Toward the Fifth Stoa: The Return of Virtue Ethics

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1. Introduction

Stoicism is back. After a hiatus of about eighteen centuries (if one does not count the brief interval of Neo-Stoicism instigated by Justus Lipsius during the Renaissance[1]), the Greco-Roman philosophy often (wrongly) associated with suppressing emotions and going through life with a stiff upper lip is back in the news. Literally. Major national and international newspapers and media outlets, including but not limited to *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, the BBC, *Der Standard*, *El Mundo*, *El Pais*, and even *Marie Claire*, are suddenly talking about Stoicism. The major online community of people interested in the philosophy, on Facebook, counts over 40,000 members.[2]

It is easy and tempting for professional philosophers to scoff at this phenomenon, but it would be unwise. I suggest that what is known as modern Stoicism is to be situated within a broader renaissance of virtue ethics in both technical philosophy and popular culture. I will also argue that this is a clear benefit (despite some caveats) for professional philosophy, for general education, and arguably for society at large. Philosophers should therefore take notice, understand, and insofar as it is possible, contribute to the increasing interest in practical philosophy, of which modern Stoicism is but one manifestation.

I will proceed by summarizing the basic ideas underlying virtue ethics and tracing a brief history of their return to prominence in

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[1] Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[2] See "Stoicism Group (Stoic Philosophy)," on Facebook, accessed online at: https://facebook.com/groups/466338856752556.

contemporary philosophy. I will then suggest a number of factors that have contributed to the rise of modern Stoicism. After recapping the main tenets of Stoic philosophy, as they are interpreted currently, I will conclude with an overview of the ongoing project of updating Stoicism for the twenty-first century, what I refer to as the Fifth Stoa.

2. Virtue Ethics: What It Is and How It Came Back

Virtue ethics is the general label for a large family of moral philosophies that find their roots in the Greco-Roman world, particularly, but not only, in Socrates and Aristotle. As Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove put it, it "is currently one of three major approaches in normative ethics. It may, initially, be identified as the one that emphasizes the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to the approach that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism)."[3]

The three basic concepts around which all virtue ethical approaches are built are *aretê* (virtue, excellence), *phronêsis* (prudence, or practical wisdom), and *eudaimonia* (flourishing). The fundamental goal is to live a life worth living, a eudaimonic existence, though what this means, precisely, varies from school to school. We achieve this goal by practicing a number of virtues, practical wisdom being the one that teaches us the crucial difference between what is and is not good for us, morally speaking.

John-Stewart Gordon provides a handy classification of the major Hellenistic schools of virtue ethics, relating them as a function of which aspect of Socratic philosophy they emphasized or even rejected.[4] The major entries are represented by the Academics (followers of Plato), the Peripatetics (Aristotle), the Cyrenaics (Aristippus), the Epicureans (Epicurus), the Cynics (Antisthenes, Diogenes of Sinope), and the Stoics (Zeno of Citium). The first two are related by direct descent from Socrates (first Plato, then Aristotle), though they diverged sharply in their philosophies. The Academics first adopted a highly abstract theory of the forms and then turned

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[3] Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, "Virtue Ethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed online at: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/.

[4] John-Stewart Gordon, "Modern Morality and Ancient Ethics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed online at: http://www.iep.utm.edu/anci-mod/.

skeptical. The Peripatetics evolved an approach in which virtue is necessary but not sufficient for *eudaimonia*; one also needs a degree of luck, as manifested in the availability of external goods, including wealth, health, education, and even good looks.

The Cyrenaics and the Epicureans represent a separate branch, characterized mostly by the rejection of Socratic philosophy in favor of an approach that—while still rooted in virtue—emphasizes the importance of seeking pleasure and, especially, avoiding pain. The difference between the two schools lies principally in the fact that the Cyrenaics were concerned solely with physical pleasures and pain, while the Epicureans emphasized the primacy of emotional and intellectual pleasures and pains, hence the latters' influence on John Stuart Mill's famous distinction between "high" and "low" pleasures.[5] Both schools counseled disengagement from social and political activities, which is liable to bring pain rather than pleasure.

