

Stoicism, Enkrasia, and Happiness

by
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Cicero wrote in *Tusculan Disputations* that we are born with the seeds of virtue which, if allowed to ripen, would lead us to a happy life (Cicero 227). However, as things are, we find ourselves in a world of “iniquity among a medley of wrong beliefs” that inhibits the ripening process (Cicero 227). The Stoics believed many of these iniquities and wrongful beliefs are the principal sources of unhappiness. In America today, some of these sources of unhappiness are manifest in the pursuits of wealth, prestige, power, and sensual pleasure, as well as the fear of unknown things, such as death. This thesis offers a solution to achieve greater happiness for those desiring to control their own destinies through reason, self-reliance, and will-power. This solution is to adopt and practice Stoic philosophy. This thesis first describes the ancient philosophy of Stoicism whose principle objective is to

bring human felicity. Stoicism's fundamental themes could be that the world is as we make it, we should live in accordance with nature, and we can achieve happiness through virtue. The Stoics also believed that we are born with the ability to act enkratically, which enables us to practice Stoic salubrious beliefs. Through reason and other factors, such as intuition, imagination, effort, the ability to learn, experience, skill, and habit, this thesis argues that we can do what we will. With Stoic philosophy and enkrasia, this thesis concludes that many people can enhance their level of happiness.

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STOICISM, ENKRASIA, AND HAPPINESS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about human happiness. Some may ask what a 59-year-old, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, upper-class, well-off, businessman, capitalist, male like me knows about happiness. They may think I have lived a privileged life with opportunities, education, connections, and money. What could I possibly know that could help a pregnant young teenager enduring shame, a black person struggling with white discrimination, a poor person who is hungry, an elderly person trying to live on Social Security, a sick person dying from cancer, or those who are just struggling with fortune that has dealt them a bad hand?

During my life I have observed, what appears to me, many of the sources of unhappiness. There seem to be certain ways of living and thinking that lead to unhappiness. These ways are paradigms for unhappiness that can cause people to pursue false gods. Some struggle trying to make reality adjust to them rather than adjusting themselves to reality; some invest their happiness in capricious passion that is never fully satisfied; others spend their lives desiring that which they don't need; and many live their lives in ignorance, unaware of why they do what they do, and fearing that which they do not understand. In many ways, I was one of them, and I was unhappy.

In my early adulthood I knew I was unhappy, but I did not know what to do about it. Fortunately, in my early education, I was exposed to philosophy, so I turned to her for answers. What I found was a way to penetrate these paradigmatic sources of unhappiness. One ancient philosophy, Stoicism, was particularly helpful. It is a philosophy whose

principle objective is to bring human happiness, or tranquility of the mind. So, I studied Stoicism.

Stoicism was a major philosophy, and way of life, for some ancient cultures like Greek and Roman that today only exist in books. It is a philosophy that was intended to help those facing death, the poor, those whose lives have been ruined, and those who are suffering (Seneca 98). It meant to do this by showing people truth (Seneca 98). Perhaps its first and most fundamental truth is that the world is as we make it. Much unhappiness occurs because many follow the opinions of the world, rather than using their mental capabilities to make a better world for themselves. Its second fundamental truth could be that we have the ability to make our worlds better through our own will-power. The Stoics believed that nature has given us the tools to achieve happiness, and all we have to do is use them. Perhaps most importantly, these tools are available to all. They are accessible to people of all colors, genders, social positions, levels of wealth, education, age, and degrees of health.

I studied Stoicism and it brought me happiness, and I am assuming it can do the same for others. Certainly, my sources of unhappiness may not have been as profound as others, but my angst was as real. It is because we all feel the pangs of unhappiness that I think a 59-year-old white male like myself, who learned something useful from Stoic philosophy, may have something meaningful to say about happiness.

I think the ability to make ourselves happy is an art and not a science. It is like a craft that must be learned and practiced. I believe, if we can improve the craft of doing Stoic philosophy, many can achieve greater happiness. This craft, and its ability to bring happiness, is the topic of

this thesis.

1.1 What are the problems?

In order to achieve personal happiness through Stoicism two problems must be addressed and resolved. The first problem is whether Stoic philosophy can bring happiness. The Stoics believed the purpose of philosophy is to bring human happiness. Seneca, for example, said philosophy “holds out to humanity . . . help [for] the unhappy” (Seneca 98). The entire subject matter of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* is what constitutes the minimum essentials of a happy life (MacKendrick 171). The question is, does it? This question, and the problem it precipitates, will be examined from both a philosophic and historic perspective.

The second problem is if Stoic philosophy can bring happiness, can Stoic philosophy be done? Can we act enkratically, or use our strength of will, to act on the tenets of Stoic philosophy that purport to bring happiness? Can we, for example, use our will to master our passions and consequent desires? This is an important question because Stoicism died out in the second century, in part, because it seems many people simply could not do it.

This second problem precipitated a third issue, which is what are the limits to reason? Specifically, can reason cause us to act our will as the Stoics claim? If it cannot, as some skeptics argue, then what role, if any, does reason play in our actions?

1.2 Why do these problems matter?

These problems matter because it seems certain most humans desire happiness. Most

people prefer a state of tranquility and felicity, rather than one that is disturbed and filled with angst. It seems that people naturally seek happiness. I think unhappiness is a profound problem too often overlooked by contemporary philosophers. What is the purpose of philosophy? It has many purposes, but I think the Stoics were right, its most important function is to bring human felicity.

I believe much unhappiness derives from wrongful, self-defeating beliefs and attitudes. Philosophy is uniquely suited to penetrate these beliefs and attitudes, expose their weaknesses, and replace them with salubrious ones. In order to achieve this there are two principle solutions this thesis intends to pursue.

1.3 What are the solutions?

One solution to the problem is to do Stoicism, which entails two solutions. The first is to know Stoic philosophy, and in particular Seneca's Stoic philosophy. This solution will be examined in Chapter Three. The second solution is to act enkratically, and in particular to master our passions and major desires. This solution will be examined in Chapters Four and Five.

1.4 Assumptions

This thesis will assume certain significant matters. The first is that humans have some compatibilist form of freedom to choose. Further, I will assume in this thesis that the will is closely tied to our beliefs and desires. The Stoics believed in both determinism and free action. They believed that we have to distinguish between what is in our power and what is not – that is what we are free to do. They also believed that we could, by adopting Stoic prescriptions for happiness, causally affect our own decision making process for the better. Both of these insights are best captured by compatibilist theories like Daniel Dennett's. Such theories are determinist because they hold that the will is always completely determined by a chain of causes; while holding that we are free insofar as we can do what we wish without outside interference. Such theories thus make it clear that our actions are limited, like a dog on a leash, but we are free within the length of that leash. We can act on ourselves to change our own decision making process. Thus, such theories are also more compatible with what the classical Stoics say about freedom and determinism than any other of the alternatives available to contemporary philosophers.

My second assumption addresses the question whether Stoicism is a moral theory. Is Stoic philosophy simply prudential advice or is it other-regarding? The theme of this thesis is how an individual can bring themselves happiness, and prudential advice alone may be sufficient to achieve this. Thus, the question whether Stoicism is a moral theory appears to be beyond the scope of this thesis.

This said, I will assume in this thesis that Stoicism is a moral theory. I have numerous

reasons for asserting this, some of which are as follows. Certain ideas of Stoicism are other-regarding and do impart duty. The Stoics taught, for example, that all men are “citizens of the world” (Green, 57). Seneca said that all men are equal, all men are brothers, and that we should engage in upright dealing (Seneca 15, 16, 19). Late Stoic Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius was undoubtedly the greatest exponent of Stoicism’s other-regarding philosophy. He said we are dedicated to the common good, to focus on what is in our power, including kindness, that we are born for community, that we are rational and here to serve each other, that we are born to serve the good of the community, and to benefit fellow citizens (Aurelius 6, 36, 41, 66, 112). Perhaps his most striking comment on this point is “[the] quality of a rational soul is love of neighbor” (Aurelius 105).

Further, from these general principles, Stoicism derived certain codes of conduct on how to treat others. Epictetus said, for example, that “what belongs to others do not covet,” Diogenes Laërtius said “The wise man will . . . honor his parents and brothers” and the ruler should “do no harm,” and Marcus Aurelius said “never be a tyrant . . . to any man” (Epictetus 55; Inwood 121, 122; Aurelius 29).

Finally, Stoicism emphasized virtue, which requires individuals to restrain their passions and desires. This, for example, prescribed fair treatment of others and proscribed harming others.

1.5 Disclaimer

Some matters concerning Stoicism should be clarified. First, this thesis focuses on the Stoic philosopher Seneca primarily because his philosophy is, in my opinion, relevant to many Americans today. Seneca, however, is not a contemporary American. He lived in a very different age that included slavery, the subjugation of women, and murderous gladiatorial games. Seneca, I suspect, would not approve of a modern liberal democracy. His importance resides in the relevance of some of his philosophy, and particularly that which deals with human happiness and America today.

Second, Stoicism is by no means a perfect philosophy. It has many flaws. It contains contradictions, some wrongful ideas, and can be somewhat detached and cold. It is not my intention to proselytize Stoicism, but rather to impart what I consider some of its themes that may bring happiness.

Third, it is sometimes difficult to discern exactly what some ancient authors intended. Some writings, such as those of the Sophist Gorgias, exist in fragments, and in other cases the original author's philosophy is known primarily through intermediaries. Zeno of Citium's philosophy, for example, is principally known through the writings of Diogenes Laertius, and Epictetus' philosophy from the historian Arrian. I tried to present accurate portrayals of these authors' beliefs. I did this by quoting the original source whenever possible and by using commonly accepted authoritative sources. I also endeavored to caution the reader when any questionable sources or opinions were used.

Fourth, one significant source of akrasia, and inhibitor of enkrasia, not addressed in this thesis is self-deception. Clearly, if we deceive ourselves, we blind our ability to both know and do what is moral. I do discuss in Chapter Four Alfred Mele's five reasons for acting akratically rationally, which could be sources of self-deception. Other causes of self-deception were described by Samuel Johnson in his 1750 *Article 28* on self-deception in *The Rambler*. These include inflating our virtues, viewing one personal lapse as insignificant, and thinking nobody is perfect. I might add pride to this list of causes of self-deception. I acknowledge that self-deception can inhibit our ability to act enkratically, but do not address it directly because the topic is simply too large and involved to adequately discuss in this thesis.

Fifth, this is a Masters of Interdisciplinary Studies thesis that integrates history, philosophical ethics, and topics in philosophical metaphysics. This process problematically involved selecting theories from each discipline that occurred within a fabric of competing ideas, arguments, and interpretations of events, over time. There exists the risk that these ideas and events can be misinterpreted when used out of their historical contexts. Put another way, "cherry-picking" philosophic theories and interpretations of historic events out of context may lead to wrongful conclusions. I believe this is a potential limitation of any MAIS thesis. My objective in this thesis was to use those parts of history and philosophy that were relevant to my thesis topic, and to portray and use them accurately. However, I acknowledge the problems of achieving this objective in this multi-disciplinary thesis.

Finally, Stoicism's prescriptions for happiness are not always mine. I do find some of

their solutions extreme and unrealistic. To totally extirpate the passion of love or remain completely indifferent to your child's death may bring relief, but they fail, in my opinion, to accommodate the exigencies of human feelings.

1.6 Terms defined

There are three important terms used throughout this thesis that require definition, which are happiness, virtue, and enkrasia.

1.6.1 Happiness

The term happiness is unusually subjective. Happiness, and how to achieve it, means many things to many people. Some think it is an active state of mind while others consider it a byproduct. Some believe happiness is derived from beliefs we hold, such as a person of faith, and others from physical pleasure, such as a sensualist. The words used to describe it are similarly disparate. It is commonly described as pleasure, tranquility, felicity equanimity, or simply an undisturbed state of mind. It is also frequently defined in a negative sense such as freedom from anxiety, pain, ennui, agitation, or troubles.

Defining happiness and how to achieve it was of particular interest to the ancient Greek and Roman philosophic schools because they believed it was the end of human life, and the purpose of philosophy was to help people achieve it. Very generally, the Platonists referred to it as a harmony of the soul that is free from internal strife. The Aristotelians called it eudaimonia, or happiness obtained from achieving one's potential for a fully rational life.

The Cyreanic Hedonists and Epicureans described it as the presence of pleasure and absence of pain, and the Skeptics thought happiness was a trouble free mind that comes from the suspension of belief.

Perhaps the origins of the Stoics' definition of happiness can be found in the distinction between two ancient Greek words; *ataraxia* and *apatheia*. *Ataraxia* was a word for happiness used primarily by the Epicureans that means tranquility, or imperturbability of mind and body. In contrast, *apatheia*, which means "not suffering," or "pain" in Greek, was used principally by the Stoics to mean indifference to pleasure and pain, a state of tranquility, or peace of mind and body resulting from the emotional detachment from the everyday world (Angeles 14, 19).

The Stoics defined happiness as tranquility, peace, contentment, calmness of mind, peace of mind, and well-being. It is the state of not being disturbed, troubled, worried, or driven by insatiable desires. This definition of happiness, in part, derives from two of Cicero's minimum essentials for a happy life described in his *Tusculan Disputations*. These conditions are to learn not to be a prey to anxiety, and to acquire the ability to control the "sensations of excessive joy, fear and desire" (MacKendrick 171). Happiness is used in this thesis in this Stoic sense.

It is important to point out that this Stoic definition of happiness may not apply to everyone. For example, happiness may be an unachievable state for some with chemical or psychic problems. It may also not be of use to those who invest their happiness in faith alone, or who suffer from guilt. Rather, it is a definition that may appeal, and be the most

useful to, independent and self-directed individuals who prefer the use of reason to achieve happiness. A kind of person who prefers to retain control of their own destiny, including their happiness, and not hand it over to matters beyond their control.

One other of Cicero's minimum essential conditions for happiness is virtue (MacKendrick 171). The definition of virtue as it is used in this thesis will be discussed next.

1.6.2 Virtue

Virtue was a central concept for most of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophic schools, and each defined it differently to some degree. For the Stoics, virtue principally meant right knowledge (between good and evil), self-control, fortitude, and justice. It is complete accordance with nature as a rational being (Inwood 681). Some resulting characteristics that derive from this definition of virtue include simplicity, integrity, dignity, hard work, self-denial, contentment, frugality, kindness, independence, discretion, magnanimity, bravery, loyalty, modesty, restraint, thrift, mercy, and self-control (Aurelius 36; Seneca 101).

Cicero further defined virtue as the chief end that derives from the exercise of choice between good and evil (MacKendrick 167). He, like many of the ancient philosophers, believed that virtue is "self-sufficient for the happy life" (MacKendrick 175). This thesis uses virtue in the Stoic sense of the word. The significance of this way of defining virtue will become conspicuous in Chapter Three because Stoic virtue, in part, comes about through the will. Seneca made this point when he wrote that "nature does not give a man virtue,"

rather it comes only with “character which has been thoroughly schooled and trained . . . by unremitting practice” (Seneca 176).

1.6.3 Enkrasia

The Greek word *akrasia* means the condition of character where we know what should be done, but do not do it. It means a lack of will power. *Enkrasia* is the opposite, or the ability to do what we believe should be done. I use the term *enkrasia* often because much of this thesis deals with this ability. The concept of *enkrasia* has two components, which are discerning what you believe you should do and the ability to do it. In contrast, *akrasia* is not doing what you believe you should do.

Because this thesis is about happiness, *enkrasia* as a cause should be distinguished from its desired effect, or consequence, which is happiness. The causes of *enkratic* action are the beliefs we hold and desires we experience that, if fulfilled, we think will bring us happiness. This provides the reasons why we would want to do them in the first place. The consequence then, in this thesis, is happiness.

This thesis argues that some people can become happier doing Stoic philosophy. Chapter Three is devoted to explaining why Stoic philosophy can bring happiness, which is intended to fulfill the first sense of *enkrasia*, or discerning what should be done. What remains is the second sense of *enkrasia*, or the ability to do it. This could also be called will power, continence, or the ability to will ourselves to action. *Enkrasia* is used in this thesis principally in this second sense. Put another way, *enkrasia* is used continently in the sense

of “can do” in “if we ‘can do’ Stoic philosophy we may become happier.”

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this thesis has two broad categories. The first category consists of the extant literature on Stoic ethics, and particularly their philosophies that pertain to human happiness. There are two sections within this category. In Section One are the original and principal Stoic writings. These are the original, complete, and unedited Stoic writings such as the *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. The second section is secondary sources that contain extensive original Stoic writings such as Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson's *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, extensive quotes from Stoic philosophers such as Anthony Everitt's *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician*, and writings on Stoicism. There is considerable secondary source literature involving authors commenting, criticizing, interpreting, and evaluating Stoic philosophy such as Wright J. Duff's *The Literary History of Rome* and Martha A. Nussbaum's *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Most of these sources contained valuable information on the history of Stoicism.

The second category of literature deals broadly with the metaphysical philosophy on will, enkratic action, and the limits to reason. Harry G. Frankfurt's *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person* and Alfred R. Mele's *Irrationality: An essay on akrasia, self-deception, and self-control*, for example, will be referenced often in this thesis.

2.1 Literature on Stoic ethics

Stoicism is an ancient philosophy with numerous authors. Perhaps the best way to view Stoic literature is as a corpus consisting of many philosophers expressing similar evolving and maturing themes. Four original Stoic writings particularly expounded the matured Stoic philosophy. These writings were by Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

2.1.1 Original Stoic literature

Paul MacKendrick and Herbert M. Howe's *Classics in Translation Volume II*, had extensive passages from Cicero's *On the Chief End of Man*, *Tusculan Disputations*, *On the Good Life*, and *On the Nature of the Gods*. These provided many of Cicero's views on ethics and human happiness. It also contained Seneca's drama *Medea*. Loeb's Classical Library book *Cicero* provided a complete translation of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic* is one of the best sources of Stoic philosophy. I chose to focus on Seneca in this thesis as the chief spokesman for Stoic philosophy for four reasons. He explains Stoic philosophy clearly, he represents the matured Stoic philosophy from the third Stoa, he presents Stoicism in a practical and understandable way, and much of what he says is relevant to America today. His letters are to young Lucilius giving advice, much of which presents the Stoic's solutions for the theme of this thesis, which is happiness. Some themes of particular importance are Seneca's views that all men are brothers, we should be ruled by reason, do not place a high value on things outside our control, and live in accordance with nature (e.g., live simply). He also advises Lucilius to avoid ambition, luxury, and avarice because they diminish happiness. Two critical Stoic themes central to this thesis Seneca expounds are

that things are as we make them, and pleasures and passions should be subordinate to the mind. Because Seneca is the central Stoic philosopher for this thesis I endeavored to read most of his works.

Seneca's corpus consists of three general works, *Letters from a Stoic* (also called *Letters to Lucilius*), *Natural Questions*, and the *Apocolocyntosis* (or "pumpkinification" of Emperor Claudius); twelve dialogues, three of which are the consolations *To Marcia*, *To Helvia*, and *To Polybius*. The other dialogues are *On Anger*, *On the Happy Life*, *On the Constancy of the Sage*, *On Tranquility*, *On Leisure*, *On the Shortness of Life*, *On Providence*, *On Clemency*, and *On Benefits*; and nine tragedies and a play. The tragedies are *Hercules Mad*, *Trojan Women*, *Phoenician Women*, *Medea*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, *Agamemnon*, *Thyestes*, *Hercules on Oetaea*, and the play is *Octavia*. These works were found in numerous sources including Seneca's *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé's *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, Brad Inwood and Lloyd G Gerson's *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, Samuel Dill's *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, and Moses Hadas' *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca: Essays and Letters*. These are sources that contain extensive original Stoic writings which will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Even though Stoic philosopher Epictetus' student Arrian wrote *The Discourses*, it is the essential source of his Stoic philosophy. Epictetus could be described as the "Stoics' Stoic" because he examines Stoic issues in such depth. His writings were particularly helpful in justifying and elucidating certain Stoic themes that relate to the subject of this thesis, such as the need to eliminate desire and to remain indifferent to that which is not in our control.

On judgments, for example, he says “of . . . judgments we ourselves, and not externals, are the masters,” and later explains the significance of this Stoic idea with

What did [Odysseus] trust in? Not reputation, or riches, or office, but in his own strength, that is to say, in his judgments about what things are in our power, and what are not. For these judgments alone are what make us free. (Epictetus 32, 223)

Here Epictetus connects judgment with freedom, which launched a critical part of my thesis. It sounds intuitively true that exercising judgments within our sphere of choice is freedom, but what if we are incapable of enkratic action? Further, if we can act enkratically, can we do it through the exercise of our reason? The answers to these questions have much to do with human happiness, and will be addressed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis under enkrasia and the limits to reason. Epictetus’ other major work is the *Enchiridion*, which is a condensed version of *The Discourses* consisting of 52 points summarizing Epictetus’ philosophy. I relied primarily on *The Discourses* due to its comprehensiveness.

Marcus Aurelius’ principal work is the *Meditations*, which are his personal meditations on Stoic philosophy written in the form of a diary. His writing is an analysis in conversational style of various Stoic topics, and his views and conclusions are very representative of the Stoic canon. Two strengths of his work are, first, he has a unique perspective on Stoicism because he was an emperor. Much of the advice seems to come from the perspective of one experienced and in command. Second, because he is writing in diary form, his comments have a certain honesty about them. He draws fewer conclusions than the other principle Stoics, but sometimes offers better explanations of Stoic principles.

I have relied on the literature of these four principle Stoic philosophers, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, to summarize Stoic philosophy. In order to reference their writing in this thesis I indexed their significant comments under about 370 headings. It is interesting to note that the majority of their views are on anger, community, death, desire, externals, fate, fear, freedom, happiness, judgment, life, nature, philosophy, pleasure, possessions, and Stoicism.

One other original source was Plato's *Dialogues*, and particularly the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, *Books VII, VIII, and IX*. With Plato's *Collected Dialogues* I was able to compare Plato's concept of virtue, desire, and happiness with the Stoics.

2.1.2 Secondary literature on Stoicism

Secondary sources on Stoicism were indispensable for a number of reasons. They, for example, contained much of the literature from the first Stoa, which represents Stoicism's nascent stage that has been lost or exists in fragments. Many of these sources of original Stoic writings are found as reproductions, quotations, and fragments of the original authors' work. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé's *Seneca; Moral and Political Essays* contained many of Seneca's dialogues including *On Anger*, *on Mercy*, *On the Private Life*, and *On Favors*. Moses Hadas' *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca* reproduced Seneca's dialogues *On Providence*, *On the Shortness of Life*, *On Tranquility of Mind*, *Consolation to Helvia*, and *On Clemency*. Previously mentioned Paul MacKendrick and Herbert M. Howe's *Classics in Translation Volume II* and Brad Inwood and Lloyd G Gerson's *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* contained many valuable original writings from the early and middle Stoas, and

lesser known writers from the third Stoa. The latter source included fragments from early Stoa philosophers like Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, as well as original writings on the Stoics from Diogenes Laërtius, Eusebius, and Stobaeus (on Zeno of Citium). It also contained some writings on the little known third Stoa Stoic Musonius Rufus. Inwood and Gerson's book also reproduced original ancient criticisms of Stoicism, particularly from the Sceptics. Moses Hadas was the editor of another useful book, *Essential Works of Stoicism* that contained important original Stoic writings, including historian Diogenes Laërtius' *Life of Zeno* and Stoic philosopher Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*.

There are many Stoic authors, but I believe the principle ones are Chrysippus of Soli from the first Stoa, Cicero from the second, and Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius from the third. Even though Zeno of Citium was the founder of Stoicism, none of his work survives (Cooper 313). Many consider Chrysippus' voluminous writings the source of "orthodox" Stoic philosophy even though they exist today in fragments, reports, and quotations (Cooper 311). Cicero was a late convert to Stoicism, but his later writings express the Stoic philosophy eloquently. Without a doubt, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius best represent Stoicism as a matured, integrated, and consistent philosophy. I use these authors and their works in this thesis as the principle spokesmen for Stoic philosophy.

Much secondary Stoic literature consists of books written on Stoicism that contain considerable reproductions and quotations from original Stoic philosophers. Anthony Everitt's *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician* is a biography of Cicero's life and philosophy. It was particularly helpful in explaining why Cicero converted to

Stoicism. W. K. C. Guthrie's *The Sophists* offered important background information on how the Sophists influenced the Stoics. Sophist Gorgias' influence on the founder of the Cynic school, Antisthenes, and his influence in turn on Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, helped put Stoicism in historical context and explain the early development of Stoic philosophy.

Some secondary sources on Stoicism were germane to my thesis' topic because they put Stoicism in a historical context. These critical analyses of Stoicism usually contained fewer direct quotations. Peter Green's *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* helped explain the attraction of Stoicism during the Greek Hellenistic Age. The chapter *Stoic Ethics* in the *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* by Brad Inwood and Pierluigi Donini was particularly helpful in explaining the nature and evolution of Stoic virtue. Samuel Dill's *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* was helpful in explaining how Plato's Academy influenced Stoicism in the second Stoa and why Stoicism faded from history. W. E. H. Lecky's *History of European Morals* provided reasons for Stoicism's failure. J. Wright Duff's *The Literary History of Rome* contained a good biography of Seneca and summarized many of his major works. Duff also offered useful explanations of Stoicism's separate periods, and, like Peter Green, offered explanations for Stoicism's appeal. Specifically, he said it offered "genuine consolation amidst desperate afflictions," and steeled men, which allowed them to overcome "dangerous experience in dark times" (Duff, 232, 233). Sir William Tarn, in G. T. Griffith's *Hellenistic Civilization*, elucidated Stoic principles and provided many insightful historic perspectives on Stoic philosophy. For example, Tarn said Stoic philosophy did not aim at truth, but rather the satisfaction of

practical needs (Tarn 327). Among these needs was happiness, so an aim of Stoicism was “happiness of the individual; and what mattered was conduct” (Tarn 327, 328).

Although Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* is about the mistaken shift away from Aristotelian ethics during the Enlightenment, it contained useful ideas about the limits of reason in desire, which I discuss in the second half of this thesis, and the importance of nature, custom, and habit, in ethics (MacIntyre 54). Other secondary reference sources on Stoic history include Albin Lesky’s *A History of Greek Literature*, and Gary B. Ferngren and Darrell W. Amundsen’s *Virtue and Health/Medicine in Pre-Christian Antiquity* in Earl E. Shelp’s *Virtue and Medicine: explorations in the character of medicine*.

