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Toward a Practice of Stoic Pragmatism

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DESPITE BROAD INFLUENCE ON THE HISTORY of philosophy, Stoicism has lain long dormant as a practical philosophy. Of late, however, some have sought to modernize Stoicism for the contemporary world.[1] It has found success in the military, as Stockdale and Sherman report. While the promise of tranquility through reason and self-discipline presents an appealing vision in emotional times, some tenets of Stoicism cannot gain purchase among society at large: predetermination, absolute morality at all times, and the idea of a non-relational conception of virtue sound dated to a modern audience, particularly Americans.

John Lachs has recently proposed an enriched philosophical program, "Stoic pragmatism," implicit in his life's work.[2] Its origins are obvious enough: in marrying the attitudes and practices of ancient Stoicism—as exemplified in the writings of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus—and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American pragmatism—particularly that of William James and John Dewey—Lachs puts forward a novel admixture that preserves what is useful in the two traditions while overcoming some of their potential weaknesses.

Pragmatism, Lachs says, captures what is best in the can-do American spirit. Problems, including those that seem most meaningful or intractable, are opportunities for solution. This instrumentalist impulse, buttressed by James's and Dewey's argumentative underpinnings, serves to remind us that the world can be ameliorated for human benefit and remade toward human purposes. Despite the great successes of human intelligence and inquiry in a wide variety of fields, it is unclear that every problem has a solution, that all "problematic situations," to use Dewey's apt phrase, can be reconstructed, overcome, or settled to the inquirer's satisfaction. The risk here is that prag-

matists, in their optimism and enthusiasm for progress, are "never wanting to give up" (Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism* 23).[3]

Stoicism, on the other hand, prioritizes the integrity of the human psyche, the so-called "inner citadel" (Hadot). Stoicism, particularly in its ethical, Roman iteration, recognized the limits of human agency, and sought to shield the psyche from the world's risks. Epictetus's dictum, "Is it up to us?" encouraged Stoics to recognize that, while they may be unable to control all that happens, they could control their reactions. Thus Stoics sought to define their integrity independent of their environment and circumstances.[4] This isolation, however, drew criticism: the emphasis on self-preservation, with a belief in predetermination, critics asserted, allowed Stoics to excuse weakness or indolence. As Lachs summarizes it, they "give up too soon" (*Stoic Pragmatism* 23).

Lachs admits that the two positions he attempts to synthesize have their tensions: it is "clear that pragmatic ambition and Stoic equanimity appear to be incompatible values. Pragmatists and Stoics seem to occupy opposite ends of the spectrum, with the former busy trying to improve the conditions of life and the latter adjusting their desires to the course of nature" (*Stoic Pragmatism* 41). This interpretation is in some measure caricature, as Lachs himself suggests, but there is some disagreement of emphases between the two schools. For the sake of their projects and ideals, they sometimes disregard the lessons that the other tradition emphasizes. Thus, there is an opportunity for adherents of either tradition to learn from followers of the other and, more than this, a productive mixture of the two traditions may be possible. This overlap is what Lachs attempts to sketch.

We seek to advance Lachs's proposal by taking a harder look at both the theory and practice of Stoic pragmatism, with an especial emphasis on contemporary application. This paper's first task is to look at some ways in which the commitments of traditional Stoicism and pragmatism come into conflict. In particular, we briefly examine the Stoic and pragmatic takes on free will because we believe this is the most significant tension between the amalgamated elements of Stoic pragmatism. We then offer an argument congenial to the work of many pragmatists, that these disagreements about matters of physics and metaphysics can be set aside, at least here, for ethical and practical purposes. This is Lachs's implicit position, so we are here affixing argumentative meat to the bones of his claims. Our second task is to work through the background of some themes Lachs presents as consonant with Stoic pragmatism. Our third aim is to suggest how some practices of Stoic pragmatism for life in the contemporary world might look. While

Lachs insists throughout his book that Stoic pragmatism is a suggestion for a way of living, he says very little about what particular practices this might involve. By taking a close look at some of the practices of ancient Stoicism, enriching them with insights of American pragmatism, and applying them to contemporary situations, we hope to follow up Lachs's offering by beginning to develop a promising and living pluralistic philosophy.

I. Does Matter Matter?

With the apparent tension of core values between Stoicism and pragmatism softened to a disagreement about emphasis, Lachs writes: "[N]one of this means, of course, that there are no differences between what pragmatists and stoics believe. On the contrary, there are important disagreements, but they are of a sort whose presence does not make the constructive combination of the two views impossible" (*Stoic Pragmatism* 42). But he does not express what these disagreements are or how to overcome them, and so a central claim about the feasibility of Stoic pragmatism remains underdeveloped and undefended.

One of the central commitments of Stoicism is the fatedness of all things. Its founder Zeno illustrates fate with a parable about a dog tied to a cart. Regardless of the dog's will, the cart travels in a given direction; the dog must travel in the same direction. The situation is analogous, Zeno concludes, to humans, tied to fate.[5] The fatedness of all things has a therapeutic consequence insofar as it provides an explanation for a Stoic to "let go" of past events and to acknowledge the limits of human action. This runs counter to a pragmatic commitment to betterment, and it faced similar criticism in antiquity. If all things are fated, then humans have no incentive to exert themselves (the "Lazy Argument").[6] Permutations of this argument are employed in contemporary discourse to refute doctrines of predetermination.