The third branch includes the Stoics and their immediate predecessors, the Cynics. Both schools consider virtue to be necessary and sufficient for *eudaimonia*, aligning themselves most closely with Socratic philosophy. They do differ, however, in the treatment of external goods, which they call "indifferents." For the Cynics, externals (wealth, fame, even family and friends) get in the way of practicing virtue, as they saw their mission in life to live a minimalist existence and to preach virtue (their name means "dog-like," as in the style of living they adopted). For the Stoics, by contrast, externals are divided into the classes of preferred and dispreferred "indifferents." I will elaborate below on what this means and why it is crucial for Stoic philosophy.

Virtue ethics is not found only in the Western philosophical tradition; for instance, Confucianism is often considered akin to Aristotelian virtue ethics.[6] Several authors have also expounded on the similarities between Stoicism, in particular, and Buddhism.[7] This

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[5] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John Robson, vol. 10, accessed online at: http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/mill-collected-works-of-john-stuart-mill-in-33-vols.

[6] Stephen Angle and Michael Slote, *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2013).

[7] Antonia Macaro, *More Than Happiness: Buddhist and Stoic Wisdom for a Sceptical Age* (London: Icon Books, 2018).

article, however, confines itself to the Western canon, within which virtue ethics went into decline with the turn of the Roman Empire to Christianity, and then throughout the Middle Ages, although it must be noted that four of the seven Christian virtues identified by Thomas Aquinas were, in fact, Stoic.[8]

The modern return of virtue ethics on the philosophical, if not popular, scene owes much to the work of four philosophers: Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Bernard Williams.[9] Anscombe advanced the view that we should simply stop doing moral philosophy as it has been done so far, until we develop what she calls a philosophy of psychology. For her, concepts like moral obligation and moral duty are obsolete, the remnants of a way of thinking that is no longer tenable in light of the modern scientific understanding of the world. Consequently, she regards the well-known differences among modern moral philosophers to be, essentially, irrelevant. Her demolition job on moral philosophy paved the way for the resurgence of virtue ethics, especially through her influence on MacIntyre.

Foot famously changed her position about crucial aspects of her meta-ethics during her career, but she was instrumental in articulating a Neo-Aristotelian view of virtue ethics as well as sustained criticisms of consequentialism and non-cognitivism. She introduced the philosophical device of "trolley dilemmas" to explore our moral intuitions (and coined the term "consequentialism"). She also articulated a moral philosophy constructed on hypothetical imperatives. Most crucially for my purposes here, Foot conceived a type of natural goodness that is contingent (as opposed to the Kantian idea of a universal moral law) in the sense that it depends on the kind of biological organism that *Homo sapiens* is, just as the Stoics had proposed long ago when they articulated their apparently paradoxical slogan: "Live according to (human) nature."

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[8] Christopher Kaczor, *Thomas Aquinas on the Cardinal Virtues: Edited and Explained for Everyone* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009).

[9] Elizabeth E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958), pp. 1-19; Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1985).

MacIntyre rejected both of the then-current major systems in moral philosophy, utilitarianism and Kantian deontology, going so far as to consider them irrational. His seminal book *After Virtue* is arguably the most important work in the modern revival of virtue ethics. MacIntyre singled out Aristotle, but more broadly made the case that the Greco-Roman approach to ethics was in far better shape than the modern one.

Finally, Williams also produced scathing criticisms of both utilitarianism and Kantian deontology, and he was generally skeptical of moral philosophical systems. Real life, he thought, is just too complex for such narrow straightjackets. That, naturally, led him to abandon the Kantian question of duty and to arch back to what interested the Greeks: What sort of life should we live? What kind of persons do we want to be?

The way I see the contributions of these four authors (and of several more who followed and are following in their footsteps) is in terms of a dual approach, what Bacon would call a "negative project" and a "positive project."[10] Anscombe and especially Williams did more of the former, while Foot and MacIntyre more clearly contributed to the latter.

The negative project consists in a sustained criticism not just of the various specific systems of modern moral philosophy, but in a wholesale rejection of the entire approach they instantiate. Both utilitarianism and Kantian deontology attempt to articulate universal principles, focusing respectively on the outcomes of actions (independently of the agent's intentions) or on the agent's intentions (independently of the outcome of actions). It is their common assumption that it is meaningful to search for relatively simple universal moral principles that is rejected, for various reasons and in different fashions, by all of the authors mentioned above. What then?