Two very helpful books that addressed numerous parts of my thesis were Martha A. Nussbaum’s *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, and William B. Irvine’s contemporary book *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want*. Nussbaum’s Chapters Nine through Twelve, which focused on Stoicism, were particularly helpful because they expanded on the relationship between Stoic philosophy and desire and happiness. Irvine’s book illuminated the Stoic philosophy on desire and triggered a central question in this thesis: can major desires be mastered?

2.2 Metaphysical literature

My thesis, that knowing Stoic philosophy can bring happiness, carries little significance if we cannot use our will, or act enkratically, to implement it. Further, in evaluating our ability to act enkratically, the role of reason becomes a crucial question. Consequently, the

metaphysical literature is divided into two parts: that which deals with enkrasia and that which addresses the limits to reason. First, however, I will discuss the topic of free will and determinism in this thesis.

The philosophic issue over free will and determinism is mentioned in the introduction to this thesis and in chapter three in the description of Stoicism's belief in fate. This thesis assumes human's have some form of freedom to choose. This assumption was made based on the literature surrounding the free will versus determinism debate. This literature included Gary Watson's *Free Will*, Derk Pereboom's *Living Without Free Will*, A. J. Ayer's *Philosophic Essays*, and Daniel C. Dennett's *Freedom Evolves*.

In my discussion in Chapter Three about the Stoics' belief in fate, I relied mostly on original Stoic writings, and in particular Chrysippus, in order to present the Stoic position. In my evaluation of their belief I used Richard Sorabji's *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory*, and A. A. Long's *Problems in Stoicism*. Sorabji provided important ancient background information on the debate. He claims the Stoics did connect necessity and cause, a position from which they were unable to extricate themselves (Sorabji xi, xiii). A. A. Long endeavored to defend the Stoics and argued that the Stoics are not strict determinists and that their philosophy does not exclude "voluntary human action" (Long 174, 178).

2.2.1 *Enkrasia*

Because the ability to act enkratically presupposes some form of will, at the beginning of

my discussion on enkrasia I explained that I will use the folk psychology theory of the mind. Virtually all of my sources use the concept of the will in terms of the language of folk psychology. One source that was particularly helpful in explaining and evaluating this theory was Ian Ravenscroft's "Folk Psychology as a theory" from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

On the Stoics' position on enkrasia and reason, I relied primarily on the Stoic literature already mentioned. Particularly useful sources representative of the Stoic position that we can do what we will were Epictetus' writings, Seneca's *On Anger*, Gaius Musonius Rufus' fragment *Whether habituation or reasoning is more effective*, and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Zeno* and previously mentioned Brad Inwood and Pierluigi Donini's article *Stoic Ethics* were particularly helpful in clarifying the Stoic's stance.

William Irvine's *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want* and personal e-mail correspondence were the principle sources of the skeptics' position on enkratic action.

2.2.2 Limits to reason

The Stoics' firm belief that reason is sufficient to act enkratically was derived from the previously mentioned Stoic corpus. Their position was delineated primarily from the original writings of Seneca, Epictetus and Cicero.

The skeptics' argument that reason is limited was developed from David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Hume's position was supported by Alfred R. Mele's *Irrationality: An essay on akrasia, self-deception*,

and self-control. Hume's position was further supported with Harry Frankfurt's *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*. Frankfurt considers himself a libertarian who believes what makes us human is the ability to have certain desires, or desires of the second order, which make us free agents. Also, Keith Lehrer's *Theory of Knowledge* was useful in evaluating the limits to reason.

I drew from a number of sources in my discussion on the limits to reason. Particularly useful were Plato's *Republic, Books VII, VIII, and IX*, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Both were used to support the importance of habit in enkratic action. Ian Tattersall's *Becoming Human, Evolution and Human's Uniqueness* was a particularly useful source supporting the significance of intuition in enkrasia. This relationship was further supported from various observations made by Antonio Damasio in his book *Descartes' Error*. Finally, I consulted John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to clarify the source of happiness as well as its relationship to reason.

2.3 Reference sources

Three reference sources frequently used for this thesis were Peter A. Angeles' *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Simon Blackburn's *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, and Antony Flew's *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. I often consulted them to understand numerous philosophic terms, phrases, and concepts. William S. Sahakian's *History of Philosophy* helped me sort out the different ancient schools of philosophy and their moral theories, particularly in the chapter *The Problems of Man*. I would like to mention Hanna Arendt's *The Human Condition* that provided a philosophical backdrop of Greek society, and particularly the nature of the polis.

Various authors cite the loss of the ancient Greek polis as a reason for the rise of Stoicism in the late fourth century BC. Finally, Lee G. Boule, Meredith W. Michaels, and Robert C.

Solomon's *20 Questions: an introduction to philosophy* was helpful clarifying Stoicism's status as a moral philosophy.

CHAPTER THREE: STOICISM

3.1 Stoicism and Stoic Philosophy

In this chapter I intend to describe and analyze the philosophy of Stoicism in order to answer my first problem, which is whether Stoicism can bring some people happiness. My objective is to show that it can. There were many philosophic schools competing during the age of Stoicism, all of which have their strengths and weaknesses. Although it is not the purpose of this thesis to show that Stoic philosophy was the best of the competitors at bringing about human felicity, I believe this analysis will demonstrate that it was very good at it, which is one of the reasons for its initial appeal, eventual ascendancy in Greece, and adoption by the Romans.

This analysis will be divided into two parts. The first deals with the history of Stoicism and the second with the philosophy of Stoicism, and in particular Seneca's Stoic philosophy.

3.1.1 History of Stoicism

The history of Stoicism weaves an evolving tapestry around certain core principles of one ancient school's philosophy. The thread of this philosophy began around 500 BC in Greece and ended around 200 AD in Rome. I intend to follow this thread in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of Stoic philosophy. My course will be first to describe

Stoicism's origins, its parent philosophic schools, and then to follow the Stoic thread through its three principal periods. These periods were the First, Second, and Third Stoas (which are sometimes referred to as the Old, Middle, and Roman Stoas). Along the way I hope to provide the reasons for both Stoicism's appeal and consequent ascendancy, and for its demise.

3.1.1.1 Stoic thread through history

The historic thread of Stoicism began with the philosopher Gorgias (c. 490 BC-c. 385/381 BC) the Sophist, and Socrates (b. 470, d. 399 BC) at the beginning of the fifth century BC, and ends with Emperor Marcus Aurelius in the late second century, a period of about 700 years. This thread explains the evolution of Stoic philosophy from Socrates and Gorgias to Antisthenes, who founded the Cynic School. Cynicism, in turn, gave rise to formalized Stoicism, which began to emerge at the end of the Peloponnesian War (404 BC), which ushered in the First, Middle, and Later Stoas. This "Stoic thread" is depicted in Appendix A *The Stoic Era Thread*.

In many ways Socrates and Gorgias were the forerunners of Stoicism. Socrates, Cicero said, brought philosophy down from the heavens because he was interested in how we ought to live, which entailed examining life in order to make it worth living. Many of Socrates' teachings influenced Stoicism, but it was his concept of *arête* that had the greatest impact. *Arête* was the Greek word for virtue and it generally meant excellence, good behavior, good conduct, and what it means to be a moral person. Socrates believed that the good ought to be defined in terms of usefulness, and that among the most useful things was

knowledge. Knowledge, the basis for right action, leads to virtue, or right conduct, which results in happiness (which Aristotle called *eudaemonia*), and a contented and satisfied life. Like the Stoics, Socrates believed that the soul can perceive by intuition what is good. He believed all people have the knowledge to be noble and good and that virtue may be taught to achieve that good.

The Stoics, on the other hand, believed humans are knowingly and willingly capable of committing evil acts. Epictetus wrote, “throw a bit of land between yourself and your son, and you will see that he will quickly wish you dead and buried” (Epictetus 133). According to the Stoics, we are strongly attached to our self-interests, and self-interest drives many of our actions (Epictetus 134). This altered view of human nature resulted in a retooled Stoic definition of Socratic *arête*.

One consequence of this re-tailoring was that we must use our will to be good, which requires self-control. For this reason, the Stoics emphasized one component of Socratic virtue called *sôphrosunê*, which means temperance, self-control, to restrain impulse, and the rational control of our desires and emotions (Plato 99; Angeles 267). Edith Hamilton in her preface to Plato’s *Charmidies* said that, for the Greeks, *sôphrosunê* was “an ideal second to none in importance” (Plato 99). Plato discussed the nature and importance of *sôphrosunê* in his dialogue *Charmidies* and a large part of the *Gorgias* is devoted to Socrates’ effort to persuade Callicles that happiness does not come from “[satisfying] every appetite,” but rather by tempering them (Plato 274).

Later Stoic Cicero, whose *Tusculan Disputations* often refers to temperance, was perhaps

most responsible for introducing the concept of *sōphrosunē* into Stoicism. He wrote in *Book IV* of the *Tusculan Disputations* that happiness depends on the control of the sensations of excessive joy, fear, and desire, and that “virtue is self-sufficient for the happy life” (Cicero 175; MacKendrick 171). He wrote that viciousness, which is virtue’s opposite, leads to disorders of the soul because it is at “variance with temperance and self-control” (Cicero 363, 365). For Cicero, viciousness is a trait “bitterly hostile to peace of mind and peaceful life” (Cicero, 363, 365).

Later Stoics expanded on this self-control aspect of virtue. A central theme, for example, of Seneca’s dialogue *On Anger* is the need to control anger, and in *Letters from a Stoic* Seneca wrote that “people who know no self-restraint lead stormy and disordered lives . . . never able to relax” (Seneca 196). Indeed, A. A. Long made the point in *The Socratic Legacy* that the Socratic lifestyle consisted of “[maximal] self-sufficien[cy], [where one is] in control of his or her own life” (Long 623).

This influence will be discussed further in the Fifteen Tenets of Stoicism as Tenet Ten, which is that happiness and the good life come from virtue. The philosopher Antisthenes was a pupil of Socrates.

Gorgias of Leontini (c. 490-c. 385/381), who lived over 100 years, was a Sophist and teacher of rhetoric. Only fragments of his work remain and there exists some doubts about his teachings. However, historian W. K. C. Guthrie described him as having a certain skeptical and nihilistic philosophy, described in his book *On Nature* that influenced future philosophers (Guthrie 269). As a Sophist, Gorgias championed *nomos* (what is right or

believed in) over *physis* (nature or reality) (Guthrie 55). For example, he believed that “might makes right,” but *nomos* gives each individual the right to throw off repressive laws. He also believed all men are born equal and free. Both views entail personal independence and individualism, ideas that will reappear in Stoicism. Antisthenes was also a student of Gorgias.

The philosopher Antisthenes of Athens (445-365 BC) was a crucial link in the Stoic thread. He studied under both Gorgias and Socrates, but was particularly drawn to “following in the true spirit of” Socrates (Sahakian 34). Antisthenes conflated certain philosophies of Gorgias and Socrates, and in doing so founded the school of Cynicism. He believed that happiness was dependent on moral virtue and that virtue could be instilled through teaching. In teaching people how to be virtuous, he demarcated two categories of objects: first, external goods that embrace personal property, sensual pleasure, and other luxuries: and, second, internal goods, including the truth and knowledge of the soul. He advocated great restraint on the part of an individual tempted to take pleasure in external goods, and he encouraged his students to accept the burden of physical and mental pain that accompanies the soul's search for its own inner health. Here we see the genesis of many Stoic principles including the importance of virtue, the need to focus on that which is within one's sphere of choice, and to remain indifferent to that which lies outside it.

Antisthenes also considered virtue, which entailed a life of poverty, self-sufficiency, and the suppression of desires, to be the sole good. Clearly, this emphasis on self-sufficiency and the suppression of desires became key Stoic principles. Self-sufficiency presupposes

individuality, which is derived from virtue and results in contentment. Antisthenes had much to say on the suppression of desire. He believed that desire makes us slaves in bondage, and that true salvation comes from the reduction of our needs. Virtue is liberation from want, indifference to desire, the elimination of egotistical passion, and it derives from the practice of self-control. He said, "I would rather go mad than feel pleasure" (Sahakian 35). Like the later Stoics, the key common principle between Antisthenes and the Stoics is that happiness does not depend on fortune or the fulfillment of desires.

Antisthenes' Cynic School was a Greek philosophical sect that flourished roughly from the fourth century BC to the sixth century AD. It advocated extreme individualism, withdrawal from society, and contempt for civilization. The most famous of the Cynics, and a student of Antisthenes, was Diogenes of Sinope (b. 412-d. 323 BC). Diogenes was born in Sinope, Paphlagonia, and most likely died in Corinth, Greece. He was the archetypical Cynic who attributed his philosophy to Antisthenes. There are many celebrated stories about Diogenes, which include his asking Alexander the Great to get out of his sunlight, ostensibly asking Alexander "why don't you just relax now," and carrying a lantern looking for one honest man.

Diogenes' Cynic philosophy, however, was serious and it directly influenced early Stoicism. In independence, he practiced extreme anti-conventionalism and sought to expose the falsity of most conventional standards and beliefs. He yearned for independence, he disdained civilization, and had contempt for prevailing culture. In self-control, he believed we all possessed self-sufficiency, which is all we need for happiness. The good life for

Diogenes consisted in simplicity and self-control. For him, happiness and independence were possible even under reduced circumstances. This emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency particularly influenced Stoicism.

Diogenes also believed that the passions should be limited and pleasure should be avoided, which are ideas he practiced by living an austere life with few possessions. He once, for example, discarded a cup because he found he could drink water with his cupped hands. The need to limit our passions and avoid pleasure became core Stoic beliefs. Also, to a certain extent, the wariness of wealth is common to both philosophies, although for different reasons. For the Cynics, it was to celebrate poverty, and for the Stoics, it was because wealth lies outside of our realm of choice, which makes it an unreliable source of happiness. Another key Cynic belief the Stoics adopted was the need to remain indifferent to worldly affairs. These principles were the natural product of the times that arose, in part, as a consequence of the career and death of Alexander the Great, and they met certain needs of the times those consequences generated.

Our thread now weaves into the ancient Stoic fabric. William S. Sahakian writes that Crates of Thebes, the third great Cynic and a student of Diogenes, was the “link between Cynic and Stoic philosophies” (Sahakian 36). Crates disposed of his wealth in order to live the life of a mendicant ascetic because he believed there is happiness in poverty. He was the first of the “beggar philosophers” to demand money for speaking and haranguing his audience. Zeno of Citium (c. 340-265 BC), the founder of Stoicism, was his pupil.

Before we continue the Stoic thread with Zeno of Citium, it is necessary first to examine

the issues of the age Zeno lived in and how those issues predisposed people toward his Stoic philosophy. Perhaps the two greatest events that influenced the Hellenistic Age were the Peloponnesian War and the career of Alexander the Great. The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta occurred from 431 to 404 BC. Some consequences of this war on Greek society included a decrease in rural farming and a shift away from an agricultural economy, decreasing patriotism, growing class consciousness, and increased specialization. These trends, and in particular the diminution of the ideal of a renaissance man, were inward focused trends that set the stage for increasing individualism. They signaled the beginning of a shift to cosmopolitanism because there were fewer rural agricultural communities (and thus fewer poleis), and the decline of Greek patriotism and nationalism.

The second great event was the career of Alexander the Great (359-323 BC). Alexander conquered Persia in the later part of the fourth century BC, and thereby greatly expanded the Hellenistic world. With his death in 323 BC, and the beginning of the Hellenistic Age, Greece found itself part of a bigger empire, and influenced over time by eastern mystery religions. With these developments came the further diminution of the polis, cosmopolitanism, and more reliance on the self, or individualism. It also began a period of increasing hardship owing in part to Greece's declining population, and the struggles and conflicts for control of the empire by the successor generals of Alexander. These events set the circumstances that made Stoic philosophy appealing and fueled the ascendancy of Stoicism.

It was not certain that Stoicism would ascend as a principal philosophy at the end of the

fourth century. There was competition among numerous philosophies in Athens, each vying for followers. The principle ones were the Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, Cynics, Skeptics, and Stoics. A leading scholar of this period, Sir William Tarn, believed that, in part, by modifying itself and adopting some Platonic views underlying the importance of virtue, Stoicism eventually became the philosophy of the Hellenistic world (Tarn 325).

Cynicism blossomed into Stoicism in the late fourth century BC. Its principle teachers were Zeno of Citium (c. 340-265 BC), Cleanthes of Assos in Troas (c. 303-232 B. C.), and Chrysippus of Solsus (280-206 B. C.). Zeno, as I mentioned earlier, was a disciple of the Cynic Crates and is considered the founder of Stoicism (Sahakain 37). Zeno went to Athens in 317 BC and began teaching at the Painted Porch, or the Stoa, in 302.

The early Stoics emphasized the importance of the will, the need to control passions, the use of reason, and individuality. They advocated an unconquerable will in order to control those things within our control. Things control us only to the extent we allow them to do so, and a strong will was necessary to control our passions, a central tenet of all Stoic philosophy. The passions are unnatural, irrational, and a disease of the soul that must be expelled completely. They believed that we overcome the world when we overcome our passions. Reason is a critical component of the early Stoics' teachings because it assists the will in limiting our passions and corrects any false notions caused by our instincts. Evil occurs when the passions cannot be controlled by reason. Finally, in order to control that which is within our choice, they believed that we must cultivate self-sufficiency, individuality, and personal independence. People who are dependent on others tend to go

with the crowd, and rarely make independent decisions.

Under the idea that we should remain indifferent to worldly affairs, the early Stoics also emphasized the concept of *adiaphora*, or the attitude of indifference to controversial issues for peace of mind. We should remain indifferent to distressing sources of pain, such as pleasure and passion, and gain the knowledge that will help us morally to strengthen our will, and make us impervious to worldly vicissitudes. With these beliefs, the early Stoa established core Stoic tenets that were built on, and embellished, by the later periods.

The chief characteristic of the Middle Stoa, which comprised the first and second centuries B.C., was its emphasis on virtue and happiness. They introduced the idea that happiness comes from knowledge and virtue. Indeed, Middle Stoa Cicero said that “virtue alone is sufficient to a happy life” (MacKendrick 171). Stoic philosophy was influenced by the Academic Platonic philosophers and the Peripatetic school founded by Aristotle. The chief authors of the Middle Stoa included Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 180-110 BC), Antipater of Tarsus (second century BC), Boethus of Sidon (d. 119 BC), and perhaps its most famous member, Cicero (106 BC-43 BC). The authors of the Second Stoa continued to champion happiness, which was defined as a state of inner tranquility; freedom from disturbances and peace of soul; the belief that virtue consists of endurance, courage, self-control and justice; and the need to adjust yourself to the world (so that when the wise man loses his luggage, he resigns himself to it). They also continued to defend the controversial idea that suicide is permissible. The Stoics were uniquely interested in suicide. They believed that it showed moral strength and indifference to life to commit suicide, and commended early Stoics like

Zeno and Cleanthes who committed the act.

In the Middle Stoa there was a gradual shift of Stoicism from Greece to Rome, a link created by the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon. He is remembered chiefly for his visit to Rome in 156/155 BC, which served to arouse interest in the Stoic creed among the Romans. He studied in Athens under Chrysippus, the principal systematizer of Stoic philosophy, and succeeded Zeno of Tarsus as head of the Stoic school there. Panaetius, who founded Roman Stoicism, was one of Diogenes' pupils.

The most famous member of the Middle Stoa was undoubtedly Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC). Cicero was a leading politician of Rome and philosopher. Although Cicero is often identified as a Stoic, his philosophic development was more complex. He is considered by some to be the founder of Eclecticism, which was a short lived school. Its primary goal was to reconcile Stoicism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Epicureanism. He was also an adherent to the skeptically oriented Platonic Academic under Carneades. In his work *Supreme Good and Evil*, he rejected both Epicureanism and Stoicism. He even suggested the strangely un-Stoic and un-Socratic idea that "virtue will not necessarily produce happiness" (Everitt 256).

In about 45 BC, Cicero's daughter Tullia died, which both sent him into distress and caused him to convert to Stoicism (Everitt 257). In his *Conversations at Tusculan*, or *Tusculan Disputations*, he discussed the death of his daughter and why it caused him to convert to Stoicism. He said Stoic philosophy alleviated his distress by teaching him to be indifferent to death. It also taught him how to endure pain, to avoid distractions that disturb

our peace of mind, and that moral worth alone is adequate to ensure a happy life. These lessons are derived primarily from the core Stoic tenet that we must distance ourselves from the cares and desires of life in order to achieve happiness and avoid pain (Everitt 257). Cicero turned to Stoicism for consolation.

In the *Disputations* Cicero asked how is the good life to be lived? He infers that his grief for his dead daughter was useless and should be put aside. Instead of grieving uselessly, Cicero turned to Stoicism and decided to “[drag] himself from the brink of breakdown through firmness of mind” (Everitt 257). With this Cicero made another key Stoic point, which is that certain right attitudes and abilities, coupled with “a [Stoical] philosophical cast of mind,” can alleviate misfortune and suffering (Everitt 256). He thought that adopting the right attitudes and abilities that alleviate mental suffering such as courage and self-control would be beneficial. It could be assumed, with this newly adopted Stoic frame of mind, Cicero’s grieving abated.

Finally, in addition to Cicero’s turn to Stoicism, it should be mentioned that he also emphasized scholarship because he believed that it enables us to live well, be happy, and avoid discontent and vexation. Regarding death, which is an enduring Stoic topic, he said that we should “dissociate ourselves from our bodies . . . [and] acclimatize ourselves to the idea of death” in order to be happy (Everitt 257). Cicero’s conversion to Stoicism strengthened Roman Stoicism and greatly influenced Third Stoa philosophers.

Stoicism began with the Early Stoa, grew in the Middle Stoa, and matured in the Later Stoa. The Later Stoa, which covered the first two centuries, is where the components came

together into the Stoic philosophy that most think of today. It was Stoicism's most significant and famous period that Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius inhabited. It was a period in which Stoicism began emphasizing community, which could be summarized in their maxim that man is a citizen of the world. It was a period that witnessed the important Stoic shift from strict determinism to a limited form of free will. The Later Stoa was also a period in which the Stoics emphasized the importance of friendship.

The Later Stoa flourished in Rome and was dominated by two groups of Roman philosophers. Some were concerned with the Stoic interpretation of reality and others with morality. The later group included, in chronological order, Annaeus Seneca (4 BC-65 AD), Musonius Rufus (first century), Epictetus (b. c. 55 AD-d. 135 AD), and Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-180). I will focus on Rufus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius here and discuss Seneca in the next section.

Gaius Musonius Rufus, the least known of the four, was a Stoic teacher who lived in the mid-first century. He taught philosophy in Rome during the reign of Nero, who sent him into exile in 65 AD. He returned to Rome under Galba. He was again banished when Vespasian expelled all philosophers from the city in 71 AD. He was one of the many philosophers expelled for condemning monarchy as a danger to the traditions of republican freedom (Dill 40). He returned to Rome again after Vespasian's death. All that remains of Rufus' teachings is a collection of extracts from his lectures. He was also noted for being Epictetus' teacher.

One of his collections is titled *That women too should do philosophy*, in which he advocates educating women in philosophy, a suggestion that one must assume was radical

for that time (Inwood 177, 178). He concluded that women should do philosophy because they share the same rationality, senses, and the “affinity to virtue” with men (Inwood 177). Like Aristotle, he emphasized the acquisition of virtue through habituation as opposed to reason. In his fragment *Whether habituation or reasoning is more effective* he, by analogy, demonstrated that it is better to go to a doctor who cannot explain medicine well but has extensive experience, than a doctor who can give an excellent account of medical knowledge but has no experience (Inwood 179).

Epictetus (c. AD 50-138) was the second great Stoic of the Late, or Roman, Stoa. He began life as a slave, but made himself a philosopher. He is perhaps the most articulate exponent of Stoic philosophy with his carefully crafted philosophic arguments found in his *Discourses*. He believed that true education consists in recognizing that the only thing that individuals possess fully is will. He also believed that humans are not responsible for the ideas that present themselves to their consciousness, but they are wholly responsible for how they react to them. This is a perspective that puts the burden of happiness on the individual and not anything external.

Epictetus was expelled from Rome in AD 90 and spent the remainder of his life in exile. His principal works are *The Discourses* and *Enchiridion*, the latter being an abridged manual of *The Discourses*. One of his pupils was the historian Arrian, who was responsible for writing down and preserving Epictetus’ Stoic philosophy. Epictetus also greatly influenced Seneca and Marcus Aurelius.

Epictetus’ philosophy was captured by one author who said, “The good life can be

achieved [according to Epictetus] by adjusting one's desires to the way the world is rather than trying to adjust the world to satisfy one's desires" (Epictetus 56). Epictetus emphasized our ability to make proper judgments of events and our power of choice, which taken together allow us to control how we think and act. Epictetus, in his *Discourses*, said we should examine and modify the impressions we form (Epictetus xxi); that we have the power rightly to deal with our impressions (Epictetus 5); that we cannot control outside events, but we can control what we think about them (Epictetus 6); and that "the man who rids his mind of desire and avers things only within his sphere of choice has virtue and an untroubled mind" (Epictetus 12). The Stoics' concept of an impression means a view, or idea, that we form about events that may mature into a judgment or belief. The significance of impressions for the Stoics is that they believed we can modify them, which allows us to control how we view existence.

Unlike Epictetus, who was born a slave, Marcus Aurelius (*b.* 121-*d.* 180 AD) was the heir to privilege even though he was not born to the purple (Aurelius xi). He was an unusual Stoic philosopher in that he was Emperor of Rome from 161 to 180 AD, an era Edward Gibbon called the "golden age for humankind" (Aurelius xi). His only work is the *Meditations*, which is his private journal that consists of aphorisms, pithy definitions, reflections, reminders, and exhortations about Stoicism. Some have said his meditations were written not to instruct, but rather to "reassert his rule over himself" (Aurelius xiv).

Aurelius may represent Stoicism internalized because he wrote the *Meditations* in a diary form to himself. He advocated decency, mild temper, integrity, manliness, piety, generosity,

avoidance of wrongdoing, simplicity of living, avoidance of the habits of the rich, good teachers, education, and toleration of pain. He also believed we should feel few needs, that we should mind our own business, and be deaf to malicious gossip. These are Stoic beliefs personalized. His dedication to the common good can be seen as Stoicism externalized (Aurelius 6). He was unique in that he endeavored to reconcile Stoic prudential, individualistic, and self-regarding philosophy with the Socratic emphasis on communal harmony. Both Stoicism and Platonism believed rationality was an essential ingredient for happiness, but it was the Platonic influence that caused Marcus Aurelius to realize that rationality can also lead us to be other-regarding. He wrote, for example, that “we are rational and here to serve each other, we are social” (Aurelius 66). This could be the realization that caused Aurelius to say that “a quality of a rational soul is love of neighbor” (Aurelius 105).

