

# Two New Kinds of Stoicism

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is an attempt to introduce two credible versions of Stoicism. The first is made to greatly resemble Stoic ethics, as it actually existed, by accepting that we should prefer to act instinctively, and by rejecting ethical justifications for actions other than virtue. This will be called “Neo-Aristonism.” The second version of Stoicism is radically different because it requires us to reject the Stoic conclusion that only virtue is an ethically justified goal. This will be called “Common Sense Stoicism.” The original forms of Stoicism will be referred to as “Ancient Stoicism.” Both of the new Stoic views will endorse Epictetus’s moral psychology, but will not require us to accept Stoic metaphysics.

Epictetus maintains that true moral beliefs lead to appropriate emotions and actions. Once we can use reason to guide emotions, we must attempt to answer the following questions: What evaluative beliefs are true? Are some emotions always based on purely delusional beliefs? How do we know if or when certain emotions are based on inappropriate beliefs? If certain emotions are based purely on delusional beliefs, then those emotions could be seen as inappropriate. Each new version of Stoicism will find a different answer to what emotions are inappropriate. Part 1 of the thesis describes the moral framework of each view, (1) Ancient Stoicism, (2) Neo-Aristonism, and (3) Common Sense Stoicism; and part 2 describes how each view would judge our emotions.

## Part I: The Moral Framework

### 1. Ancient Stoicism

Ancient Stoicism denies that any goal could be ethically justified other than virtue, and virtue is good for its own sake.<sup>1</sup> Because virtue is good for its own sake, virtue does not require a further evaluative justification and it is a goal that can be used to justify other goals. The Ancient Stoics reject that life, consciousness, happiness, and pleasure are good for their own sake; but even the goal to accumulate money could be justified insofar as it helps people achieve virtue. They emphasize the fact that goals and considerations other than virtue should be taken as a very low priority in our lives and describe them as “indifferent,” and virtue should be taken as incomparably more important than other considerations.<sup>2</sup> Indifferent things can still be preferred, so attaining food is preferred to starving. The fact that virtue is the only good makes virtue a goal that cannot be sacrificed for any other goal.

#### 1.1 Virtue of Ancient Stoicism

The Ancient Stoics describe virtue as “life in accordance with nature” (Laertius 195). Virtue requires us to be willing and able to do what is appropriate in any given situation.<sup>3</sup> We do

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<sup>1</sup> Cleanthes holds that virtue is “choice-worthy for its own sake and not from hope or fear or any external motive” (Laertius 197). The Stoics agreed that “virtue in itself... is worthy of choice for its own sake” (Laertius 233).

<sup>2</sup> Ariston of Chios was the first to introduce the idea of indifferent things. “He declared the end of action to be a life of perfect indifference to everything which is neither virtue nor vice; recognizing no distinction whatever in things indifferent, but treating them all alike” (Laertius 263-265). Indifferent things could still be intrinsically valuable. Pierre Hadot argues that “indifferent” means “make no *difference* between them” or “love them equally” (Hadot 197). He then argues that this was Marcus Aurelius’s attitude, who said: “*The earth is in love with showers and the majestic sky is in love. And the Universe is in love with making whatever has to be. To the Universe then I say: Together with thee I will be in love*” (Aurelius 277).

<sup>3</sup> To be willing and able to do the right thing only requires that we have the necessary skills and willingness to do the right thing. It does not require us to successfully achieve all of our ethical goals because sometimes it is impossible to achieve these goals. Outside interference could never divert us from doing the right thing because we cannot be

not need virtue to be taken as our only end. Instead, virtuous actions require us to act appropriately with consideration given indifferent things.<sup>4</sup> Virtue is also seen as an all-or-nothing state of being.<sup>5</sup> To have virtue is to be wise, and “the wise are infallible, not being liable to error” (Laertius 227). If we are virtuous, then we will always be willing to act appropriately because we are infallible and virtue requires that we live in accordance with nature, which is God<sup>6</sup>. To live in accordance with nature requires one to live as *part of God* and to *be like a god*.<sup>7</sup> Nature is God and is guided by God’s plan (providence)<sup>8</sup>, and God’s plan is the best plan we could hope for. Because the Stoics saw virtue as the only good, and virtue is all-or-nothing, moral progress was seen as being morally indifferent.<sup>9</sup> This position may be counterintuitive, but the Stoics did agree that moral progress was preferred and encouraged.

