely disseminated propaganda of, for, and by the wealthy that freedom trumps all. I know people like that right here in California – college educated, gainfully employed, and middle class – who cannot afford to buy a home and raise a family, and it is these people that especially concern me. I'm not surprised that they are angry, but I am surprised that they vent their frustration and anger behind the motto of millionaires: "Give me freedom from government or give me death!"

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the US federal government created parks, national highways, bridges, hydro-electric dams, and a space program that put the first man on the moon. But, no more. We are not even taking care of what our fathers and grandfathers built, and it all began with one statement made by one man. "Government is not the solution; government is the problem." And what exactly was the problem to which this man, President Ronald Reagan was referring? Nothing. It was just oratory. The US was the richest, most powerful country in the world. Reagan made this statement when he was giving his first Inaugural Address (January, 1981) and it was oratorically idealizing the conservative message. But the phrase caught on and was the kind of easily remembered quote that kept getting repeated over and over until it became a kind of essential truth to the right wing of American politics. BTW, this is also the president who said, when he was told there were 17 million people who go to bed hungry every night, "it's probably because they are all on diets (Wikiquote)."

This jingoistic soundbite should be compared to another great quote by another president from the other end of the political spectrum. President

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21 AA Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (California, 1986, p. 215)



John F. Kennedy's oft-repeated challenge in his first Inaugural Address (January, 1961) had an entirely different focus: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." In twenty years, we went from Kennedy's urging of citizens to do their duty to Reagan's insistence that your country doesn't deserve your duty (and certainly not your taxes). Government is *not* the solution; it's the problem. This has been the battle cry of the American conservative ever since, and it has become a fixed mindset that doesn't even allow questioning.

### Marcus Aurelius

By word and deed Marcus Aurelius is the model for the Stoic concept of our duty. As a well-educated Stoic he certainly knew that virtue (*aretē*) is the only true good, and if the people were suffering it was really from ignorance of that fact. When Rome was in the grips of great famine and starvation was threatening whole sections of the population he knew perfectly well that those who were suffering were doing so because they equated happiness with a full belly—what we Stoics know as an indifferent. We know that starvation is not an evil. We know that death is not an evil.

Why should Marcus be concerned if people starve? Pity is not a Stoic virtue; it's a weakness. And yet, Marcus also knew he had a duty to perform for the aid of his people, and he acted. He sold off much of his personal fortune to assist the starving masses of people less fortunate than the patricians of Rome. Is this the behavior of a Stoic? Yes. It is precisely *because* he was a Stoic, and a good one, that he could live up to the high ideals of our philosophy. He sacrificed his own, personal wealth as an expression of compassion towards his fellow human beings.

Students of our philosophy are quick to accept the belief, often found in the teachings of Epictetus, that we only need to care about our *own* virtue and the decisions we make in our *own* will without regard for what others are doing. It's harder and takes longer to understand that there is another side to that coin, that we are also members of a family, and that the health and welfare of our family, the human family, is our duty and our concern. Yes, there is no evil in starvation or death, ours or others, but there is coldness in our soul, a dampness upon the Logos Fire within, when we turn our backs on the ignorance and suffering of the weak and those less fortunate among us.

### Heraclitus

Our cosmologist said, "We must know that war is common to all, and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife (61, Burnet trans.)." Was he talking about our lives today, yours and mine? Was he saying that as social animals we had better get used to constantly fighting each

other? Yes and no. He was talking about all life, all of reality on this plane of existence as a world made up of polarities of opposites: hot/cold; soft/hard; black/white; right/left; and, yes, Libertarians and Socialists. And, he was talking about learning from each other. "Men would not have known the name of justice if these unjust things were not (ibid., 59). The political continuum is the same as every other aspect of reality.

If it is our duty to care for one another, why are Stoics not 100% in support of the side of the polarity that idealizes our duty? Isn't that what Socialism means, to emphasize society and its needs over the needs of the individual? Perhaps, but most of the Stoics I know are Libertarians, hard core individualists. Are they right (no pun intended)? The Japanese have a saying, "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down." Should we agree with the Japanese, a space-age tribal culture, who have nothing but contempt for the feral aggressiveness of the individualist? Most Stoics I know are downright uncomfortable with being members of the "common herd," as Epictetus called them.

What do we believe? Do we believe that when a Stoic evolves to the altruistic stage, as Marcus Aurelius appears to have done, he or she will put the needs of society above their own? Do we believe that? If we do, then why would we support a political philosophy that champions exactly the opposite? Why would we promote belief in a utopian dream that promises true justice only when the freedom of the individual is paramount? Perhaps it's because most of us by nature prefer to be left alone, and we follow a political philosophy that emphasizes the *freedom* to be left alone. Socialism is too . . . social. Equality makes us acknowledge the existence of others and, scary word alert, cooperate.

### We are NOT Epicureans

To the Epicurean the goal of life is pleasure, or at least an avoidance of all suffering. What's more, Epicurus claimed the pursuit of pleasure was more important than virtue. Virtue was the obsession of Stoics and others who thought there was something sacred about being good. Rubbish! Epicurus would say. There was nothing wrong with illegal acts in and of themselves. Stealing, for example, was not wrong; getting caught was. The only bad thing about theft is because we may get caught, and if we do then we will probably be punished, and being punished is definitely going to compromise our pursuit of pleasure. We must on all occasions pursue pleasure and avoid pain. That is the sum total of our reason for living. Therefore, don't steal.

Is this the Epicurean's idea of how to create a noble character? No, because to them worrying about having a noble character is nonsense. Do you believe creating a noble character is a waste of time? I don't. Epicurus was wrong. There is something worse than being punished for theft; stealing itself, because it

destroys our soul, the rational soul that makes us human and capable of assent, the rational organizing principle of our life in virtue, the only good, and the only guarantee of happiness. Regardless of whether you are caught and/or punished you become what you do, and that is what really matters. This is profoundly important to a Stoic and a truly great difference between us and the Epicureans. Regardless of the pleasure or pain attendant to reprehensible acts against man and nature, when we trample on virtue, and that includes our natural duties, we become despicable human beings.

Los Angeles Times newspaper: October 25, 2015: They are not naming names, yet. The California Department of Water and Power (DWP) is thinking about it, thinking about publishing the names of the biggest water hogs who persist in guzzling far more than their share during the longest and most difficult drought in California history. The DWP has not released names, but they have released numbers. The biggest water hog lives in a mansion in Bel Air (an affluent community in LA) and they annually consume all by themselves 90 times more water than the average citizen. *90 times!* And, if you know anything about the entitlement attitude of people who would do such a thing in a time of ecological crisis you know exactly what their response would be, "It's my money; I can do anything I damn well please with it."

Freedom. That's what it's called. Freedom means you can use 90 times more water than the average consumer to have lush green lawns, spouting fountains, or anything else you want to do with it. Hire people to flush your 20 toilets 100 times a day if you want to. If you're a billionaire, that would hardly be spare change. So, let the little people use the Navy mantra ("When it's yellow let it mellow. When it's brown flush it down."), we don't have to. We're rich, and we love the sound of gushing water in a desert. Ha ha!