The positive project, in all of these cases, depends on a return to the Greco-Roman conception of ethics as the study of how to live one's life, with a focus on the agent's character, from which right motivations emerged and, fate permitting, right outcomes derive. This is a return to the roots even literally in a linguistic sense. "Ethics" comes from the Greek *êthos*, a word related to our idea of character. "Morality," in turn, is how Cicero translated *êthos*, and it captures a

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[10] Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620), accessed online at: http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/bacon-novum-organum.

reference to the habits and customs of people, that is, how they actually behave in a society.

As we have seen from the brief sketch given above, much of the resurgence of virtue ethics, at least within academic philosophy, has taken the form of Neo-Aristotelianism. Outside the academy, however, the focus has increasingly been on Stoicism. This has, in turn, triggered serious academic work not only on the ancient Stoics, but also on the practicality of their version of eudaimonism in modern times.

3. Why Stoicism?

In ancient times, Stoicism went through three phases, known as the early, middle, and late Stoas.[11] The early period was centered in Athens around figures such as Zeno of Citium, the founder of the sect, his student Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, one of the major logicians of antiquity. The middle period marked the diaspora from Athens and the spread throughout the Hellenistic and Republican Roman worlds, with the major figures being Panaetius and Posidonius (the latter was also Cicero's teacher). The late period is the one from which we have the most extant documents; it spans the first two centuries of the Roman Empire; and it is characterized by authors like Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

After Marcus Aurelius, in the second part of the second century, we do not have a record of other prominent Stoics, though the philosophy influenced Christian writers from Paul of Tarsus to Thomas Aquinas as well as major modern philosophers, including René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and Adam Smith.[12] As mentioned above, there was also a brief period during the Renaissance when Justus Lipsius attempted a formal reconciliation of Stoicism and Christianity; his Neo-Stoicism attracted thinkers like Michel de Montaigne.[13]

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[11] David Sedley, "The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 7-32; Chris Gill, "The School in the Roman Imperial Period," in *ibid.*, pp. 33-58.

[12] Anthony A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[13] John Sellars, "Neo-Stoicism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed online at: http://www.iep.utm.edu/neostoic/.

We have to wait until the second half of the twentieth century for the emergence of modern Stoicism. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact dynamics for this, as there are no sociological studies available that I am aware of. However, several factors seem to have played a role, in sequence or simultaneously:

(A) The development, after World War II, of cognitive-based psychotherapies, particularly Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, Albert Ellis's rational-emotive behavioral therapy (REBT), and Aaron Beck's early cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). I am not aware of an explicit acknowledgment of Stoicism by Frankl, but both Ellis and Beck were openly influenced by the Stoics, particularly by Epictetus.[14]

(B) The work of Pierre Hadot, who almost single-handedly put (back) on the map the concept of practical philosophy with a series of influential books, especially *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (which includes a discussion of Stoicism), and *The Inner Citadel* (devoted to an analysis in modern terms of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*).[15] As he put it, ancient philosophers conceived of philosophy as involving a therapy of the soul, or a "remedy for human worries, anguish, and misery brought about for the Cynics, by social constraints and conventions; for the Epicureans, by the quest for false pleasures; for the Stoics, by the pursuit of pleasure and egoistic self-interest; and for the skeptics, by false opinions."[16]

(C) The appearance in 1998 of Lawrence Becker's book *A New Stoicism* (recently updated). This is nothing less than a systematic, if partial, attempt at updating Stoic philosophy for modern times.

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[14] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1959 [1946]); Albert Ellis and Robert Harper, *A Guide to Rational Living* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961); Aaron Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, Inc., 1975).

[15] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[16] Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 102.

Becker examines all of the major aspects of ancient Stoicism, from its metaphysics and logic to, especially, the various components of its ethics, and re-interprets them in light of the intervening two millennia of philosophical and scientific progress.[17]

(D) The explosion of applied modern Stoicism made possible by social media platforms. Other than the already mentioned main Facebook presence, people interested in Stoicism find themselves on a number of additional, more focused Facebook pages, but also on Twitter, Google+, and so on. This has made possible the enormous success of annual events like the Stoicon conference and the online "Stoic Week" training seminar.