Zeno's follower Chrysippus apparently attempted to fine-tune the Stoic doctrine on fate. Reports of Chrysippus's work articulate both a more tightly woven sense of fate and more room for human choice. His work, Cicero reports, created a taxonomy of causes that separated proximate from primary causes: while all acts, including human assent to impulse, were fated, Chrysippus believed that some will could be exerted over assent because driven by a proximate, rather than primary, cause.[7] Thus for even the early Stoics, tension between fate and human will was a source of consternation.

Despite how dialectically compelling arguments about the limitations of the will may be, we continue to find ourselves having free choices about the

direction of our lives and the world around us. Some philosophers, including the Stoics, have wanted to push this experience into the realm of "seeming." They insist that metaphysical argumentation carries the day despite our folkish experiential scruples. The arguments for this position are compelling, especially bolstered with theological and scientific reasons, but the classical American pragmatists argued that this approach to the question of freedom was unsatisfactory. Their reasons for suggesting a reorientation to the question mainly fit into two categories: the experiential and the motivational. We engage with only the second here.[8] The pragmatists have a reply to the Stoics that speaks to an enrichment that pragmatism offers Stoicism: by believing we can make a difference in the world, we are motivated to make this difference.

James presents a striking example of the difference that faith and belief can make: when mountain climbing, one might find oneself in a precarious position, needing to jump to safety. It is only one's belief that one can make the leap that propels one to do so (James, "Will to Believe" 53). What we believe about the constitution of the world impacts how we act. In James's words: "It makes a tremendous emotional and practical difference to one whether one accepts the universe in the drab discolored way of stoic resignation to necessity, or with the passionate happiness of Christian saints" (*Varieties* 41). This difference, this choice, goes a long way to determine how one approaches the world. If one sincerely considers oneself a floating log on the tide of being, there is little reason to believe that one can do much to change the tide's flow. In a sense, this is freeing, as Stoics suggested, but in another way, it is devastating—namely, devastating of activity. The belief that one's actions can better the world makes these actions worth trying. The pragmatic conception of meliorism demands that real possibility and freedom are constituents of the world; without, there can be no change to a more satisfactory situation—things are necessarily as they are.

We take this latter argument to be more convincing than the former, and we think that it gives grounding for belief in indeterminism. But is it appropriate to accept Stoic practices without their attendant metaphysics? Despite the close affinity between their ethics and fixed, teleological metaphysics, we suggest that the former can be practiced without the latter. One may live, as the Stoics say, "in accordance with virtue and reason" without conceding that virtue, or reason, is a principle that structures the universe.[9] In short, the future, destined or not, is not known to us, and one's ethical practices cannot be affected by an unknown future. Indeed, Julia Annas asserts that the early Stoics did not posit a strong relationship between cosmic order and

individual ethical practice.[10] Thus even an indeterminist may learn much from the Stoics. If one disagrees with the pragmatists, though, and wants to continue holding onto determinism, we believe that the techniques of Stoic pragmatism below are still useful. Despite the apparent fatedness of all things, the individual is still able to determine his or her response and assent to the world. An ameliorative attitude is one possible mode of response—one that we believe is beneficial.

II. Some Themes of Stoic Pragmatism

Lachs emphasizes that action, rather than intellectual gymnastics, lies at the heart of Stoic pragmatism: "It serves also as a description of sound practices, along with an account of largely unintellectualized attitudes. The theory derives from the discovery of these habits and attitudes" (*Stoic Pragmatism* 71). Despite insisting that Stoic pragmatism is a way of living, Lachs offers little in concrete practices one can attempt to make life more satisfied and satisfying. He does, however, present a series of themes that are appropriate for Stoic pragmatism, some of which imply activities. We begin by tracing the Stoic and pragmatic genealogies of these principles. We argue that that they point toward the orientation and habituation necessary for pragmatic meliorism and Stoic stability. Thus a more substantial set of practices should be developed.

A word about sources: no definitive text for Stoicism, let alone Stoic ethics, exists. Little remains of the writings of the founders of the school, Zeno and his followers Cleanthes and Chrysippus; much of what we do have is preserved in the form of anecdotes and quotations in later works, some of which are hostile to Stoicism. Roman Stoics such as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius describe and espouse Stoic practices as they understand them, while later compilers such as Stobaeus and Diogenes Laertius synthesize these works into a homogeneous system. Thus we have chosen an eclectic method to match our eclectic set of sources, selecting practices from a variety of sources.

Lachs outlines general themes of Stoic pragmatism: (1) awareness, (2) moral holidays, (3) recognizing "good enough," (4) leaving others alone, and (5) courage.

Lachs's first theme seems to us most promising from both the Stoic and pragmatic perspectives. Awareness, as we term his subtle response to an unpacking of the consequences of James's "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (132–49), demands that one cultivates habits of literal and metaphorical seeing. James suggests (here and elsewhere) that we all interact with the

world only partially, in ways shaped by our temperaments, purposes, needs, and selectivities. This partialism sometimes manifests in a failure to remain attentive to the variety of experience as well as inattention to the perspectives of others. When we remain limited by the narrowness of our biases, there is danger of living a less significant, less integrated life.

If the pragmatists are to be appreciated for their insistence on reshaping the world, then the practical solipsism of blindness can be especially problematic. Dewey tells us that the first step in inquiry is the problematic situation, recognition of a difficulty in experience. But if we are attentive only to our own limited perspective, then we may miss the ways in which the world is failing for others, including people whose fortunes are directly tied up with our own. For example, blindness about the dangerous working conditions of faraway people who make our most intimate, quotidian products—our clothing—abounds in this contemporary world.