The Stoics endorse the unity of the virtues.<sup>10</sup> Any virtue was said to require all of the

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morally obligated (or encouraged) to do anything impossible, and outside interference can make it impossible for us to achieve some of our goals. An analogy used in antiquity was that of an expert archer who perfectly shoots an arrow but misses the target due to a gust of wind (Becker 113). The archer did the right thing, but outside interference made the goal unreachable.

<sup>4</sup> Indifferent things “do not contribute either to happiness or to misery, as wealth, fame, health, strength, and the like; for it is possible to be happy without these things, although, if they are used in a certain way, such use of them tends to happiness or misery... [They are] quite capable of exciting inclination or aversion... some are taken by preference, others are rejected... [T]hings of the preferred class are those which have positive value, e.g. amongst mental qualities, natural ability, skill, moral improvement, and the like; among bodily qualities, life, health, strength, good condition, soundness of organs, beauty, and so forth; and in the sphere of external things, wealth, fame, noble birth, and the like” (Laertius 209-13). The Ancient Stoics tend to find virtue to be necessary and sufficient for happiness.

<sup>5</sup> “It is a tenet of theirs that between virtue and vice there is nothing intermediate” (Laertius 231). “They hold that all goods are equal and that all good is desirable in the highest degree and admits of no lowering or heightening in intensity” (Laertius 207).

<sup>6</sup> “God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus” and the “universe” is “God himself” (Laertius 241). The substance of god is declared by Zeno to be the whole world and the heaven” (Laertius 253). Antipater of Tyre argued that “the whole world is a living being, endowed with soul and reason” (Laertius 243).

<sup>7</sup> The virtuous are “godlike” (Laertius 223).

<sup>8</sup> According to Chrysippus and Posidonius, the world “is ordered by reason and providence... inasmuch as reason pervades every part of it (Laertius 243).

<sup>9</sup> The Stoics found that “moral improvement” was “indifferent,” but was “preferred” (Laertius 211). The decision to define virtue as an ideal that cannot have degrees is not one necessary to Stoicism as a whole. Both new kinds of Stoicism will encourage us to define virtue as having degrees.

<sup>10</sup> “They hold that the virtues involve one another, and that the possessor of one is the possessor of all” (Laertius 229).

virtues, which is probably due to the fact that virtue was seen as all-or-nothing and required infallible knowledge. If you have one virtue, then you have them all. Once we accept that virtues are all perfect, to accept that the virtues are unified only requires us to accept that each virtue potentially relates to another. (If we lack any one virtue, then we could fail to act virtuously whenever a different virtue is required, and we are often required to use more than one virtue at the same time.) For example, courage relates to justice. A group of people might kidnap a child, and justice might require that we save the child. But we would need courage to save the child if we have no choice but to try to save the child at the risk of our own health. If we aren't courageous, then we could fail to act justly. Since courage is perfect courage and must never fail to relate to justice when applicable, it is understandable why the Stoics would find that the virtues are unified. This supports the fact that virtue is all-or-nothing. We have to know everything about every possible virtue, or we can't even have one perfect virtue. In order to be fully virtuous in any sense, we must be virtuous in every sense.