This perspective on the consequences of rationality may have lead Aurelius to the belief in the importance of cooperation. He believed, for example, that rational beings were created for a single cooperative purpose because “I am a limb of the composite body of rational beings” (Aurelius 60). He wrote that “nature demands we cooperate like hands and feet” (Aurelius 10), and in a similar fashion argued that

[Should] An eye . . . demand a reward for seeing or the feet for walking?
They were made for a particular purpose and they must act in accordance
with it. Similarly, man was made to do good. (Aurelius 93)

Thus, it may well be that Aurelius’ declaration that we must be “dedicated to the common good” derives from his perspectives on the relationship between rationality and community

(Aurelius 6). When he says “our minds. . . were born for community,” and “we are born to serve the good of the community, and to benefit fellow citizens,” he exposes the Socratic influence on Stoicism (Aurelius 41, 112). It may be that these Stoic precepts precipitated the decline of Stoicism and ascendancy of Christianity. Christianity, which reflected some of these views, emphasized love of neighbor and turning the other cheek, which made the “strong Stoic individual” unnecessary.

But Aurelius never lost his Stoic roots. Being other-regarding is a choice that ultimately depends on us because how we think or act is up to us. How we act depends on our judgments and our will. In the end, kindness comes from “focus[ing] on what is in your power,” and not externals (Aurelius 36). Of his judgments, my favorite is to live each day as if it is your last, because it just may be.

Annaeus Seneca (b. 4 BC-d. 65 AD), who wrote *Letters from a Stoic*, was a Roman born in Spain, tutor to Emperor Nero, and an influential advisor to the Emperor for a time. He is a central figure in Stoic history. He emphasized that the world does not conform to our desires, so we must prepare ourselves for the “battle with fortune” (Seneca 99). For comfort and happiness, we must look within and use proper judgments about what is in our control, and remain indifferent to matters beyond our control.

Seneca’s emphasis on this form of self-control is, I think, a consequence of living under tyrants like Nero, who could and did kill him. It is no wonder that Seneca said that we must prepare ourselves for sudden disaster because our lives could change at any moment. We should assume what may happen, will happen. Seneca is particularly noteworthy because

he faced exile and instant death under capricious power and demonstrated how Stoic philosophy enabled him to deal with these sources of unhappiness. Seneca's life and philosophy will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

3.1.1.2 Stoicism's ascendancy

Sir William Tarn offered compelling reasons why Stoicism prevailed over its rival philosophic schools in Athens in the late fourth century, and why it appealed to the Hellenistic Age that ensued. Tarn believed that Stoicism and Epicureanism were, in part, products of Alexander the Great, who accelerated the change from the polis to cosmopolitanism and individualism. Stoicism and Epicureanism did not aim at truth, but rather the satisfaction of practical needs (Tarn 327). The aim of these philosophies was the ". . . happiness of the individual; and what mattered was conduct" (Tarn 327, 328).

Unlike the Epicureans, Stoics, such as Zeno of Citium, who Tarn called the "the noblest man of his age," developed a philosophy that was followed and enhanced by eminent men like Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius (Tarn 330). They believed in brotherhood, a cosmopolitan idea, and wrote treatises on how states should be governed. They were opposed to tyranny and they promised greater equality of people, which meant "the abolition of class-war" (Tarn 331, 332).

The shift to cosmopolitanism occurred for three reasons. First, as Peter Green observed, cosmopolitanism flourished when the Greek presumption of superiority over the *barbos* was gradually disabused because they were being conquered by the barbarian Macedonians

(Green 339). Second, Greek culture lost its insularity and was increasingly influenced by foreign cultures after Alexander the Great's conquests. Greece became a part of a much larger empire. Third, and perhaps most significant, Stoicism offered the Greeks a practical alternative to other Hellenistic philosophies for the individual to achieve happiness in the face of hardship.

I will expand on this last reason because it illuminates a critical argument of my thesis. It seems that people of all ages look for solutions that alleviate pain and enhance happiness. Some look to spirituality, some to religions, some to politics, and others to philosophic ideologies. It seems that people adopt whatever works within the cultural limitations of their age that bring happiness. Stoicism fit such a requirement in ancient Greece. It did so because when the Greek polis began to decline as an institution, Greeks became more interested in their personal affairs than in politics or, as Peter Green wrote, the "individual was thrown back on himself" (Green 587).

Stoicism filled this void when it proposed that happiness is better attained by controlling one's passions and exercising proper choice. Because there are matters that lie outside of our control, we ought to remain indifferent to them. This approach emphasized the individual directing their own future and not being controlled by any external authority, such as the polis. This is not to say that self-governance and other-governed are incompatible, but rather that the decline of the polis demanded alternate solutions to achieve happiness. This, I think, is Stoicism at its best: teaching self-sufficiency, individuality, and personal independence.

It is interesting to speculate why Stoicism's conception of happiness and its solutions appealed to the people of ancient Greece and Rome. Certainly, the other philosophic schools of that age offered many compelling remedies for unhappiness. It would appear, however, that Stoicism's views had the broadest appeal. It would seem Stoicism was an intuitively practical philosophy that appealed to people. It did not require great education or sacrifice, only an altered point of view to bring happiness. When people mitigated excessive passion, they also lessened the unhappiness that comes with passion. For example, devaluing the passions for wealth, power, prestige, and sensual pleasure ameliorates the angst that comes with wanting them. Further, deciding to remain indifferent to that which is beyond our control is an intuitive concept that comes naturally. It mitigates the pain caused by the death of a wife or child, the fear of death, the angst caused by the possibility of punishment from a despotic government, and the despondency caused by poverty. Indeed, I think it is Stoicism's teaching to remain indifferent to that which lies beyond choice that appealed to Seneca and Cicero. They both sought and achieved a level of tranquility from this Stoic idea: Seneca from capricious power that could execute him on a whim, and Cicero from the death of his daughter.

I will suggest a third reason that I think is relevant to America today, which involves Stoicism's prescriptions for happiness in times of unusual hardship. Stoicism's ideas are prescriptions for happiness that I believe people have intuitively endorsed over time in order to alleviate suffering. They may not be politically corrective measures, or solutions that improve humankind's circumstances, but they work for many at the time they need them. This may be why the Stoics' prescriptions to relieve unhappiness appealed to many

people and, for a time in the ancient world, prevailed over the other philosophies in that age.

This third point, which is that people seek philosophic solutions to happiness in times of hardship, is significant to my thesis because my thesis is about happiness. There was a time when people facing hardship looked to Stoicism for answers, and it provided them. I believe the causes of unhappiness are similar through time, as are the solutions. Consequently, it would seem Stoic philosophy can help Americans today. We face the same wars, disease, poverty, and “tyrants” of wealth, power, prestige, and sensual pleasure that the Greeks did 2,400 years ago. The oppressors are the same, and Stoic philosophy offers one possible solution.

3.1.1.3 Stoicism's decline

A woodpath is a path that ends abruptly nowhere in the woods. It could be said that the thread of Stoicism is a woodpath. After five hundred years of influence, Stoicism faded abruptly with the death of its last great adherent, Marcus Aurelius, at the end of the second century. Why did Stoicism die out? Samuel Dill offers numerous reasons for the extinction of Stoicism, three of which I think are significant. I will give a brief description of each reason because they reveal a number of Stoicism's weaknesses as a philosophy of how to live. I will then focus on three critical reasons.

Dill said that moral experience taught Romans a growing sense of humility and greater sympathy for mankind that went beyond Stoicism's creed, which was cold and impersonal

(Dill 391). Second, seeking salvation through Stoic reason was not working for man as he is constituted (Dill 391). Some of Stoicism's teachings, and particularly the need to limit the passions, did not accommodate human nature (Dill 512). Desire and passion are inherent human traits and trying to eliminate them may be simply beyond the ability of many humans. Further, many people resist debriding these emotions because they give them comfort.

Third, people began to think there should be a place for them in the universal scheme of things. Stoic teaching did not offer such a place; indeed, Stoicism's nature can be cold and indifferent to man's needs, with no special moral concern for humanity. A consequence of this, according to Dill, is that under Stoicism people found themselves in an alien world with no real object of worship (Dill 391).

Two related reasons for the decline of Stoicism, according to Dill, concern man's struggle to escape his earthly bounds. In ancient Rome, long before Marcus Aurelius was born, there was a drift toward personal immortality, which Stoicism did not offer (Dill 511). This human aspiration to escape nature ran counter to the Stoic maxim to live in accordance with nature and remain subordinate to her dictates. Dill describes this as a growing discordance between physical nature and the developing human spirit.

Dill's last two reasons for the decline of Stoicism involve morality. Generally, under the influence of ethical study, people of that age's conception of God changed to be more of a "person, a moral power, a father." The voice of God increasingly became the voice of "conscience, consoling, prompting, supporting, inspiring, an ideal of fuller communion in

another sphere." Morality became more transcendent and less dependent on the individual. The Stoic creed, on the other hand, was entirely dependent on individual will. For Dill, Stoicism had no "moral import," only the "lonely triumph of human pride" (Dill 512).

In order to evaluate Dill's reasons for Stoicism's decline, and because it was Christianity that supplanted it, it seems relevant to consider religion's appeal. William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, offered many reasons, two of which seem significant in relation to Stoicism. These were that religion is easier because it accommodates human nature, and religion brings happiness. Dill's first reason is that Christianity prevailed because, for many, it is easier to achieve happiness through faith. Under Stoicism, an unsympathetic nature left individuals struggling in an uncaring universe. Religion, on the other hand, offered a caring omnipotent being that brought comfort and happiness. Indeed, James said that religion is an emotion, and in particular the emotion of a happiness that is absolute and everlasting (James 48). Religion simply "makes our necessary surrender and sacrifice to the universe easy and happy" (James 51). This view is supported by W. E. H. Lecky, who said our illusions, such as faith, bring more consolation than our knowledge. Happiness is more a condition of feeling (the feeling of happiness derived from faith in this case) and not circumstances (Lecky 51).

William James also said that "Morality through will power is transient and difficult, we all fail at some point, but morality through religion is easy, positive, and not athletic" (James, 47). Stoicism, on the other hand, is hard, negative, and athletic. It takes considerable effort to master our emotions, and many fail. In this sense, some tenets of Stoicism fight human

nature, and religion accommodates it. The second reason then is that Stoicism failed simply because many people could not do some of Stoicism's prescriptions for happiness.

It may be that when life is hard in any struggling nascent society, the best solution to achieve happiness is by limiting personal passions based on the idea that the absence of what you do not need cannot make you unhappy. But, when a society thrives and matures, life improves and wealth abounds, much like the conditions of Rome in the second century and America today. Under these circumstances it may no longer be necessary to limit desires for happiness, because wealth can satisfy desires. Indeed, wealth often brings indulgence, luxury, and easy living that militates against Stoicism's admonition to limit desire for happiness. There is less want and more temptation. We read about the early American "Stoic-like" rugged and self-reliant individual, from Emerson and Thoreau; now, with wealth, we read about indulgence, whether it be sensual, luxury, prestige, or power. It may well be that successful and enterprising societies plant the seeds of their own destruction, which the decline of Stoicism mirrored. The Stoic creeds of independence, self-reliance and steady temperament gave way to selfish desires and capriciousness, which may be why Stoicism died in ancient Rome and is nowhere to be found in contemporary America. In ancient Rome it was easier to turn to religion, and in contemporary America it is easier to go to the mall.

It is interesting to note that Seneca anticipated this problem. He realized that many would consider Stoicism beyond the capacity of human nature. He said, in response, that he had more confidence in people than they do in themselves. He said that we are able to limit

our passions, but many won't do it (Seneca 191). Seneca may have overestimated human nature, but he did not underestimate humans' ability to overcome unhappiness.

The third reason for Stoicism's extinction may be due to humanity's enduring aspiration for meaning in life. Samuel Dill wrote that Stoicism's nature is cold and indifferent to man's needs, with the result that people found themselves in an alien world with no real object of worship (Dill 391, 391). Unlike many religions, Stoicism does not offer the comfort of heaven or an eternal after-life. Stoicism is, in the end, not a religion, but primarily a prudential and practical philosophy on how to live in order to achieve happiness.

Even with these deficiencies, I believe that Stoic philosophy can still bring humankind considerable happiness. What then is Stoic philosophy, and which of its tenets brings happiness? This will be examined next.

3.1.2 Stoic philosophy

So what are Stoicism's principle tenets, who advanced them, and how do they deal with happiness? This section of my thesis will proceed from the general to the specific. I will first explain the Stoic belief that philosophers are doctors of the mind and its significance. I will then give a general description of Stoicism along with its principle tenets, and focus on its theories. Finally, I will describe in more detail the life and philosophy of the Stoic philosopher Annaeus Seneca.

John Stuart Mill famously asked whether it is best to be a pig satisfied or Socrates dissatisfied. A Stoic philosopher would not ask this question; rather he would ask whether it

is better to be a pig dissatisfied or have the opportunity to be a satisfied Socrates. For them, “ignorant human pigs” are dissatisfied because they have allowed themselves to be victims of fortune and their passions. The solution, for the Stoics, would be to understand that the “world is as we make it,” and advise us to enlighten ourselves by studying philosophy to the point at which we can control that which is within our control, and remain indifferent to that which is outside it. This, for me, is perhaps the most important contribution of Stoic philosophy. It is a point that emphasizes choice, freedom, and individual happiness.

Stoicism was a philosophy that arose after Plato and Aristotle, and lasted longer than its principal rivals, Epicureanism and Skepticism. It was born as a practical alternative to Platonic idealism, and it died with the ascendancy of Christianity. It could be argued that Stoic moral philosophy was second only to Christianity in influencing ancient Western beliefs, actions, and institutions. I believe it was an influential philosophy because it was, above all, a practical philosophy that served the needs of the people in that age. It was a philosophy that acknowledged the difficulties of living, and it offered both theoretical and prudential advice on how to deal with the issues of the day to achieve a level of happiness.

The doctrines of Stoicism covered logic, physics, and ethics. Stoics emphasized logic because they believed logic was a prerequisite for any genuine knowledge about the physical world. Indeed, Epictetus asked, “. . . how can you yourself admit that logic is [not] necessary, since without it you cannot even determine whether it is necessary or not?” (Epictetus 145). In physics, the Stoics were generally materialists who rejected Plato’s forms and Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover (Inwood xiii). They believed that the universe was

teleologically organized and the early Stoics embraced determinism, albeit in an increasingly compatibilist form: they wanted free will and determinism to be compatible. It was this later critical compatibilist development that established the possibility of personal freedom, and thus moral responsibility within a determined world. In ethics, Stoicism addressed the importance of proper judgments of impressions, living in accordance with nature, and the need to remain indifferent to that which you cannot control. They examined the nature of virtue, justice, happiness, good, and evil. They particularly emphasized the importance of choice, the necessity of reason, and the need to control our passions and desires in order to achieve happiness. Stoicism had many political consequences, of which the belief that we are all equal may be the most significant. Seneca believed, for example, that all people are equal, which implies all humans, including women and slaves, should be treated equally (Seneca 19). This belief in equality must have had significant influence on subsequent ages.

One other Stoic belief that may have influenced history is their unwavering belief that happiness is the goal of human life (Inwood xiv). Many ethical philosophies emphasize happiness, but Stoicism was unique in its single-minded belief that happiness comes by controlling desire. This is in contrast to Stoicism's principle rival, Epicureanism, which taught happiness was achieved by pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. These two competing—and timeless—prescriptions resonate in America today. Many Americans seem to believe that happiness comes from material possessions, more prestige, or more sensual pleasure. The Stoic principle to mitigate these desires seems absent today, and needed.

3.1.2.1 Doctors of the soul

I think the analogy of philosophy with medicine is apt. Philosophy is uniquely suited to fill the role of a doctor helping people who are disturbed, unhappy, and suffering, owing to their personal problems and individual zeitgeist, or world outlook. Central to philosophy is the study of ethics, and how we ought to live and treat others. Philosophy inquires about the nature of things. It is the search for truth, and its methods include questioning, evaluating, introspection, and examination. Its methods are conducive to deep thinking about who we are, what is meaningful, and most importantly for this thesis, what is the nature of happiness. They are methods uniquely tailored to the individual seeking to escape ignorance in order to see the world in its proper light.

Stoicism, along with other Hellenistic philosophies, believed that philosophers were doctors of the mind or soul. This medical analogy pervades Stoicism. For them, the purpose of philosophy is to bring human happiness in a way analogous to a doctor bringing health to a patient. Early Stoic philosopher Chrysippus believed philosophers were “physicians of the soul” (Nussbaum 316). Seneca said the point of philosophy is not to solve puzzles, but rather to help the unhappy, and derided philosophers who thought that philosophy has no business trying to make people better (Seneca 98, 19). He said that philosophy should “speak to our condition,” and compared philosophy to the “formulae of successful medication” (Seneca 19, 45). Cicero, in Book Three of his *Tusculan Disputations*, also described philosophy as the medicine of the soul (MacKendrick 171). He wrote that healing the soul has lagged behind healing the body and that “diseases of the soul are both more

dangerous and more numerous than those of the body” (Cicero 229). In Book Four he wrote, “how efficacious is the medicine applied by philosophy to the diseases of the souls” (Cicero 393).

Christopher Gill, in his introduction to Epictetus’ *Discourses*, wrote that the book can be seen as therapy, or, as Philo said, “removing beliefs which cause disease in the critical faculties of the mind and implanting healthy beliefs” (Epictetus xix). It is a book of advice, “giving instructions about how to live [a healthy life]” (Epictetus xix).

Stoicism, in concert with many ancient philosophies, assumes that it is the doctor of the mind, and not the patient, who is competent to decide what counts as sickness and health. Gaining health of the mind entails the philosopher doctor’s helping patients form a correct understanding of the proper goal of human life, which can then shape the whole pattern of a person’s beliefs, emotions and desires. Stoic Epictetus’ *Discourses*, as well as other Stoic writings, are clearly designed to be “therapeutic” or “advisory” in a way that reflects this understanding of philosophy as the medicine of the mind (Epictetus xvii, xix, 8).

One caveat that was made in the introduction to this thesis needs to be repeated. There are many sources of unhappiness, including neurosis, psychosis, and physical addictions that require professional medical therapy. Be that as it may, it seems that much of human unhappiness derives from wrongful beliefs. Stoic philosophy can enhance human happiness by helping people change those beliefs, or in their words, ‘judgments’. Stoicism is unusual in this respect because many philosophies, and in particular contemporary moral theories, seem more interested in analyzing happiness than imparting it.

In *Letter XLVIII*, Seneca asked what philosophy holds out for humanity. I would like to quote his answer because it is so poignantly relevant to the medical analogy:

One person is facing death, another is vexed by poverty, while another is tormented by wealth-whether his own or someone else's; one man is appalled by his misfortunes while another longs to get away from his own prosperity; one man is suffering at the hands of men, another at the hands of gods...This isn't the place for fun-you're [the philosopher] called in to help the unhappy. You're pledged to bring succor to the shipwrecked, to those in captivity, to the sick, the needy and men who are just placing their heads beneath the executioner's uplifted axe...What are you about? The person you're engaging in word-play with is in fear-go to his aid...All mankind are stretching out their hands to you on every side. Lives that have been ruined, lives that are on the way to ruin and appealing for some help; it is to you that they look for hope and assistance. They are begging you to extricate them from this awful vortex, to show them in their doubt and disarray the shining torch of truth. Tell them what nature has made necessary and what she has made superfluous. Tell them how simple are the laws she has laid down, and how straightforward and enjoyable life is for those who follow them and how confused and disagreeable it is for others who put more trust in popular ideas than they do in nature. (Seneca 98)

There are examples of philosophy's ability to doctor the soul of those "doing battle with fortune," including Seneca himself, Cicero, Boethius, and Jason Regier (Seneca 99). I will use two of them to demonstrate this point. One comes from history and the other the present. The first is the story of Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (470/75-524), who was a Roman scholar, Christian philosopher, statesman, and author of the celebrated *Consolation of Philosophy*. The example from the present is Jason Regier.

3.1.2.1.1 Severinus Boethius

In about 520 CE Boethius was charged with treason and condemned to death. He wrote his masterpiece in prison while awaiting execution. His story is about a man suffering from the knowledge that he will soon be executed. He endeavors to escape the prospect of his imminent death through philosophy. He wants to be consoled in his darkest hour, like those among us today facing their darkest hours. His consoling philosophic thoughts are eminently Stoic beliefs, indeed, his *Consolation of Philosophy* could have been written by Cicero or Seneca.

He begins by asking how philosophy, which he depicts as a nurse, can show the way to happiness. His first observation is, in part, that the pursuit of wisdom is the true source of human happiness (Boethius 102). He thinks to himself that fortune has seduced him into a false sense of happiness (Boethius 54). Fortune is random and unreliable, and when he committed his “boat to the winds of fortune” he was forced to sail whichever way it blew (Boethius 55). He had to acquiesce to fortune’s ways: he could not go where he wanted (Boethius 55, 56). He concludes that he could never be happy, always wanting that which fortune offers because its ways engender insatiable desires. Fortune’s mutability will never bring happiness (Boethius 63).

Boethius contemplates one of fortune’s greatest lures, which is wealth. He observes that money never quenches intense greed; instead it only creates a want of its own (Boethius 71). He realizes that nature is easily satisfied, whereas nothing satisfies greed. He also realizes that when you set out on life with nothing, you “whistle your way by the

highwayman,” but if you have money you always live in fear of losing it to the highwayman (Boethius 68). Finally, he observes that when you have wealth, you need others to protect it, so wealth, which ostensibly makes us self-sufficient, actually makes us more dependant on uncertain outside help (Boethius 84). These observations, to mitigate desire, to live simply in accordance with nature, and to be self-sufficient, are essential Stoic prescriptions for happiness.

Like my next example, perhaps Stoicism’s most consoling principle for Boethius is that things are as we make them. He thinks nothing is miserable unless we think it so, including death, and that human happiness is an attitude (Boethius 63, 81). Happiness is based on how we think about things, or what judgments we use to evaluate perceptions. In the end, it seems that Boethius’ perspective on his impending death was simply to accept it because he has no control over fortune’s ways. Boethius was executed in 524, probably at Pavia, but he did not die unconsolated. His philosophic mind enabled him to transcend his misfortune and prepared himself to meet his maker undisturbed.

3.1.2.1.2 Jason Regier

Jason Regier was a philosophy student at Oregon State University in the mid-1990s. Jason grew up in Denver, Colorado, and came to Oregon State to play soccer. He took some philosophy classes at Oregon State because they dealt “with the big picture of life, and how we live” (Regier e-mail). He was more interested in learning “how to live right, and not how to make a living” (Regier e-mail). Philosophy’s insights on life and how to live kindled an enduring interest in philosophy, and precipitated his decision to make it his major. At 21

Jason's future was full of opportunity. He planned to be a soccer coach and to travel Europe. He had a wonderful girlfriend named Kathy, and he was considering playing professional soccer. His whole life was a buffet of choices that lay in front of him.

On September 22, 1996, Jason's "buffet of life" changed forever. He was returning to Corvallis from Denver for his senior year at Oregon State when his Jeep rolled going 75 miles an hour, 30 miles north of Salt Lake City, and he injured his spinal cord. He damaged cervical vertebrae six and seven, he almost lost the use of his diaphragm, and he was immediately paralyzed from the neck down. Jason, in one instant, became a quadriplegic (or technically a tetraplegic), with only partial use of his arms, some use of his chest, and no use of his legs. He spent five days in intensive care at Salt Lake City, and then flew back to Denver for rehabilitation at the Craig hospital. His coaching future in soccer and dream to travel Europe were questionable, he and his girlfriend eventually mutually separated, and any chance of playing professional soccer was dashed.

Jason found himself in a sterile hospital room paralyzed, alone, and with only his thoughts. His first reaction was to think about the negative aspects of his circumstances. He was overwhelmed and deeply depressed. He had completely lost his view of any "mountain-top, because it was shrouded in clouds" (Regier interview). He surveyed his circumstances; he could never use his arms or legs again, he could no longer dress himself, and he could no longer brush his teeth. He thought to himself that this is the place where people commit suicide.

As he lay paralyzed and alone in his hospital bed, his thoughts turned to the philosophy

he had learned at Oregon State, and he began contemplating this sudden and gratuitous turn in his life. He began thinking beyond his predicament from other perspectives. When he went outside himself and looked back, his unexpected first thought was to be grateful because it could have been worse. He observed that some with spinal cord problems in his hospital were born with them, and these people never had the experiences he had before his accident. He realized there were people in the world who also had spinal cord injuries that would never receive the advanced care and therapies that were available to him. He even began considering the good that his accident may have precipitated. He thought about his family and the many friends who had come to his side after the accident, and the new opportunities to become closer to those he formerly knew casually. He realized he still had his life and loved ones, so he was in many ways better off than he originally realized. He was applying his knowledge, philosophic introspection, and objective analysis to his real life problem (Regier interview).

Jason continued to contemplate. He realized that whether he goes “up or down” in life from here depends on what he thinks about his circumstances. He knew he could go either way, but which way he realized was ultimately up to him. Which way, he thought to himself, depended on his mind-set and his ability to think about things for how they really are, and not how they ought to be. He concluded that his accident was “not the end of the world.” He realized that his injury could be defined by how he viewed it, and for what it was. He thought to himself that it may not be as bad as he thinks it is. This caused him to recall a quotation by Theodore Roosevelt, which was that we should “do what we can, where we are, with what we have,” and with this idea he began “going up” (Regier interview).

His thoughts gradually became more positive. He began thinking about what to do now. He began to focus again on his enduring interest, which was how to live right. Living right, he thought, may mean different things to different people, but it truly must entail doing what we can, where we are, with what we have. Jason was now a quadriplegic with limited opportunities, but that disability was a part of who he is now.

Incredibly, he even began to laugh at himself. He thought how useless it is to worry about the things he can no longer do, rather than the things he can. Before the accident, he thought, he could do 10,000 things, but now he can only do 100. But he asked himself, why not just focus on just 20 of the 100 that I can do? Many people go through life aimlessly without purpose or meaning because they never focused on anything, whereas he had been given the opportunity to focus on those precious 20 (Regier interview).

Jason came to appreciate the ability he had to control that which was within his control, like the 100 things. He came to the understanding that there are things he cannot control, like the other 19,900 things, and he came to appreciate his ability to distinguish the two. As a consequence of these reflections, Jason, when asked by a former philosophy professor about his circumstances, said that philosophy had been a major factor in helping “save” and rehabilitate him (Regier interview).