More individually, failure in awareness can cause us to accept suboptimal situations that could be ameliorated. A variation on Dewey's metaphor against expert rule is here instructive. Insisting on the felt character of problematic situations, he writes: "The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches" ("Public and Its Problems" 364). If the wearer of a poorly fitting shoe does not take it off or visit the cobbler, then the foot finds ways to adapt. This may involve painful blistering, which only gradually gives over to callusing, a remaking of the foot's skin, which sacrifices sensation for safety. Some blindnesses function in just this way. We become hardened and unable to feel the possibilities of integration with the world and with one another. Cultivating awareness is one way to avoid the danger of these blindnesses.

The Stoics, too, link awareness with happiness (*eudaimonia*, which they hold as the ultimate goal of human life). Seneca's Letter 89 explains Stoic ethics in three steps: (1) assessing each thing's value, (2) adopting the proper internal attitude toward the thing, and (3) behaving in accordance with the internal attitude.[11] The first of these three steps may be considered one type of Stoic awareness: reasoned assessment of what each thing is. Knowing thoroughly what something is allows us neither to overvalue nor to undervalue it. Such knowledge ensures happiness, the Stoics aver, because we are prone to overvaluing and becoming too attached; their demise leads to pain.

As Marcus exhorts himself throughout the *Meditations*, Stoics must put each thing they encounter through an interrogation in order to assess its value. He uses arresting images to reiterate his point, as at 6.13, where he lectures himself on the true nature of some foods: that they are "the dead body of a

fish, the dead body of a bird, the dead body of a pig." Wine is but juice, and purple garments (a symbol of wealth and authority) are but hair of a sheep dipped in the blood of a mussel. He strips sex bare, defining it "the friction of genitalia, and after some spasm, the discharge of mucus." He then reminds himself to perform cutting analysis upon everything: to see them as they are, unclouded by emotional attachments.

If these analytic principles seem to alienate and encourage detachment from the world, the Stoics also espouse the practice of *oikeiosis* ("appropriation," which prescribes a cosmopolitan perspective). *Oikeiosis* describes a series of concentric circles, with the Stoic at its center: the first circle encompasses his body, the next his immediate family, the next his extended family, and so on.[12] The last circle encompasses all of humanity. The work of oikeiosis is to draw these circles together, considering distant people as one's own (oikeiosis is derived from the term *oikos*, "home," so can be thought of as "homing"). This cosmopolitanism counters the isolation that may result from analysis. These two practices are not exclusive: treating all humanity as extensions of oneself does not preclude a reasoned attitude toward their existence. People die, both those nearest to us and those we have never met. The combination of analysis and oikeiosis teaches us to acknowledge the deaths of those we do not know without dissolving into hysterical grief. Such awareness, the Stoics claim, grants us knowledge to secure happiness. We will return to these practices below, in our proposal for practices for Stoic pragmatism.

Lachs's second theme is moral holidays, an ambiguous phrase that suggests some sort of respite from striving toward the good. In referencing "moral holiday," Lachs reminds us of James's teasing gesture toward the Absolute pragmatist, Josiah Royce. If our finite individual efforts are only shards of the Absolute's totality, then why not respond to the world's horrors with a shrug and a vacation? This attitude of wholesale detachment is unpalatable to pragmatic ameliorists—and to Royce too!—but there is something right about moral holidays: sometimes one must take a break now in order to do good later. Frenetic action, even toward laudable ends, tires us and defeats our ability to do more good. The holidays we take are not from morality but are rather in service of our striving toward the realization of moral aims.

Within Stoicism, Seneca advocates for an occasional "moral holiday," noting that "we need to relax our minds; with rest, they rise up better and sharper" (*On the Tranquility of Mind* 17.5). He provides examples of the likes of Socrates taking breaks by, for example, playing with children. But he stresses that these rests are merely a loosening of the reins rather than a complete abdication of control.

But in light of pragmatism's more active approach, Stoicism as a whole may, *pace* the Stoics, be termed a "moral holiday." Certainly, they do not advocate immoral action; nor do they advocate doing much to change the world. Rather, their philosophy focuses on self-preservation against the world's impingements. Since the world constantly presents us with situations and stimuli, that itself is activity. Further, a Stoic should advise others toward self-improvement, but ultimately one's integrity is tantamount. From the perspective of a more proactive philosophy, Stoic ethics appears passive or reactionary: it responds to problems when they are presented directly, but it does not go out looking. In that sense, Stoicism may serve as the "moral holiday" to pragmatism's "work day."[13]

This sense that there is only so much one can do in a day is tied to Lachs's third principle, recognizing the "good enough." This invites comparison to Voltaire's injunction not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. We humans are finite; we have limits. Insisting on realizing an ideal may require too much. Instead, we should strive only to do what we can: at the end of the day, as Royce noted, one can say "my bit is done." This does not mean that all the work is done; it means that one is in a different place than one started. One has done something, and in so doing, the world has been changed, hopefully for the better. Other people must do their bits, too, and there is always more to do tomorrow. The "good enough" for today need not and should not be where one stops permanently, but it can be a good perch for rest in preparation for tomorrow's inexorable flights.

The Stoics offer another approach to the phrase "good enough" with their notion of "indifferents." While "good" things and actions (termed "proper functions") are strictly defined as those in accordance with nature, and "bad" as those against nature, there is nonetheless a separate category, "indifferents," for those with no absolute correlation vis-à-vis nature.[14] While proper functions must be performed, indifferents are merely "good enough." Even among these, there are degrees of desirability: some are "more preferred" indifferents, while others are "less preferred."[15] Health, for example, is considered a preferred indifferent: good health aids in acquiring the ultimate goal, happiness. But health is not necessary, the Stoics say, to be happy. In Lachs's terms, healthy activity might be considered something that is "good enough": it contributes to today's work. The Stoics thus contribute a different angle from which to define "good enough": by activity rather than by quantity.