## **1.2 Happiness of Ancient Stoicism**

Most of the Ancient Stoics firmly believe that virtue is a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness.<sup>11</sup> However, happiness is not the justification for why we should attain virtue. Happiness is an added bonus. The Stoics claim that virtue guarantees happiness. This seems counterintuitive. If virtuous people are tortured for years, then how could they be happy? A virtuous person becomes godlike, and such a being may have total mastery over their

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<sup>11</sup> Virtue is "in itself sufficient to ensure well-being" (Laertius 233). Virtue leads to "joy and gladness" and vice leads to "despair, moroseness, and the like" (Laertius 203). This was not a universal claim of the Stoics. Panaetius and Posidonius denied that virtue is sufficient for happiness because "health is necessary, and some means of living and strength" (Laertius 233).

emotions. Torture would not bother a godlike person.

Ancient Stoics view happiness as a very calm state of mind.<sup>12</sup> Happy people would not be miserable, and they would not be very passionate or seek excitement. A lot of people seem to equate happiness with excitement or pleasure, but that is not how a Stoic views happiness. We have some reason to be attracted to the Stoic view of happiness, and it could be greatly attributable to the greatness and achievement of the person who is happy. Happiness does not require an unusual dependence on the external world because greatness and achievement could be described in terms of the person's actual existence. A virtuous person could be seen to have succeeded in great achievements by being virtuous in the first place.

A better understanding of Stoic happiness and suffering requires us to understand Stoic psychology. A more complete discussion of Stoic psychology will be provided in part two. Epictetus stated that the person who follows Stoicism would be happy because the Stoic would not rely on the external world to be happy.<sup>13</sup> We can rely on what is within our control to be happy rather than what is outside our control. In contrast, people who rely on the external world to be happy will be taking a risk. We rely on the external world to be happy whenever we treat anything outside our control as a good for their own sake, rather than what is within our control (such as virtue). If the external world does not live up to our values and desires, then we will suffer. For example, people who find money to be excessively valuable will feel bad when they lose their wallets. The Stoic only finds virtue to have special value, so the Stoic could never be disappointed about what happens in the external world. This description of Stoicism may have

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<sup>12</sup> Epictetus describes how those with virtue attain "happiness and calm and serenity" (Discourses Books I-II 29).

<sup>13</sup> The virtuous learns "that he who craves or shuns the things that are not under his control can be neither faithful nor free, but must himself of necessity be changed and tossed to and fro with them" (Discourses Books I-II 33).

been used to convince people to become Stoics. If they seek happiness or seek to avoid suffering, then Stoicism could help. The promise of happiness could help “sell” Stoicism to the masses. Stoicism itself does not allow happiness to be a justification of Stoicism because happiness is only good insofar as it is good-for-virtue, and it could be difficult to prove that happiness is good for virtue.

### 1.3 Metaphysics of Ancient Stoicism

How do the Stoics know that virtue is a legitimate goal? This is answered by their metaphysics. The Stoics cannot say that virtue is justified because of the good consequences that virtue provides us, such as better government policy, happiness, or survival. Virtue must be seen as a justified goal without any other evaluative justification required. This may seem counterintuitive, but an understanding of Stoic metaphysics will make it clear how the Stoics justified virtue.

Ancient Stoics use metaphysics to justify their ethics. The Stoics view nature as pervaded by God or divine reason,<sup>14</sup> and believe that everything that happens is part of God’s divine and reasonable plan. This is why knowledge (knowing the truth of the universe) tells us to act in accordance with nature. The plan of the universe is guided by divine reason, so it is the best plan possible. A person who helps God’s plan is doing something divine. Someone who goes against God’s plan is impious.<sup>15</sup> If someone were to ask a Stoic, “How do you know that virtue is justified?” then the Stoic would reply, “Because virtue *is* living in accordance with nature, and

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<sup>14</sup> “[T]he right reason which pervades all things... is identical with Zeus” (Laertius 197).

<sup>15</sup> “All those things, which thou prayest to attain by a roundabout way, thou canst have at once if thou deny them not to thyself; that is to say, if thou leave all the Past to itself and entrust the Future to Providence, and but direct the Present in the way of piety and justice” (Aurelius 321).

nature is divine reason.” Since virtue is a life in accordance with nature and divine reason, virtue is divine. Virtue can be seen as the human part of divine reason and the divine plan for the universe.