Today Jason is 34 years old. He was a soccer coach, he has traveled the world, he owns a business, he gives speeches around the country, he obtained an MBA, he has had girlfriends, and he plays “quad-rugby”, in which he won a gold medal for the United States in the 2008 Beijing Paralympics (Regier interview). He also is planning to go to Europe and hopes to get

married and have children (which is now possible).

Jason's story is an inspiration for those plagued by unhappiness. It is, in part, a story of how philosophy can help those suffering. Jason today believes that philosophy is "a part of him" that enabled him to study life, to live life, and to evaluate how he ought to live (Regier interview). He says that philosophy is as important, or perhaps more important, to him today than it was thirteen years ago when he was in his hospital room contemplating his circumstances.

I think Jason Regier's story is an example of how Stoic philosophy can help individuals achieve happiness. His story exemplifies certain core Stoic tenets. These include the ideas that philosophy ought to be practical and help people achieve happiness, that things are how we make them, and that we should be satisfied with what we have and live simply according to nature. Most tellingly is Jason's watershed quotation (from Roosevelt), which was to do what we can, where we are, with what we have, that mirrors Stoicism's belief that we ought to remain indifferent to that which we cannot control. His story poignantly demonstrates philosophy's ability to treat the human soul.

Boethius and Jason Regier's problems were catastrophic. Certainly, facing execution and becoming paralyzed are causes of unhappiness that far exceed our everyday sources such as a failed relationship, an insult, or a broken leg. However, the severity of the source of happiness does not lessen the Stoic message because the therapeutic value of Stoic philosophy remains relevant in each case.

When I was young I was more concerned with being right. The older I get I prefer to be

useful rather than right, which is why I think the analogy between philosophy and medicine appeals to me. I, too, believe philosophy has the unique ability to treat some suffering minds, as in the cases of Boethius and Jason Regier, and with this ability it becomes eminently useful.

The remainder of this chapter will deal with a description of Stoic philosophy, and in particular that of Anneaus Seneca.

3.1.2.2 The fifteen tenets of Stoicism

This thesis is about Stoic theory on how we ought to live and treat others, which I will now describe. This is a complicated subject because there were many Stoic philosophers expounding on many issues, in different ways, over time. However, I believe the fundamental teachings of Stoic ethics can be condensed into fifteen principles, the first eleven of which are particularly relevant to achieving human happiness. These tenets are intimately connected and weave a unified philosophy of life. I will now explain each Stoic tenet and how it relates to happiness.

The first tenet is that the goal of philosophy is human happiness, or tranquility of the mind. Stoic philosophy is of one mind on this tenet. Zeno said he “will not send his visitor home without making him happier” (Hadas 66). Stobaeus says on the Stoics that “They say that being happy is the goal for the sake of which everything is done and that it is itself done for the sake of nothing else” (Inwood 133). Epictetus in particular stressed this tenet when he said “[for] what end do you pursue your studies . . . is it not so that you may be happy?”

He continues with “If one is unhappy, remember that he himself is responsible, for god made all mankind to be happy, to enjoy peace of mind He has furnished [us] with the resources to achieve this,” and “We should be happy for all, and chiefly for god, who made us for this purpose.” Finally, he wrote “Should you not be showing what makes men happy” (Epictetus 171, 205, 212, 221). Seneca asks in *Letter XLVII* “What [does] philosophy hold out to humanity? . . . to help the unhappy” (Seneca 98). For the Stoics, philosophy is a practical and useful endeavor whose objective is to help humans live better and happier lives. Seneca famously put this idea in metaphoric terms when he said, “philosophy consists not in words but in realities. She sits at the helm and steers the voyage through the hazards of the waves” (Duff 198).

The Stoics believed that happiness is the end of philosophy, and philosophers should apply themselves to that end. The next ten tenets are generally the Stoic philosophers’ means to accomplish this end.

The second tenet is that things are what we make them. How we view the world, what attitudes and beliefs we adopt about events, how we feel about circumstances, or what makes us happy or unhappy, depend on how we judge perceptions. We could judge poverty as disgraceful and demeaning, or we may judge it like Diogenes, which is that we need little to exist and be happy. An injustice we suffer may cause us anger and the desire for revenge, or we may decide, like Plato, that the perpetrator of injustice suffers more than the victim. Similarly, if we choose to believe that what we learn is more important than grades, we can take comfort in what we have learned and remain undisturbed by another’s judgment of

how well we learned it. Seneca believed that “what matters is our state of mind, attitudes, and how we can heal our minds” (Cooper xxvi).

The Stoics took this view further and, according to Nussbaum, theorized that humans come into this world with an innate orientation to the good (Nussbaum 332). Nussbaum made this point in reference to Epictetus who said, “but as for good and bad, who was not born with an innate conception of these things?” (Nussbaum332). Like virtue, Epictetus believed we are born for the good but not with it, and that the good only comes with practice (Epictetus 176-7).

The Stoics defined nature as good, and living in accordance with nature as good (which is their sixth tenet), while living outside nature is evil. Therefore, humans who live in accordance with nature are inherently good. Evil arises when we form artificial, wrongful, and non-natural beliefs and opinions, or when we live outside of nature. Our happiness depends on how we make things and our judgment of impressions. The Stoic message is simple and clear: have views of events, and have judgments of impressions, that enhance happiness.

The third tenet is that the rule of reason allows us to conquer sources of unhappiness like pain, grief, and fear of death. The Stoics valued reason for a variety of reasons. Reason allows us to mitigate our passions, avoid misguided opinions, achieve proper judgments of impressions, and be virtuous. They believed that human evil and error come from incorrect reasoning, and not from evil itself (Nussbaum 335). Reason is what differentiates us from the beasts (MacKendrick 165). Cicero, for example, in response to the Epicureans’ belief that

pleasure is the highest good, said, "I cannot bring myself to think that the highest good for man is the same as a beast's. For in that case, what is the use of reason" (MacKendrick 166). Epictetus, in *The Discourses*, wrote that reason is the subject-matter of a philosopher. He quotes Zeno, who said we should "know the elements of reason, the nature of each one . . . how they are adapted to one another, and what follows from all this" (Epictetus 268).

For the Stoics, reason is the antidote to unrestrained passion, wrongful opinions, improper judgments, and lack of virtue. Reason is the therapy for unhappiness. Reason's ability to control and/or excise passion, however, is a controversial claim that I will examine later in this thesis.

The fourth tenet is that peace and contentment do not come when high values are placed on externals, which can be taken away. For the Stoics, fortune is fickle. The desire for wealth, power, prestige, honor, or things is misguided because they can be lost. Their possession depends on matters beyond our control, so when we give ourselves over to these objectives we lose control of our circumstances. What fortune gives, it also takes away. Seneca was particularly wary of fortune and believed that one is never "crushed by adverse Fortune who has not first been beguiled by her smile" (Hadas 112). He also said in *Letter VIII* that what fortune has made yours is not yours, and in *Letter XV* how pleasant it is to ask for nothing and be independent of fortune (Seneca 87, 89). Epictetus also made this tenet clear when he said "The difficulties men face arise with externals" (Epictetus 274). People who invest their happiness in external things, like wealth or prestige, have invested in something that may be lost and with it their happiness. They have lost control of that

which brings happiness because they believe these things will bring them happiness, which they may not. They have cast their happiness to the winds of fortune that scatters their aspirations like a puff of smoke in a strong winter breeze.

The Stoics fifth tenet is that ambition, avarice, and luxury impede happiness (Cicero 353, 355). Ambition causes us to seek advantages over others, avarice makes us want more than others, and luxury attenuates our will. For the Stoics, each of these causes us to live outside the bounds of nature, to give into desire and fortune, and spoil us because we succumb to our passions.

This Stoic tenet derives principally from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, in which Cicero repeatedly warns that the wise man does not pursue ambition, avarice or luxury. In discussing the analogy between diseases of the soul and of the body in Book *IV*, Cicero describes avarice, ambition, and "love of good living," or luxury, as sicknesses of the mind (Cicero 351, 352). Cicero believed that when our souls are freed from such ailments we are "rendere[d] . . . entirely happy" (Cicero 369). On ambition, Marcus Aurelius echoed Cicero's advice when he said we become slaves to our ambitions (Aurelius 72). For these Stoics, unguided and unrestrained ambition is a significant source of unhappiness.

On avarice, Cicero wrote "when money is coveted . . . evil circulates in the veins and vital organs, and disease and sickness ensue . . . such a disease [is called] avarice" (Cicero 353). In *Book IV* he continued with the thought that "where the mind recoils from reason . . . desire that is always greedily coveting" occurs (Cicero 367). But, Cicero continues, "when the soul is freed from [avarice] it renders men completely and entirely happy" (Cicero 369).

For Cicero, avarice is a “sicknesses of the soul” (Cicero 419).

Unrestrained ambition and avarice bring unhappiness because they are unsatisfiable desires. Those with these traits are like Sisyphus forever pushing the rock uphill: they forever want what they cannot achieve. Further, the ambitious and avaricious have invested their happiness in goals that are subject to fortune: whether they are happy or unhappy will depend on which way the winds of fortune blow.

Finally, on luxury Cicero wrote that “love of good living” is a sickness (Cicero 353, 355). He said that “riches, pleasures, and . . . the acquisition of these . . . things is disgraceful” (Cicero 405). Seneca was particularly dismayed with the advent of the ambition to live luxuriously in Rome in the first century because pleasure was indulged to the degree that the passions had become reasons’ master instead of servant.

Ambition, avarice, and love of luxury are just a short list of character traits the Stoics discourage. Sprinkled throughout Stoic literature, and in particular Book I of Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, are others like anger, caprice, conceit, cowardice, cruelty, envy, flattery, greed, hatred, hypocrisy, lust, pity, pride, revenge, and vanity (Cooper 4; Cicero 367, 365). Conversely, character traits they encourage are beneficence, caring, frankness, generosity, gentleness, intimacy, serenity, steadfastness, and tolerance (Hadas 170; Aurelius 6).

The sixth tenet is to live in accordance with nature. This tenet has many meanings, including the need to assent to truth, to dissent from falsity, to suspend judgment when faced with uncertainty, to desire the good, to avoid that which is evil, and to remain neutral

to that which is neither good nor evil (Seneca 156, 157). Two particularly important implications of this tenet are to live simply and to avoid self-defeating beliefs. For the Stoics, nature is easily satisfied. We too often think we need more to be happy than we really do. Humans can live with the bare necessities of life and be happy. We simply do not need bigger houses, fancier cars, larger bank accounts, or more sensual pleasure to be happy. Indeed, it is the desire for these things that often causes us to live unhappily outside of nature. On greed, for example, Seneca said, "For greed nothing is enough; Nature is satisfied with little" (Hadas 122).

The second implication is that we should avoid artificial and destructive self-defeating beliefs and attitudes. Certain societal norms and cultural values can impede human flourishing and happiness. Animals in nature do not endure grief from not owning things, angst because they are not respectable, or envy for things other animals have. They, unlike many humans, do not complain about their lot in life. It is because many humans labor under these human-made sources of unhappiness the Stoics admonish us to live in accordance with nature (Seneca 98, 167, 225, 226).

The seventh Stoic tenet is the need to use proper judgments of impressions, which is the Stoics way of saying we must develop the right beliefs and attitudes about events. We are bombarded daily with multiple impressions like others' opinions, societal norms and values, the inevitability of death, and the pull of passion. These impressions in themselves are just impressions; what matters is how we judge them. Epictetus demonstrated this tenet cogently with a comparison between two individuals with different judgments. He said one

takes pains to gain office, and the other to gain right judgments. Another endeavors to achieve riches, while the other concentrates on the proper use of impressions (Epictetus 260). He continues:

One . . . gets up in the morning and looks for some powerful person to flatter, someone to address pleasing words, someone to send a present to, and to gratify one man by reviling another. [The other] gets up in the morning and asks himself how can I be free from passion, how can I enjoy tranquility, and what am I? (Epictetus 261)

The Stoics believed one function of philosophy is to separate socially taught opinions from true belief in order to rid themselves of false beliefs that obscure the good (Nussbaum 333). Although this Stoic tenet pertains primarily to individual judgments, it also applies to the health of society. The Stoics, for example, say that they want to excise superficial false beliefs that justify differential treatment of humans based on status, class, origin, gender, and wealth (Nussbaum 334).

Clearly, having the right judgments entails having beliefs, attitudes, and values that enhance happiness. If we maintain the belief, for example, that what others have should be ours, we have set ourselves up for unhappiness because we will forever be desiring what we cannot achieve rather than be satisfied with what we have (Aurelius 90: Epictetus 158, 256).

The idea that happiness and freedom lie within choice, and that we ought to remain indifferent to that which is outside choice is the eighth Stoic tenet. Some matters are within our control, such as how hard we study for an exam, and some outside our control, such as

whether we will die. The Stoics believed that it is pointless to worry about those matters outside our control because there is simply nothing we can do about them. Hence their admonition that we ought to remain indifferent to matters outside choice.

The collateral view, that human freedom uniquely lies within choice, derives from the Stoics' belief that we have complete control over how we judge matters within our power. Epictetus says, for example, that our freedom is limited by "many masters," which are "circumstances," and the path to freedom is not to destroy the tyrant outside, but rather the one within us (Epictetus 232, 235). He tells us that knowledge is the path to freedom because with it we can, through proper judgments and choice, "turn out the tyrants within ourselves" (Epictetus 235). This form of freedom has been described as like a dog on a leash. The dog does not have the freedom to go wherever he wants, but he can go where he wants within the limits of the leash.

A consequence of this tenet is that we can choose to remain indifferent to matters beyond our control that bring unhappiness, and choose what to believe and how to act on those matters within our sphere of choice. Of the latter, Epictetus was thinking of desires in particular. He believed that our "tyrants" are those desires for things that are not within our ability to control (Epictetus 235). He said that tyrants are only "master[s] of [our] carcass" (Epictetus 46, 47). In a similar fashion, Seneca often refers to the "tyrants within," or those inner uncontrollable desires that often bring us unhappiness.

The ninth, and perhaps most famous, tenet is that pleasure and passion should be subordinate to reason. Seneca, for example, in *On Anger*, wrote that unrestrained anger at

some point becomes uncontrollable. Passions, like anger, possess us, we do not possess them (Cooper 35). Without superintending reason, anger indulges itself, judges capriciously, refuses to listen, and clings to what it has seized (Cooper 35). This tenet depends on the previously discussed third tenet that the rule of reason allows us to conquer our fears and passions.

This tenet bears directly on human happiness because, as the Stoics believe, uncontrollable pleasures and passions are a primary cause of human unhappiness. Once a passion is initiated, such as anger, and once pleasures become habit, there is little reason can do to restrict them. Uninhibited, they take on a life of their own, and anger becomes insatiable and pleasure engenders the desire for more pleasure. Unquenchable anger and unsatisfiable pleasure are significant sources of human unhappiness.

There is some disagreement on the scope of this tenet. Some believe that the Stoics, like Aristotle, meant that passion and pleasure should be moderated, whereas others believe they meant certain passions should be excised. I believe the Stoic message is mixed on this point. On the passion of anger, for example, Seneca clearly says in *On Anger* that the emotion of anger is not needed (Cooper 35). Conversely, on the passion of love, the Stoics equivocate. Marcus Aurelius said we should have “genuine love for children,” and Seneca says that family affection is natural and good (Aurelius 5). But, on the other hand, Seneca says in his consolation *To Helvia* that people come and go, so the Stoic ought to remain indifferent to such externals by remaining indifferent, which include familial relations (Hadas 11).

This tenet also precipitates certain important issues in philosophy, which are what the role of reason is in superintending the emotions and, collaterally, are there limits to reason's ability to moderate the passions? Further, are there alternate methods, such as intuition and imagination that can help us acquire beliefs that mitigate passion? These questions will be taken up later in Chapters Four and Five that deal with *enkrasia*.

Christopher Gill, in his introduction to Epictetus' *Discourses*, says that the tenth Stoic tenet, which is that happiness and the good life come from virtue, is a central Stoic ethical claim. For the Stoics, Gill says, virtue is the only good thing, and it alone constitutes human happiness (Epictetus xxi). Like many Hellenistic ethical theories, the Stoics emphasize it is what you are, and not externals, that determines your happiness. For happiness, what you are should include the virtues of simplicity, integrity, dignity, hard work, self-denial, contentment, frugality, kindness, independence, simplicity, discretion, magnanimity, bravery, loyalty, modesty, restraint, thrift, mercy, and self-control (Aurelius 36; Seneca 101). With such virtues, according to Cicero, when we can choose between good and evil, we will choose the good and thereby live in accordance with nature, and thus be happy (Cicero 167).

One Stoic belief concerning virtue that precipitates a problem is that we are not born with virtue, but rather acquire it only through effort. Epictetus said that nature does not give us virtue; rather the process of becoming a good man is an art. Virtue only comes by practice; we are born for it but not with it (Epictetus 176, 177). The ability to acquire virtue is problematic and thus tied closely to our ability to do what we will.

The Stoics conception of virtue as a character trait needed to regulate the passions through the will was a significant change in the historic meaning of the term. Virtue, in classical times, did not carry the connotation of moral uprightness that it does today (Ferngren 3). It originally signified Homeric masculine aristocratic qualities of courage, skill, and competitive prowess, which resulted in superiority (Ferngren 3). Its meaning evolved, however, to include excellence in other softer qualities like justice, right knowledge, and self-control. Plato used the term to denote the quality of human excellence attained through rationality. In the *Protagoras*, Plato said that “no one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil . . . it is not . . . in human nature,” which implies humans are inherently good and commit evil only out of ignorance (Plato 349). His concept of *arête* emphasized rationality, and is deterministic in that it is goodness humans naturally seek. To live a moral life, what mattered to Plato was to live in accordance with reason and to have the right knowledge in order to distinguish good from evil. Discerning how to act through will-power was not required to be a moral person.

The Stoics inherited much of Plato’s conception of *arête*, mostly through Cicero, but differed in the aforementioned need for will. Because, as Epictetus said, man was born for virtue and not with it, humans have the capacity to be good, but can also commit evil. For Epictetus, the essence of good resides in a certain disposition of our choice (Epictetus 76). The implications of this are that humans are not inherently good and are capable of irrational acts. This new Stoic interpretation of goodness presupposed an ability to choose, which, in turn, gave rise to the need for enkratic action to act in a moral way. It was natural then that the Stoics placed special emphasis on self-control in *arête*. To be a moral person

required, in part, knowledge of good and evil, a life lived in accordance with reason, and the ability to do as one wills. Through skill we have the capacity to become excellent at achieving these abilities, and thus the capacity to control our passions, which are the source of all evil, and live a happy life.

The Stoic interpretation of human nature and morality was realistic. Evil acts arise from more than just knowledge. Humans, with full knowledge of good and evil, are fully capable of committing evil acts due to other deficiencies in character, such as akrasia. Such people may know the moral thing to do, and they may judge it in their interests to do it, but not do it. Even though the Stoics wrongfully believed reason could cause enkratic action, their conception of human fallibility accounts for the many ways human fail to be moral, which presaged Christianities' concept of original sin. Because of this, the burden is placed on us to use all of our capacities, including reason, to act morally. I will further examine this topic, and in particular our ability to act enkratically and the limits to reason, in the next two chapters.

Stoic virtue brings happiness in two ways. First, if we are virtuous we hold the right beliefs or judgments regarding impressions which enhance our felicity. We remain indifferent to externals and make the right choices regarding that which is within our control. Second, because part of the Stoics' definition of virtue entails temperance and self-control, with it we are better able to rationally control our desires and emotions. For the Stoics, our appetites are the principal source of unhappiness, and controlling them is the antidote that enhances our level of happiness.

The eleventh Stoic tenet is that we should aim in life to achieve wisdom, to be courageous, to maintain self-control, and to act justly (Seneca 16). Wisdom includes having proper moral insight, and to act justly means upright dealings with other humans (Seneca 16). For the Stoics, these four qualities derive from virtue, or *arête*. They are necessary qualities that are subsumed in the tenth Stoic tenet, that happiness and the good life come from virtue (Seneca 15). In short, these virtuous qualities enable us to achieve true happiness.

Two of these four qualities bear directly on human happiness. Seneca said in *Letter XC* that wisdom's task is to discover truth (Seneca 162). Denial, self-deception, and self-serving beliefs may disguise sources of happiness, so they are not the route to happiness. Philosophy is unique in that it pursues truth, which makes it the ideal vehicle to disabuse us of harmful and self-defeating beliefs that cause unhappiness.

In *Letter CVII* Seneca said that we cannot change the conditions of our existence, so we should adopt a noble spirit and bear up bravely (Seneca 199). It might seem strange to list courage as a therapy for unhappiness; however, Stoic teaching tells us to remain indifferent to matters beyond our control, which is a tall order indeed. Your car has been stolen, your house burned to the ground, or you have just been told you have some fatal disease. None of these things are within our control, but with the help of courage we can stoically remain indifferent to them, and thus mitigate our unhappiness.

These are the Stoic tenets that deal directly with human happiness. The remaining four are general Stoic tenets that obliquely affect our happiness and are mentioned because they

are important distinguishing characteristics of Stoic philosophy.

The twelfth Stoic tenet is that all men are brothers, or as Cynic Diogenes of Sinope put it, we are “citizens of the world” (*kosmopolitēs*) (Green 57). This belief was a consequence of Alexander the Great’s career that made Greece but part of a much larger empire, which accelerated the decline of the insular Greek *polis*. The result was a more cosmopolitan Greek citizen where the “wise man stood apart from convention and . . . all regional ties” (Green 64). This tenet fostered an attitude of oneness, commonality, and even compassion for other human beings.

This tenet exposes a significant unresolved contradiction in Stoic philosophy. Earlier, Samuel Dill had characterized Stoicism as cold and indifferent, due to its emphasis on remaining indifferent to matters beyond our control and the need to limit passion. So, the Stoics are telling us to remain indifferent to others and to have compassion for others. Perhaps the best explanation for this contradiction is due to the evolving nature of Stoicism. Early Stoics, such as Zeno and Chrysippus, emphasized the need for indifference to achieve happiness, and later Stoics, like Marcus Aurelius, emphasized the brotherhood of man. The emphasis in their position changed over time.

The Stoics did make some inadequate efforts to resolve this contradiction. One such effort was to distinguish between doing something, such as wishing your children good health, but not desiring it, or not really caring whether they die. This seems like an implausible and unrealistic resolution to the contradiction because it requires us to simultaneously hold two contradictory sentiments.

In spite of this contradiction, I think this twelfth tenet was instrumental in making Stoicism, particularly that of the Third Stoa, a moral theory that explained how we ought to treat others. Indeed, we read in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* that we should be dedicated to the common good (Aurelius 6); that nature demands we cooperate like hands and feet (Aurelius 10); that we should focus on what is in our power, including kindness (Aurelius 36); that we were born for community (Aurelius 41); that rational beings were created for a single cooperative purpose, "I am a limb of the composite body of rational beings" (Aurelius 60); that we are rational and here to serve each other; that we are social (Aurelius 66); and, finally that we are born to serve the good of the community and to benefit fellow citizens (Aurelius 112).

It should be pointed out that this tenet makes happiness problematic for the individual because it implies that the source of our happiness depends on another's actions, which is an uncontrollable external that is beyond the individual's field of choice. Nevertheless, it is assumed that an individual's happiness would be enhanced by living in such a mutually supportive Stoic community.

I think the thirteenth Stoic tenet is remarkable, considering that in ancient Greece and Rome, inequality was the accepted way of life. The Stoics believed that all humans are equal, including women and slaves. Among modern interpretations of this Stoic tenet are Robin Campbell's introduction to Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic*, which said that Seneca had an "implicit belief in . . . equality," and Martha Nussbaum, in her book *The Therapy of Desire*, who wrote that the Stoics frequently criticized "the differential treatment of human beings

based on superficial distinctions of status, class, origin, gender, wealth” (Seneca 19; Nussbaum 334). This is a belief that the Stoics may have inherited from the Sophists, which derives from the idea that if we have the capacity to make people unequal, then we must also have the capacity to make them equal.

Stoic Musonius Rufus, who wrote in the Third Stoa, provided the justifications for treating women equally in *That women too should do philosophy*. He said that “Women have received from the gods the same rationality as men have;” that “the female has the same senses as the male;” and that “the desire for and affinity to virtue are not limited to [men] but also occur in women” (Inwood 177). Because the genders have the common capacity for rationality and virtue, and because they share the same senses, Rufus concluded that women ought to also do philosophy.

I will digress here and discuss the Stoics controversial fourteenth tenet, which is the belief in fate, because it has a direct bearing on humans’ ability to help themselves achieve happiness. The term fate generally means personal destiny or personal fortune, which presupposes determinism, or the idea that everything is a necessary result of a sequence of causes. The Stoics belief in destiny, therefore, is a deterministic view. Clearly, the early First Stoa philosophers believed in fate. Chrysippus, in *On Fate*, Posidonius, in the second book of *On Fate*, and Zeno all say that things happen by fate (Laertius 44). Historian Diogenes Laertius, in his *Life of Zeno*, attributes the belief that human “fate is an endless chain of causation” to these Stoics, and in particular Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism (Laertius 44). Their position, however, is not so clear. They understood the contradiction between

their belief in fate and their belief that “[We] have only to will a thing, and it comes to pass” (Epictetus 273).

This contradiction surfaces often in Stoic literature. W. E. H. Lecky said that “the Stoics asserted [free will] in unequivocal language, and in their practical ethics even exaggerated its power” (Lecky 200). Seneca, for example, said in *On Favors*, “fate is simply a chain of connected causes” in which everything happens in accordance with a fate, or necessary sequence of causes (Cooper 279). He also says in *Letter CVII* that events outside our control, like floods and fire, “are conditions of our existence we cannot change,” so we must “adopt a noble spirit” toward them and “bear up bravely” (Seneca 199). On the other hand, John Cooper and J. F. Procopé believe that central to Seneca’s philosophy is that “we have the ability to cause changes in our bodies and in the world around us through our *own* power of thought and decision,” which power we derive from reason (Cooper xviii, xix). We have the freedom to choose. It seems plausible that Third Stoa Stoic philosopher Epictetus’ took a compatibilist position similar to that of Daniel Dennett’s which was described in the introduction. Like the dog on a leash, we have the ability through reason to act freely within the “length of the leash,” which, are those events within our control, owing to our own attitudes and beliefs of impressions.