Is that a Stoic attitude? Is that a Stoic thing to do, even a rich Stoic? No. Absolutely not. Does that sound at all like Epicurus's advice that there is nothing wrong with illegal acts in and of themselves? It does to me. In the case of the severe drought hereabouts, it's not even illegal to be a water hog, or a whole pigsty of water hogs. But the question is, would a Stoic, even a rich Stoic behave like this? No. Would an Epicurean? Yes, if he truly believes what Epicurus said about the only good being pleasure, and if it gives you pleasure because you can waste water while everyone else has none, who cares? That's their problem.

We all know that this kind of attitude is not Stoic, right? Why not? Because Stoics recognize, at least intellectually if not in practice, that we are social animals, and that the good of the whole is good for the individual. You know I'm right. I'm not just making this up. Throughout the history of our philosophy we have acknowledged our relationship of the part to the whole, both in the matter of our fellow human beings and to the whole of Nature, the cosmos. Anyone who has

read Marcus Aurelius knows that he repeatedly wrote about our relationship to the Whole in a number of passages in the *Meditations*. Here's one of my favorite quoted from Book 7.9, "All things are interwoven with one another; a sacred bond unites them; there is scarcely one thing that is isolated from another. Everything is coordinated, everything works together in giving form to the one universe."

But with respect to our relationship to each other he is even more clear and repetitious. I could quote several, but I think I only need one passage to make my point. "Chief in all features in a man's constitution, there, is his duty to his kind (ibid., book 7.55)." He didn't say it's a good idea to give some thought to the welfare of humanity; he said it was *chief* in all features of a man's constitution. In other passages he emphasizes that we are made for one another as the upper teeth fit the lower and the right hand works with the left. This is Stoic. This is what a Stoic is; not the man of wealth and entitlement who claims preeminence of his liberty and freedom to do what he damn well pleases.

This is the manifesto of the Epicurean, pleasure is the greatest good. Libertarians say the same thing using a different word. To them, freedom is the greatest good. They say, when it's my property and my money, I can do with it as I *please*. Do you see how similar their attitude sounds? Is it a great stride or just a tiny step from one word to the other? IMO, the best philosophy for the Libertarian is the Epicurean philosophy. Not only can he use 90 times more water than the average, even in a prolonged drought where water is increasingly scarce and lakes and rivers are drying up, he can do this with impunity because it's legal. Grossly wasting water rations is not wrong in and of itself; it's only a problem if he gets outed. And then, so what? Who cares what the little people think?

It is wrong when a Stoic isolates himself from the rest of humanity and has no care or concern for them. And not just humanity but all of nature and all of life so long as it pleases us to do whatever we have the money and will to do. As Stoics we must know this is wrong! Our *reason* for being a Stoic is not to be independent and self-sufficient but to ethically evolve, to build a noble character; and our duty as a Stoic is to all humanity. As Marcus said, it is *chief* in our constitution as a man. What does that sound like?

There appear to be as many kinds of Libertarians as there are kinds of Socialists, and as a Stoic the kind of freedom we can and must believe in is that which allows every man and woman the freedom to pursue whatever philosophy they believe is in their own best interest. They will anyway. What are we going to do force them to agree to our point of view? That's what totalitarian tyrants attempt to do. The Stoa is not a tyrant. Marcus Aurelius said (ibid., book 6.27): "How barbarous, to deny men the privileged of pursuing what they imagine to be their proper concerns and interests! Yet, in a sense, this is just what you are doing when you allow your indignation to rise at their wrongdoing; for after all, they are

only following their own apparent concerns and interests. You say they are mistaken? Why then, tell them so, and explain it to them, instead of being indignant.”

## Work

The Quick and Dirty Principle (QDP) rules the workplace, because whether they want to or not, American corporate leaders are *required by law* to maximize profits for their shareholders. Those who are born with a talent for working hard and fast and quality-be-damned, the QDP, are rewarded with continued employment. Those who are born with a talent for making *others* work the QDP are rewarded with promotions, especially if they are a friend or relative of the boss. Personally, I was never very good at either, nor was I well-connected, so I struggled along at one job or another, never making myself or my bosses happy, until I gave up and became a civil servant. I entered Law Enforcement.

I'm not an academic economist who looks down my nose at the world, armed with charts, graphs, statistics, and grand theories about ideal economic models. My reference is that of the wage slave who spent a life time searching for work that had some meaning or satisfaction beyond selling my body and soul for a survival wage. I never found it. After I retired, I created a job that had meaning, but it didn't pay a cent. Perhaps more importantly, it wasn't until I took Stoic principles seriously, about 20 years ago, that I was able to resign myself to the world of wage slavery.

But is this the best that so many of us can hope for? Is there any justice in rewarding those who are smart, ambitious, and have the sensitivity of a psychopath with salaries 300 times greater than the average employee? Is their work and responsibility and genius so much greater than the rest of us? They think so. I don't. I find their arrogance incomprehensible and completely out of touch with reality. But, what can I do about it?

## Evolution

Nothing. Revolution is not the answer; evolution is. Revolution seemed like a good idea for the typical Russian in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. After all, the vicious treatment of the aristocracy towards those less fortunate cried out for revolution, but all they did was trade one set of masters for another. Evolution is better. It may require the patience of a Stoic, but conversion is more reliable and reasonable. Yes, the reason we find in Stoic principles can be our ally. Consider the following:

1. **The beginning and foundation of Stoic ethics is *oikeiosis***, the Doctrine of Appropriations, the survival instinct that seeks what is appropriate to one's nature and avoids what is inappropriate. To bring

reason to the survival instinct, Stoics ascribe three values to all things: good, bad, and indifferent.

2. **The good** is virtue, aka *aretē* or excellence, and it is the *only* good, because it is the *only* thing that can never be used for evil, and it is the *only* guarantee of happiness, *eudaimonia*, the ultimate goal of life.
3. **The bad**, aka evil, exists only in the absence of virtue. There is no evil in nature; it only exists in human beings, and it only exists there when we believe indifferent things are either good or bad.
4. **Indifferent** things are of three kinds: preferred, neutral, and non-preferred. Preferred indifferents contribute to our well-being; neutral indifferents are neutral; and non-preferred indifferents contribute to the deterioration of our well-being.
5. **Pursuing preferred indifferents** is in accord with Nature, because it is natural to prefer health, wealth, and respect. Sickness, poverty, and alienation often limit our natural abilities.
6. **Choosing a preferred indifferent** is an *appropriate action*, because it contributes to our well-being, but choosing virtue is what Stoics call a *completely correct* action, because it contributes to the creation of a noble character. Only human beings can choose virtue and have completely correct actions.

We have to recognize that we live in a world with a certain and well-established paradigm. It is universally accepted in most modern countries that we maximize profits and minimize soul. Of course there is the tiny country of Bhutan that substitutes the Gross Domestic Product (GNP) with Gross National Happiness (GNH), but at this time in our history, they and their kind of thinking are rare and far outside the mainstream of economic reality. I don't want to fall into the logical fallacy of *ad populum*, but we must deal with the facts as they are on the ground for most of us.