(E) The above has naturally generated a market for trade books devoted to the theory and practice of Stoic philosophy.[18]

(F) This, in turn, has led to a demand for new translations of the major Stoics.[19]

(G) Finally, the above has also triggered—or has perhaps been accompanied by—a renaissance of scholarly monographs on Stoicism.[20]

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[17] Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[18] See, e.g., William B. Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Massimo Pigliucci, *How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Donald Robertson, *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness* (Abingdon, UK: Teach Yourself, 2013).

[19] *Letters on Ethics: To Lucilius by Lucius Annaeus Seneca*, trans. Margaret Graver (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); *Epictetus: Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); *Meditations by Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[20] See, e.g., Long, *Epictetus*; Brian E. Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus: Stoicism in Ordinary Life* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013); Margaret Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007); René Brouwer, *The Stoic Sage: The Early Stoics on Wisdom, Sagehood, and Socrates* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

4. (Modernized) Stoicism 101

What does modern Stoicism look like? Just as contemporary interest in Aristotle's ideas about ethics has brought about forms of Neo-Aristotelianism, so contemporary interest in Stoicism is shaping a number of projects seeking to update the ancient philosophy for modern times. There is, however, a major difference between the two: while much of the literature on Neo-Aristotelianism in ethics is part of the scholarly revival of that approach, modern Stoicism is largely a grassroots movement, albeit one that is informed by the contributions of some scholars in ancient philosophy as well as practitioners of cognitive-behavioral and allied therapies. In other words, the emphasis is on the applied aspect of the philosophy.

As noted above, the most comprehensive effort at updating Stoicism for the twenty-first century is Becker's book *A New Stoicism*. A number of other authors (including myself), though, have published books and essays aimed at a general public that consciously seek to modernize the philosophy in light of developments in science and general philosophy over the intervening two millennia.[21] In what follows I will sketch five fundamental principles of ancient Stoicism and how they are being translated and applied to a modern setting.

a. Living according to nature

This motto was one of the famous Stoic "paradoxes" of antiquity, that is, a deliberately provocative phrase that was meant to stimulate discussion about Stoic doctrine. As Diogenes Laertius summarizes it:

> This is why Zeno was the first (in his treatise *On the Nature of Man*) to designate as the end "life in agreement with nature" (or living agreeably to nature), which is the same as a virtuous life, virtue being the goal towards which nature guides us. So too Cleanthes in his treatise *On Pleasure*, as also Posidonius, and Hecato in his work *On Ends*. Again, living virtuously is equivalent to living in accordance with experience of the actual

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[21] For examples of essays seeking to modernize Stoicism in an accessible way, see my website, *How to Be a Stoic*, accessed online at:
https://howtobeastoic.wordpress.com/category/modern-stoicism/.

course of nature, as Chrysippus says in the first book of his *De finibus*; for our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe.[22]

The ancient Stoics were pantheists and relied on a conception of Providence (especially in Epictetus) that, although certainly different from the Christian one, still guaranteed a teleological component to their philosophy.[23] Their "living according to nature," therefore, was a relatively straightforward extension of their metaphysics. We are part and parcel of the Logos that permeates the cosmos; a major directive in life is to keep in harmony with the Logos, regardless of the fact that in specific instances things do not seem to us to be going in a way that is conducive to our own flourishing.

Most (though not all) modern Stoics, however, reject any strong sense of the transcendental, even the relatively limited Stoic conception of God as coinciding with the universe itself. Nonetheless, we can retain a meaningful sense of "living according to nature" at both levels identified by the early Stoics. In terms of the nature of the cosmos, as Becker puts it, this translates to "follow the facts," that is, do not engage in a metaphysics that ignores or does not take on board the best understanding of how the world actually works. More importantly, in terms of human nature (which does not need to be understood in essentialist fashion), we can still agree with the original Stoic idea that crucial aspects of it are the fact that we thrive in social groups and the fact that we are capable of reason. "Living according to nature" in that sense, then, translates to applying reason to improve social living.[24]

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[22] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, VII.87, accessed online at:
https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers.