The consequence of this contradiction precipitated an ongoing effort in Stoicism to retreat, or reconcile, fate with free will. This issue was the subject of a spirited debate between A. A. Long, in his *Problems in Stoicism*, and Richard Sorabji, in his impressive book, *Necessity, Cause and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle’s Theory*. A. A. Long claimed that the

Stoic determinism does not exclude a coherent theory of voluntary human action (Long 174). Man, he claims, is a rational being, and under Stoic pantheism there exists a portion of God in each man (Long 179). Man's portion may be weak, but man does have autonomy. (Long 179) Richard Sorabji disagreed. He did a masterful job identifying, and refuting, eight arguments the Stoics used to escape the determinist label. Some of these arguments are that the impossible does not always follow from the possible (a controversial argument from Chrysippus that is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine); necessity does not always spread from antecedent to consequent (from Cicero); and perhaps, most importantly, that there exists a distinction between internal and external causes (Zeno, Chrysippus, and Cicero) (Sorabji 72, 80).

Endeavoring to resolve this dispute is beyond the scope of this thesis, which is why I made the assumption in the introduction that some form of human freedom exists. The point of all this is that, even though the fourteenth tenet ascribes the belief in fate to the Stoics, I think the jury is out on the issue.

The fifteenth and last Stoic tenet is the controversial belief in suicide. I do not endorse this tenet, but the Stoics did. For the Stoics, suicide is a viable solution for unhappiness. Seneca said in *Letter LXXVII* that freedom from pain is always near: just kill yourself (Seneca 128). He also says in *Letter XCI* that no one has power over us when death is within our power (Seneca 183). Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, said that if your judgments of things trouble you, if there is an obstacle in your way "too solid to move," there is no cause for distress because you can always depart this life (Aurelius 79). (The actual quotation

from Aurelius is that you “must” depart this life. For purposes of this explanation of the Stoics’ view on suicide, I believe “can always,” or “may” depart this life, is representative of his view). Unlike many of the other tenets, this is not a way to bring happiness, rather a solution to escape unhappiness.

Today, we generally discourage suicide. However, it remains a controversial issue. Oregonians have debated this issue and decided that suicide is acceptable under certain circumstances: they passed Oregon’s Death with Dignity law that legalized suicide for the terminally ill. The interesting question is, why should suicide not be legal for other maladies that bring unhappiness? Put more broadly, why should the state usurp the individuals’ right to do with their own life as they see fit? This question is beyond the scope of this thesis, but contemporary Oregon law demonstrates that the issue of suicide’s relevance continues to be controversial.

These tenets, and in particular the first eleven, will surface often in this thesis. There are numerous additional lesser tenets, beliefs, and ideas the Stoics espouse that will emerge and be examined. I believe that these fifteen Stoic tenets are pertinent ideas that are as relevant today as they were 2,300 years ago.

Now that Stoicism as a broad ancient philosophy has been described, I will now focus on one particularly important Stoic, Annaeus Seneca.

3.1.2.3 Seneca’s life

Annaeus Seneca (b. 4 BC-d. 65 AD) was a Roman politician, writer, and Stoic philosopher

in the first century. Because he is perhaps the best interpreter and exponent of Stoic philosophy, I have chosen him to be Stoicism's chief spokesman. His philosophy is representative of Stoicism, he presents it clearly and concisely, his philosophy is delivered in a didactic way in his *Letters from a Stoic*, and his views represent the matured and systematized Stoic philosophy of the Third Stoa. I will give a brief biography of his life, a description of his philosophy, and summary of his corpus.

Seneca was born in Cordoba, Spain, then a Roman province, in about 4 BC, to an upper-class family of the equestrian order (Cooper xi). His father, Marcus Annaeus Seneca, was an imperial procurator (a high level administrator involved in governing and tax collecting) (Seneca 7). Seneca suffered ill health, particularly from asthma, and valetudinarianism plagued him throughout his life. He spent a portion of his youth living in Egypt with his Aunt Maria, where he studied administration, finance, geology, and ethnology, and where he acquired an enduring interest in Pythagorean mysticism (Seneca 7). He also was attracted to the practical aspects of philosophy, which could be summarized in his previously mentioned comment that philosophy "consists not in words but realities," and that its purpose is to steer us "through the hazards of waves" (Duff 198). He was taken to Rome as a young child to live with his aunt, where he received an extensive education in philosophy with teachers like Sotion, Attalus (a Stoic philosopher from Pergamum), and Papirius Fabianus, who had studied under Quintus Sextius (Cooper xii). He trained for the bar and entered politics, eventually becoming a quaestor and leading speaker of the Senate (Duff 199; Seneca 8). In 17 AD his talent as an orator brought the jealousy of Emperor Caligula, who ordered his execution. Seneca was only saved by "a woman close to the imperial throne

who said that [he] was ‘suffering from advanced tuberculosis and it would not be long before he died’” (Seneca 8).

Caligula was murdered in 41 AD, and his uncle Claudius ascended the throne (Cooper xiii). In 41 AD Seneca was again sentenced to death by Claudius for allegedly having an affair with Julia Livilla, a niece of the emperor, which was commuted to banishment (Duff 162; Cooper xiii). He endured exile in Corsica from 41 to 49 AD, during which he wrote some of his consolations, including *To Helvia*, *To Polybius*, and *On Anger* (Seneca 8; Cooper xiii). During his banishment he also lost his father, wife, and child (Duff 162). His fortunes were dramatically reversed in 49 AD, when he was recalled to Rome at the instigation of Agrippina, the emperor’s mother (Seneca 8). He was given the high office of praetor, and he was made tutor to her twelve-year-old son, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, soon to be the emperor Nero (Seneca 8, 9; Duff 163). He was then between fifty and fifty-four years old (Cooper xiii). Seneca thus began the *quinquennium Neronis*, or five years of tutoring young Nero (Duff 163). Claudius was poisoned in 54 AD, after which Seneca wrote the *Apocolocyntosis*, or “Pumpkinification” of the dead emperor. It is an imaginary tale of Claudius presenting himself at the portals of heaven, and the gods’ debate whether to admit him (Seneca 9). With the ascendancy of seventeen-year-old Nero to the throne in 54 AD, Seneca and an army officer named Afranius Burrus were able, as “behind the throne powers,” to shape Rome to their cosmopolitan bents (Duff 163; Seneca 9; Hadas 6; Cooper xiv). Seneca has been characterized during this period as “the real master of the world,” and the moving force behind the throne (Seneca 10). Some have called this period the “finest period in the history of imperial Rome” (Seneca 9). Seneca initiated legal and financial

reforms to prevent peculation and extortion, and prosecuted a successful war in Armenia (Seneca 10). This period of enlightenment gradually came to an end as the young emperor Nero began listening to other advisors and to indulge in his more violent and vindictive impulses (Seneca 10). In 55 AD Nero had his half-brother and competitor to the throne, thirteen-year-old Britannicus, poisoned, and in 59 AD he put his mother Agrippina to death (Cooper xiv). Seneca's ally, Afranius Burrus died, probably by murder, in 62 AD (Seneca 12). Nero began relying on other advisers, partly due to his desire to "shake off his tutor," so Seneca asked for permission to retire, which was granted (Seneca 12). He spent the remaining three years of his life, or about 62-65 AD, writing many of his principal works, including *On Leisure* and *Moral Letters* (Duff 164). In 65 AD a conspiracy against Nero, engineered by Piso and others, was uncovered, in which Seneca may have been involved (Seneca 13). The result was a purge in which many Romans lost their lives, including Seneca (Seneca 13). Imperial executions were accomplished by the emperor's requesting suicide, which he did of Seneca in 65 AD (Duff 164; Seneca 13). Seneca complied and committed suicide by "open[ing] his veins" the same year (Cooper xv).

Seneca's philosophy was quintessentially Stoic and the rule of reason in life was a central theme. He believed we should be ruled by reason, which is a principle with many collateral and logical consequences. Reason tells us to live in accordance with nature, or to live simply, and to avoid that which is unnatural, such as luxury and avarice, because they take our happiness. Living in accordance with reason also results in Seneca's Stoic belief that pleasures and passions should be subordinate to the mind. He believed that reason should superintend our passions. Reason also tells us that humans are naturally brothers because

they share the ability to reason. A greater sense of brotherhood increases communal harmony that enhances our safety and happiness. Further, it is our ability to reason that, as Seneca says, enables us to understand the need to remain indifferent to things outside our control because we have no control over them. We should adjust our thinking in order not to place a high value on things, and we must know that things are as we make them. Finally, because we cannot control things outside our ability, reason tells us that we should believe in fate and not fear death. He asks, "Why fear that which is inevitable?" Instead, we should approach life with wisdom, courage, self-control, and justice.

There are two important aspects of Seneca's Stoic philosophy that I would like to highlight. The first is his emphasis on remaining indifferent to things beyond our control. For Seneca, this is a requisite for felicity. I believe a principal reason for this belief is that Seneca himself lived a good deal of his life under capricious and arbitrary power under the specter of execution. He trained himself to remain tranquil under such awful circumstances. It seems certain that remaining indifferent to things beyond his control, and endeavoring to control his passions, particularly his fear of death, enabled him to cope with life, and perhaps to achieve a level of tranquility. I think this point was made conspicuous by Epictetus, who also lived under tyrants, when he said "a tyrant is only master of my carcass" (Epictetus 47).

The interesting thing to take from this, and the one pertinent to America today, is that we also live under some form of arbitrary and capricious power, and that power is fortune. Americans who passionately pursue the "tyrants" of wealth, power, prestige, and sensual

pleasure have given over their happiness to matters entirely beyond their control.

The second aspect of Seneca's philosophy I would like to emphasize is his belief that all people are equal, which implies all people should be treated equally (Seneca 19). Although Seneca held a narrow class-based view of what constitutes equality, he said in *Letter LXXVI* that all Roman citizens must be equal before the law (Seneca 145). This principle may have originated with the Sophists' concept of *nomos*, which is that morality is subjective and that laws were human-made. If we can make laws that create inequality, then we must also be able to make laws that bring equality. It seems conceivable that this belief of the Sophists may have influenced Seneca, and Gorgias, who was a part of the Stoic historic thread, is a possible source. This was a remarkably unique belief at that time, and one that enhances happiness because individuals are treated equally under the law and not capriciously.

It seems certain that if Americans followed Seneca's Stoic advice and used reason to superintend their passions; did not place a high value on things outside their control; lived simply in accordance with nature; avoided ambition, luxury, and avarice; and pursued wisdom, courage, self-control, and a proper sense of justice, they would be a happier lot.

Stoic ethics were a needed product of their time that enabled people to deal successfully with the verities of existence. There were no "safety nets" in antiquity, so people naturally endorsed a practical and prudential theory that enabled them to accept what was offered in order to retain a degree of happiness. In this respect, I believe Stoicism worked. Certainly, there are innumerable causes of unhappiness that Stoic philosophy does not address such as drug addiction and mental disturbance, but it would appear that many of the issues the

ancients faced are the same issues we face today. Poverty, sickness, bereavement, envy, anger, hate, and fear are timeless human conditions and emotions that militate against our happiness today as much as they did in ancient times. In this regard, I think the tenets of Stoicism are as relevant to contemporary Americans as they were to ancient societies.

3.1.2.4 Seneca's corpus and philosophy

Seneca's Stoic philosophy, and how it pertains to happiness, is presented in his main corpus, which consists of three general works, twelve dialogues, three of which are consolations, nine tragedies, and a play. His Stoic philosophy on how to live is presented mostly in *Letters from a Stoic* and the twelve dialogues. The *Apocolocyntosis*, the tragedies, and the play primarily dramatize his philosophy. Undoubtedly, *Letters from a Stoic* is the principal, and most comprehensive, summary of his ideas (Cooper xv). It has been described as the "most important body of more or less complete Stoic writings to survive from antiquity" (Cooper xi). His dialogues generally focus on some particular topic or aspect of life that deals with happiness, such as anger, the shortness of life, leisure, or tranquility. For this reason, what follows of Seneca's corpus and philosophy will focus on his *Letters from a Stoic* and dialogues.

Seneca's general works are *Natural Questions*, *Apocolocyntosis*, and *Letters from a Stoic*. *Natural Questions*, which consists of seven books that deal with certain natural phenomena like thunder, snow, rain, hail, earthquakes, and comets, will not be described here (Hadas 13). It was an influential book, albeit its "science" is antiquated. The *Apocolocyntosis*, or "pumpkinification," is a satire on the deification of Emperor Claudius (Hadas 14). It was

Seneca's effort to pass judgment and calumnize Claudius posthumously, which he did by concocting a debate among the gods on what to do with him at the gates of heaven. One god says "there's a bit of the Stoic deity in him . . . for he's got neither heart or head" (Duff 240). Another god says that he used to kill people as a dog squats down. Eventually, they decide to send him to Hades to meet his victims. His victims then judge him as he judged them, which was by hearing only the prosecution's case. They pronounced him guilty and made him a "law-clerk in attendance upon cases for evermore" (Duff 242).

Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic* touches on many core Stoic tenets that deal with human happiness. On the Stoic belief that happiness and the good life comes from virtue, Seneca says in *Letter XXVII* that good character is the only guarantee of everlasting, carefree happiness (Seneca 73). With virtue we live by principles which naturally limit our actions, and without it we, as Seneca says in *Letter CV*, live without self-restraint in stormy and disordered lives passing time "in a state of fear" (Seneca 196).

On the Stoic view that peace and contentment do not come when high value is set on externals, he says in *Letter VIII* that what fortune has made yours is not your own, and in *Letter IX* he says once you start looking outside yourself for any part of yourself, you are on the road to being dominated by fortune, which means you have lost control of your happiness (Seneca 47, 51). For Seneca, the wise man is content with what is his (Seneca 53).

Because wealth is an external, the Stoics discourage it and the avarice and greed that often accompany it. On wealth, Seneca, in *Letter CVIII*, quotes Publilius Syrus, who said, "he needs but little . . . desires but little, [because] he has his wish, whose wish can be to have

what is enough," and in *Letter XVII* he tells us if we practice poverty we will not fear the loss of wealth (Seneca 203, 68). Seneca explains the Stoics' reason for not placing value on externals in *Letter IX*, where he says the wise man refuses to allow what goes badly for him to affect him (Seneca 87).

The reality that we die seems to disturb some people, which is a source of unhappiness. Seneca's solution follows the Stoic advice that, because we cannot control that which is outside our choice, we should remain indifferent to it. For the Stoics, happiness and freedom lie within choice. In *Letter XXVI*, for example, Seneca says that a person who has learned how to die has learned how not to be a slave, and in *Letter XII* he tells us not to be disturbed by death because it is "unnatural to hope for one more day" (Seneca 72, 89).

A fundamental canon of Stoic philosophy is to live in accordance with nature. This idea has many meanings that include to live simply, to want the right things, and to be wary of common opinion. Seneca espouses this canon many times, such as in *Letter XVI*, where he quotes Epicurus, who said, "If you shape your life according to nature, you will never be poor; if according to people's opinions, you will never be rich" (Seneca 65). In *Letter V* he advocates simple living and points out that looking into the future only brings anxiety and, I would add, unhappiness because we start thinking about controlling the future rather than adapting ourselves to the present (Seneca 37, 38). We, in short, unnecessarily complicate our lives by focusing on the uncertain future rather than solving the real problems we face today.

Perhaps the best known Stoic tenet is that pleasure and passion should be subordinate to

the mind and soul. The idea is simple; the Stoics believe that the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure for happiness can never be achieved because the satisfaction of pleasure only brings the desire for more pleasure. Indeed, in *Letter XVI* Seneca asks if desire is capable of coming to an end (Seneca 65). The Stoic's solution is both to dampen, and, if possible, debride the emotions, the passions, and desire with reason. They believe the result will bring happiness. Seneca expresses this tenet numerous times in many ways throughout his *Letters from a Stoic*. In *Letter XC* he says that when we begin wanting things that are inessential, we hand the mind over to the body and become slaves to pleasure; we only focus on the "business of the body" (Seneca 168). In *Letter CVI* he tells us to reject the life of pleasure because it makes us place demands on fortune (Seneca 194). On desire, Seneca says in *Letter II* that it is not the man with too little who is poor, but rather the man who hankers for more; the latter only counts what he is yet to get, and not what he already has (Seneca 34). In *Letter IX* he says the wise man is content with himself, and in *Letter XV* that following blind desire will never bring satisfaction (and I would add lasting happiness) (Seneca 51, 62). Seneca makes it clear in *Letter XV* how pleasant it is to ask for nothing, and thus be independent of fortune (Seneca 62).

In *Letter LV* Seneca makes it clear that the passions are perhaps the greatest source of human unhappiness (Seneca 107). Of the passions, he is particularly interested in anger. In his dialogue *On Anger*, he argues that anger is a useless emotion that we ought to purge from our character. In *Letter XLVII* he reminds us how masters are robbed of their senses by passing fancies when they get angry, and that anger is called out by anything that fails to answer the master's will (Seneca 95).

Three closely related Stoic beliefs are (1) that reason allows us to conquer pain and grief; (2) that the proper use of reason in philosophy can bring tranquility to the mind; and (3) that the result will be wisdom, or knowledge of how to live in such a way that brings happiness. This is why Seneca said in *Letter IX* that all we need (for happiness) is a rational and elevated spirit that treats fortune with disdain, and in *Letter XLI* that our spirit is reason perfected because it fulfills the purpose for which we are born, namely to live in accordance with our own nature (Seneca 51, 89). Seneca believed that philosophy focuses on happiness and strips the mind of empty thinking (*Letter XC*), and it guides those in doubt and disarray by showing truth (*Letter XLVIII*). Philosophy makes conspicuous what is necessary and what is superfluous (Seneca 171, 98). Philosophy also has the ability to blunt the blows of circumstances (Seneca 103). Finally, reason and philosophy bring wisdom, and it is the perfection of wisdom that Seneca tells us in *Letter XVI* brings happiness (Seneca 63). The opposite of wisdom is ignorance, which Seneca tells us in *Letter XXVIII* is like running away, which cannot bring happiness because we are running away in our own company (Seneca 76).

The Stoics believed that in order to be happy we need to use proper judgments of impressions, one consequence of which will result in our holding the right beliefs and attitudes. Selfishness and hubris are examples of wrongful beliefs. In *Letter XLVIII*, for example, Seneca says that no one can lead a happy life when one thinks only of himself and turns others to one's purposes. In *Letter LXII* he tells us that sadness will cease as soon as we take our eyes off ourselves (Seneca 96, 114). Another proper judgment is to appreciate today because tomorrow we may be dead. He says, for example, in *Letter CVIII* that every

day should be welcomed as if it were the finest day imaginable; what flies past has to be seized (Seneca 209). It seems that too many people live life as if they are going to live for 1,000 years.

My favorite Stoic view is that things are what we make them. If you think about it this is profound. You could be sick, poor, angry, anxious, fearful, jealous, or physically tortured, but ultimately it is what you think about it that determines whether you are happy or sad. Certainly, some things like the pain experienced in dying or torture are difficult to master, but this does not defeat the Stoic's proposition that, ultimately, how we feel about them depends entirely on what we think about them. The Stoics often say that the world is as we make it, which is timeless advice that we might as easily hear from a psychology counselor today. Simply put, Seneca says in *Letter LXXVII* that everything hangs on one's thinking (Seneca 134).

Seneca's dialogues are primarily concerned with what makes for a happy life. In them he addresses issues like the destructive nature of anger, what constitutes a happy life, the salubrious nature of tranquility, the importance of leisure, as well as certain maladies of the soul. In the three consolations he deals mostly with grief, misery, and sadness because they are deterrents to happiness. An underlying theme in the dialogues is the nature of externals and how we ought to deal with them in order to be happy. His dialogues express Stoic tenets, albeit in different ways. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on his dialogue, *On Anger*, because it exemplifies Stoic philosophy on the emotion of anger. I will then mention the salient points of Stoic philosophy presented in the other dialogues.

On Anger is perhaps Seneca's most important dialogue. I wish I had read it when I was a young man, for it would have saved me from considerable angst caused by anger. I would have learned from Seneca the nature of the passion of anger, its pejorative consequences, and the need to remove it entirely from my emotional make-up. Because this dialogue is a paradigm of Seneca's persuasive reasons why certain injurious passions should be extirpated, it will be examined in depth.

Seneca wrote *On Anger* in response to the assassination in 41 AD of the emperor Caligula, whose tyrannical anger inflicted considerable suffering (Cooper 3). In the introduction he calls anger a "brief insanity," which leads to his memorable line, "you could not tell whether the vice is more hateful or ugly" (Duff 171). Seneca makes the case that anger is uncontrollable, harmful, unnecessary, and useless.

Seneca is responding primarily to Aristotle, who said, ". . . 'good temper' consists of a fixed disposition to feel intermediate amounts of anger, as suits the circumstances . . ." (Cooper nn. 22, 25). Seneca disagrees, and makes the case that anger, once unleashed, is uncontrollable. He says that anger is:

oblivious of decency, heedless of personal bonds, obstinate and intent on anything once started, closed to reasoning or advice, agitated on pretexts without foundation, incapable of discerning fairness or truth . . . those who possess it are insane. (Cooper 17)

Aristotle believed that emotions like anger serve as arms, to which Seneca says that if this were true then, like weapons of war, they could be picked up and put down at will (Cooper 35). Unfortunately, the weapon of anger goes to war by itself, without waiting for the

warrior (Cooper 35).

Central to Seneca's argument is the belief that anger can prove more powerful than its governor, reason (Cooper 25). It is a self-sustaining force that sweeps us on (Cooper 25). If a man, for example, is angry, he will be angry with each transgression, and the greater the transgressions, the angrier he will get (Cooper 47). For Seneca, "[T]here can be no limit to his anger, if it is to tally with each man's action," and he will spend his life in "bad temper and grief At every moment he will see something to disapprove of . . . [and always] some ground for indignation" (Cooper 47). Anger simply refuses to be governed (Cooper 37).

Seneca argues that anger is beneficial like poison (Cooper 30). He says that man was begotten for mutual assistance, not angry mutual destruction; to seek to help, and not to do harm; to succor even the unknown, rather than fly at those who are dearest (Cooper 23). "Human life," he continues, "rests upon kindness and concord . . . [and] . . . not by terror" (Cooper 23). The nature of man is not to punish with anger because it is not in accordance with nature (Cooper 24). Anger is simply unnecessarily harmful.

Seneca continues to make the case that anger is an unnecessary emotion. He says, "Virtue needs no vice [anger] to assist it; it suffices for itself" (Cooper 27). He disagrees with Aristotle's contention that "anger is needful; no fight can be won without it," by pointing out that it is mistaken to ". . . enlist the aid of reckless unbridled impulses over which [reason] has no authority" (Cooper 27). For Seneca, virtues like bravery, industry, and quietude are demoted to dependency on vice when they come about only by anger, greed, and fear; they simply do not need vices, like anger, to be virtues (Cooper 28).

Some, like Aristotle, think that anger is useful because it makes men “keener in a fight” (Cooper 31). To this argument Seneca retorts that, based on such a principle, so would be drunkenness, lunacy, and madness (Cooper 31). He says anger is not an aid to courage, but rather a useless replacement for it (Cooper 3). It is more admirable to face adversity with guidance and self-duty (and I would add resolution, will, and reason), than anger and raging impulse (Cooper 30).

Seneca now turns to the importance of reason and argues that anger is not needed because we are equipped with reason (Cooper 35). He believes that reason is enough, it is stronger, and it stands by its decisions, whereas anger quickly collapses (Cooper 35). Anger is inconsistent and sometimes goes further than it should or sometimes stops short. It, unlike reason, indulges itself, judges capriciously, refuses to listen, and clings to what it has seized (Cooper 35). Reason, on the other hand, gives itself time to “tease truth” to arrive at a fair judgment, whereas anger is in a hurry to arrive at a judgment that has already been passed (Cooper 36). Reason considers the matter at hand, whereas anger is aroused by irrelevant trifles (Cooper 36).

Seneca raises the question whether anger starts with a decision, or with an impulse (Cooper 42). He concludes that anger is only set in motion by an impulse with which the mind assents (Cooper 42). This means that we have the ability to control anger; it is not a knee-jerk emotion, but rather one that requires us to evaluate and assent. As Seneca says, anger only occurs “with the mind’s approval” (Cooper 42). Put another way, anger is put to flight by precept because it is a voluntary fault of the mind (Cooper 43). This is a remarkable

Stoic insight into the nature of anger. Our precepts, or those perceptions and beliefs we voluntarily adopt, control our emotions. The implication is that if we regard anger as a destructive emotion, we will naturally avoid it. Literally, if we can choose our precepts, then we could control our emotions, like anger. I find this a liberating thought. Stoicism tells us that if we adopt the proper precepts we have it in our power to control our emotions. Circumstances do not define how we feel; we determine how we feel.

Seneca offers some practical advice on avoiding anger; namely, do not expect too much from humans. Demanding perfection in others, or yourself, only sets you up for disappointment and unhappiness. He says that we are like children who fail to see what they are doing, so we must “pardon the human race” (Cooper 49). Because there are so many wrongdoers, we must accept our human condition (Cooper 50). Put simply, Seneca says that no one should be angry at human error (Cooper 49).

Seneca concludes his discourse on anger on an optimistic note. He says that the mind can tame anger through dogged determination. He believes that we have it within our power to beat back the “germs of anger” (Cooper 26). If we succeed, our prize is the “unshaken calm of a happy mind” (Cooper 53).

Seneca’s remaining eleven dialogues address numerous sources of unhappiness, four of which I will briefly describe. They involve fear, meaning, mercy, and grief. His dialogue *On Tranquility* is about fear. He claims fear is a significant, but avoidable, source of human unhappiness. He tells us that we should be like Socrates, who lived life as a free man walking unafraid amid the thirty tyrants of Athens. With the proper judgment of events we

can “move and not freeze in the fetters of fear” (Hadas 87).

In this dialogue Seneca focused on the fear of non-acceptance, or the fear of not being accepted and being rejected by others, which are two sides of the same coin. He says that our need to be accepted causes us to maintain a careful pose. We are “tormented by the thought of being caught out of character and constantly feel as if [we] are being assayed every time [we] are looked at” (Hadas 104). We fear that others will not like who we really are, so we never reveal our natural selves. The consequence is that we live like “people in a fiction, polished up for exhibition” (Hadas 104). We, in short, live life “under a mask” (Hadas 104). The solution is for us to be honest with ourselves and others because it is “better to be scorned for simplicity than tormented by permanent hypocrisy” (104). In *On the Shortness of Life*, Seneca argues that our happiness is enhanced if we have meaning in life. Much unhappiness derives from a life “frittered away in futile occupations . . . squandered for trivial reasons” (Hadas 11).