Lachs says the Stoic pragmatist leaves others alone. With examples ranging from provincial traditionalism to xenophobia (*Stoic Pragmatism* 115 ff.), this seems like an appropriate way to avoid trampling on others'

ways of living. It is an encouragement to appreciate pluralism about values and modes of independence as well as a reminder to be humble in our commitments, especially when they impact others. The classical American pragmatists would find this attitude salutary, though with their (particularly Dewey's) insistence on the value of education, they would hasten to add that leaving others alone does not mean we cannot learn from them—or that they cannot learn from us. Even if we take up an intentionally non-interfering attitude, we will still be interacting with others, creating opportunities to exchange ideas. To borrow a phrase from the work of Gregory Pappas inspired by Dewey, we must have "hospitality towards the new" (320).

This concept is also relevant to the Stoics. It is prevalent in the *Meditations*, perhaps as a consequence of the author's emperorship. While Stoics advocate enlightening others on the proper course of action, they also support leaving others alone after initial attempts prove unproductive.[16] Since Stoic happiness is defined solely by maintenance of integrity, what others say and do are ultimately beyond one's control and, frankly, concern. A Stoic should try to help others, but never at the cost of virtue or self-control. Marcus also extends "leaving others alone" to "letting others leave me alone": at 5.25, he consoles himself for criticism, reiterating that the critic has his own disposition and actions, and Marcus, too, does as nature has accorded him. This extension of "leaving others alone" allows self-preservation when, following pragmatism, we are tempted to persist in trying to ameliorate the world at our own expense.

Finally, Lachs proposes a fifth theme: be courageous. In particular, he encourages us to stand up to power, even when it is unpopular to do so. Without this, the status quo will remain unchallenged, even when it is dreadful.

The pragmatic basis of this principle is implicit in the rejection of traditional philosophical predilections toward finality, certainty, and absolute footings. For the pragmatists, life is risky, supported as it is by fallible inductions and finite human bodies. As Pappas notes: "Courage is needed at every step of the way if instability, indeterminacy, and uncertain possibilities are inherent to every situation" (330). When life is inherently risky, one must be courageous to do much at all.

Lachs's description of courage—doing what is right despite fear (of reprisal, ostracism, and the like)—finds its ancient equivalent in the Stoic treatment of actions. Specifically, we may refer back to Seneca's tripartite division of ethics into assessment of value, adopting the proper internal response, and acting in accordance with the proper response. Lachs's characterization of courage is consonant with Seneca's third part: the Stoic must persist in performing actions that accord with what he has determined is virtuous. Indeed,

many of the texts of Roman Stoicism fixate on this issue. The difficulty in ethics, as Stoicism sees it, is not so much in knowing what is virtuous, but in doing it.

III. Technologies of Stoic Pragmatism

What this exploration of the themes of Stoic pragmatism has underscored, we believe, are two complementary characteristics of Stoicism and pragmatism. We see Stoicism most fully at play in themes like moral holidays, recognizing "good enough," and leaving others alone, while pragmatism is the nearer source of such principles as awareness and courage. It is implicit in Lachs's combination of these two philosophies that Stoicism's "inner citadel" and pragmatism's ameliorative spirit work together as defense and offense. In the panoply of Stoic pragmatism, Stoicism provides the shield and suit of armor to pragmatism's lance and sword. The practices we suggest below may be performed to varying degrees of "defense" or "offense." When one feels besieged or overwhelmed, a self-preservational mode of practice is warranted; on the other hand, if one is feeling confident in one's moral and physical stability, one can perform these practices in a more active mode.

These practices are drawn from Stoic *askesis*, methods or techniques for ethical education, typically for the betterment of one's self.[17] The purpose of Stoic ascetic practice is to condition oneself toward correct behavior through regular incremental adjustments, like a splint that supports growing bone. These practices, then, are meant to be used frequently and consistently in order to mold oneself into the portrait of virtue. Michel Foucault, in his analysis of Stoic practices, refers to them as "the material equipment of *logos*" (323). He understands the practices as rooted in the logic of Stoicism but corporealized in the form of sayings, writings, and other physical manifestations of rational thought. These practices function much like maxims or mantras, reminding the practitioner of the essential reasoning that undergirds Stoicism.[18] They recall and revive the logical argument, effecting what Foucault calls a "reactualization of the *logos*" (324). Thus many of these practices—both those of the Stoics as well as their modifications we propose below—are logical, or perhaps rather rhetorical, in character; while referred to as "exercises" or "technologies," the practices are neither physical aerobic activities nor do they require the acquisition of external tools. They are, as Pierre Hadot calls them, "spiritual exercises."

And yet this misleading analogy to physical fitness highlights a key facet of these practices. As Foucault observes, these philosophical practices must be like an athlete's fundamental exercises: in order for exercises to be effective, they

must be easy to learn, remember, and implement (325). Jogging, sit-ups, or push-ups can be done at any time, with no equipment, with nary a thought; similarly, philosophical exercises, in the training of the ethical self, must be immediately graspable and adaptable to any situation. They must be "ready at hand." To wit, the text that collects Epictetus's lectures and sayings is titled the *Encheiridion*, or literally, "The (In-)Hand-Book."