We have turned our ideals upside down. As Heraclitus said, "It is hard to fight with one's heart's desire. Whatever it wishes to get it purchases at the cost of soul (frag. 99, Burnet)." As we have seen by the above, our ethical principles state that it is perfectly natural, and therefore *appropriate*, to pursue the preferred indifferents of health, wealth, and respect. But, that effort must always be guided by what is *completely correct*, the pursuit of virtue. Certainly all of the cardinal virtues are of value in this discussion, but especially justice.

Back to how the modern world economic paradigm works. As the distinguished economist, E.F. Schumacher pointed out in *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (Harpers Perennial, 2010, p. 57), There's a conflict between the ideals of the employer versus the employee. For the employee, wages are compensation for the sacrifice of one's time and energy spent doing what most of us would rather not be doing, while the the employer's ideal would be to not

sacrifice profits by paying any wages at all. As Heraclitus said, "War is common to all, and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife (frag. 61, Burnet)." Since it is the employer who pays the wages and the worker who needs those wages to live it's the employer who invariably wins the battle.

Quick and dirty. Push! Push! Push! Time is money. Money equals power, and it is power that makes the rules. We basically have an economic system of might-makes-right, whereby justice is by definition whatever the mighty say it is. As we saw in the Introduction to Part One, "The Aspen Lecture," the Princeton Study on America becoming an oligarchy is the issue that started me on this quest just over one and a half years ago. Except in employee-owned businesses, it's not a democracy; it's virtually a dictatorship. And, when workers organize in an attempt to find some balance in this power struggle, it's all out war. 2500 years ago, in Heraclitus's day; 500 years ago in Machiavelli's Medieval Europe; and, even today we have warfare in the workplace based upon the rule of power. The powerful make the rules, and what they decide, then, becomes the definition of justice. This is the world we live in today.

But let's take a look at Stoic economics. Our ethical principles make a clear distinction between what is appropriate and what is completely correct. In all cases, virtue is the highest good and the unfailing guide to how we pursue the appropriate, the preferred indifferent, in the pursuit of health, wealth, and respect. As you will recall, the preferred indifferent is *preferred* because it contributes to our well-being, but it's still an indifferent. Virtue is the only true good. Is that the way modern economics works? No. Wealth is the highest good, not virtue, and the rulers of material empires leave virtue preaching to churches, temples, and children's Sunday School.

## Transcendence

Who is right about our political economics, the Libertarian or the Socialist? In some ways they are both wrong. Freedom, the Libertarian's dream, guarantees that those who are born rich, strong, and ruthless will become the mighty and make all the rules in their favor. They already do that now, and there's no reason to believe that will change. Equality, the Socialist's dream, is an "affirmative action" nightmare where bureaucrats rule and freedom dies from a thousand paper cuts. But we've got to live somewhere, and I am the kind of Stoic who would rather live with the tedious rules of the bureaucracy than with the uncertain whims of the bully.

There is a war between the polarity of freedom and equality. But how can a Stoic philosopher choose sides in this war? We can't. We shouldn't. The Stoic philosopher can comfortably accept the many continua of our natural world, and

by acceptance we rise above them. To take sides in a diverging polarity of opposites is beneath and beyond us. It is a conflict that can never be resolved, only transcended. We *know* what is greater than appropriate action. We *know* that completely correct actions make us reach for something that is higher than simply being appropriate. We must restore our economic values to their proper place and reach for the highest good, Virtue. Our highest good *transcends* pleasure, it *transcends* freedom, and it *transcends* equality. It is justice for all, because we care for all. This is Stoic economics.

All of humanity are our brothers and sisters, not just the ones we like, but also the ones we don't like. It is our *duty* to care. We *know* it is our duty, because Stoic philosophy tells us so, and we believe it, and our reason tells us so, and we believe it, and the longer we practice what our philosophy tells us and our reason tells us the more we will know it, not just in our heads but also in our hearts. The fragment of Pneuma planted in each of us not only fills our soul with reason but also with brotherly love. We live not for ourselves but for one another. This is Stoic economics.

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## Eros Again

### Erik's Republic Chooses Eros as its Patron God just as Zeno did

Eros was the ancient Greek God of love, not Aphrodite. Today, the difference between the two is commonly misunderstood and their roles are often reversed. In early Greek religion Eros was a god and the son of the god Chaos, the "original primeval emptiness of the universe." He represented the recreation of life through the union of the male and female. Aphrodite was the goddess of *sexual* love and beauty. Roman Stoics rarely mentioned Eros, and when they did he was usually denigrated or diminished. The debasement of the great God Eros was complete with Alexandrian poetry's depiction of him as a mischievous child.

*The Republic*, written by the Father of the Stoa, Zeno, was a utopian city of rather radical ideas about human relations in a communal setting. Without being sidetracked by that remarkable information it's important to know that the patron



god that Zeno gave to his Republic was Eros.<sup>22</sup> It could have been Apollo or Athena or Zeus himself, but he gave the honor to Eros. Love.

None of this idealism can be seen in ancient Rome.<sup>23</sup> Seneca believed Eros was friendship gone mad (*Letters IX, 9*), and Epictetus considered Eros a kind of divine madness (*Discourses Book 4, Chapter One*), but is that really Eros? Is that love or a physical attraction inflamed by lust, the sexual love of Aphrodite? Of all the Romans, only Marcus Aurelius appears to have written about an idealized love in our care for humanity.

In the many years of my experience with Stoics today Eros is something that is seldom mentioned. Early in my philosophical discussions with Stoics I once brought up the subject of love. This was in an email to a group of Stoics who corresponded regularly. When I asked about its place in Stoicism, one member, a professor of philosophy, accused me of "being in my cups." In other words, he assumed I must be drunk instead of simply ignorant. I didn't really know anything about Stoic love because I hadn't done my research (see footnotes for Gaca and Stephens below).

I've found this attitude to be common among persons whose mental faculties are more highly developed than their hearts. It's wrong. Eros is everywhere in nature, it is *of* Nature, it is nurturing, socializing, and re-creative. Stoics must welcome the concept of love and restore Eros to his rightful place in our world. We need to get over the idea that us Stoic tough guys don't talk about love. It's essential to understand it's place and practice in our lives and in the logic, physics, and ethics of our philosophy. If I ever wrote a treatise on the creation of a republic I would join Zeno and ask Love to be the guiding principle and patron of the people, for the people, and by the people of planet Earth.

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22 Kathy L. Gaca, "Early Stoic Eros," *Apeiron Journal for Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2000, pp. 207-38;

23 William O. Stephens, "Epictetus on Stoic Love," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XIV, 1996, pp. 195-210.