Seneca became concerned when his former pupil Nero came to power and began his reign of cruelty. He intended his dialogue *On Mercy* to be a message to Nero, which was to be merciful (Cooper 119). Seneca believed that, because all men are born even-tempered, it is natural to have the characteristics of clemency, tolerance, and forbearance (Cooper 122). They are “characteristic[s] of a great mind [and its tendency] . . . to be peaceful and calm” (Cooper 134). They are characteristics that make “a house happy and calm” (Cooper 134). Seneca demonstrated that happiness is a consequence of mercy with an example. A Roman named Cinna, who was a “dim-witted man,” planned to assassinate the Emperor Augustus

for some perceived offense (Cooper 138). Augustus, who discovered Cinna's intention, could have had Cinna executed on the spot, but instead was merciful. He asked Cinna whether killing him would truly solve his problems, to which dim-witted Cinna had no answer (Cooper 140). Augustus then pardoned Cinna and declared, "from this day on, let friendship between us begin" (Cooper 140). The result was that Cinna "[became his] . . . warmest and loyalist friend . . . [and]. . . no further plots were hatched against him by anyone" (Cooper 140). Augustus' simple act of mercy saved a man's life, avoided the pain his execution may have caused Cinna and others, enhanced his personal safety, and brought him a life long friend and loyal subject. It was a wise and gracious act that brought greater happiness for all.

The consolation *To Helvia* deals with grief. It is a letter from Seneca to his mother, Helvia, endeavoring to console her for the loss of her son, who has been sent to Corsica in exile (Hadas 10). Seneca offers his mother certain essential Stoic remedies to mitigate unhappiness. He tells his mother that nature has equipped humans with the ability to make themselves happy, so she must rely on herself to allay her grief (Hadas 11). He tells her that reason will enable her to control the passion, and to remain indifferent to things beyond her control. He says people come and go, so the Stoic ought to prepare for this eventuality by remaining indifferent to familial relations (Hadas 11).

Seneca's nine tragedies and play *Octavia* mostly dramatize Stoic principles, and in particular the need to control our passions. The tragedies and play repeatedly demonstrate how uncontrollable passion leads to unhappiness, anguish, and tragedy. Because they

introduce few new philosophic reasons that support Stoic theory, I will describe *Medea* and *Thyestes* because they so dramatically express Seneca's Stoic point, and then briefly comment on the others.

Of his tragedies, *Medea* is Seneca's greatest. His rewrite of Euripides' *Medea* features Medea, or "the scheming one," whose love for her husband Jason causes her to become enraged when he decides to marry the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth (MacKendrick 309). Medea exclaims, "the fury of revenge" and "wild delight . . . possess me and drives me on" to kill my children for revenge (MacKendrick 322). For Seneca, this is an example of the inexorable consequence of unrestrained passion.

The brutal consequences of anger and revenge are dramatized even further in Seneca's disturbing play *Thyestes*. Atreus, the king of Argos, is enraged at his deposed brother Thyestes for numerous transgressions against him. In revenge, he kills Thyestes' sons and feeds their ground up bodies to an unwitting Thyestes at a banquet. Trusting Thyestes says during the banquet that he wishes to be with his sons, to whom Atreus slyly says, "you are" (Seneca 87). Seneca puts in Atreus' mouth the words that "sin's requital acknowledges no limits" (Seneca 91). For the Stoic Seneca, sinning for revenge and the uncontrollable passion of hatred know no limits (Seneca 91).

In the *Trojan Women*, Seneca demonstrates the consequences of anger and its child revenge. In it, Agamemnon, the commander of the Greeks, says "anger . . . whose appetite, once [having] tasted blood, outruns all reason" (Seneca 167). Seneca's tragedy *Phaedra* dramatizes the pejorative consequences of lust. Phaedra, who lusts after innocent

Hippolytus, initiates an unforeseen chain of cause and effect that ends in tragedy. In *Oedipus*, Oedipus gouges his eyes out after learning he killed his father and married his mother, which demonstrates that wrongs only perpetuate wrongs, remorse and grief. The tragedy reminds us of the Stoic solution to wrongdoing, which is to cultivate virtue.

Seneca's only play *Octavia*, in which his contemporaries appear as characters, makes the point that unrestrained covetousness, cruelty, greed, lust, and impiety are the causes of many human troubles. Octavia, the wife of the cruel Emperor Nero, suffers horribly from his indulgence in these passions. Under their influence, Nero kills her brother Britannicus, condemns Octavia to exile, marries his mistress Poppaea, and kills his own mother Agrippina. Octavia laments being married to such evil, an evil that hates her and wishes her dead.

3.1.2.5 Comments and summary

It is important to mention two things about Seneca. First, he lived in a different age with a different world view. His Roman world accepted slavery, gruesome gladiatorial shows, mostly authoritarian government, and stratified classes. It was a world entirely different from contemporary America, American values, and American principles of government. Seneca is not a modern American. This said, I believe that much of his Stoic philosophy is timeless and applicable to many contemporary American problems.

Second, many have accused Seneca of being a hypocrite, owing to the difference between his philosophy and practice. He eschewed wealth but was wealthy, he derided tyranny but

was the tutor to the tyrant Nero, and he advised against living a life of pleasure, yet indulged in pleasure. Seneca had said, for example, in his consolation *On the Happy Life*, that wealth is “the wise man’s servant and the fool’s master,” and that the wise man could lose all his wealth and still be happy (Seneca 11). Suillius asked, “What kind of wisdom, what philosophical teachings, had led [Seneca] to acquire three hundred million sesterces within the space of four years in royal favor?” (Seneca 11). Thomas Carlyle famously said that Seneca was “so wistfully desirous to stand well with Truth and yet not ill with Nero [and thus is] our perhaps niceliest proportioned half-and-half” (Duff 205). Seneca might have rejoined these critics with the lame response that “philosophers do not practice what they preach” (Seneca 11).

Seneca’s hypocrisy is a significant problem for my thesis because I claim we must be able to do Stoic philosophy in order to achieve happiness. We must be able to act enkratically. In Chapter Five I describe enkrasia as a continuum in which we have varying degrees of control over our actions. I claim that the greater the control, the greater the potential for happiness. Thus, the answer may be that even though Seneca is closer to the akratic end of the continuum, he is still exercising some continent ability. More importantly, it would appear that Seneca’s principal source of distress was the possibility of instant execution, and it was this source of unhappiness he assuaged by adopting a key Stoic tenet. That tenet was to remain indifferent to matters beyond choice. Carlyle never lived under Caligula and Nero. It is easy for one who lives safely in a free country to criticize at a distance another who lives under tyranny and in constant fear of losing his life.

Seneca was only human, which for me only makes him more complicated and interesting. His balancing act between philosophy and tyranny, his association with unrestrained power, and the suffering he experienced as a result, signify a man who knows what he is talking about. He understands capricious power, wealth, and the pursuit of pleasure. The important point may be that even though many humans live lives “saying one thing and doing another,” in the end, knowing so marks the beginning of wisdom, and it is that wisdom that really counts in any philosophy on how to live life. I do not think Seneca’s philosophical advice is hindered by any lack of character.

Seneca’s Stoicism was attractive to many Romans. The Romans were a special breed that were warlike, enshrined duty to the state, and endured many tyrants. Seneca’s Stoicism may have been one of their chief sources of consolation. He said people should remain indifferent to matters beyond their control because they could lose their lives at any time. Like Seneca, they gained strength through Stoic philosophy by deciding to take matters into their own hands, reduce their passions, accept death, eschew wealth, and thus live with a degree of happiness. Stoicism helped Seneca, and many Romans like him, to retain a degree of tranquility in the face of hardship.

This chapter has outlined the history of Stoicism and described its philosophy, particularly the philosophy of Seneca. I have made the effort throughout the chapter to relate Stoic philosophy to human happiness, and to discuss in particular how Stoicism can bring human happiness. If Stoicism can bring happiness, the next natural question to ask is whether it is possible for some people to act on that which Stoicism advises in order to be

happy? This is the topic of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: ENKRASIA

4.1 Enkrasia

The question in this chapter is this: Given that someone has adopted the eleven Stoic tenets from the previous chapter as a prescription for life, is it possible to effectively carry them into action so as to achieve happiness? To answer this, this chapter has three main parts. First, I will describe folk psychology because this is in effect a common language shared by all of those in the debates I am concerned with. Using this language will also allow me to make clear what the differences are between various positions in respect to the will. Second, I will present a debate pitting the Stoics' view that we can act enkratically against the skeptics' view that we cannot. The principle skeptic is neo-Stoic philosopher William Irvine, whose modifications of classical Stoicism cause him to question certain Stoic assumptions. I will use the Stoics' ideas concerning choice, judgment, and constitutional person to support their position. I will use one imaginary example, Lydia's Love Life, to illustrate the Stoics' assertions on enkratic action. Third, I will present the Stoics' belief that we can act enkratically with reason along with the skeptics' position that reason is limited and cannot cause us to act. The skeptics are principally philosophers David Hume and Alfred Mele. In my conclusion at the end of this chapter, I will conclude that we can act enkratically, but that reason is insufficient to cause us to do so.

I have three preliminary comments. First, as I described in the introduction, *enkrasia* is the ability to do what we believe, which entails the ability to do what we believe we should do. Its opposite, *akrasia*, is when we do not act on what we believe we should do. *Akrasia* and *enkrasia* thus have two components, which is to know what we should believe and to be able to act on those beliefs. In this chapter, I am using *enkrasia* principally in its second sense, or the ability to act. It could also be called will-power or continence.

Second, *enkrasia* and happiness are related in this chapter in the following way. The theme of this thesis is happiness and how to achieve it. I argued in Chapter Three that certain Stoic tenets may bring happiness to some. If we believe these tenets could bring us happiness, the question now is can we act *enkratically*, or can we do them to become happier. For example, if we believe it is in our interests to control our desires because it will enhance our level of happiness, can we proceed to control our desires in order to be happier. If we cannot, then it seems endeavoring to learn any philosophy, like Stoicism, that purports to control desire in order to bring happiness is simply irrelevant. Why learn a philosophy we cannot implement?

This point will be illustrated with Lydia's Love Life at the end of this chapter. Lydia is a young woman who, like most of us, has made some mistakes in life that have brought her unhappiness. For solace, Lydia turned to philosophy and read Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic*. What she found was a way of thinking that could alleviate her unhappiness, so she adopted the first eleven tenets of Stoicism described in the last chapter. The problem Lydia now faces is whether she can do her newly adopted Stoic beliefs in order to be happier? Can

Lydia alter her way of living over time in order to act in accordance with what she now believes to be in her interests? Lydia's ability to do what she believes is the topic of this and the next chapter.

Third, the reader is reminded that the assertion that we have a will that can influence our actions assumes we have some form of freedom. In the introduction I said, for the purpose of this thesis, I will assume there exists some form of free will, or human freedom. This freedom could very likely be in the form of Daniel Dennett's compatibilist view explained in his book *Freedom Evolves*.

4.1.1 Folk psychology theory of the mind

Asking whether we can act enkratically presupposes we have a will. Common sense seems to tell us that we have some ability to direct our actions, but do we? Do we have will, what is it, and can we employ it to act in a way we judge best? To answer these questions I will use in this thesis the folk psychology model of the will, which is also known as common sense psychology.

Folk psychology is a theory about beliefs and desires that provides us with a "theory of the mind" as cognitive ethologists use that term. In this theory, beliefs and desires are what initially cause us to action. I desire a new jaguar, I see a jaguar in the showroom, I believe it could be mine, and I believe driving it will make me happy. This causes me to act: I go into the showroom and buy the jaguar. In this way, folk psychology not only allows me to understand my actions, but to explain and predict the actions of others. I could reasonably

predict, for example, that another person who desired a jaguar and who saw the one I saw in the showroom would act the same way I did.

The nascent desires and beliefs of folk psychology can further lead to innumerable factors such as hopes, fears, opinions, knowledge, reason, and passion that can themselves become vectors that influence our actions. Much of the debate about the efficacy of Stoic philosophy deals with the strength of the vectors reason and emotion.

Folk psychology's connection with action naturally precipitates the question of will. It asks us, what is the will? The will could be described as the faculty that surveys our beliefs, desires, and attendant vectors, and then makes the necessary choices and decisions on how to act. It could be described as the place where all our desires and beliefs, and vectors like hopes, fears, experience, and opinions, converge to direct our actions. The question for determinists and free will advocates in folk psychology thus becomes how strong these vectors are in determining how we act. The determinists hold that it is the strongest set of forces, and the free will advocates minimize these forces in order to render our will free. Both positions are problematic due to the complexity of discerning the extent to which these vectors affect our will.

I discuss this theory because almost all of the participants in the debates about the role of reason and the emotions in respect to the will and action speak in the language of this theory. It is thus worth making their common language explicit. The theory also allows me to make clear the assumptions I am making about the will and freedom. I believe these assumption best capture important Stoic insights about free action and our ability to cause

ourselves to act more enkratically. It is worth noting, however, that because folk psychology is sufficiently elastic to allow almost all the positions in the debate to be stated in its terms, the theory itself justifies none of them, including my own.

However, the question remains: can the vectors influence our will? Put another way, can a person influence or change the vectors that determine the will, and thus how they act? Can we influence that which causes enkratic action? This is a crucial question because the Stoics believed we must act enkratically to achieve happiness. This question will be examined in this chapter and I will argue that we can, with what I call the human toolbox, in the next chapter.

Now that we have a possible account of what constitutes the will, let me next examine if we can use it to do what we will, or act enkratically.

4.2 Stoicism and the skeptics on enkrasia

The nature of akratic action (lacking will-power) and enkratic action (exercising will power) is an old one in philosophy. Homer discussed how “hunger and greed” can pull reason from her throne (Mele 3). Socrates rejected akratic action because it is not within human nature to do the lesser good (Mele 8). Plato said of akratic action, or weakness of the will, in the *Protagoras*, that “no one willingly does wrong,” because it is irrational; thus akratic action is not free action (Mele 3, 9). Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, said akratic action is contrary to our better judgment (Mele 4). The Stoics said a person is irrational who commits akratic action when they judge something best, but do otherwise, all things

considered (Mele 5, 6). The Stoic Seneca believed that we can control our desires with proper judgments; reason is supreme and rules desire.

4.2.1 The Stoics on enkrasia

The Stoics position on enkratic action is unambiguous. We can do what we will, we can do what we think is in our best interests, and we can act how we want to act. We have the ability to control our passions and desires, major or minor. We have been given the ability to be virtuous, we can be virtuous, and with virtue it is within our ability to be happy. Happiness is completely within our grasp. We are rational beings, we have reason, and reason will tell us what are the right judgments to make of impressions, and with the right judgments of impressions we can do that which brings us happiness. Reason also tells us we have control over matters within our sphere of choice, and to remain indifferent to matters outside our field of choice. Reason tells us it is within our ability to remain undisturbed by matters we cannot control. We are free individuals directing our lives, deciding what is good or bad for us, and using our will to believe and act in such a way that brings us happiness.

Epictetus articulated the Stoic position best on enkratic action. He bluntly said “our actions are up to us,” and “[We] have only to will a thing, and it comes to pass” (Epictetus 273). Epictetus believed that we have been given the means and resources as human beings to “endure everything . . . and put [matters] under our complete control” (Epictetus 19). With our ability to make proper judgments of events we can control how we think and act. It is by modifying the impressions we form, that we can control what we think about them and thus “[rid our] mind of desire and [thus achieve] virtue and an untroubled mind”

(Epictetus xxi, 6, 12). We may not be able to control the world, but we can control how we deal with it. The world truly is, as the Stoics say, as we make it, which means we can learn how to accommodate ourselves to a world we don't make.

The basis for Epictetus' belief that we have enkratic action derives principally from his view that "The good life can be achieved by adjusting one's desires to the way the world is rather than trying to adjust the world to satisfy one's desires" (Epictetus 56). Philosopher William Irvine echoed this sentiment when he said "the best way-indeed, perhaps the only way-to attain lasting happiness is not to change the world around us or our place in it but to change ourselves" (Irvine 5, 6). We can do enkratic action by internally choosing realistic goals because our objectives are realizable. We can do what we will if we know doing it may lead to happiness, rather than getting stuck endeavoring to fulfill unsatisfiable desires.

One version of Seneca's position, which is similar to Epictetus', is clearly set out in his dialogue *On Anger*. You may recall from Chapter Three that Seneca asked whether anger was controllable, and his answer was that anger starts with a decision (Cooper 42). Anger only occurs with the mind's assent, so if we do not assent we can eliminate anger. We are not prisoners to our passions like anger, rather we can choose to approve or not approve to enact an emotion. Our emotions, for Seneca, are controlled by our precepts, or those perceptions and beliefs we voluntarily adopt. It is thus within our ability to enkratically control our passions because we can choose those precepts that control our emotions. Our will controls our passions, and we can do what we will.

Late Stoic Marcus Aurelius believed that the power to act is the principle of life (Aurelius

104). He often wrote about our directing mind that has the ability to “. . . stop impulse, quench desire [and] keep [our] directing mind its own master” (Aurelius 85). For Aurelius, we endure troubles, as when we succumb to harmful desires, because we have not allowed “[our] directing mind to do the work it was made for” (Aurelius 88). If we focus our directing mind on how we ought to act, we are capable of doing what we will.

The Stoics do not equivocate on the issue of whether we can act enkratically; they would say we can. They would probably cite three reasons for believing this that involve choice, judgment, and their concept of the constitutional person.

4.2.1.1 Choice

The Stoics would first distinguish between matters within and without our field of choice. For them, matters that arise from sources outside our field of choice are irrelevant because we have no control over them. The only way to deal with these is to remain indifferent to them. Marcus Aurelius would say that a central tenet of Stoicism is that there are matters within our field of choice and matters outside it. There are simply some things, like our own death, that we cannot control. Because of this, we must remain indifferent to them. In the case of desire, the Stoics would say we may not be able to prevent the occurrence of certain desires that come from our emotions or biological make-up. However, for those that are beyond our control, they would say it is not a matter of dealing with them enkratically, but rather indifferently.

Marcus Aurelius would point out that “death and life, fame and ignominy, pain and

pleasure, wealth and poverty-all these come to good and bad alike, but they are not in themselves either right or wrong: neither are they inherently good or evil” (Aurelius 13). Because each of these dichotomies is either inexorable or subject to fortune, the only way to achieve an undisturbed mind is by not investing hope in one or another outcome. For Aurelius, remaining indifferent to these dichotomies is following nature, for it is nature herself that has created these opposites, and to which she herself remains indifferent.

But what about our ability to control desires within choice? Do we have the ability to control through our will, desires like lust and the desire for wealth that lie within our field of choice? The Stoics would answer with an emphatic yes. We can act enkratically with the proper judgments of perceptions.

4.2.1.2 Judgment

We saw in Chapter Three that the seventh Stoic tenet is the need to use proper judgments of impressions, which is the Stoics way of saying we must develop the right beliefs about events. Events themselves are just events, what matters is how we judge them. Marcus Aurelius said if you are distressed at some external cause, it is not the thing itself that troubles you, but your own judgment of it. He believed you can strip away many unnecessary troubles which lie wholly in your own judgment because “things themselves are inert: it is we who procreate judgments about them” (Aurelius 79, 90, 109).

Seneca would say that “we have the ability to cause [change]. . . in the world around us through our *own* power of thought and decision,” which power we derive from reason

(Cooper xviii, xix). Epictetus most emphatically makes the Stoic point that we can act enkratically. He believed we should examine and modify the impressions we form, we have the power to rightly deal with our impressions, and even though we cannot control outside events, we can control what we think about them (Epictetus xxi, 5, 6). He emphasized that our judgments are our masters and the causes of all our actions (Epictetus 32, 168). He believed if we did not know a “standard of judgment,” we would be unable to examine everything accurately, which could cause us to make bad choices that bring about self-defeating circumstances where everything goes wrong (Epictetus 32, 41, 65). So what are the right judgments to have? They are the beliefs Stoicism teaches, like learning virtue, controlling our passions, and not desiring wealth, prestige, power, or sensual pleasure.

4.2.1.3 Constitutional person

The Stoics’ concept of a constitutional person both supports and helps explain how we are able to act enkratically. Brad Inwood and Pierluigi Donini’s discussion of the constitutional person in *Stoic Ethics* from the *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* explains why. The Stoics, and particularly Zeno (described by Diogenes Laertius), Cicero, and Seneca, reconciled self-preservation and virtue by viewing the individual as a “constitution” that is a kind of self with both general and specific features (Inwood 679). Seneca, in *Letter 121*, says our constitutions change as we grow up, so a child and an adult have different constitutions (Inwood 680). Our constitutions are dynamic and develop as we age (Inwood 680). When we become rational, the objects of our evolving constitution allow an “attachment [to objects] that is now intrinsically rational, which allows both self-

love and attachment to virtue, and in particular virtues that are ‘other-regarding’” (Inwood 680). The idea of a constitutional person was a major step in Stoic ethics and it enabled the Stoics to move from a philosophy that focused on selfish interests to one that incorporated other-regarding interests.

Even though these Stoic philosophers were endeavoring to reconcile the commitment to self and attachment to others, they were collaterally demonstrating how we learn enkratic action, and ultimately virtue. There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between virtue and enkratic action. Once our goals have been established, if we decide to become virtuous, we collaterally assume the obligation to act enkratically. The ability to be virtuous, to control vectors like desires and passions, requires our ability to do what we will. Conversely, when we are enkratically ethical we are practicing virtue, and a consequence is the opportunity to be happy. It would appear that happiness is a learned behavior built on virtue, enkratic action, and for the purposes of this thesis, Stoic philosophy over time. This point will be expanded on in Chapter Five.

4.2.2 The skeptics on enkrasia

It is ironic that the skeptic case against the Stoics should be presented by a Stoic philosopher. William Irvine describes himself as a Stoic, or perhaps neo-Stoic, but remains skeptical about some important claims made by the ancient Stoics. In his book *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want*, he says that we may not be able to control our major desires. He says that, to a great extent, “we don’t control our desires . . . they control us. Indeed, we tend to have the least control over those desires that have the greatest impact on our lives”

(Irvine 50). Irvine often uses the passion of love to demonstrate this view. He says, "Falling in love is only one instance in which we don't choose our desires, but they choose us"

(Irvine 15). "Falling in love [for Irvine] is the paradigmatic example of an involuntary life-affecting desire . . . [it is like] waking up with a cold" (Irvine 12). He then extends our inability to control the desire of love to other desires, with the comment that "the same thing can happen with material desires" (Irvine 15).

To be fair to professor Irvine, he does specifically separate an episode of desire and an action. He says, "We cannot control the occurrence of a desire within us, but we can, to some extent, determine whether or not we act on that desire," which is a view that could best be described as neo-Stoic (Irvine e-mail). He also leaves open the possibility that we can control desire, and devotes portions of his book to describing just how this can be done. He says, for example, even if the "perfect mastery of our desires is probably impossible . . . we should therefore seek . . . relative mastery [of desire]" (Irvine 6). However, his implication that we may not be able to control major desires remains.

Two reasons for Irvine's position that our control of desire is limited rest on his taxonomy of desires and our Biological Incentive System. Irvine divides desires into terminal desires, or desires for their own sake, and instrumental desires, or desires for something else. An example of a terminal desire would be to avoid the pangs of hunger, and of an instrumental desire to achieve wealth. Of the terminal desires there are hedonic desires, which are desires caused by our emotions in order to feel good and avoid pain, and non-hedonic desires, which are desires that occur "just because" (Irvine 60). Examples of a

terminal hedonic desire could be the desire to avoid the pangs of hunger, and of a non-hedonic desire to “click our tongue,” which is a desire that brings no hedonistic satisfaction (Irvine 60). Our emotions are the source of the hedonic terminal desires, and our will-power is the source of our non-hedonic desires (Irvine 68, 69). Reason is the cause of our instrumental desires, or desires for the sake of something else. The desire for wealth, for example, is an instrumental desire because we seek it for other reasons. Irvine points out that most desires are hedonistic, like hunger pangs, and these desires have a far greater impact on our lives than the other types of desire, such as non-hedonistic desires (Irvine 64).

Irvine’s reason for presenting this taxonomy of desire is to point out that there exists a battle between our emotions and our intellect (David Hume calls the intellect reason, which term I will adopt), over which desires to have, in which the intellect “all too often ends up losing” (Irvine 69, 70). “Because our emotions can veto them, the terminal desires [our] intellect gets to form and act on tend to be inconsequential” (Irvine 73). Our reason has only the power of persuasion in its dealings with the emotions (Irvine 76). The result of this is that our major desires are mostly emotionally driven and our reason has little control. It is because our major hedonic emotionally-driven terminal desires, or desires for their own sake, prevail, that we often fail to enkratically control our desires. Our ability to use reason to control desire is limited due to the power of our emotions (Irvine 73).

Irvine’s second reason why we may not be able to control our major desires is straightforward: biology constrains our decision-making ability. Our Biological Incentive

System, or BIS, “has a schedule of incentives that dictates the behavior for which we will be rewarded or punished . . . the schedule of incentives are written into our wiring” (Irvine 149). Simply stated, our BIS determines our choices based on our chances of surviving and reproducing (Irvine 151). Biology demands we make choices that enhance our survival and reproduction, and we have little choice to do otherwise.

According to Irvine, we are biologically hardwired to feel hunger, fear, and lust, and we have little control over how we act on these desires. It should be noted that Irvine does occasionally contradict this position. He wrote, for example, that “Our BIS changes with time . . . [some of which is due to] our life experience,” and “We can [to an extent] choose what we desire” (Irvine 155, 171). The extent to which we can control our biologically driven desires with enkratic action is a key issue in this chapter that will be illustrated shortly with Lydia’s Love Life.

4.2.3 Conclusion: we can act enkratically

Irvine weaves a wonderfully insightful, complex, and sometimes ambiguous story of human desire and our ability to control it. I find him a moving target. He may well be right that we cannot control the occurrence of our desires, but he equivocates on whether we can control them. He says we may or may not be able to control major desires, which means we either can or cannot. But if his answer is we cannot, he contradicts himself when he says we can [to an extent] choose what we desire (Irvine 171). He also says that our BIS is beyond our control, but that we can change it with experience, and that it gives incentives, but we have the ability to ignore them (Irvine 164, 167).

In spite of his waffling, I believe Irvine in the end would agree with the Stoics. When he says “Our BIS changes with time . . . [some of which is due to] our life experience” and “We can [to an extent] choose what we desire,” he tacitly acknowledges the Stoics’ constitutional person (Irvine 155, 171). We may, at some point in our lives, have little control over our passions and BIS, but we have the ability to learn and change. Reason’s ability to make conspicuous the value of choice and judgment may enhance our ability to act our will and collaterally modify our BIS. We thus have the capacity to lessen the impact passions have on our lives and actions in such a way as to enhance our happiness.

I think the Stoics were right, we can learn virtue, we can change our constitutions, and we can enhance our ability to act enkratically. To borrow a thought from Epictetus, we are not born with the ability to do what we will, rather we were born for it.