[23] Keimpe Algra, "Stoic theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Inwood, pp. 153-78.

[24] See Skye Cleary and Massimo Pigliucci, "Human Nature Matters," *Aeon*, accessed online at: https://aeon.co/essays/theres-no-philosophy-of-life-without-a-theory-of-human-nature; Massimo Pigliucci, "Living According to Nature," *How to Be a Stoic*, accessed online at:
https://howtobeastoic.wordpress.com/2017/11/29/living-according-to-nature/.

b. The dichotomy of control

One of the fundamental principles of both ancient and modern Stoicism is the so-called dichotomy of control, famously expressed by Epictetus at the beginning of the *Enchiridion* in this fashion: "Some things are within our power, while others are not. Within our power are opinion, motivation, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever is of our own doing; not within our power are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, whatever is not of our own doing."[25] It sounded as counterintuitive then as it does now, since one's immediate reaction most likely is to object that surely some things are under my partial control, including all those listed by Epictetus as being not so: my body, my property, my reputation, and so forth. Indeed, modern Stoic William Irvine has attempted to introduce a significant modification of this doctrine, which he calls the trichotomy of control.[26] Some things are under our control (our judgments, opinions, and so forth). Others are outside of our control (the weather, major international events, natural catastrophes). Much else falls in the middle (the body: I can eat healthy and go to the gym; reputation: I can work toward improving or safeguarding it; and so on).

Donald Robertson and I have objected to Irvine's revision as essentially destroying an important aspect of Stoic doctrine.[27] To begin with, surely Epictetus knew the difference between what we can do about the weather (nothing) and our body (something), so he must have meant something very specific. The common interpretation is that he was making a distinction between things that are completely under our control versus things we either do not control at all or can only influence. The idea is that our *eudaimonia* should depend only on things which we completely control; the rest should be accepted with equanimity. Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose; sometimes things go our way, at other times they don't. It is this interpretation that makes sense of a nearby passage in the *Enchiridion*:

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[25] Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 1.1.

[26] Irvine, *A Guide to the Good Life*.

[27] See, e.g., Donald Robertson, "Review of Irvine's *A Guide to the Good Life*," accessed online at: https://donaldrobertson.name/2013/05/17/review-of-irvines-a-guide-to-the-good-life-the-ancient-art-of-stoic-joy-2009/.

> Remember, then, that if you attribute freedom to things by nature dependent and take what belongs to others for your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you take for your own only that which is your own and view what belongs to others just as it really is, then no one will ever compel you, no one will restrict you; you will find fault with no one, you will accuse no one, you will do nothing against your will; no one will hurt you, you will not have an enemy, nor will you suffer any harm.[28]

The most frequent modern rendition of the dichotomy of control is that it encourages us to internalize our goals, a view derived from a famous passage in Cicero, where he uses the metaphor of an archer attempting to hit a target.[29] The archer controls how much time he practices, his choice and maintenance of bows and arrows, his focus before letting the arrow go, and the precise moment at which to let it go. Beyond that, the outcome is entirely outside of his control, as a gust of wind or a sudden evasive maneuver by the target (say, an enemy soldier), could ruin the best shot. This holds similarly with the things we care about: It is misguided to want a job promotion, to be loved, or to be healthy. We should, instead, do whatever we are capable of in order to deserve the job, we should be loving, and we should take care of our body. The rest is up to the universe.

A second objection is that contemporary cognitive science seems to restrict significantly the range of things that are "up to us," according to Epictetus. Daniel Kahneman's distinction between system 1 and system 2 thought processes[30] (as well as research on cognitive biases[31]), which shows that a lot of our thinking takes place below the threshold of consciousness, appears to be at odds with this fundamental Stoic idea. However, the ancient Stoics were well aware of the fact that

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[28] Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 1.3.

[29] Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, III.22.