## PART FOUR: Another Stoic Sage

## Why I don't Want to be a Stoic Sage

*If philosophy is an art of living devoted to transforming one's way of life, then the ultimate goal of that art is to turn one's life into the life of a sage. All the various parts of Stoic philosophy are, in their own way, directed towards this end.*

John Sellars<sup>24</sup>

*Again, they [the Stoics] tell us that all good men are austere or harsh, because they neither have dealings with pleasure themselves nor tolerate those who have.... Pity is grief felt at undeserved suffering....[the Stoic wise] are not pitiful and make no allowance for anyone; they never relax the penalties fixed by the laws, since indulgence and pity and even equitable consideration are marks of a weak mind which affects kindness instead of chastising. Nor do they deem punishments too severe.*

Diogenes Laertius<sup>25</sup>

Austere and harsh. Pitiless. Without mercy. No punishment too severe. Without pleasure of any kind. Does this describe the Stoic sage? Is this the kind of person we Stoics are striving to become? Is this the kind of person we would want as a friend or member of our family? If I had read this description of Stoics when I first encountered our philosophy more than 50 years ago, I would not be a Stoic today. Aristotle considered pity a positive quality, but it's clear from the above that the Stoics did not. Could it be that the Stoic sage as described in antiquity was a sociopath, or would it be more accurate to describe him as a psychopath?

To answer that question we need to distinguish some differences between the sociopath and the psychopath. It is generally agreed by psychologists today that although there is some overlap between the two, the sociopath is the product of nurture—a damaging childhood, a harsh and painful start in life; whereas the psychopath is the product of nature, they were born that way. Of the two, the sociopath is the more mentally and emotionally damaged, but the psychopath is clearly the more dangerous. The sociopath will likely not have any friends, a loner, a blunderer, poorly educated, and is a deeply troubled individual who could very well be “austere and harsh. Pitiless. Without mercy. No punishment too severe. Without pleasure of any kind.” There is none of the Stoic's good emotion of joy in his life.

On the other hand, perhaps our sage is a psychopath. This occasional product of nature can be charming, even charismatic, a guru leader with followers, smart,

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24 John Sellars, *Stoicism* (California, 2006), p. 36.

25 DL, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, v. II, bk VII, 111,117, 123.

well-educated, a con man, a serial killer that is highly skilled, even meticulous in their methods. The psychopath also makes an exceptional politician and corporate executive, because they are ruthless and not troubled by pity or remorse. If we could choose between sociopath or psychopath as an identity for our sage, certainly the psychopath sounds more interesting, and there may even be some joy along the way.

Let's isolate and emphasize the qualities of the psychopath that could be Stoic. Yes, they may have the ethics of an alley cat, but they are also fearless and have control of the emotion of anger and can turn it off and on like a light switch as needed to manipulate others. The emotional makeup is very shallow, if it actually exists, and they do have those qualities of the Stoic sage we just learned about: pitiless, merciless, and without remorse. Although in the psychopath's case the lack of pity, mercy and remorse is based on narcissism not philosophy. It's highly unlikely they will be austere, and when they are harsh it is aimed only at others. They only care about the self and are completely lacking in empathy for others. But why should they be? They know the misery of others is a product of their own making and no need for concern.

We can never *become* a sage if our sage is a psychopath, because you have to be born that way. All the effort in the world cannot take us back to the womb. So, apparently the only way we will ever know a Stoic sage is to convert a psychopath to our philosophical point of view. It shouldn't be too hard to find a smart and charismatic psychopath inasmuch as they are fairly common in politics, on Wall Street, and in corporate boardrooms. So, all we would need to do is teach them Stoic ethical theory and practice, and we would have, at long last, our Stoic sage. For 2300 years we've been looking for this sage, and now we find they're all over the place—almost. It's got to be easier to teach ethical theory and practice, than it is to teach fearlessness, control of anger, and lack of pity, mercy and remorse. A common Stoic could work for a lifetime and not be able to master even one of the qualities the psychopath comes by quite naturally.

Do you see the problem here? I hope so. The concept of the Stoic sage of antiquity, while internally and logically consistent, left out one of the most important ingredients of life, *caring*, as in you actually *care* about humanity, all of humanity, not just yourself. This is not just an important ingredient of life it is essential to the continuance of life, and transcends geographical as well as species borders. And if you are born without the ability to care for anyone but yourself, if you never evolve beyond the understanding of the absolute narcissist, the infant, then the label you get depicts one who is truly abnormal. But, you may ask, isn't the sage abnormal?

Of course, but of all the Stoics the sage must be the most cosmopolitan, caring not just for himself but for all of humanity, for all life even unto the cosmos. So

obviously, there is either something wrong with the Stoic sage, or there is something wrong with Diogenes Laertius' definition of one. We will need to do a little dissecting here to find out which. Let's consider pity alone. If we use DL's definition of pity as grief felt at undeserved suffering, then we must first work with the idea of two kinds of suffering, deserved and undeserved. Do we feel pity for one who is suffering deservedly? Generally, we do not. Let's say some corporation has dumped industrial waste into a river, killing the fish and waterfowl as well as sickening any who use the river for recreation. Most of us would say the executive who authorized the dumping of poisonous waste deserved to suffer *some* penalty—providing the penalty reasonably fit the crime.

If the punishment was excessive, let's say the wrath of an Old Testament god was applied to the offender, then one might expect that not only the offender would be punished, probably put to death, but all of his relatives for at least two or three generations might also be killed, raped, or sold into slavery. If this were the case, then even the most diehard environmentalist may feel some grief for the undeserving, in particular, the relatives of the offender. In a word, pity. But the Old Testament god and the Stoic sage wouldn't. Don't forget, DL says for the Stoics no punishment is considered too harsh.

One might find more pity among atheists than among Stoics. Is that right? Is that the way it should be? Is there any religion in the world where pity is forbidden or discouraged? Well, maybe the Indian Thuggees, but they haven't been an active force in India since the late 1800s. They were a cult of both Hindu and Muslims who worshiped the Hindu mother goddess Kali, creator and destroyer that was used as an excuse for vicious murders and robbery and gave birth to the term *thug*. They certainly found pity irrelevant, at least for their victims, but they had tightly knit families and probably had a great affection for them, with all kinds of feeling, including pity.

What about collateral damage in warfare? Noncombatants may be killed when the leader of your enemy is hiding behind women and children, and they all get killed in one great explosion. Is that OK? Can we feel pity, anyone? What about the Japanese citizens who were killed in the atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Well, from the perspective of the Utilitarian John Stuart Mill and the American President Harry Truman pity would not be warranted or even given a second thought. The numbers of American soldier's lives saved in the Pacific campaign, if these acts of horror forced the enemy to surrender, made such a decision an "ethical" one.

But what about unpleasant acts of God. The Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011 killed more than 15,000 human beings to date, not to mention countless other life forms, and there was no indication the Japanese were at war with God. So, are we allowed pity in situations where there is undeserved mass slaughter?

No, again. I suppose this must also be true of the 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides of Saloth Sar (*nom de guerre*, Pol Pot) of Cambodia where more than 2,000,000 were systematically slaughtered; or again, the incalculable genocide totals of Uncle Joe Stalin, with estimates at 10,000,000 or more. Of course the psychopaths Pol Pot and Uncle Joe thought these people needed to die to achieve their respective goals.