On the other hand, there does seem to be some truth in Irvine’s claim that we may not be able to control our major desires. Desiring to satiate hunger, satisfy lust, or to buy the car we have become enamored with are powerful desires. Indeed, it would seem more often than not we do succumb to our desires, so how can the Stoics be so certain we can control them? The extent to which we can control our biologically-driven desires with enkratic action is a key issue in this chapter that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

4.2.4 Lydia’s Love Life

How we learn to act enkratically may be demonstrated with the fictitious life of Lydia and the story of her love life. This will throw a different light on the issues of enkratic and

akratic action, and allow us to see them from a quite different perspective from that of the philosophers who mainly engage in these debates. These philosophers are generally thinking only of single acts and whether it is possible to fail to do what we think best. They do not assume that the person they are imagining and discussing has a prescription for happiness in life, like Stoicism, against which to measure the various actions that such a person might contemplate doing. Their arguments may show, at best, that on any given occasion we may fail to carry the Stoic tenets into practice for a variety of different reasons. However, I maintain that having an effective prescription for happiness is bound, at least in the long run, to make a quite significant difference. Following it, we will increasingly do those things that will lead us towards happiness.

Imagine a young woman, Lydia, at age 20 who meets a handsome, attractive, married man with children, who expresses interest in her. He lavishes attention on her, gives her gifts, and pursues her. It is entirely conceivable young Lydia could succumb to his charms and engage in an illicit love affair with such a man. Now imagine Lydia is 50. She had married, her husband committed adultery, they divorced, and she and her children have suffered. Now, at age 50, she again meets a handsome, attractive man who asks her for a date, to which she agrees. On the date she is enthralled with his sophistication and puffed by his amorous attentions. She finds herself falling in love with this man.

But Lydia is now a different person. The man confesses that he is married, which immediately raises a red flag in Lydia's psyche. This new information confronts new goals Lydia developed as a result of the interplay between her divorce experience and her

passions. Her reason, for example, immediately tells her that there are severe consequences to those who commit adultery. She thus now sees him with new eyes and decides that this is not what she desires. She says to herself that she does not want to fall in love with him and decides not to fall in love. So Lydia, at age 50, is different and defers from a romantic relationship with this married man. Lydia has engaged her reason to remove a major desire and passion, and thus avoided handing her happiness over to circumstances beyond her control.

Part of Lydia's experience involved her decision to read philosophy, and in particular Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic*. From Stoic philosophy Lydia learned a number of useful ideas that helped her discern which desires to act on, or in her case, whether to fall in love or not. Unlike Irvine's assertion that we may not be able to control our major passions, Lydia did so by stoically remaining indifferent, or not acting on an event that lies beyond her field of choice, which is the occurrence of the attraction to a married man. At age fifty she now knows the uncontrollable and uncertain nature of the passion of lust and its equally uncontrollable and uncertain consequences. Her judgment, which was gained in part from experience, tells her that the immediate gratifications gained by a romantic affair with a married man are transient. She has learned that certain pleasures derived from her passions are better controlled by her directing mind. Finally, like the constitutional person, her character changed over time as she became more rational and virtuous. She became more adroit at controlling vectors like passion and desire with her will. Lydia at age fifty is a different person who is better able to manage these vectors in such a way to enhance her happiness.

Indeed, it is due to the Stoic philosopher's unambiguous belief that we, like Lydia, have the ability to act enkratically that the very word 'Stoic' implies one who has mastered their desires. We are bombarded daily by impressions capable of inciting desires that can initiate unhappiness, but through our judgments and directing mind are we able to have the ability to control our desires. It would seem that we can do enkratic action, which is a prerequisite for happiness.

In some respects Lydia's Love Life is an illustration of Irvine's neo-Stoic view that we can control our desires. Lydia was initially driven by her BIS, a particularly strong hormonal drive in her youth, and it is a drive that, as Irvine pointed out, has occurred in her uncontrollably. Lydia also, like a good Stoic, engaged her reason and judgment to alter her constitutional character over time in order to act more enkratically. She changed, and with that change she was better able to resist the urgings of her BIS.

Like the Stoics' view on judgment, there exists the possibility that our reason can both influence and help achieve our goals. It can influence the vectors that themselves determine what we do, thus establishing the possibility of acting enkratically. We could, as Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius claim, under this scenario, put matters under our control through proper judgments, the use of precepts to control our emotions, and by employing our directing mind to stop impulse and quench desire.

Lydia's Love Life demonstrates that, according to the Stoics, we can act enkratically. We can remain indifferent to matters beyond choice, we can use the proper judgments of impressions, and that we can change. With these Stoic ideas, we are able to do what we will

in a way that can increase our happiness.

4.3 Stoicism and the skeptics on reason

This second debate is precipitated by the Stoics' belief we can act enkratically with reason. The Stoics said reason gives us the capacity to form the right judgments of impressions that in turn allows us to do what we will. Does it? Some question reason's ability to do so because reason has limits.

4.3.1 *The Stoics on reason*

Like their position on our ability to act enkratically, the Stoics position on the role of reason in our decision-making process, and subsequent actions, is unequivocal. As we saw in Chapter Three, the third Stoic tenet emphasized the supremacy of reason. For the Stoics, reason enables us to connect causes, effects, and consequences so we can form the right judgments and thus act enkratically. Cicero made this point clear in his philosophic work *On Duty*, in the section titled *Instinct and reason* (Cicero 193, 194). He said the man who shares in reason, "easily foresees the whole course of his life and prepares in advance what is necessary for its progress" (Cicero 194). Reason, Cicero writes:

Distinguishes sequences of cause and effect, sees the causes of things [so we are] . . . not unaware of their consequences, and what we may call their antecedents, [which allows us to compare] like events, and [join] and [link] the present with the future. (Cicero 194)

Our reasoning ability enables us to act enkratically because we "[foresee] the whole . . . [which] prepares [us for]. . . what is necessary for [life's] progress," and thus "gives [us] an

impulse to desire” (Cicero 194). Nature gave us reason that gives rise to “impulse[s] to desire,” which regulates our appetites (Cicero 181). Reason, for the Stoics, enables us to do what we will.

One of the explanations why the Stoics place such a premium on reason is that they believed, like many philosophers, it is reason that separates humans from beasts (Cicero 165). Cicero, for example, chides the Epicureans’ belief that pleasure is the highest good. He said, “I cannot bring myself to think that the highest good for man is the same as a beast’s. For in that case, what is the use of reason...” (MacKendrick 166).

With reason, Seneca believed “we have the ability to cause changes in our bodies and in the world around us through our own power of thought and decision,” which allows us to avoid many of our troubles; we are “set to rights by reason” (Cooper xviii, xix; Seneca 227). Epictetus echoed Seneca’s view when he wrote that it is our faculty of reason that makes us exceptional, so we should “adorn and beautify that” (Epictetus 152). He made the explicit point in *The Discourses* that reason is the subject-matter of a philosopher, and he quotes Zeno, who said we should “know the elements of reason, the nature of each one . . . how they are adapted to one another, and what follows from all this” (Epictetus 268). Finally, Marcus Aurelius emphasized the importance of “rational . . . judgment unhurried and undeceived,” which allows our “directing mind” to “follow the straight road,” which is the road of virtue (Aurelius 66).

It seems, for the Stoics, there are no limits to reason and what it does for humans’ ability to do what they will. Reason restrains passion, prevents wrongful opinions and improper

judgments, brings virtue, allows us to conquer pain, grief, and fear, and is the antidote for unhappiness. Naturally, for the Stoics, reason also tells us to follow Stoic philosophy if we desire happiness. It tells us, in part, that we should live in accordance with nature; avoid that which is unnatural, such as luxury and avarice; control our passions; to remain indifferent to matters outside our control; to not place a high value on things; that things are as we make them; and that we should live life with wisdom, courage, self-control, and justice. Perhaps most importantly, for the Stoics it is reason that brings happiness. Ultimately, as Seneca said, "Peaceful stillness" only comes with reason (Seneca 111).

However, not all philosophers agree with the Stoics on reason's capabilities. Some, like David Hume and Alfred Mele, argue that reason is limited.

4.3.2 The skeptics on the limits to reason

David Hume would not agree with the Stoics on the supremacy of reason. He is perhaps the most significant historic representative of the classical position on reason's limits. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he says, "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (Hume 415). For Hume, reason is passion's servant, and in choosing the ends it cannot cause us to act enkratically (Hume 415). In his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume continues:

The ultimate ends of human actions can never . . . be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties. (Hume 105)

Reason simply does not account for why we do what we do. In order to explain why we

do what we do, we need “something . . . desirable on its own account,” which something is not reason. For a human to have interests, there must exist something to have interest in, and “reason being cool and disengaged,” does not offer something to be interested in on its own account (Hume 105). As a consequence, reason offers “no motive to action,” and thus no motive to act on what we will. If the source of our reason to act enkratically were derived from reason, we would not be motivated to act enkratically. Hume explained that it is only our appetites, or taste, that gives us a “motive to action . . . or impulse to desire and volition” (Hume 105). Reason itself offers no pleasure or pain like the passions, thus it is from our passions alone that we experience happiness or misery (Hume 105). Reason simply does not motivate us, cause us to act enkratically, or control our desires.

Hume would disagree with Cicero, who said nature gave us reason, which gives rise to “impulse[s] to desire,” which regulates our appetites (Cicero 181). For Hume, our “impulse[s] to desire” are just desires that naturally arise from our appetites. Our appetites and subsequent desires are innate, and reason has nothing to do with their occurrence. Further, once our appetites occur, reason has nothing to do with regulating them. Hume would say Cicero and the Stoics misunderstand the power of reason and its relation to our passions. Our passions rule our reason, which is a sentiment that William B. Irvine echoed when he said “reason tends to be the servant rather than the master of desire” (Irvine 19).

Two aspects of the Stoic’s and Hume’s philosophies concerning reason should be clarified. First, it should be made clear that Hume and the Stoics have very different ideas concerning reason and passion that ought not to be confused in this discussion of reason.

Unlike the Stoics, Hume did not think all passions are bad. He not only believed that some passions are good, but also that they are the basis of morality. For Hume, a consequence of this could be human happiness. The Stoics, on the other hand, believed the passions were evil and must be excised in order to achieve happiness. We achieve happiness by controlling the passions with reason. Hence, the importance of will and the ability to act enkratically. For Hume, reason is passions' servant, and for the Stoics it is passions' master. I acknowledge this important difference. It is only Hume's belief on the role of reason, in contrast to the Stoics', that is being employed in this discussion on reason.

Second, regarding the role of reason, Hume said human ends can never be accounted for by reason which, for purposes of this debate, means reason cannot create the goal of happiness. However, I believe Hume would agree with the Stoics that reason does not need to supply this end because the desire for happiness is instinctual – we are born with it. Happiness is, as John Locke pointed out, concomitant with consciousness. It would seem that Hume then could agree that reason has a role in supplying the means to happiness, which is a topic that will be addressed in Chapter Five.

4.3.2.1 Harry G. Frankfurt

Even though contemporary philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt, in *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*, like the Stoics, argues that we can act enkratically, he attempts to give a Humean account of enkratic action that makes conspicuous the limitations of such an account. He proposed first-order desires, which are simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another (Frankfurt 323). He also proposed second-order desires, which are the

desires to have the right desires. Only humans have the capacity for second-order desires, or “reflective self-valuation” (Frankfurt 324). Frankfurt said, “It seems particularly characteristic of humans . . . that they are able to form . . . ‘second-order desires’” (Frankfurt 323). Humans want second-order desires to “do it,” to move themselves to action, and to “decisively . . . [do their] will” (Frankfurt 326). Frankfurt said the essential difference between humans and other creatures is our will. We are unique in that we can engage in deliberation and make decisions based on prior thought, and thus form second-order desires (Frankfurt 323).

Those with second-order desires either want to have a certain desire or want a certain desire to be their will, which Frankfurt calls “volitions of the second-order” (Frankfurt 327). These volitions are essential to being a person (Frankfurt 327). Those without second-order volitions are “wanton,” or like animals not caring which of their inclinations are strongest (Frankfurt 328). Frankfurt believes that the essence of a human being thus “lies not in reason but in will” (Frankfurt 328).

To demonstrate his levels of desire and volition, Frankfurt uses an addict as an example. An addict who does not care if he takes drugs is engaged in a first-order desire, to take drugs, and is wanton because he follows his first-order desire without concern. He is like an animal acting with no rational direction, doing only what his desires demand. He lacks reflection and remains mindlessly indifferent to evaluating his own motives and desires (Frankfurt 330). The unwilling addict is different because he lives a conflicted life taking drugs but not wanting to. He has the first-order desire to take drugs, but he has also formed

a second-order desire not to take drugs. He both wants and does not want to take drugs. If he can do his second-order volition, he will stop taking drugs and his second-order desire will prevail. If he cannot, unlike the wanton addict, he will experience internal discord and struggle because he is doing something he does not want to do (Frankfurt 329). For Frankfurt, it is precisely this internal struggle that makes us human because we are struggling against our desires, whether they are drugs, wealth, prestige, or sensual pleasure.

Frankfurt's second order-desires do not prove we can act enkratically, only that we have the ability to establish certain right desires that give us a motivation, or reason, to do enkratic action. It would seem, however, if our unique ability to form second-order desires were coupled with outright persistence that matured into a habit, our ability to act enkratically could be enhanced.

Frankfurt's philosophy also has a bearing on human happiness. He infers that some can and some cannot do second-order volitions. The wanton addict, for example, "has no volitions of the second order," and thus is "a helpless bystander to the forces that move [him]" (Frankfurt 332). This means that, if enkratic action coupled with virtue can bring happiness, then those without second order desires will not be able to attain happiness.

It seems that Frankfurt has some important insights regarding reason's limitations. He, like Hume, emphasizes that it is desire, or in his case second-order desires, that cause us to act and not reason. Perhaps most importantly, when he distinguishes between first- and second-order desires and volitions, he makes conspicuous the significance of will. Will, which enables us to act enkratically, only engages in those with second-order desires and

not those who are wantonly animal like. He thus may well be right in saying that it is the will that makes us human, and not reason.

A limitation of Frankfurt and Hume's philosophies is that they do not explain what second-order desires are best. They offer no solutions for discerning which of our conflicting desires are better than others. This is important for a number of reasons. First, they may have failed to appreciate reasons' important role in determining which desires to have. Second, having the right desires has much bearing on our happiness, so it is critical we choose the right ones. Third, if the desire to be virtuous is one of those right desires, then we must be able to act enkratically, or do what we will, in order to be virtuous. Fortunately, I believe Stoicism provides an answer, which is to adopt Stoic beliefs, and in particular the first eleven Stoic tenets described in Chapter Three.

4.3.2.2 Alfred R. Mele

Contemporary philosopher Alfred R. Mele, in his book *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Self-Control*, adds support to Hume's contention that reason is limited with mind-bending complexity. Mele's central theme is that weakness of the will and self-deception are possible. For Mele, we can act against our will rationally. If we can rationally act akratically, or against our beliefs, and enkratically, or in accordance with our beliefs, then rationality is not a reliable guide to acting in accordance with our beliefs. We could go either way. Put differently, reason will not always cause us to act in accordance with what we judge to be in our best interests. Thus, like Hume, Mele argues that there are limits to reason.

According to Mele, Plato in the *Protagoras*, argued that akrasia, or weakness of the will, is irrational. He said, “no one freely does wrong,” and thus Plato rejected strict akratic action (Mele 3, 8). Mele disagrees and asserts that a person can freely and rationally do wrong. He offers numerous arguments and illustrations for this position. I will present four of his arguments and one illustration, along with some comments on reason’s inability to compel.

Mele’s first point envisions a hierarchy of motivational forces. An agent’s assessment of what they desire is influenced by the motivational force of those desires. Some desires influence what we desire more than others. Further, if these “hierarchy of desires” were influenced by habit, character, or unvetted desires, our better judgments would be rendered ineffective by opposing wants or motivations (Mele 11, 14). Put another way, some strong desires that come from sources other than reason can determine our actions.

Mele’s second point is that, in some cases of akratic action, an agent may make no judgment about the “amount of effort required” to resist desire (Mele 25). A strong aversion may itself defeat a reasoned intention. He gives an example of two boys who wish to become blood brothers by cutting their hands so when they shake hands their blood intermixes. One, who has a strong aversion to cutting himself, carefully weighs the reasons for and against cutting himself and intentionally concludes that doing so is in his better interests. But when it comes time to cut himself, he cannot do it because he had failed to consider the “effort required” to commit the act. He had used reason, he made an intention, and his action was free, but he acted akratically because he failed to appreciate the “amount of effort required” (Mele 25). Even though he had used his reason to act, he could not act,

which again demonstrates the limits to reason.

Mele's third and fourth points are closely related. His third point distinguishes between two aspects of self-control: motivation and evaluations (Mele 53). A self-controlled person endeavors to keep their motivations in alignment with their better judgment and to promote rational evaluations (Mele 53). However, our rational evaluations may be warped by our wants or motivations (Mele 53). They may be the result of "unmotivated carelessness . . . lack of skill in drawing inferences, to innocent mistakes" (Mele 53). The result is that reason is limited in its ability to bring about proper evaluations.

This leads us to his fourth point, which is that our beliefs may be derived from sources other than reason. We could have little control over some beliefs that guide our reasoned judgments (Mele 53). We could have, for example, wrongful opinions that interfere with our reasoned better judgments. Beliefs based on faith, for example, could have been learned but not agreed to. In this case, according to Mele, the agent has not made a "self-commitment of the self by the self" (Mele 57). A self-commitment requires the agent to make a moral judgment that overrides other moral judgments (Mele 53). In this case, an agent's judgment may have been violated because, even though they may have good evidence p is true, their faith causes them to believe $\neg p$, which they justify by believing that there could be some other explanation (Mele 56). The result might be moral imperfection due to reason's inability to correct wrongful beliefs, hence the limitation of reason.

Mele provides an illustration of strict akratic action, Susan's Stroll, to demonstrate that we can act akratically for rational reasons (Mele 81). Susan is a college student with

competing desires:

For the last hour Susan has been preparing for tomorrow's history midterm. Boredom and restlessness are beginning to set in, and she is now entertaining the prospect of a solitary stroll through the quad on this quiet Spring evening. She decides that it would be best, all things considered, to remain in her dormitory room and study. The recent rash of muggings on campus really is quite frightening; and, in any case, she has a lot of work to do tonight if she is to pass the test. Susan judges that each of these considerations provides her with a good and sufficient reason to forgo the stroll; but a short time later, against her better judgment, she leaves her room for a solitary walk through the quad. (Mele 81)

Mele asks, why did Susan stroll across the quad? Mele says Susan's incontinent action may be explained in three ways (Mele 93). The rewards of a stroll were available (an obvious point); she did not make a successful attempt at self-control because, if she had, she would not have taken the stroll (she may simply have made no attempt at self-control because she was focused on the pleasure of the stroll and not her reasons for studying); and her motivation to restrain from strolling was not high enough to prevent her from strolling because the "proximity of the pleasures" of a stroll influenced her motivational level (Mele 93, 94). Mele points out that Susan's assessment of the reasons for and against the stroll were based on reasons that were determining her actions, but some of these were "lesser reasons" (Mele 94).

Susan's action, taking the stroll, was rational. She had a coherent collection of reasons, she thought practically, she did it for reasons, and her behavior was intentional and free (Mele 94, 95). However, her behavior was irrational because she acted contrary to her

better judgment (Mele 95). But was Susan's behavior irrational? She was "possessed of a coherent collection of evaluations . . . [and] her practical thinking yields a judgment that is rational in light of her evaluations of her reasons for and against strolling. Moreover, she takes her solitary stroll *for* a reason or reasons" (Mele 94). Perhaps her action was rational after all.

To answer this, the natural inclination is to say her actions are merely a consequence of the relative merits of her reasons to stroll and not to stroll, that is, which are better reasons. Mele's response would be that there are two things operating here, Susan's evaluation of her reasons and her reason's motivational force or valence (Mele 95). It may well have been that the "proximity of the pleasure" of the stroll decisively influenced the motivational force of Susan's reasons. Susan's Stroll illustrates how akratic action can occur for rational reasons, but the agent doing it is acting irrationally. Thus, reason's ability to cause us to act as we will rationally is limited.

Even though Mele has a different view of reason than Hume, he supports the view that reason is limited with numerous arguments and an illustration. In particular, Susan's Stroll demonstrates that reason was not enough to prevent Susan from taking her stroll. As a consequence, Mele has made a powerful case that reason is insufficient to cause us to act enkratically. In particular, he has demonstrated that our judgments can be affected by innumerable things such as desire, motivational forces, not accounting for effort, warped evaluations, and the influence of factors that are themselves unreasoned. Hume and Mele have thrown serious doubt on Seneca's claim that all we need are the "right judgments of

impressions” to do our will.

Mele’s argument, however, involves a one time event: whether Susan will stroll or not. It seems certain we all act akratically rationally sometimes, like Susan. It is also true that we could act akratically rationally repeatedly, thus further reducing our ability to act enkratically. What Mele fails to address is that there may be other factors in addition to reason, which in conjunction with Stoic philosophy may have the effect of reducing the various causes of our fallibility in making decisions to a minimum. This point will be addressed in Chapter Five.

4.3.3 Conclusion: reason is insufficient to cause enkratic action

Seneca said, “we have the ability to cause changes in our bodies and in the world around us through our own power of thought and decision,” and we are “set to rights by reason” (Cooper xviii, xix; Seneca 227). David Hume said, “The ultimate ends of human actions can never . . . be accounted for by reason” (Hume 105). So who is right? In the case of reason’s ability to cause enkratic action, I think Seneca is wrong and Hume is only partially right.

The skeptics have presented a compelling case that explains why reason cannot cause us to act enkratically. First, there are simply too many other factors, such as warped evaluations, unreasoned beliefs, ignorance, and false opinions that may influence our judgments of impressions that militate against our ability to do our will. As Alfred Mele said, endeavoring to use reason may not be limited to only two motivational sets that are competing over the agents doing *A* and *–A* (Mele 64). Not doing *A* may be due to that which

is “not limited . . . to motivation” (Mele 64). It may well be that our beliefs and actions, as Pascal pointed out, “are ultimately founded on nature, custom and habit,” with reason playing only a minor role (MacIntyre 54).

In the case of ignorance, we may simply be unaware of what is motivating us to act. In Susan’s Stroll, Susan may have had good reasons to stroll that she simply did not know. She could be unaware that she was fatigued and a stroll might rejuvenate her mind so she could study better. Or, she could be unaware that sitting for a long time has exacerbated a lower back problem, which pain she has been ignoring. A stroll may help alleviate the pain. These unknown factors may have not only influenced her decision to stroll, they were also not facts or premises considered in her reasoning process. Reason is sometimes limited because it does not always account for all the relevant facts in its premises. Further, even if reason could cause enkratic action, other factors themselves could interfere with our ability to discern which reasons are the better reasons to act one way or another. The proximity of the pleasure of a stroll in Susan’s case may warp her ability to objectively weigh and judge which are the better reasons for and against the stroll.

The skeptics, and in particular Hume, have made a strong case that reason cannot compel us to act. First, for us to act, there must exist something to have an interest in and “reason being cool and disengaged” does not offer that something (Hume 105). Cicero’s claim that nature gave us reason, which gives rise to “impulse[s] to desire,” simply does not refute this charge (Cicero 181). You may recall that William Irvine postulated instrumental desires, or desires for the sake of something else, that were caused by reason. However, he also

postulated a battle between our emotions and intellect in which the intellect “all too often ends up losing” (Irvine 69, 70). He said our reason has only the power of persuasion in its dealings with the emotions, which is why we often fail to enkratically control our desires. He concluded that our ability to use reason to control desire is limited, due to the power of our emotions (Irvine 73). Our desires, and not our intellect, are the forces behind our actions.

Second, Cicero’s claim that reason gives rise to “impulse[s] to desire” does not account for reason’s need to engage our will first in order to give rise to a desire (Cicero 181). Hume’s response to Cicero’s assertion is that our reason simply lacks the ability to engage our will to cause a desire. He said:

Nothing can oppose or retard the impulse of passion, but a contrary impulse: and if this contrary impulse ever arises from reason, that later faculty must have an original influence on the will, and must be able to cause, as well as hinder any act of volition. But reason has no original influence. (Hume 415)

If reason has “no [such] original influence,” then it cannot compel us to action. However, it should be noted that Hume and Cicero could agree that reason plays a role in *influencing* our actions. Reason can help us achieve pre-established goals by altering those vectors that affect our will and ultimately actions. Even though Hume and the Stoics have different views concerning reason’s influence on motivation, there does exist some concurrence on reasons’ role within this theory of the mind.

It seems the Stoics have lost this debate. Reason cannot cause us to act enkratically, or

live the Stoic philosophy to be happy. If we can act enkratically, it seems more is required. You may recall from Chapter Three, that one of the reasons Stoicism faded in the second century was because some of its tenets were too hard for people to do. It may well be that it faded because people could not live a philosophy that preached they can do what they will through reason. It was not that they could not do what they will, but rather they could not do it with just reason.

However, it may also be possible that Hume and Mele are only partially right. Could it be that reason is just one of many factors, which when taken together are sufficient to allow us to act enkratically? Further, Mele was addressing a one time event which was Susan's decision whether to stroll. It seems certain Mele's assertion that we can akratically act rationally occasionally is true, perhaps even trivial. But one-time akratic decisions do not always bring unhappiness. Can we employ more factors, including reason, to improve our ability to make multiple enkratic decisions over our lifetimes in order to increase our happiness? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

In this chapter I have tried to show how we can do our will by describing, analyzing, and discussing enkrasia. I first argued that the Stoics were correct in believing we can act enkratically, but pointed out in the second debate that they are wrong in believing reason can cause it. With these conclusions I have created a critical contradiction in this thesis that must be resolved. The contradiction is I concluded the Stoics were right that we can act enkratically through reason, but that reason is incapable of causing enkratic action. In the next chapter I will endeavor to explain and reconcile these two conclusions in order to

resolve this contradiction. To achieve this, I will focus on what it might take to cause us to act enkratically.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the last section I asked whether Hume and Mele may only be partially right concerning reason's limits. I speculated whether reason, in conjunction with additional factors, could cause us to act enkratically. I will argue in this chapter that certain human capabilities, some consequences of those capabilities, along with some additional factors, taken together, are sufficient to cause us to act enkratically. My objective is to demonstrate that these capabilities and factors are sufficient to bring about enkratic action in order to escape the contradiction created in the last chapter.