These Stoic practices respond to situations that arise in order to protect the innermost self and so may be called "defensive" or "reactionary." Lachs indeed criticizes this almost passive tendency of Stoicism. With Lachs, we believe that pragmatism's insistence on relationality and a tight link between thought and action enriches these practices, and we suggest modifications to them accordingly. Though the practices we recommend are primarily "mental" in the sense of being dispositional and evaluative, they also have practical consequences in behavior and habit.

Practice 1: Awareness

The Stoics recommend that we build awareness through two complementary practices, those discussed briefly in section II: analysis of impressions and oikeiosis. At *Meditations* 3.11, Marcus describes the interrogation process of analysis:

> [A]lways create a definition or outline of an impression that appears, so as to see what sort of thing it is, and its essence, naked, as a whole, as an individual; its particular name and the names of the things out of which it is composed and into which it will decompose. . . . That which now creates this impression on me—what is it, and of what is it composed, and for how long will it remain? What virtue do I need for it? Gentleness, courage, trust, simplicity, self-sufficiency, and the rest. It's necessary to tell yourself about each thing: this thing has come from god; or: this thing is in accordance to the weavings of fate, and coincidence, and chance; or: this thing is by someone of the same tribe, same birth, a fellow human, who is ignorant of what is in accordance with fate for him. But I am not ignorant; therefore I will treat him according to the natural laws of kinship: kindly and justly.

This interrogation, which we see throughout the writings of Marcus, Seneca, and Epictetus, walks the practitioner through a series of questions about impressions and objects in order to: (1) define the object for what it is, devoid of emotional attachments; (2) determine what ethical response is appropriate for it; and (3) recognize its role in the cosmos.

Take, for example, a modern scenario: road rage. If someone cuts me off in traffic, I am tempted to honk, curse, tailgate, or pass at an excessive

speed only to slow down again. Marcus recommends, rather, that I analyze the situation. First, what is it, of what is it made, how long will it last? It is a person in an inanimate, metal vehicle. The traffic situation is temporary; the car will last a few decades, shorter than the lifespan of the human, about a century. Next, what is the virtue I should apply? Patience, empathy for the other driver. I should tell myself that this thing has come about because of a fellow human who made a mistake, but it is not right for me to retaliate.

Another observation, one of time and psychology, can be made here: the length of time it takes to read the above paragraph is the least time required for Stoic analysis to take place. We may recognize that, because of the engagement required in answering questions, by the time one has completed analysis, one is no longer involved in the emotional reaction that was initially overwhelming.

As the final part of analysis—recognizing that the offender is merely another human, with concomitant limitations—emphasizes, a good part of awareness entails awareness of others' circumstances in life. The Stoic practice of oikeiosis specifically targets the development of the ability to understand and sympathize with other human beings. Oikeiosis, we will recall, asks us to imagine ourselves at the center of a series of concentric rings comprised of all humanity, and it is the task of this practice to bring these circles closer to the center: those from the third ring should be treated as if they are in the second ring, the fourth in the third, and so on. It also recommends that we extend more intimate terms of address to those in outer circles, calling them cousins and brothers. We ought, therefore, to consider the driver in the road-rage example above not a stranger, but a friend—what if our friend were driving the other car? We should also refer to him as brother, cousin. Employing such practices on a daily basis will, as the Stoics see it, train our awareness.

Recently, Marilyn Fischer, responding to Martha Nussbaum's adaptation of oikeiosis, has argued that early twentieth-century pragmatist thinkers had important cosmopolitan commitments but that they "unsettle . . . [the] implicit background assumptions that the circles are conceptually distinct" (151). On this score, the individual practitioner cannot understand him- or herself independently of the members of other circles and their effects. The different circles also cannot be understood without reference to one another. Fischer goes on to suggest, in regular pragmatist spirit, that particularity matters: "[E]ven though all humans share a common vulnerability to death, the time and cause of death are not common vulnerabilities" (161). This argument serves both to problematize the spirit and to complicate the practice of Stoic oikeiosis. It asks us to recognize that we are the products of the interaction of other circles and

thus cannot be understood as isolated citadels. As such, it adds to the theory of oikeiosis—both in its ancient and contemporary guises—by insisting that we recognize that these groups of circles, including our own limited position, intersect and interact. We are not the center of other people's circles, and in fact it may well be a conceptual and narrative fiction to think of ourselves at the center of any circle whatsoever.

This does not mean that the cosmopolitan impulse is useless or impossible in the contemporary world but rather that it is more difficult to carry out: for instance, when we start asking questions about the material conditions of a vehicle's creation, empathy seems an even more appropriate virtue. Thus a full analysis takes even more time and serves to calm immediate, passionate responses even more effectively.

But as Stoic pragmatism functions defensively as well as proactively, we must go beyond analysis of the situations that are routinely presented to us. Stoic pragmatism must include a component of seeking out difference. The Stoic pragmatist should attempt to make expeditions to other circles, visiting and experimenting with other modes of life. We suggest, then, that the atheist go to church, that the heterosexual spend a night at a PFLAG meeting, that the vegetarian try meat on Monday and veganism on Thursday, that the pagan celebrate solstice with her Christ-loving uncle. And so on. These excursions are made for two purposes: first, they destabilize our Stoic-privileged central location, and second, they give us experiential bases to understand more fully the lives of those who appear to be in other, seemingly disparate, circles. By making ourselves uncomfortable now, we make possible less discomfort and more situational integration in the future.