Granted, we must act divinely at all times, or we are not acting in accordance with divine reason. That is not to say that there is only one way to behave at all times. It could be maintained that there could be more than one divine action we could take.

#### **1.4 How We Know About Divine Reason**

We learn about divine reason through instincts, practical concerns, and suffering.

God gave us instincts (human nature) to guide us into doing whatever is appropriate. It could be said that our instincts are part of human nature, which is part of nature as a whole.<sup>16</sup> These are not all selfish instincts. They include rationality and instincts of a social animal, to want to help other people and animals.<sup>17</sup> We may be worried that some of our impulsive behavior is not instinctual. Perhaps some of our unconscious behavior is guided by social conditioning. This is seen as a corruption, and it could be possible to figure out what behavior is artificial by seeing if it is coherent with our other instincts. Murder is not coherent with our instincts because we depend on other people to survive and we need social instincts. Ancient Stoics find social behavior to be natural, and anti-social behavior to be unnatural.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chrysippus argued that “our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe. And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe” (Laertius 195).

<sup>17</sup> “[T]he Nature of the Universe has fashioned rational creatures for the sake of one another with a view to mutual benefit based upon worth, but by no means for harm” (Aurelius 231). “[W]e understand rationally which things have ‘value,’ since they correspond to the innate tendencies which nature has placed within us. Thus, it is ‘natural’ for us to love life, for parents to love their own children, and that human beings, like ants and bees, should have an instinct of sociability” (Hadot 189).

<sup>18</sup> It is possible that some people’s biology could be naturally anti-social. Perhaps sociopaths lack social instincts. This could either be seen as unnatural (a mistake made in the divine plan), or sociopaths might have a different role

This is not to say that violent instincts play no role at all. Violent instincts can be justified in terms of our social instincts. We may have to use violence, as the police may have to use violence, to protect the natural order of the world and protect other human beings.

We can also use non-instinctual means to discover more about divine reason, such as practical considerations. Instincts are seen as good insofar as they are good-for-virtue. Anything good-for-virtue is justified. Life, food, honor, political power, and wealth could all be seen as helpful to a person's virtue because these are all necessary to achieve any way of life. These indifferent things could be used for good or evil, so they are not good in and of themselves, but that doesn't mean that virtuous people shouldn't desire to use these things for virtuous reasons.

Suffering can also be a guide to understand divine reason.<sup>19</sup> The promise of happiness and a life without suffering are not merely a way to "sell" Stoicism because they also reveal another method to learn about divine reason. If the Stoics were right that happiness is guaranteed to the virtuous and happiness is a life without suffering, then we would suffer from lacking virtue.<sup>20</sup> This means that suffering is a *guide to false needs and desires*. We will suffer when we give ourselves unnatural desires. Unnatural desires are caused by false evaluative judgments.<sup>21</sup> This is clear when we consider that the virtuous Stoic never has to suffer. When we feel bad when our wallet is stolen, it is evidence that we are judging our money as having excessive value,

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to play in God's plan for nature than other people have.

<sup>19</sup> "If it is virtue that holds out the promise thus to create happiness and calm and serenity, then assuredly progress toward virtue is progress toward each of these states of mind" (Epictetus 29).

<sup>20</sup> I will question whether or not virtue really does guarantee a happy life without suffering in when I discuss Neo-Aristonism.

<sup>21</sup> "Can anyone prevent you from assenting to the truth? No one at all... 'But,' says someone, 'if a person subjects me to the fear of death, he compels me.' 'No, it is not what you are subjected to that impels you, but the fact that you decide it is better for you to do something of the sort than to die'" (Epictetus 117). Everything that happens is part of God's plan, so we must not judge that anything is good or bad except our own decision to also live in accordance with divine reason.

but for the Stoic money is an indifferent consideration. It is possible to not suffer when we lose our wallet, which is evidence that it is not required for our happiness or to satisfy our instincts.