5.1 The toolbox

In the last chapter, neo-Stoic William Irvine questioned whether we could superintend our major desires. Could it be that we have certain tools, or factors, that he did not anticipate, that enable us to act enkratically? If your car's engine stopped running, depending on the problem, the odds are it would take more than a wrench to fix it. Rather, you would need many tools in order to work on the engine in order to get it running. It would seem good mechanics carry many tools in order to make repairs. Similarly, could we have a toolbox of "tools," or capabilities and factors (henceforth called factors) that enable us to influence those vectors that impart will and ultimately enkratic action? With them, could we be better able to achieve our goals, including happiness? I will consider a few possibilities including intuition, imagination, persistence (or effort), the ability to learn,

experience, skill, habit, and finally reason. These are factors that, in addition to or in conjunction with reason, might cause us to act enkratically.

5.1.1 Intuition

University of Iowa College of Medicine neurologists Hannah and Antonio Damasio wondered why patients with lesions on their ventromedial prefrontal association cortex, which is the part of the brain that holds our intuitive ability, could do well on memory and IQ tests, but typically make dreadful decisions in normal life (Tattersall 212). To understand why, they contrived a gambling experiment with different decks of cards that provided different chances of winning, using patients with lesions on their ventromedial prefrontal association cortex and healthy persons without them (Tattersall 212). The healthy participants quickly favored the winning decks, but those with prefrontal lesions continued to take cards from the losing deck, even after they knew which decks were winners (Tattersall 212). The Damasios surmised that non-conscious biases, or intuitions, guided the behavior of the normal participants and not those with lesions (Tattersall 213). They deduced that patients with lesions make bad life decisions because of their defective intuitive ability (Tattersall 213). They knew which decks were good or bad, but they did not possess an intuitive faculty, and thus the ability to make good decisions (Tattersall 213).

The Damasios concluded that it is misleading to divorce emotional and rational brain functions because “between the two, there exists an intermediate level of neurobehavioral function, with a foot in both camps,” which is intuition (Tattersall 211). Intuitive thinking plays a major role in rational decision making, and when individuals make decisions, they

are weighing inputs from multiple sources, including feelings, that produce a decision that derives from both rationality and intuition (Tatarsall 211, 212). Thus, intuition is an “indispensible pillar of human creative achievement [that is] . . . an indispensable mediator in our thought processes” (Tatarsall 213).

Throughout our lives we acquire, I must assume, millions of bits of information from innumerable sources that become our base of knowledge. We learn things from our experiences, our emotions, and education, from which we conjure new thoughts and ideas. Much of this information is not readily perceived by our consciousness. When we make decisions using reason alone, our reasoning process too often fails to account for this information in our knowledge base. The result is that our reasoning process can begin with insufficient or wrongful premises. Intuition is one tool that remedies this because our knowledge base is unconsciously consulted, which brings to bear more information, or premises, on a problem. Often, if we just allow a problem to “cook” for awhile, the intuitive result is a better decision.

It should be pointed out that Damasio is assuming a different model for reason and the emotions than the Stoics and Hume. The latter are assuming that reason is distinct from emotion, whereas the former is assuming that reason and our emotions are a unity. In his book *Descartes Error*, Damasio wrote, for example, that “feeling [is] an integral component of the machinery of reason” (Damasio xxi). He demonstrated this assertion with an individual, Phineas Gage, whose emotions were impaired due to brain damage, which changed his mental process and resulted in his making poor life decisions. In some respects,

this unity of emotion and reason can be viewed as an extension of Irvine's assertion that we cannot prevent the occurrence of emotion, and from this propose that at least some emotions play an important role in our reasoning process. This said, I do not think these different models lessen my central message, which is that imagination in conjunction with reason can help us act enkratically. Indeed, this unity may be essential for us to do what we believe will make us happy.

5.1.2 Imagination

Imagination is a critical tool in our box because, when it is coupled with reason, we can use it to conceive of plausible alternatives that give rise to impulses and desires that compel us to action. Reasoned imagination could be a causal process where we imagine if we did *A*, then *B* could happen, and if we desired the imagined consequence *B*, we may be compelled to do that which could bring it about. In this way, our imaginative reasoning could give rise to action.

In my story about Lydia in Chapter Four, I described an unhappy, divorced woman being pursued by a married man with children. It seems plausible that Lydia could use her reasoned imagination to conceive of the small house with a garden she always wanted. She could imagine herself living their happily alone. So, she could willfully decide not to have an affair with a married man, but rather to work harder so she can earn enough money to buy that house and have her garden. Her imagination, coupled with reason, created an alternate possibility that caused her to eschew an affair with the married man, which put her on a path that could result in her living a happier life.

5.1.3 Persistence

Aristotle said “. . . we are equipped by nature to acquire the virtues, but we achieve them only by practice . . . teaching needs both nature and practice” (Guthrie 68). Persistence is an important component of will-power. Nature may have equipped us with the ability to do what we will, but we need persistence to develop strong wills in order to do it. Doing what we will is not easy; it requires effort, tenacity, exertion, struggle, and strength to bring about what we want.

Persistence is an important theme in Stoicism. Marcus Aurelius mentions the importance of “stamina and perseverance” (Aurelius 6). Epictetus, who may have been the greatest Stoic proponent of persistence, said, “constant training is necessary so we do not fail at aversion and do not fall into what should be avoided” (Epictetus 174). He emphasized “habit is a powerful influence . . . [because] we must oppose one habit to another, and where impressions are most liable to make us slip, there resort to training to counter the risk” (Epictetus 174). He explained that “one must know that it is not easy for a man to come to a judgment, unless he should state and hear the same principles every day, and at the same time apply them all to his life” (Epictetus 313). Perhaps his strongest statement for persistence is the following:

. . . learn from the wrestling-masters. Has the boy fallen down? ‘Get up’, they say, ‘and wrestle again, until you have gained strength’ . . . You too should think in some such way as that. (Epictetus, 273)

In order to act enkratically, we must be persistent.

5.1.4 Ability to learn, experience, and skill

Most humans have the ability to learn. The learning child puts his hand on the hot stove and gets burned. He quickly learns not to do that again. Likewise, we go through life observing innumerable natural pejorative or beneficial consequences of actions. Some learn from this causal relationship and thus become better at making decisions for the future. They improve their decision making ability and increase their chances of achieving some desirable end, such as happiness. Those that do not learn from these causal relationships remain inexperienced and doomed to forever repeating their mistakes. For these poor souls, their desire to achieve happiness often remains unfulfilled.

The ability to skillfully and adroitly navigate the minefields of life is one consequence of learning and experience. Certainly, skill comes from many sources, including innate ability, but learning and experience are capabilities available to most everyone. They, for example, offer those without innate ability the opportunity to become more skillful. So, like the yeoman artist who has become skillful at painting from years of learning and experience, we can become skillful in doing what we will through learning and experience. Indeed, Epictetus said that the trait of self control involves not only strength of will, but also skill; like the skill required to wrestle well (Mele 58).

5.1.5 Habit

It is significant that the word 'ethics,' the study of how we ought to act, comes from the Greek word 'ethos,' which means habit. The ancient philosophers' use of habit was not in

the sense commonly used today, such as having a bad habit, but rather in the sense that habit helps us achieve virtue and ultimately happiness. Plato, in *Book VII* of the *Republic*, said virtue is “created by habit and practice,” and in *Book X* that the prophet “[participated] in virtue by habit” (Plato 751, 843). Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, wrote, “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit,” it does not arise from nature (Aristotle 28). He emphasized that with “the virtues we get by first exercising them . . . we become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts” (Aristotle 37). According to Aristotle, virtue comes with practice, which eventually becomes part of our nature and character. The Stoics perpetuated Plato and Aristotle’s emphasis on habit. Epictetus said if you want to do something, make it a habit, and that habit is a powerful influence (Epictetus 119, 174).

Habit differs from persistence in that the acquisition of good habits requires effort, or persistence, whereas when we have achieved good habits we act in certain ways habitually. Habits do not just happen; they come about by consistent effort and will-power. Enkratic action is needed to make something a habit, therefore, what these ancient philosophers are collaterally emphasizing is the need to exercise our will in order to achieve virtue. Habit is an important component of our toolbox because the very process of establishing a habit reinforces our ability to do what we will, or *enkrasia*.

5.1.6 Reason

I am now in a position to describe reason’s role in our toolbox, evaluate the Stoics’ claim that it can bring enkratic action, and answer the skeptics who claim reason cannot control

the passions or cause us to act. Reason accompanies every factor in our toolbox. It evaluates the information acquired from our intuition, it helps us to logically imagine alternate desirable possibilities, and it helps us remain consistently persistent rather than impulsive. It also enables us to draw logical causal relations that help us learn, be experienced, and achieve skill.

Reason, being a higher order capacity of humans, enables us to develop capacities that do not arise from nature alone. It provides the ability, as Cicero wrote, to distinguish sequences of cause and effect, see the causes of things, become aware of consequences, and link the present with the future (MacKendrick 194). Reason is the critical organizing force for each of the tools that allows us to manipulate knowledge in a way that helps us act in a way we judge best. In conjunction with the other tools, it is the instrument for acting on and realizing our goals. It could, for example, make us aware of the need to make certain actions and beliefs a habit. Further, in conjunction with imagination, it could alter, or improve, certain pre-established goals. Even though our goals ultimately derive from the folk psychological causal interaction between our passions and experience, reason, in conjunction with other factors, may assist in more effectively achieving those goals. We may, for example, have learned through folk physics the goal not to touch hot stove burners, but with that experience, and reason's ability to relate causes with consequences, we may expand that goal to avoid touching anything hot.

This description of our toolbox revealed that the Stoics did advocate the use of some of the tools in our toolbox in addition to reason, such as persistence and habit. However, if the

tools were to be ranked in importance, I believe the Stoics would place reason first for many of the reasons mentioned. Indeed, it is significant that reason, and its concomitant ability to bring happiness, is listed as one of the principal Stoic tenets.

5.2 Reason and the toolbox can cause enkratic action

I used Lydia's Love Life earlier to demonstrate that reason can cause us to act our will. I concluded that "we can learn enkratic action with reason." It seems the other tools in our toolbox are of little value without reason. What good are intuition, imagination, effort, ability, experience, skill, and habit without reason? Cicero's belief that it is reason that regulates the soul's appetites appears true because without reason the other tools are of little use to cause us to act in such a way to achieve happiness (Cicero 181). Reason, combined with other tools, can bring about enkratic action that in turn provides us with the ability to influence those vectors that enable us to control our passions. Reason may be an insufficient tool to control passion, but it appears to be a necessary one.

Alfred Mele argued that reason does not bring enkratic action, due to warped evaluations, unreasoned beliefs, ignorance, false opinion, and influence from wrongful desires. However, it seems every one of these problems can be corrected with some combination of reason and other factors in our toolbox. Warped evaluations could be corrected with intuition, imagination, and experience; unreasoned beliefs with imagination and experience; ignorance with intuition, learning and effort; false opinion with intuition, effort, and experience; and wrongful desires influence on reason with intuition, effort, experience, and skill. Further, the combination of these tools may refute Hume's charge that reason is too

cool and disengaged to cause interests to act on. Reason, in conjunction with imagination and experience, could give rise to alternative desires that themselves become the source of interest to act on. It turns out that Hume may be right in that reason cannot cause us to act, but he fails to recognize that without it we cannot cause ourselves to act in accordance with our will.

The Stoics and David Hume may have different views on the role of reason in our lives, but it should be mentioned that they agree on the origins of human happiness in our natures. The Stoics believed reason is a means to achieve happiness, whereas Hume would argue reason cannot determine the end of happiness. Both would agree, however, that happiness is a human end, and that it is an end we are born with. Reason may give us a motivation to act with the toolbox, but we are born with the motivation to be happy. Reason is not required to provide us with the desire for happiness; it only helps us achieve it. Perhaps the Stoics' and Hume's agreement on the source of happiness can be captured best with John Locke's point that a person extends themselves from present existence only through consciousness, "all which is founded in a concern for happiness" (Locke 220). This happiness, according to Locke, is the "unavoidable concomitant of consciousness" (Locke 220). I think the point of agreement is that happiness and existence are necessarily and inexorably connected.

The tools of our toolbox enable us to do what we will in order to bring about desirable ends for ourselves such as happiness. It makes us better mechanics.

5.3 Lydia's Love Life reprise

To illustrate our toolbox's ability to enable us to act enkratically and bring about the desired end of happiness, I will revise and embellish Lydia's Love Life. In my earlier version of Lydia's Love Life I wrongly concluded that a matured Lydia could resist a love affair with a married man through reason. It turns out Lydia needs more than reason to successfully resist, she needs a toolbox. The point of this revised version is to demonstrate that we can act enkratically with our toolbox.

To resist an affair with a married 50-year-old man, Lydia now employs her toolbox. Her *intuition* tells her that a married man who is willing to break his vow of fidelity to his spouse is very likely going to break any vow to her. Her *imagination* conjures up images of the possibility of a happy life in the house and garden she always wanted without romantic engagements. The *persistent past effort* she has made to resist immediate pleasures in order to achieve more enduring future rewards engages. Like the child who got burned by touching the hot stove, she has *learned* that she can be "burned" with pain and suffering if she has an affair with this man. Her ability to learn from her last failed marriage, and the consequences that flowed from it, gave her the *experience* that tells her an affair with a married man is not in her interests. She also now has acquired the *skill* to elude his attractive advances. She is better able to resist the passion this man has kindled because she developed the *habit* of not succumbing to impulse. Finally, her *reason* enables her to connect past causes with future consequences, which reminds her of the potentially severe consequences of an affair with a married man.

Lydia's decisions in this case are not only one-time events. They represent multiple

decisions Lydia makes throughout her life that enhance her happiness. These decisions, and the process of deciding, are paradigmatic ways of how we may act enkratically. We all, like Lydia, are confronted daily with events, or temptations, that require decisions, and our happiness often depends on our ability to make the right decisions. Achieving happiness seems to be a long term process, or a “way of life,” where we continually act on salubrious personal pre-established goals. It seems certain that if we could make these paradigmatic ways of thinking and acting a habit, we could achieve a greater degree of happiness.

So Lydia, at 50 years old, defers from a romantic relationship with this married man. She now sees him with new eyes and decides that this is not what she desires. She says to herself that she does not want to fall in love with this man and follows her willful decision by not falling in love. Lydia has engaged her intuition, imagination, persistence, ability to learn, experience, skill, habit, and reason to act enkratically to control desire, and thus avoided handing her happiness over to circumstances beyond her control. Lydia’s Love Life demonstrates that we can learn enkrasia to control our passions, which provides the opportunity to achieve happiness.

Lydia is a Stoic, or perhaps a neo-Stoic. She had decided to study philosophy and read Seneca’s *Letters from a Stoic*, and thus learned the eleven Stoic tenants for happiness described in Chapter Three. She then spent a good part of her life developing her toolbox in order to do those tenets to manage her life’s storms. Clearly, during her life she did act akratically rationally, as Alfred Mele pointed out, but these were just one-time events that happen to us all. We all fail to do what we believe sometimes. Further, as William Irvine

pointed out, Lydia could not control the occurrence of her desires. But Lydia developed the ability, with the help of her toolbox, to modify her Biological Incentive System and thus gain control of her desires. She learned to act enkratically, and with this new ability she was able to do Stoic philosophy and achieve a higher level of happiness. For Lydia, neo-Stoicism was a wise and useable guide in life to achieve happiness.

5.4 Enkrasia is a continuum

It should be noted that our ability to act enkratically is a continuum. Alfred Mele said self-control comes in degrees; it is not all or nothing (Mele 60). He thought akrasia and enkrasia are a continuum with strict akratic action at one pole and pure enkratic action at the other (Mele 60). It is a mistake to think of our ability to do our will in an all-or-nothing way. Rather, our ability to do our will is better understood as a continuum of enkratic ability. We may not have the ability to always do what we will, like Seneca said, but with the help of our toolbox it seems we can skillfully wrestle our actions to the enkratic pole of the continuum.

In the next section I will endeavor to answer the two problems outlined in the introduction.

5.5 Conclusion: Stoicism and our toolbox can bring happiness

My first problem in this thesis was whether the ancient philosophy of Seneca and the Stoics can bring happiness. It appears evident if we could assimilate the first eleven tenets of Stoicism described in Chapter Three into our personal life philosophies, we could greatly enhance our level of happiness. If we believed, for example, that things are as we make

them; that we ought not to place high value on externals; that we should avoid ambition, avarice, and luxury; that we should live simply in accordance with nature; that we should use proper judgments of impressions; that we should remain indifferent to matters outside our field of choice; that pleasure and passion ought to be subordinate to reason; and that we should try and be wise, courageous, self-controlled, and just, we could be happier. I illustrated this point with two lives, those of Boethius and Jason Regier, to demonstrate this is possible. Further, the adoption and implementation of these Stoic tenets for happiness would be an evolving, life-long process as our constitutions change in response to the assimilation of these ideas.

My second problem was precipitated by the thought that these Stoic prescriptions for happiness are of no value if we cannot do them. Hence the problem: can we act enkratically, and in particular, can we control our passions and consequent desires? I have argued that our reason in conjunction with other factors like intuition, imagination, persistence, the ability to learn, experience, skill, and habit can enable us to do our will. It seems with these tools, we can alter our characters in such a way to enhance our ability to act enkratically.

I defined happiness in Chapter One as tranquility, peace, contentment, calmness of mind, peace of mind, and well-being. It is a state where we are not disturbed, worried, or driven by insatiable desires. I believe some can achieve this state through Stoic philosophy and our toolbox. Stoicism provides the right beliefs, or goals, and our toolbox enables us to act on those beliefs. Stoicism and enkratic action thus appear to be sufficient conditions that can bring some happiness, which conclusion was the objective of this thesis.

In the introduction to this thesis I mentioned some paradigmatic sources of unhappiness. These included trying to make reality adjust to us, investing happiness in capricious passion, desiring what we don't need, and ignorance. I also said that when I was a young man I behaved according to some of these paradigms, and that I was unhappy. I feel certain, knowing what I know today, if I had known then what I know now about Stoicism and enkrasia, I would have been a far happier human being.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 The problems summarized

This thesis addressed two problems. The first was whether Stoic philosophy can increase some people's happiness. Stoicism was one of many ancient philosophies that believed a central purpose of philosophy is to alleviate suffering and bring happiness. The Stoics believed philosophers are doctors of the soul capable of using certain remedies to achieve these ends. There are many sources of human suffering, but injurious self-defeating beliefs and attitudes are among the most significant. Thus, the first problem was whether the precepts of Stoic theory, and in particular its first eleven tenets, can achieve this end. Chapter Three addressed this problem.

The second problem was whether we can act enkratically. Can we do what we believe? Some people know what is the right thing to do, know that it is in their interests to do it, and want to do it, but do not. This problem, put differently, asks whether people can overcome akrasia. The Stoics claimed we can through reason. This precipitated a third problem which was whether reason can cause us to act enkratically. This problem asks whether there are limits to reason. Chapters Four and Five addressed these problems and provided answers and solutions to both.

These problems are significant because, if they can be solved, it seems some people could

increase their level of happiness. These problems are also significant because history may be telling us that they are not solvable through Stoicism. Specifically, Stoicism was supplanted in the second century by Christianity. There are at least two possible reasons: perhaps Christianity was better at bringing happiness, or perhaps people could not do Stoicism. One author implied, for example, that Stoicism was simply too athletic to be done (James, 47). By contrast, in Chapter Five I concluded that Stoic philosophy can be done by some people.

6.2 Thesis summarized

I began this thesis with the idea that philosophy can bring some people greater happiness. Happiness generally means a state of tranquility or equanimity that is free from disturbance. I first explained the two obstacles to this claim, why they matter, and the solutions. The obstacles were whether Stoicism can bring some happiness and can we act enkratically to do Stoic philosophy. I said these problems matter because people desire happiness. My solution was to do Stoic philosophy through our strength of will. After making certain assumptions and disclaimers, the terms happiness, virtue, and enkrasia were defined.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature used to explain the history and philosophy of Stoicism, as well as the literature on akratic and enkratic action. On Stoicism, I said I intended to rely primarily on the original writings of Stoics Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. On enkrasia, I said I relied on the writings of these Stoics along with William Irvine, Harry Frankfurt, David Hume, and Alfred Mele.

Chapter Three described and analyzed Stoicism. It began with its origins, which were Socrates and Gorgias, who influenced Antisthenes, who founded Cynicism. Cynicism in turn influenced Zeno of Citium, who was the founder of Stoicism. The Stoics were particularly influenced by Socrates' emphasis on virtue and the Cynics' admonition to limit passion and avoid pleasure. The evolving Stoic philosophy and its principle philosophers were described in the Early, Middle, and Late Stoas, with emphasis on the writings of Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

I then discussed the Stoic belief that philosophers are doctors to the soul, which was demonstrated with the experiences of Boethius and Jason Regier. I proceeded to describe the fifteen essential tenets of Stoicism and then discussed how the first eleven, including the need to remain indifferent to matters beyond choice and the world is as we make it, can enhance individual happiness. Finally, the biography, corpus, and philosophy of Stoic Seneca were described. I concluded Chapter Three with the assertion that Stoic philosophy can bring happiness to some.

In Chapter Four, I dealt with the question whether we can act enkratically by following two debates. In the first debate I presented the Stoics' view that we can will what we do with reason, and then skeptic William Irvine's contention that we may not be able to control major desires. I concluded that the arguments for continent action, along with the Stoics' idea of a constitutional person, support the conclusion that we can act enkratically.

Because the Stoics' case for enkratic action relies principally on reason, my second debate first presented the Stoics' reasons for believing this, and then the skeptical arguments of

David Hume, Harry Frankfurt, and Alfred Mele's, that reason is limited. For Hume, reason is a slave to the passions, for Frankfurt it is our will and not our reason that make us human, and for Mele, we can act irrationally for rational reasons, which he demonstrated with Susan's Stroll. I concluded that the skeptics had made the better argument and reason alone cannot compel us to act.

My conclusions from these two debates created a critical contradiction, which was that Stoics were right in that we can act enkratically through reason, but reason is incapable of causing enkratic action. To resolve this contradiction, in Chapter Five I focused on what it might take to cause us to act enkratically. I imagined a human toolbox of factors that contained intuition, imagination, persistence, the ability to learn, experience, skill, habit and reason. I then considered a number of scenarios to determine if various combinations of these factors can cause us to act enkratically. I concluded they can, and demonstrated this conclusion with Lydia's Love Life.

I concluded in Chapter Five that Stoic philosophy can bring happiness for some people and that some can act enkratically. As a result, some people can learn how to increase their happiness by doing Stoic philosophy, which conclusion was the objective of this thesis.

6.3 The limitations of Stoicism

I said in the introduction that Stoicism is not a perfect moral theory. Its major deficiencies involve Stoic philosophy itself and how it fails to address some sources of unhappiness. Seneca, in *On Anger*, argued that anger should be completely eliminated from our emotional self. He had numerous reasons for this assertion, but his primary one was that once damaging anger starts, it at some point becomes uncontrollable. In *Medea*, he dramatized this point by showing how Medea became “controlled by another” once anger consumed her (Nussbaum 455). The difficulty is whether we can completely debride any emotion, like anger, from our emotional make-up. Even with the Stoics’ right prior judgments of impressions, it seems William Irvine is right in saying that we cannot control the occurrence of desire, and thus its emotional source. The Stoics did not acknowledge this important point. We may only have the ability to control existing emotions, and not the capacity to eliminate them.

This raises another difficulty, which is that some emotions and desires are good. Einstein’s desire to correct the deficiencies of Newtonian physics and Marie Curie’s desire to understand radiation brought tremendous benefits to humankind. Seneca, in his consolation *Helvia*, gives his mother the Stoic advice to remain indifferent to matters beyond her control, which includes the fate of family members. He tells her, because people come and go, she should prepare herself by remaining indifferent to familial relations (Hadas 11). This demonstrates the hard side of Stoicism, which is the unavoidable requirement to remain emotionally detached for personal happiness. Is it realistic or

advisable, for example, for parents to be emotionally detached from their children's welfare? It seems not. Parenthood may just be one of those life choices we make that necessarily entails the potential for unhappiness.

The Stoics' emphasis on reason, fate, and suicide are additional difficulties in Stoic philosophy. As I discussed in Chapter Four, reason is insufficient to bring enkratic action. The Stoics' myopic reliance on reason may deter individuals from exploring other sources that might enhance their will power. On fate, the Stoics were never completely able to extricate themselves from the consequences of this determinist belief. The problem is, if our actions are determined we have no control over our level of happiness because our level of happiness is fated. How can Stoicism teach a philosophy that purports to bring happiness when we have no ability to do it? Finally, in matters beyond our control, such as ill health, the Stoics believed suicide may be a solution. However, a consequence of counseling suicide is that it discounts the possibility that circumstances may improve, or that some effort by the individual may improve circumstances. Further, it does not take into account the unhappiness suicide creates in other people, such as family members and friends.

It should also be mentioned that Epictetus' belief that the good life can be achieved by adjusting one's desires to the way the world is rather than trying to adjust the world to satisfy one's desires requires qualification. This may be true only under certain circumstances because some improper judgments about circumstances could make one happy.

Perhaps the greater difficulty with Stoic philosophy is that it does not address significant

sources of unhappiness. Even though the Stoics believed we are all citizens of the world, it remains mostly an inward-looking prudential philosophy. It does not purport to change the world. It does not overtly seek to correct societal wrongful beliefs, attitudes, or customs. It is a philosophy that does not, for example, strive to alleviate poverty or eliminate racism. In this respect, Stoicism can be seen as a lethargizing force for any societal reform. With its admonition to remain indifferent to matters beyond control and to not place value on externals, it may have the effect of freezing any initiative for the betterment of society. It could have the effect of bringing complacency in the face of evil. Stoicism focuses on bringing happiness from within the individual, and not from the alteration of uncontrollable external sources.

6.4 Conclusion

Even with its limitations, I think Stoicism has much to offer contemporary Americans. I believe many Americans passionately pursue false gods like prestige, power, wealth, and sensual pleasure under the mistaken belief that they bring enduring happiness. Further, many who are aware of these self-defeating beliefs seem incapable of using their will to bring their actions in line with self-improving salubrious beliefs. I think Stoicism addresses both of these problems.

I think the result is that Stoicism offers a way for Americans to achieve a greater level of happiness. Stoic philosophy, through reason and virtue, brings wisdom and the ability to do what is wise. It is a philosophy that has a history of doing just this. It helped Cicero, Seneca, Boethius, Jason Regier, and myself achieve greater happiness. For these reasons, I think

Stoicism is as relevant to contemporary Americans' state of happiness as it was 2,000 years ago to the peoples of ancient Greece and Rome.

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APPENDIX

THE STOIC ERA THREAD