Practice 2: Moral Holidays

In the above discussion about Lachs's notion of "moral holidays," we stressed rather less the idea of indolence and opted to focus on the importance of time for recuperation and reflection. Accordingly, the practice we propose is founded on the idea that self-reflective meditation allows the practitioner to review the events of today and prepare for tomorrow. There are two types of Stoic reflection, both of which are directed at self-betterment. The *praemeditatio malorum* (pre-meditation of bad circumstances), of which the *praemeditatio mortis* (pre-meditation of death) is a subset, asks the practitioner to imagine the worst possible outcome for a situation, and to imagine (in the case of praemeditatio mortis) his or her own death. It is not necessarily the case that these worst possible outcomes will come to pass; rather, the praemeditatio both reiterates to the practitioner that he or she is not,

and will not be, in these worst circumstances, and that, should they come to pass, it is not an unbearable experience. As such, this praemeditatio prepares one for the future. For example, in Letter 24 of his *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca counsels his interlocutor Lucilius, who is worried about a lawsuit. Seneca advises Lucilius to imagine that the very outcome he fears has taken place, and to dissect exactly what would be so horrible about that situation. In this way, if indeed that future comes to pass, Lucilius will be ready.

Seneca proposes a different type of *meditatio*, one that takes place at the end of the day. At *De Ira* 3.36–7, Seneca describes a practice he borrows from his friend Sextus, wherein he tucks himself into bed and asks himself: "What bad habit of yours have you cured today? What vice had you resisted? How are you better?" He uses a juridical metaphor, as if his behavior were being called before a judge. Even this daily act of reporting, Seneca asserts, is enough to deter him from bad behavior during the day—because he is aware that he will have to report to the judge at bedtime. Seneca also ascribes a more productive use to reviewing the day: he reconsiders his actions and decides how to improve next time. In rhetorical fashion similar to other Roman Stoics such as Marcus and Epictetus, Seneca talks to himself, forgiving, advising, and extracting promises from himself for future improvement. There is likely some efficacy to the use of direct address in both the analysis of impressions above and in the *meditatio* here, at once externalizing and reifying the accusation with words while personalizing and intensifying it with a direct address: the mistakes we made today are both real and personal. By not simply reviewing the day's events but instead insisting that we find a way to do better next time, the "moral holiday" of meditating becomes a productive moment for improvement.

This latter Stoic meditatio is retrospective, a consideration of what one has done throughout the day. The praemeditationes malorum and mortis are prospective, and in this way, they hint in the direction a Stoic pragmatist might meditate. For while many writings in the pragmatist tradition are shot-through with reminders of finitude, there is more to forward-looking consideration than only tragedy. Our best efforts may sometimes fail, but they will not always, and thus we must also attempt to plan ahead for all actions, including those that we expect to see succeed. Dewey, of course, knew this. Consider, for instance, a passage from his *Human Nature and Conduct*, on the importance of deliberation:

> Deliberation is an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible action are really like. . . . The experiment is carried on by tentative rehearsals in thought which do not affect physical facts out-

side the body. Thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes, and thereby avoids having to wait the instruction of actual failure and disaster. An act overtly tried out is irrevocable, its consequences cannot be blotted out. An act tried out in imagination is not final or fatal. It is retrievable. (*Human Nature and Conduct* 132–33, qtd. in Alexander 197)

Deweyan "dramatic rehearsal" functions as a limitation on the blind and ceaseless striving that Lachs diagnoses in pragmatism. Reflecting on the quoted passage, Thomas Alexander writes: "[I]magination constitutes an extension of the environment to which we respond. By reading the possibilities of the present, the present situation is itself transformed and enlarged" (197). By engaging in this sort of reflection, as Alexander has consistently emphasized, an imaginer comes "to understand the actual in light of the possible" (Alexander 171), effecting a reorientation toward the present situation and its possibilities for ameliorative reconstruction and fruitful development. If all imaginative rehearsals lead to imagined disaster, then a limitation on these possibilities has been recognized. An enriched Stoic pragmatist should then imaginatively rehearse not only death and the worst that could happen, but as many other activities and possibilities for action as he or she is able. These reflective moments are "holidays" from striving toward our moral ends, but they always function in service of the same.

Practice 3: Good Enough

The related theme of "good enough" proposes that the Stoic pragmatist should learn to evaluate when to say "when." Perhaps we should take our Stoic cue from Epictetus, whose *Encheiridion* begins with the phrase: "[O]f what exists, some things are up to us, and some are not up to us" (1.1.) He explains that our emotions, our opinions, and things that are our doing are up to us, but that all else, such as our body, belongings, and reputation are not up to us. Things that are "up to us" are worth fretting about, and getting right; things that are not "up to us" are not worth vexing over. The practice Epictetus proposes, then, is that we apply this criterion of "up to us" to all things we encounter—we will, in this way, be able to sort out the things worth working on from the things we could, but need not, work on: it is a method for sorting out what is "good enough."

An objection, perhaps, is that Epictetus draws the line for "up to us" very close to oneself. Indeed, even one's body is not "up to us"; as a former slave, Epictetus would have been acutely aware that his body was not entirely his own. But this also speaks to circumstances such as illness or captivity: Epictetus reiterates that one can find "good enough" even within these cir-

cumstances because he recognizes that the body is not within our control.[19] For Epictetus, then, the cost of happiness is that we "give up" on the things that are not within our will. We forsake amelioration and control of the body, possessions, reputation, for the security of our own happiness.

While this practice for drawing a line to determine what constitutes "good enough" is useful, a pragmatist might seek to circumscribe a larger area for what constitutes "good enough." One cannot will away an illness. But one can choose to go to the doctor, and then one can choose what steps he or she takes during his or her convalescence. To have a chance at successfully reaching our ends, in this case, a return to health, we may need the help of medical professionals, antibiotics, understanding partners, healthful foods, and restful sleep. These elements of the situation are not "up to us" in the sense of guaranteed to be in control and guaranteed to be successful. But we still impact them and bring them about due to our interactions with them, and so we may think of them as "partially up to us."