One of my favorite stories about Stalin had to do with his mastery of power and control. He once called his top comrades into his office for a first-hand lesson in leadership. When everyone was gathered, Stalin picked up a chicken that was brought into the office as a training aid. He held the chicken, clucking and fully alive, and proceeded to pluck out all of its feathers. The chicken went into shock, a kindness of nature, then Stalin tossed it down to the floor. He next pulled out a handful of dried corn from one of his pockets and proceeded to place it, one kernel at a time in a line up to a chair where Uncle Joe sat down. The plucked chicken came out of its shock and proceeded to peck the corn kernels right up to Stalin's feet, then hopped up into his lap where he stroked it and fed it more kernels from his hand. "And that, Comrades, is how you rule people," Stalin said.

Despots kill. Cancer kills. Tsunamis kill. Wars kill combatants as well as noncombatants. And many times laws are unduly harsh, Draconian, unjust. As Heraclitus says, "Men would not have known the name of justice if these unjust things were not." Are we Stoics attracted to justice? Of course we are. It's a cardinal virtue. It's a duty. In fact it's the only one of the four cardinal virtues that is presented as a duty. If we can bring justice to these unjust things, then we should. But as for the rest, why should we grieve or encourage the idea of victimization when there are no victims here? There is only life as we know it on the material plane. Heraclitus also said that "We must know that war is common to all ..." The dynamic continua that form all existence. And without it, our familiar world would cease to exist. That's just the way things are. We can hate the world and call it bad names, as some religions do, but there are compensations that we Stoics know make life worth living.

And one them is love. When war is the common condition we can feel grief at having been born here, or we can feel love, which includes compassion and caring. Stoics sages are not just ethical psychopaths when they know love. Psychopaths know lust, control, and jealousy, but love is not one of their strengths. The sage can know love for one and one another and all of nature, not just the human kind. One could even say that pity is a wasted emotion that is better replaced with love. Love brings compassion, not grief. Love brings caring and a desire to seek the virtue of fairness for all things, to transform the Draconian into the Solonian. If we love fairness, also known as the cardinal virtue justice, then we will care enough to bring it about in our world.

And, if we cannot *feel* love, then caring must be done as a duty. Duty is a kind of discipline, of going through the motions, of putting one step in front of another. I'm sure we've all done it many times, some more than others, but over time we can even find joy, if not love, in duty. Duty starts with discipline, which is not as enjoyable as caring, but if that's all we have to offer it's still a gift. Instead of pity and remorse, we can care enough to *do* something. We can do what we do well. If we are to confront injustice, what we can do best is what we should do. Some of us are warriors, some politically shrewd, some can write letters, and some can just stand silently in the way of a rolling tank. When there is injustice, our compassion motivates us to *do* something. When there is grief, we can show love, and if we don't know how to show a love we do not feel, then we can show gentleness, kindness, sensitivity. And sometimes that's best done with silence.

I've known Stoics who harbor a misunderstanding about the Stoic lack of pity. I've known Stoics who seek permission for their greed, and they believe they have found that permission in our philosophy. I've known Stoic who think they are Stoics but are really just narcissists who believe they have found the perfect philosophy for their lack of care for others. They are wrong. They are all wrong! Lacking pity is *not* a loophole in the duty toward one's friends, relatives, community, or to the god of Nature. It is *not* a prescription for happiness, eudaimonia, a freeing of oneself from negative and unnecessary emotions. It is important to recognize the difference between pity and caring. One does not need to feel pity in order to care about someone who is aggrieved. In fact, pity may get in the way of a more appropriate and positive emotion, what Stoics call well-wishing, an odd mouthful that describes caring about the happiness of others.

We help someone in need, not because we pity them, but because we care for them. Actually, anyone who is not a Stoic is in need of our care. That's why Stoics have always had schools. Education is what we do to teach others how to ethically evolve, find happiness, and build a noble character. It is our duty to care for each other. When someone needs us, we have a duty to help them to overcome their ignorance, their grief, their sickness and pain. We don't pity them; we donate time, effort and money to make them whole. What is there to pity? If they are ignorant, they are ignorant; nothing more. We can do something about that. If they are injured, they are injured; nothing more. We can practice healing. We don't need to complain and cry, "Nature is mean and cruel; God is mean and cruel; life is mean and cruel and we have a right to curse it and kill or die."

What nonsense.

Will the *Real* Psychopath please stand?

Epicurus. His goal of life was pleasure, the highest good, which if you couldn't manage that, then at least do what you can to eliminate suffering. Wait for it.

Here's the key. He said there was nothing wrong with illegal acts in and of themselves. One could steal, and presumably rape, murder, and pillage not because these acts were wrong in and of themselves but because *you may be caught*. Whether you were caught by the law or by vengeful friends and relatives, that was all that mattered. If you didn't get caught it was OK. The only reason you don't want to get caught, of course, is because you are likely to be punished, and that is going to hurt, and you should always seek to maximize *your* pleasure and minimize *your* suffering.

Epicurus, the psychopath, was wrong. There is something worse than being punished for vicious acts; the vicious act itself. When you a liar, thief, murderer or other expressions and acts of the madman or fool, then your act destroys your soul, the Greek soul not the soul that is tied to the Christian heaven or hell, but the soul that is the rational organizing principle of your life and the nobility of your character. Regardless of whether you are caught and/or punished you become what you do, and that is what really matters. Regardless of the pleasure you've heaped upon yourself you have only become a narcissistic, despicable human being. Don't believe Epicurus; bad behavior is wrong in and of itself. You are wrong to do it, and whatever pleasure you may have derived from such acts is only a mask of self delusion. The rest of us are not fooled for one minute.

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## Beyond Virtue

*Mental pain is a contraction of the psyche resulting from the belief, again erroneous, that something bad is present. Among its species are envy, jealousy, grief and, more surprisingly, pity. The condemnation of pity has been bad for the Stoics' reputation. But it was logical if pity is understood as arising from the belief that what the other person suffers is really bad. If sorrow or resentment are not to be felt at one's own suffering, why should they be felt for those of another?*

F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Hackett, 1994, p. 61)

The old way to become a Stoic sage, as prescribed by the Stoics of antiquity, was a contraction exercise or way of life. That is, the constant discipline of perfecting virtue is in itself a fist-clenching, teeth-grinding contraction of the psyche. If we believe that something bad is going to be present when we relax our guard against the expression of emotion, we cannot relax our guard. Practicing being a Stoic is very hard work. Epictetus admitted as much when he said theory was easy practice was hard.



With the Stoic's nagging about virtue all the time, is there any wonder we got a reputation for being austere, pitiless, and harsh? Is this something to be proud of? Do we not bleed? Must we endlessly try to become some kind of abstract ideal as unreal as Plato's Theory of Forms? The old way to become a Stoic sage was and is impossible—as proven by 2300 years of failure. Another way to be a sage could be just the opposite: not a contraction but an expansion, not a left brain but a right brain endeavor, a *relaxation* of effort as found in meditation, for example. A new kind of Stoic sage can go beyond virtue; not that virtue disappears and is no more, but that it is no longer the only focus.