[30] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

[31] Thomas Gilovich et al., eds., *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

we have instinctive reactions and automatic thoughts over which we have no control, as made explicitly clear, for instance, by Seneca's treatment of the phases of development of anger in *De Ira*. Indeed, research by Joseph LeDoux on cognitive components of emotions,[32] as well as the effectiveness of evidence-based approaches to psychotherapy inspired by Stoicism, like cognitive-behavioral therapy, demonstrate that the Stoics got their psychology broadly right, on the basis of their keen direct observation of human behavior. Nonetheless, a modern Stoic would do well, of course, to be aware of what recent research in psychology and neuroscience has to say about the dynamics of human thinking and decision-making.[33]

c. The cardinal virtues

The Stoics inherited from Socrates the view that there are four, deeply interconnected, virtues that we need to practice in order to become better persons: practical wisdom or prudence (*phronêsis*, Latin *prudentia*), courage (*andreia*), justice (*dikaiosynê*), and temperance (*sôphrosynê*). Practical wisdom is knowledge of what is good and evil for us, which essentially reduces to understanding that the only things really good for us are our correct judgments, decisions, and values, while the only evils for us are our own incorrect judgments, decisions, and values (see dichotomy of control, above). Courage is not just physical, but above all moral, as in the courage to stand up for the right thing. Justice is what tells you what that right thing is, and in general how to treat fellow human beings. Temperance is acting in right measure, neither too little nor too much, in proportion to what the circumstances require.

Socrates famously defended the controversial view of the "unity of virtues" (for instance, in "Laches"), which was adopted by the Stoics and is being reinterpreted by modern authors favorable to

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[32] Joseph LeDoux, *Anxious: Using the Brain to Understand and Treat Fear and Anxiety* (New York, Viking, 2015).

[33] It is worth noting that the concept of a dichotomy of control is found also in several other traditions, from the eighth-century Buddhist Shantideva (Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, rev. ed., trans. Padmakara Translation Group [Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2006], chap. 6, verse 10) to the eleventh-century Jewish philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol (Solomon ibn Gabriol, *A Choice of Pearls*, trans. A. Cohen [New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1925]) to the 1934 serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr (http://skdesigns.com/internet/articles/prose/niebuhr/serenity_prayer/).

that tradition.[34] In essence, this view holds that one cannot possess one of the virtues without possessing all of them. It is impossible, for instance, to be courageous and yet unjust, since "courage" here refers to a moral property, not just to bravery in the face of danger. Interpreted this way, the doctrine of the unity of virtues says that the four are different facets of the same fundamental thing, namely, wisdom.[35]

Interestingly, cross-cultural research on the concept of virtue finds that there is a core set of virtues, virtue-like behavioral tendencies, or character traits, that are universally (or nearly so) recognized across literate cultures throughout history.[36] This core includes the Stoic cardinal virtues, plus two more that are recognized by the Stoics but not treated as virtues: "humanity" (a sense of brotherhood with all other human beings, which falls under the Stoic heading of cosmopolitanism) and "transcendence" (which for the Stoics translates to a sense of kinship with the cosmos, via the universality of the Logos).

d. Preferred versus dispreferred indifferents

One of the most "paradoxical" principles (in the literal ancient sense of being contrary to, *para*, popular opinion, *doxan*) is the Stoic treatment of "externals," such as health, wealth, education, physical appearance, and so forth, as either preferred or dispreferred indifferents. At face value, the phrase does sound oxymoronic, until one realizes that "indifference" here refers to the moral value of such externals. Being rich (or poor), healthy (or sick), or educated (or ignorant) does not, in itself, make you a better or worse person. That said, some externals (wealth, health, education) are preferred, other things being equal, while other externals (poverty, sickness, ignorance) are dispreferred.

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[34] Becker, *A New Stoicism*.

[35] I visualize this geometrically, with each virtue being a face of a tetrahedron; see my "Disciplines, Fields, and Virtues," *How to Be a Stoic*, accessed online at: https://howtobeastoic.wordpress.com/2017/12/11/disciplines-fields-and-virtues-the-full-stoic-system-in-one-neat-package/.

[36] Katherine Dahlsgaard, Christopher Peterson, and Martin E. P. Seligman, "Shared Virtue: The Convergence of Valued Human Strengths across Culture and History," *Review of General Psychology* 9 (2005), pp. 203-13.