It is not necessary to claim that every false desire leads to suffering, but every desire that leads to suffering would be proven to be based on an unnatural or false desire. False desires that don't lead to suffering would be less relevant to virtue because they would not be based on false values.

### **1.5 How Intuitive is Ancient Stoicism?**

Ancient Stoicism does not force us to reject all of our common sense values.<sup>22</sup> It does not tell us that life doesn't matter. It just matters less than divine reason and virtue. We should attempt to survive insofar as we have an instinct given to us to survive as part of the divine plan for the world.<sup>23</sup> For example, money can enable the virtuous to help others (perhaps by buying people food), and could help people attain necessities in order to survive. Once we accept Ancient Stoicism, we have reason to promote human life, to help increase the level of consciousness of ourselves and others, and to help relieve needless suffering. Art can also be valued insofar as we have instincts to be artistic and art has various functions in human life. For example, the enjoyment given to artists and admirers of art can help them deal with

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<sup>22</sup> Within the thesis, common sense is a set of assumptions that are taken as "given" as long as the assumptions are found to be compatible with our knowledge, experience, and intuitions. Common sense assumptions can be speculative, but intuition might be a source of pre-speculative assumptions. An example of a common sense assumption is that we generally assume induction is true. Hume's argument that induction cannot be proven would be irrelevant to the fact that induction is assumed as true because it is such a helpful assumption to have whenever we make practical decisions in our everyday lives. Common sense can be defended because it doesn't require that we prove everything from the ground up and many of our common sense assumptions are very helpful, or even necessary in order for us to live our everyday lives. Philosophy that makes use of common sense assumptions can be ambitious, but is often considered to be more uncertain.

<sup>23</sup> "An animal's first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation... for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it" (Laertius 193).

overwhelming suffering and continue to live life and develop their virtues.

It is intuitively true that animals have moral relevance and should not be abused, so common sense would dictate that Stoics could promote the well being of animals. Fortunately, there are two reasons that Ancient Stoicism can promote the well being of animals.<sup>24</sup> One, we would have every reason to believe that universal nature put animals in the world for a divine reason, so we should do what we can to care for animals. Two, we may have instincts to care for animals. One question, however, is unanswered, “Why aren’t animals seen to live in accordance with nature in the important sense that a virtuous person is?” Very few people ever become part of the divine plan (as a virtuous person is), but animals might be part of the divine plan even if they lack virtuous knowledge. The Stoics do not provide an answer to this question.

Ancient Stoicism is attractive because it is a system that very consistently gives us good answers about what is right or wrong. Even so, the most common reason that people don’t take Stoicism seriously is the Stoic metaphysical commitment to divine forces. Stoic metaphysics is not falsifiable in a scientific sense. It will be argued that it is unnecessary for Stoics to endorse their metaphysics. The argument that metaphysics is unnecessary for Stoicism is not new. Ariston of Chios, one of the earliest Stoics, concluded that the Stoics could devote themselves to ethics without being concerned about metaphysics. “He wished to discard both Logic and Physics, saying that Physics was beyond our reach and Logic did not concern us: all that did concern us was Ethics” (Laertius 265). Unfortunately Ariston’s essays have not survived and we don’t know how he defined virtue. If virtue is an attempt to live in accordance with nature, then

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<sup>24</sup> It is not clear that Ancient Stoics actually endorsed the view that animals should be protected, but their perspective can endorse such a position. Apparently many Ancient Stoics said “that there can be no question of right between man and the lower animals, because of their unlikeness” (Laertius 233).

how can we be virtuous without knowing the metaphysical truth to nature? We need a new definition of virtue. The basic idea of virtue is a life lived in pursuit of the good, but the Stoics found that virtue was the only good worth mentioning. This implies a circular definition of virtue: Virtue is the life in pursuit of virtue. How do we avoid this circularity? Neo-Aristonism and Common Sense Stoicism are two attempts to answer this question.