Modes of interaction like persuading, cajoling, pressuring, luring, and bribing are ways in which other people in the world may be influenced. While the Stoic is right to note that these efforts are not guaranteed to work, they sometimes do. The same is true for our efforts to reshape the wider world: the possibility of piecemeal, halting modification, which is never certain or complete, but occurs often throughout life, animates the Stoic pragmatist to push at the borders of the "up to us." He or she recognizes that while not everything is in his or her complete control via direct willing, many elements beyond him- or herself may be at least partially modifiable in other, less direct, ways. The Stoic pragmatist is slow to judge some feature of experience as "not up to us," completely beyond his or her potential influence, and so he or she rejects the strict binary between "up to us" and "not," instead looking for those ways in which situations are or can be made at least "partially up to us." This encourages a habit of hopeful, experimental engagement that does accept limitations—but not before trying to overcome them.

Practice 4: Leaving Others Alone

In a similar vein to Epictetus's "up to us" practice, Marcus delineates himself and other people throughout the *Meditations*. He repeatedly exhorts himself not to be vexed by the behavior of others; he can control only himself. At 11.13, for example, he counsels himself on the proper response when someone disagrees with him: he ought to let the other be, if the other cannot be convinced. He should be willing to help someone else improve and see his or her error, but should do it patiently and magnanimously, rather than

angrily and passive-aggressively. Again, at 6.27, he notes that it is crude not to let others fantasize about their desires. Perhaps those desires are not right for them; then the best we can do is to try to convince them of this calmly rather than by raging at them. Marcus points up an interesting emotional response; that is, that depriving others of their ability to fantasize about and work toward acquiring their desires is itself a cruelty. Different people imagine their happiness differently, and imposing our view upon them is unjust. To this end, "leaving others alone" is consonant with parts of the practice of "awareness" insofar as it asks the practitioner to recognize that we each have oikeotic rings inscribing us, and that, while the rings intersect, they are not identical: our values are not everyone else's.

Marcus, then, would prescribe that we practice leaving others alone by refraining from anger and judgment, trying to convince others calmly and logically, and—failing that—recognizing the rights of others to create their own happiness. While this is a way to avoid dominating others, it may unfortunately preclude possibilities for development. We suggest that disagreement is not wholly negative. Recognizing that other people may have divergent beliefs and reasons affirms what Peirce called "the social impulse," which led him to encourage an attitude of fallibilism. When others disagree with us, our beliefs should be held tentatively. Few of our beliefs are beyond possible reproach, so we encourage Stoic pragmatists to seek out disagreement not only in order to change minds, as Marcus might suggest, but also to grow and learn possibilities for their own desire and belief. This is the implicit aim of our "awareness" practice of visiting difference; such explorations educate and provide opportunity for development of one's positions as well as those of other people. Our practice of "leaving others alone" goes beyond that of "awareness" and is rather, counter-intuitively, to engage with divergent others with an attitude of openness and a willingness possibly to change one's own commitments.

Practice 5: Courage

Stoicism quite possibly views following through, or having courage, as the primary ethical difficulty. Knowing what to do is straightforward (and natural); the difficulty is doing it. Encouragement and exhortation to stay the course may be found throughout the works of Roman Stoicism. Often they take the form of a direct address to the practitioner, as at *Meditations* 6.2:

> Make no distinction about whether you are freezing or burning up; you
> do what is right; whether you are half-asleep or have had your fill of

sleep; whether others speak ill or well of you; whether you are dying or doing something else. Even that is one of the activities of life, the one in which we die. And so even in this it is necessary to do well.

Marcus speaks to himself, listing the possible reasons for indolence: discomfort of environment (about which he would have been intimately familiar, writing the *Meditations* on the Roman empire's assaulted northern border), tiredness, opposition, death—and reminds himself that none of these are valid excuses. He must do right regardless. The rhetoric of this chapter identifies and anticipates Marcus's own objections, and invalidates them. As with several other passages drawn from the Roman Stoics, the rhetoric is part and parcel of the practice.[20] A passage such as this is a useful stand-in for the presence of an actual person encouraging Marcus to take courage. When the Stoic pragmatist cannot muster the strength to get up and do what needs to be done, he or she should turn to a passage such as this—perhaps even composing one specifically for him- or herself.

In addition to self-beratement, Marcus provides another technique at 6.48: finding admirable qualities to emulate in those around us. When we become depressed, we should seek inspiration in the examples set by others around us. Identifying these allows us to take stock of the embarrassment of riches we have around us, and restores our faith in the world. It also has the effect, which Marcus does not explicitly note, of providing models of the qualities we hope to foster in ourselves.