Arguably, this treatment of externals positioned the Stoics somewhere in the middle of the conceptual space between two closely allied Hellenistic schools: the Cynics and the Aristotelians. For Aristotle, a eudaimonic life is not possible without at least some measure of external goods, while for the Cynics, externals get in the way of one's practice of wisdom (hence their famous "dog-like" lifestyle). The Stoics neatly recognized both the Aristotelian point (yes, some degree of externals are a welcome addition to one's life) and the Cynic one (yes, a focus on externals is dangerous and likely distracting one from the pursuit of virtue).

It is interesting to note that a number of modern Stoics (including myself) tend to be skeptical of the increasingly popular appropriation of Stoicism as self-help philosophy for aspiring entrepreneurs and business people. We see this as a corruption of the chief aim of Stoicism, namely, the pursuit of virtue. In a sense, this is analogous to a similar corruption of Christianity known as the "prosperity gospel."[37]

e. The three disciplines

Finally, most modern Stoics have adopted the same general approach to understand and teach Stoicism that was used by Epictetus, as reconstructed by Hadot, with modifications suggested by Brian Johnson.[38] This is Epictetus's sequence of three disciplines: of desire, of action, and of assent:

> There are three things in which a man ought to exercise himself who would be wise and good. The first concerns the desires and the aversions, that a man may not fail to get what he desires, and that he may not fall into that which he does not desire. The second concerns the movements (toward) and the movements from an object, and generally in doing what a man ought to do, that he may act according to order, to reason, and not carelessly. The third thing concerns freedom from deception and rashness in judgment, and generally it concerns the assents. Of these topics the chief and the most urgent is that which relates to the affects. . . . The second topic concerns the

[37] Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[38] Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*; Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus*.

duties of a man. . . . The third topic is that which . . . concerns the security of the other two, so that not even in sleep any appearance unexamined may surprise us, nor in intoxication, nor in melancholy.[39]

The idea, roughly, is that one first has to get clear on what is truly good and evil (i.e., one's own judgments), the only things to desire or avoid. This has to do with the virtue of practical wisdom, as we have seen. Then, one can apply the remaining three virtues to how to act in the world. Finally, the advanced student can use logical reasoning to understand more deeply the nature of human judgment, fine-tuning his own and making it automatic.

5. Toward the Fifth Stoa

I refer to Modern Stoicism as the Fifth Stoa, after the early (Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus), middle (Panaetius, Posidonius), late (Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius), and the Renaissance interlude of Neo-Stoicism (Justus Lipsius). The ongoing development of the Fifth Stoa is fascinating from the point of view of a professional philosopher because it is happening mostly as a grassroots movement in applied philosophy, and yet welcomes the input and support of professionals. We have a possibly unique opportunity to make a difference for potentially millions of people, all the while doing something that is also stimulating in terms of scholarship. We should not pass up this chance.

How does the Fifth Stoa differ from the first three? (I will not make comparisons with Lipsius's Neo-Stoicism, due to its specific Christian nature, although there certainly is something to learn from that attempt as well.) While I have given several hints above, here is a provisional summary of how I think things are unfolding:

Topic	Early Stoas	Fifth Stoa
Theology	Pantheism	Compatible with a range from theism, deism, and pantheism to agnosticism and atheism

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[39] Epictetus, *Discourses*, III.2.

Metaphysics	Logos implies Providence (though not in the Christian sense)	Logos understood as the generating principle of the universe, laws of nature, web of cause-effect
	The universe is a living organism	The universe is whatever fundamental physics says it is
Logic	Definite knowledge is possible (for the sage)	Human knowledge affected by inevitable cognitive biases, knowledge is a social phenomenon
Psychology	Unhealthy emotions (*pathē*) to be eliminated, only healthy ones (*eupatheiai*) to be cultivated	The goal is to shift the emotional spectrum away from unhealthy and toward healthy emotions
Ethics	Live according to nature, cosmopolitanism	Follow the facts, cosmopolitanism

Much more would have to be said to justify the entries in the table above. However, I have provided the reader with a number of resources throughout this discussion that justify the perspectival shift sketched here. Stoicism is alive and well in the twenty-first century, almost two-and-a-half millennia after it was introduced by Zeno of Citium. It is incumbent on professional philosophers to do their part to see that it thrives and helps people live a life that is truly worth living.