## 2. Neo-Aristonism

Neo-Aristonism is named after Ariston, and is meant to be faithful to his perspective: Everything other than virtue is “indifferent,” including the study of “physics” and “logic.”<sup>25</sup> Neo-Aristonism is meant to be a highly pragmatic form of Stoicism with as few metaphysical commitments as possible. We should not need to have a strong understanding of metaphysics or intrinsic values in order to endorse Neo-Aristonism. Neo-Aristonism can be almost identical to Ancient Stoicism. Neo-Aristonism does not require us to accept the less credible notions of Ancient Stoicism, and it will still find that virtue is the only good. Neo-Aristonism defines virtue apart from an understanding of divine reason.

### 2.1 Ancient Stoicism’s Less Credible Conclusions

Neo-Aristonism will attempt to defend the view that virtue is the only good without

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<sup>25</sup> Physics and logic covered a very broad spectrum of topics in Ancient Stoicism. Physics involves “(i.) the universe; (ii.) the elements; (iii.) the subject of causation” as well as “the gods” (Laertius 237). Physics for the Stoics included metaphysics. Logic included “rhetoric and dialectic” (Laertius 151). The fact that physics and logic are indifferent does not mean that they are totally irrelevant. We can prefer to understand physics and logic, but these forms of knowledge are considered a much lower priority than understanding ethics. According to A. A. Long, Ariston rejected that “some indifferent things have positive or negative value,” but I do not find this to require any important changes to Stoicism because all our actions must be justified in terms of virtue either way (Long 23). Ariston may require that indifferent things cannot have intrinsic value, but Neo-Aristonism will only judge indifferent things as having a positive value in terms of being good-for-virtue and negative value in terms of being bad-for-virtue.

certain conclusions of Ancient Stoicism. The following conclusions will be proposed for Neo-Aristonianism: (2.1.1) There is reason to find Stoic metaphysics to be lacking in credibility; (2.1.2) the conclusion that virtue is all-or-nothing is less useful than a more limited kind of virtue; (2.1.3) the position that virtues must be unified is undesirable; and (2.1.4) the conclusion that virtue guarantees happiness is doubtful. These four views are unnecessary for Neo-Aristonianism; they are certainly unnecessary for living a Stoic life. Neo-Aristonianism will not have to claim that these four views are false, simply unnecessary.

### **2.1.1 Stoic Metaphysics**

Many people will find the metaphysics implicit to Stoicism to lack credibility. It is too risky to base our ethics on divine entities when it might be possible to have ethics without them. Many atheists could perfectly well be Stoics if their metaphysics is dropped.

### **2.1.2 Absolute Virtue**

The view that virtue is all-or-nothing is not very useful because it lacks an evolution-based understanding of virtue. In order to become virtuous, we must first become partially virtuous. We can be wise and know about some things, but not everything. It is useful to define virtue as having degrees. Some people are more courageous than others. Some people are more honest than others. Some people may doubt that anyone could have absolute knowledge, which absolute virtue requires, and there is no reason to give people a potentially unreachable goal when they can have reachable ones. This would make a kind of baby-steps program for virtue very easy to understand. We can improve ourselves little by little instead of requiring people to achieve perfection.

It could be that the Stoics are right that it is most useful to view virtue as being absolute, but then the Stoics should give us another term to replace virtue for the less-than-absolute kinds of virtues, such as “admirable quality.” Neo-Aristonism could work either way, but the word “virtue” and “admirable quality” will be interchangeable in this paper.