A 2010 neuroimaging study of meditation and mindfulness at Harvard University shows that after only eight weeks of training there were neuroplastic changes in the gray matter of the brain. MRI scans indicated that the test subjects had an increase in gray matter concentrated within the left hippocampus, the posterior cingulate, the temporo-parietal junction, and the cerebellum. These are the very regions of the brain involved in learning and memory, emotion regulation, sense of self awareness, and a non-judgmental perspective.<sup>26</sup> All this comes about not by the perfection of virtue but by practice of meditation.

Stoicism has always been an analytical, left brain activity. Even when we practice our philosophy we refer to the logic and language that makes it what it is. That being said, it is important to acknowledge that calling philosophy a left brain activity is just a common generalization. We make this generalization because for the great majority of people (95% of the right-handed and about 60% of the left-handed) it is in the left hemisphere of the prefrontal cortex where language, logic, and calculating activity dominates. The right hemisphere includes intuition, visual imagery, and music. The two hemispheres work together through the corpus callosum connecting the two, but that is not enough.

Stoicism neither accounts for the existence of the right hemisphere nor makes any conscious effort to develop it. It's not surprising that this is so inasmuch as its existence was unknown until quite recently, and the value it adds was missing from the calculation of what constitutes a flourishing or excellent life (*eudaimonia*). A new theory of the Stoic sage would propose that it is *essential* to develop both left and right hemispheres of the brain. The absence of right brain recognition in the literature and practice of the Stoic suggests that our philosophy is incomplete and so have been our philosophers.

It is the thesis of this essay that with understanding and acceptance of the whole brain, encouraging and developing both hemispheres of the prefrontal cortex, the Stoic sage can at last appear. But how are we to do this? Doesn't it seem obvious that if the left side controls language and analysis, then the deliberate quieting of

the internal dialogue would encourage the right side to be strengthened and developed thereby? It may *not* appear obvious, but that is exactly what it does. Much of what follows on brain functions has been excerpted from the amazing lecture given February 2008 by Harvard neurobiology scientist, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, "A Powerful Stroke of Insight" at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)

The left side of the cerebral cortices is responsible for analytical work such as mathematics, logic, language, word comprehension and speech. Without it we lose our ability to talk, walk, read, write, and remember. It takes details of the past moment, organizes and categorizes from all that we have learned in the past and projects it into the future. The left hemisphere is the voice that says, "I am."

The right hemisphere deals with spatial relationships, color, visual reasoning, musical aptitude, and intuitive comprehension and expansion. The right hemisphere is all about the present moment—right here, right now, and all information that comes to the right hemisphere is processed as immediately present. According to Dr. Taylor, "In this moment we are perfect, we are whole, we are beautiful." There is no sense of self; there is no me; there is only the *all*.

Surprisingly, although there is no recognition of the right brain in Stoic history, clearly there was some hint that it must exist and be relevant. There is no indication that the Stoics meditated in any formal way, but there was an understanding of the value of mindfully focusing upon the present moment. Marcus Aurelius spoke of this a number of times, but my favorite quote in the *Meditations* is from Book 6.37: "To see the things of the present moment is to see all that is now, all that has been since time began, and all that shall be unto the world's end; for all things are of one kind and one form."

*Prosochē*, or attention on the present, was considered the fundamental Stoic attitude. Without this attention, how would a Stoic philosopher, or sage for that matter, be able to quickly apprehend the nature of all the incoming stimuli to which he or she must respond correctly? And there it ended. Yes, Stoics for 2300 years practiced paying attention to what was going on, but this kind of mindfulness didn't really step back and consciously attempt to see that in the present moment "we are perfect, we are whole, we are beautiful." Philosophers of Eastern civilizations did. Stoics didn't. But, that is exactly what I am proposing in this new theory of the Stoic sage that we should do.

The Stoic sage must be the best of both West and East; the best of working with both left and right cerebral hemispheres. When we do this I have every confidence we will at last bring into the world what has been until now the mythical Stoic sage.

# Awakening the Sage

## Introduction

The perfection of virtue is not the end but merely the beginning. The sage is beyond virtue. What does this mean? Being a sage is the end of striving; the beginning of life in self-awareness. Logic and facts become dimly lit and largely irrelevant, neither true nor false, and only meaningful in another time and place. One must stop berating oneself for the lack of virtue and start getting acquainted with the sage within. Then virtue will be what it is when it is. Socrates was right. Once you know what is the right thing to do, then you will do it because you want to.

Stoic philosophy is the foundation, not the goal. It is the base upon which the Stoic sage builds another reality. Islam is the foundation for the Sufi mystic, such as Rumi; Hindu philosophy is the foundation for the guru, such as Ramakrishna; Buddhism is the foundation for the monk, such as Vanaratana; Christianity is the foundation for the contemplative, such as Meister Eckhart. There are so many others, but why should I name or study them. Their path is not mine.

I don't want to be a Buddhist, Hindu, or Sufi sage. I want to be a Stoic sage. There must be a way that a Stoic philosopher can take the next step in personal evolution and become an *enlightened* Stoic philosopher, a sage. But the only enlightenment practices I am aware of are the Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi ways. These disciplines have developed their practices for many centuries, some of them for millennia, involving mystical experience arising through various forms of meditation. When I say that I am aware of these practices, I don't mean to imply that I am expert in any of them. I am not. I have not made a serious analytical study, but I have participated in a few.

Is the actual philosophy of the Buddhist, Hindu, or Sufi in any way superior to the Stoa? No, emphatically not, IMO, but unlike the Stoics these spiritual seekers have gone directly to the divine source, the pneuma within to expand their consciousness. Their weakness in theory is our strength, and vice versa. We have not developed a meditation in silence—at least there is no record of us having done so. We do have a kind of precedent. Our cosmologist Heraclitus is regarded by some as the first mystic of western civilization, and although we don't know how he acquired the insights of his cosmology, we do know that today they are theoretically correct. He was not a Stoic, of course, because he lived 200 years before Zeno, but his place in our philosophy is profound and important.

How Heraclitus became so important to Stoic thought is a matter of speculation, but we do have one anecdote that Diogenes Laertius tells (v. VII, 2) about Zeno. Apparently he went to consult an oracle, Diogenes doesn't say which one, but it was probably the one at Delphi, to find out "what he should do to attain the best life...that god's response was that he should take on the complexion of the dead. Whereupon, perceiving what this meant, he studied ancient authors." If this is true, then there can be no doubt it was an oracle that prompted Zeno to study the preSocratics, from which he must have found Heraclitus the most compatible, even instructive on uniting the various parts of our philosophy.

We don't know what Heraclitus did to divine the nature of reality—or if he had any spiritual exercises at all. It could be that his insights were simply spontaneous ideas based upon years of observation and study. We do know something about the Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi meditation practices used to find their respective forms of enlightenment. We don't have anything like their paths. We don't yet know what it means to be an enlightened Stoic philosopher. Yet.