The combination of these two practices act in concert like the proverbial carrot and stick: the survey of admirable qualities as a carrot to inspire us to emulate exemplary virtues, the self-beratement as a stick to goad us out of easy excuses for our cowardice. A problem, of course, is knowing when we need to apply these techniques to ourselves—if we have deluded ourselves about our lack of courage, we will not be able to diagnose when we need to berate ourselves. As such, the Stoic pragmatist must support others and request support for him- or herself. Seneca, who frequently treats the theme of appropriate friendships, stresses the importance of befriending those who will recognize and discourage our bad habits (*On the Tranquility of Mind* 7.3). As pragmatists teach about relationality and sociality, we are constituted with and through one another, and this goes as much for our aims and our efforts as for our "selves." Through practices of accountability, both to ourselves as well as to other practitioners, we bring to the fore broader attention to our failings. But accountability is not only retrospective and punitive; rather, one can encourage oneself or others to strive toward shared, mutually developed

ideals. Such practices lie at the heart of intentional communities like those found at Burning Man, in the Michigan Militia, or in the wake of Occupy Wall Street, but they also serve to structure good relationships between friends, co-workers, and even romantic partners. The courage necessary to do good in this world comes more easily when it is encouraged by another.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

In this essay, we have proposed five modified Stoic practices suitable for living Stoic pragmatism. They are:

1. *Oikeiotic Analysis*: Complex, contextualized analysis of situations, including intentionally unfamiliar ones.
2. *Meditatio*: Retrospective reconstruction of actions carried out as well as imaginative prospective consideration of possible courses of action and guaranteed eventualities.
3. *Extend "Up to Us"*: Differentiate what is "up to us" from what is "not up to us," but work to extend the scope of what is "partially up to us."
4. *Respect Others*: Respect the rights of others to make their own lives, but only after we have exhausted the possibilities of learning from each other.
5. *Seek Accountability*: Hold ourselves and others accountable both for past failures as well as for future goals.

The seeds of each of these practices are present in the habits recommended by ancient Stoicism and in the principles argued for by John Lachs. The regular application of these practices, like regular exercise, trains the Stoic practitioner in the development of both a defensive (Stoic) trunk, and proactive (pragmatic) sprouts. Together, these two elements work to form a unified and stable but still growing organism, responding to the stresses and possibilities of its broader environment.

NOTES

An early draft of this paper was presented at the 2013 Midwest Pragmatist Study Group at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Thanks to participants for their helpful questions and suggestions.

1. Some modern adaptations of Stoicism include Becker, Morris, and Irvine. Non-scholastic translations of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus for use as self-help books abound.

2. For the fullest articulation of this position, see Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism*. This text's kernel was initially published as a 2005 *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (19.2: 95–106)

essay of the same name. Weber traces Lachs's thinking on this matter to the 1981 *Intermediate Man* by Lachs; Lachs ("What Can Philosophy Contribute?") notes he had the scent of this idea by his 1964 essay "To Have and To Be" (*The Personalist* 45: 5–14).

3. Stroud argues that Lachs's complaints about the ceaselessness of pragmatic meliorism stem from a limited attention to Dewey's commitment to enjoyment in and appreciation of the present situation.

4. Adherents of pragmatism may bristle at talk of separating one's self from one's broader environment. Key elements of Dewey's philosophy, including his reconstruction of "experience" and the transactional relationship between organism and environment, suggest the impossibility of this division. Though the Stoic position on selves can be identified as a sort of "atomism," it has enough relational elements that a straightforward opposition of Stoicism and pragmatism on this point would be misleading.

5. Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.21 = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* [henceforth SVF] 2.975 = Long and Sedley [henceforth L&S] 62A.

6. Cicero, *On Fate* 28–30 = L&S 55S.

7. Cicero, *On Fate* 39–43 = SVF 2.974 = L&S 62C

8. The particulars of one "experiential" pragmatist argument, James's "two-stage" model of free willing, along with its connection to other philosophers and James's exposure to Darwinian thinking, have been recently addressed in Doyle.

9. Becker, in adapting Stoicism for the modern world, also dispenses with predestination.

10. Since the cosmic nature is fated and organized in accordance with reason (nature is synonymous with reason, to the Stoics), using reason to harmonize one's own nature with the nature of the cosmos will also lead to a smooth, happy life, akin to the dog running alongside the cart. While this sense of the individual part in the whole of the cosmos is strong with Roman Stoics like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Annas asserts that for early Stoics, alignment with cosmic nature was not a facet of ethics. Long, however, presents the more widely accepted view that "the theocratic postulate" (as he terms it) was a fundamental innovation of the Stoa upon their Socratic predecessors.

11. Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 89.14 = L&S 56B.

12. Stobaeus 4.671,7–673,11 = L&S 57G.

13. All translations from the Ancient Greek and Latin are our own.

14. Perhaps the term "moral holiday" is misleading and thus objectionable to both Stoics and pragmatists on the face of it. It implies a certain wantonness that neither philosophy advocates. But what we understand as the core idea of this principle is that there is time spent actively trying to better the world and oneself, and that there will also inevitably be time spent on preserving and maintaining oneself.

It makes sense, then, that Stoicism seems most successful not among populations who are free to do as they please whenever they please, but rather among populations with regimented lives, like the military and, famously, prisoners of war like James Stockdale (see endnote 19).

15. Stobaeus 2.79,18–80,13; 82,20–1 = L&S 58C.

16. Stobaeus 2.84,18–85,11 = SVF 3.128 = L&S 58E.

17. This sense of "knowing when to say when" seems to be what Lachs finds most attractive about Stoic ethical practice.

18. Much of the scholarship on Stoicism does not concern itself with the practices of *askesis* per se; rather, it focuses on the texts describing the practices or specific theories addressed by certain practices. The following works discuss these practices at length: Hijmans, Hadot, and Foucault.

19. For example, many sections of the *Meditations* are quotations from other authors copied down, as if for a mantra. A case in point is 4.41: "'You are a bit of soul holding up a corpse,' as Epictetus used to say" (authors' translations).

20. The real-life modern example of the efficacy of this practice is Admiral James Stockdale, who relates his experiences as a POW in the Vietnam War, and his use of Epictetus to survive captivity. Stockdale 177–84.

21. See Hadot 35–53, on Marcus's practices, and their rhetorical features, in particular.

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