### **2.1.3 Unified Virtues**

The view that virtues must be unified in a strong sense does not have to be endorsed by Neo-Aristonism. The virtues do seem related, but if we define virtues to be admirable qualities, then having one virtue does not imply having them all. Perfect courage may indeed imply that a person has all possible perfect virtues, but courage in the general sense does not require this. Perhaps we could be courageous in every situation except when justice is involved. The view that all the virtues are unified is plausible only when virtue is taken as an absolute.

### **2.1.4 Virtue Guarantees Happiness**

It may be true that godlike virtue is sufficient for happiness, but once we accept that virtue can be attained in various degrees, it is undesirable for Stoicism to insist that virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness. Perhaps a certain amount of virtue is sufficient for happiness, but it is unlikely that many Stoics would expect to reach such an invulnerable kind of happiness. For a Neo-Aristonian, the doctrine that virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness is undesirable for two reasons. One, it doesn't seem credible. There are counterexamples to the position that virtue is sufficient for happiness. It seems ridiculous to say that virtuous torture victims are happy, so virtue might not be sufficient for happiness. Additionally, we have some reason to find that virtue is not necessary for happiness. Some

criminals might have loving family and friends and may find happiness through good fortune. Two, it could be oppressive to tell people that virtue is *necessary* to be happy. If virtue is necessary for happiness and the Stoics are the only people who fully understand virtue, then we would have to become Stoics to become happy. Imagine advocates of Stoicism who teach their students that virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness. Such an advocate may end up convincing their currently happy students that they couldn't possibly be happy, and succeed in making the students unhappy. Then the students could be convinced that they have to become Neo-Aristonians in order to be happy again. We shouldn't need to appeal to a person's emotions by making uncertain promises or threats of this sort. If people think they are happy, it is inappropriate to convince them otherwise in an attempt to coerce them into becoming Stoics.

The reason that virtue might not guarantee happiness is the fact that we generally think of virtues as "admirable qualities" rather than absolutes. If people become godlike, then it is possible that they really will have an unshakable happiness. Ancient Stoics would probably agree that only people who are godlike should be expected to completely control their emotions, and consequentially to be able to stay happy, even while being tortured.

Neo-Aristonianism does not have to commit itself to any view of happiness, but there is some credibility to the view that virtue helps people become happy. Virtue would enable a person to accomplish certain goals, such as promoting human life and avoiding unnecessary suffering. If this is the case, it could be argued that virtue helps people be happier. The virtuous torture victim could endure torture better with virtue than without; fortunate criminals may be happy to some extent, but they would be happier if they become virtuous.

## 2.2 Virtue of Neo-Aristonism

How can Neo-Aristonians find that virtue to be the only good? Neo-Aristonians do not have to prove that virtue is the only ethically justified goal, but could instead attempt to prove that their theory is superior to the alternatives. From the pragmatic point of view, we may not be able to know if anything is a good for its own sake, but we should accept any theory that works the best in practice, without the need to provide proof.

If Neo-Aristonism leads to all of the possible benefits and intrinsic values that other ethical theories endorse more effectively than followers of those theories could attain, then it should be viewed as superior from all other viewpoints. Competing ethical theories could all be shown to be absurd if Neo-Aristonism could be more justified in the eyes of the competitors. Even if we delude ourselves by accepting virtue as the only good, this could be pragmatically justified if it does what all other ethical theories only dream of—perhaps it leads to greater happiness, reduces suffering, promotes health, promotes higher levels of consciousness, induces to political justice, and prevents malevolent behavior better than any other ethical theory would. The Neo-Aristonian would not view these benefits as a justification for Neo-Aristonism, but the justification can be that it is more credible than all the alternatives.