What is the Stoic enlightenment experience? Is there really such a thing? Does it happen only once, or are there numerous small insights before a great and final insight—as is said of the Zen Buddhist meditation on koans. . . . You see what you're looking for. If you're interested in buying a certain model of a new car, then you will see this car all over the place, every time you are out on the road. If you are not looking for this particular car then you will not see it. I believe that will be the same as seeking understanding about the nature of becoming and being a Stoic sage.

I'm reminded of a biblical passage Christians believe about their god, which I also believe about mine. There are a couple of references actually in the Bible, but IMO the poetry of Mendelssohn's *Elijah Oratorio* says it best. The tenor soloist sings, "If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me. Thus saith our god." I believe we can know the divine within, and also I believe that action and silence meditation is the keystone that brings all of the various parts of the life of the Stoic philosopher together in the person of the Stoic sage.

### Awakening the Sage: A New Theory Regarding the Stoic Sage

*This theory regarding the new Stoic sage ends where it begins, but more in the nature of a spiral than a circle by providing a new understanding of the way to reach its conclusion. In sacred terms it starts and ends with the ultimate goal of Stoic philosophy, the salvation and redemption of the Stoic philosopher's way of life. As such, it redefines what it is to be a sage and how one becomes that rarest of creatures—at last.*

- The salvation of the Stoic is the enlightenment of the Sage. Enlightenment is presumed to be achieved through the discipline and perfection of virtue. It has always been thus for 2300 years.
- But there has never been a Stoic sage for 2300 years. So, the concept of the sage as one who is perfect in virtue has been an unrealistic goal and an impossible ideal. In short, it has failed.
- But enlightenment has existed among Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi, as well as Christian mystics, for many centuries. The evidence for this is overwhelming and acceptable as reasonable fact.
- Thus, the path to becoming an enlightened Stoic sage by the discipline and perfection of virtue appears to be incorrectly conceived, ill-advised, and incomplete. A method we know is successful should be tried instead: the meditative and contemplative practices known to produce results.
- Once the left brain work of theory and analysis has been mastered and applied to one's life through practice a Stoic becomes a Stoic philosopher. Once achieved, the right brain work of meditative and contemplative practices may commence. The Stoic philosopher can be enlightened.
- The enlightened Stoic philosopher is a sage. Once the Stoic philosopher is enlightened this will ultimately define the *real* nature and qualities of the Stoic sage. As Heraclitus said, "If you do not expect the unexpected you will not find it for it is hard to be sought out and difficult."
- Heraclitus is the Stoic's cosmologist and widely regarded as a mystic, but we do not know what his practices were or how he came by the esoteric knowledge he acquired. Further, we cannot know if the enlightened Stoic philosopher will be more or less like Heraclitus, the Obscure One.
- The Buddha, Heraclitus, and many of those who seek enlightenment leave their family and duties in order to pursue their goal without interruption. But Stoics cannot neglect their duties. Enlightenment of the Stoic philosopher must be possible even while performing one's duties.
- The Stoic sage may be one thing or it may be more than one thing: a state of being inextricably intertwined with the personality of one's individual nature. No two things in nature are alike.
- The Stoic sage must know how it can be that "To God all things are fair and good and right, but men hold some things wrong and some right," as Heraclitus said. How can this be known?

- The sage must see and understand the point of view of God while still a man. Then he can be a sage, a demigod, a daimon, and he will know enlightenment, the Stoic's salvation.

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## Those Above Us

Are there daimones, spirit guides, or other forms of life above us? As Stoics have pointed out for millennia, there are categories of life that are cumulative in that the highest life form, they thought it was human beings, had all of the qualities of the life forms beneath it. That is, we have the essential Pneuma of all biological life forms, from plant life to Stoic philosopher. What they didn't speculate about is two things: does a plant understand the sentient form above it anymore than the sentient form understands the rationality of the humans above it; and, is there any reason to stop there? Is there any reason to be certain that we are the highest life forms in all existence?

If there are life forms above us rational human beings would we see, know, or understand them any more accurately than a lizard sees, knows, or understands us? The essence of what it is to be human is invisible. I'm not talking about the physical material with which we clothe ourselves. The rational soul is invisible to us and all others in and, presumably, below our category. In Stoic philosophy, that's OK. It's true that all corporeal forms exists as a body, but bodies can be visible *and* invisible The soul is a tension of Pneuma, and is therefore a body, according to our philosophy, but is it visible? No. Not to me it isn't. Is it visible to you?

If the rational soul is invisible is there any reason to assume or expect any category of existence above us to be visible? Have I completely lost my mind? Perhaps, but there is a great wealth of evidence that such a reality exists. Socrates communicated regularly with his daimon. Stoics of antiquity believed in daimones. Heraclitus, the Stoic cosmologist and our only known mystic said, "There awaits men when they die such things as they look not for nor dream of (frag. 113, Burnet)." What was he talking about?

The evidence from Stoic sources is slim, but from the rest of the world, especially the Orient, it's voluminous. The sheer weight of evidence showing results in humanity's search for those above us convinces me that it would be a mistake to limit ourselves to believing the rational soul is the final category. The enlightened Sufi, Yogi, and Bodhisattva have no doubt and are profoundly certain of another category of existence "above" us.

That is where I believe the Stoic must go to become a sage. I don't doubt that this "place" exists, but I doubt that we can find it or become it unless we search for it. It's not visibly here among us, and apparently never will be. In Stoic history the perfection of virtue was as far as we could go, *and it was obviously not far enough to see a way to become the sage*. So, how do we become that? Real sages, not just good Stoics who are virtuous 90% of the time.

That is the question. My answer is that I can only continue to search the same way hundreds, probably thousands, perhaps millions have successfully searched before me. But, instead of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, it will be Stoics, the Stoic philosophy, and it will be a Stoic path. Anyway, that's where I'm going. I'll see you there.

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## A Stoic's Right Brain

*The essence of religion is not morality but mysticism. And the way of the saint is the way of mysticism....all religion is ultimately mystical, or springs from the mystical side of human nature.*<sup>27</sup>

I love sweeping generalizations about human history. I'm not supposed to, because it suggests I'm a bit of a simpleton, and perhaps I am, but I enjoy the above quote as much as it's counterpart in a generalization about the history of kings. No matter how sad, weak, and confused the current king may be, all kingdoms began with a fierce warrior. In the same way we can make generalizations about religions today. For example, the Evangelical Christians of America in no way hold sacred the teachings of their founder, Jesus of Nazareth. They preach and live by beliefs virtually opposite to his.

Be that as it may, what is "the mystical side of human nature?" Is there really such a thing? Yes, and there is a mountain of evidence that has been constructed for millennia by those who have this inclination more strongly than others. I have that need; perhaps you do too. We Stoics have a great lineage of thought that goes back through Marcus Aurelius to Posidonius to Diogenes to Socrates and finally to Heraclitus. It all begins with Heraclitus. Even the Pyrrhonian Skeptics said all paths lead to Heraclitus.

To a Stoic of antiquity, the complete path of knowledge is theory, then practice after the theory was learned. This they called the art of living. It's a good path, the best of the western wisdom tradition in my opinion, but as it is I believe it's

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<sup>27</sup> Princeton philosopher Walter Stace in *Religion and the Modern Mind* (J.B. Lippincott, 1952, p. 229)

incomplete. The Eastern tradition is also incomplete in their emphasis on enlightenment under the direct control of a guru with a specific mystical experience according to the tradition of a specific lineage (Stace). The *complete* path of knowledge should combine both the Western and Eastern traditions, philosophy and mystical insight, which in the Stoic's case, follows the Heraclitean model of expecting the unexpected. This is the complete human being, the completion of our evolution on the path of the Stoic sage.

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How would you like to be awakened at 4 AM every day to the loud shock of an empty plastic soda bottle, the 1-liter size, banging hard on your bedroom door? Welcome to the Ponevezh Seminary in Israel, the most elite yeshiva of the Ultra-Orthodox Jew, a world entirely devoid of all aesthetic sense. No beauty whatsoever, either natural or artificial. No paintings, icons, sculpture, plants, flowers, trees, or pleasing colors. All male students, faculty, and staff from the ages of 16 to the age of death from old age, and all wearing the same ill-fitting, plain black suit, plain black hat, and plain white shirt under the blinding, harsh overhead cold factory white electric light in the main study hall illuminating the words of the Torah, Torah, Torah. Everything in this world is black and white, including black and white-clad students bobbing and swaying (*shuckling*) as they read, recite, and pray from 5 am until late at night for years almost without end.

I recently had a brief glimpse into this school watching a 2015 documentary called "Ponevezh Time" showing life, if you can call it that, in this prestigious seminary of 1000 students. This is the training ground of the elite, the leaders of the Ultra-Orthodox world, and students begin their studies as young as 16 and stay for 12 years and longer. It's actually a fascinating world, for about an hour, and I highly recommend it to anyone with access to Amazon Prime streaming video. It was inspirational from the perspective of intellectual discipline, and it was instructional from the perspective of what happens when the words and analysis side of the brain rules one's life after having virtually shut down and desiccated the creative and beautiful side of life.

We Stoics have the same inclination as the Ultra-Orthodox—all analytical mind work with words. This is even more true of philosophy generally, but we are not immune from the same worship of reason to the exclusion of all else. Oh, sure, we include practice after learning our theory, but we have virtually nothing to say about beauty except that the only beauty worthy of mention is the beauty in the soul of a virtuous person. True, but there's more, so much more beauty in the natural world than could ever be put into words. If we are supposed to live in agreement with Nature doesn't that also mean to live in agreement with the way Nature works, what Nature has given us by example? If we are supposed to live in agreement with Nature doesn't that mean having respect for all that Nature



has given to bring balance into our lives with two sides of the prefrontal cortex?

Yes, I believe that it does. I wish to be counted among those Stoics who insist on having respect for the other side of the brain, the side that celebrates beauty, love, awe, and quantum leaps of the mind. We can excuse those before us who knew no better, but how can we deny completion of ourselves as human beings now that we know what to do? We enter another world when we become silent and listen, and to do this we need go no further than our own sacred space, our monastery for one. This is the monastery that I have lived in for many years. I call it a monastery of one (see the book by that title).

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## I was Once a Stoic Sage

*The following notes are quoted from "The Sage Journal," my personal meditation journal. Some of the references may be obscure, but the essential information should be readily available. Just ignore or withhold judgment on what you do not understand.*

It's now 10 years since Great Insight #2, Pure Love." There have been no further insights during this period, but I have cured myself of a disabling health condition with a form of chanting meditation that I created years earlier. After briefly experimenting with the Vipassana meditation method and realizing an intense disliking for it I permanently settled into Pneuma Will Power Meditation (PnWPM). I prefer the raw discipline of simply following one's breath to following detailed and constant instruction on searching for feeling in one's body parts.

I'm still seeking enlightenment, but don't really think about it much. I continue to meditate almost every morning. My meditation posture has settled on the Burmese position which I learned from the 10-day Vipassana retreat (which I silently endured despite wanting to get up and leave a hundred times). My only paranormal experience is the Ananda euphoria of deep meditation. Suddenly, without preamble or expectation, something remarkable happened.

### Great Insight #3: The Stoic Sage

22 NOV 13: 5:55 AM: PnWPM: Consciousness Expanded! "Stoic philosophy is little more than a drop in the bucket."

The thought, *Stoic philosophy is little more than a drop in the bucket*, was based upon a feeling, an awareness of expanded consciousness at the end of an hour of PnWPM. I was finishing meditation, opening my eyes, eyes open but not focused on any one thing but on the images and icons of my meditation corner. I want to write it with a little more poetry, such as *Stoic philosophy is little more than a drop in the ocean of consciousness*, but the exact words were as stated earlier.

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Later: 10 AM: Something's different. I feel different. I see things differently. When I look at something I see more, not anything invisible, just more of what is already there that I would have overlooked—plants, trees, rocks, and insignificant things, a brick, a wall, the loamy smell of dirt after last night's rain. People are more interesting to me. I look at them longer, make eye contact with strangers. I smile at them. Sometimes I laugh at them. I let them go in front of me. I feel calmer, slower. I feel my body, my muscles working, feet walking. They all seem very interesting to me. I like the feel of my feet taking small steps and large steps. I feel a little spacey, slightly drunk. I am without fear.

I've felt this way since my expanded consciousness experience earlier this morning. I don't want it to end, but I expect it will any moment now. We'll see. I had the experience all during my Stair-climbing exercise, stopping at Sprouts grocery store on the way home, then going to Trader Joe's grocery store... I would like to return to the expansion every time I meditate. There is much that I can learn by being here.

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4 PM: Well, it's over. Back to normal by lunchtime. I was unable to get anything done this afternoon. I meditated for 35 minutes after a nap. Nothing. Afterwards, I just sat around and thought. Drank tea. One of the things I thought about was how tedious all my Stoic work had become, and how I would really enjoy retiring, turning it over to others, everything, leave the little drop of my Stoic world and return to the ocean of consciousness. I'm not talking about dying, just spending the rest of my days meditating and doing chores. I should note that on several occasions I thought of this experience as an expansion of consciousness by *one degree*. I don't know why.

Later: I can't tell you how strange it is to be an entirely new person. I say a "new" person, because it was still me, but I had a more noble character than I usually do, and that's why I called the experience, "The Stoic Sage." In truth, I don't know with certainty what it feels like to be the mythical Stoic sage, but it seemed that I was that at the time. After the feeling started in meditation and continued for more than five hours, I had plenty of time to examine my new self,

but what could I compare it to? Only my usual self. I can say that in that span of time I was an alien presence, a demigod, whatever that is, but I don't think I had any special powers. It didn't even occur to me to manipulate myself or my environment in any unusual way. I didn't levitate or leap tall buildings in a single bound.

It was unquestionably a positive experience, and I felt disappointment when I knew it had gone. The ancients believed that when one had become a Stoic sage they would always be a sage. If that's true, then I did *not* become a sage. Or, the ancients were wrong. Maybe it's possible to be a Stoic sage for five hours.

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