One challenge for Neo-Aristonism is to define virtue without an appeal to metaphysics. Virtue could be minimally defined as being willing and able to do good, but Neo-Aristonism cannot define virtue in terms of doing good because it also maintains that virtue is the only good, so this definition of virtue would be circular. If the only goals that matter are those good-for-virtue, then how could we define virtue in terms of such goals? There is an answer to this: If every conception of virtue requires certain goods, then we can define virtue as

being willing and able to attain those goods, without leading to a vicious circularity. This conception may be circular to some extent, but we could pragmatically accept such a conception as long as it leads to the best ethical theory.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, virtue is defined for the Neo-Aristonian as *a life that is willing and able to promote any goals that are necessary for any conception of virtue to exist.*<sup>27</sup>

We could justify a conception of virtue in terms of virtue-related goals by using a transcendental argument. The minimal conception of virtue is human excellence, or being willing and able to promote what is good. What are the necessary conditions for virtue? Human life, higher levels of consciousness, a level of health high enough to continue virtuous actions, and a level of suffering low enough to continue virtuous actions. People would not be virtuous if they die, so promoting life is necessary for virtue. Higher levels of consciousness (intelligence and wakefulness) are necessary for any view of virtue to enable the virtuous to consciously achieve their virtuous goals. Everyone needs sufficient health to do virtuous things, or they would be incapacitated and incapable of virtuous action. Everyone needs a sufficiently low amount of suffering, or they become too preoccupied with their suffering to continue virtuous behavior. These goals would be ultimately justified because they are good-for-virtue. We can now define virtue as *a life lived that is willing and able to maximize the existence of human life, higher levels of consciousness, a sufficient level of health, and a sufficiently low amount of suffering.*

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<sup>26</sup> It is not my project to prove any ethical theory to be the best. We can explore ethical theories to decide which is the best, or if more than one ethical theory are equally good.

<sup>27</sup> I have already argued that some people can have more virtue than others, so we are not required to be perfectly willing and able to promote these goals. It might not be possible or necessary for us to ever draw a line and say, "This person is virtuous, but that other person isn't." The purpose of virtue ethics is to attempt to improve ourselves and to promote appropriate goals, not to compete against other people.

We must accept that for virtue to be a good, virtue must be good in general. Virtue is not only good for you, but virtue is good no matter who has it.<sup>28</sup> Virtue is not only good when you have it for yourself, but it is a good to promote in general, so the more people who are virtuous the better. We can accept this to be true if we accept that certain goals really are good (or have a special kind of value). If something is justified as a goal because it really is a good goal, then it is a justified goal to promote for anyone. There are two reasons that virtue might be considered to be good. One, virtue is intrinsically valuable and it is good for its own sake. Two, virtue is necessary in order for ethics to be meaningful. Without virtue we would be incapable of promoting anything that has value. Both of these possibilities require that we accept that something has intrinsic value, but we are not required to commit ourselves to a detailed understanding of intrinsic values or meta-ethics in general.

### **2.3 Instincts and Neo-Aristonism**

How could Neo-Aristonians find that instincts could guide us to appropriate behavior? It is possible that almost all instincts were evolved because they promoted survival, and survival is necessary for virtue. If the Stoics described our instinctual psychology appropriately, then it would be agreed that natural desires are fully compatible with virtue, and only artificial (non-instinctual) desires lead to suffering. Suffering is evidence of an artificial need because the perfectly virtuous Stoic would never suffer from anything. It could be the case that the Ancient Stoics were wrong that *all* instincts are good guides to appropriate action. Some instincts could be failures of evolution, or mutations, or they could be egoistically good-for-survival for one

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<sup>28</sup> Aristotle might have assumed that happiness is a final end for each individual without accepting that everyone's final end is to promote happiness in general. Instead, happiness might only matter to the person who wants to be happy. I would argue that if happiness is a final end, then happiness is really good no matter who is happy.

person and fail to promote everyone's survival.

How do we know which instincts are bad? If an instinct is necessarily detrimental to virtue, then it would be seen as a bad instinct.<sup>29</sup> Any antisocial instinct would be a bad instinct if it motivates irrational violence that destroys the indifferent things that help lead to virtue; it causes suffering that could damage the development of virtue, and it can lead to death and prevent those who are killed from further progress to virtue.<sup>30</sup>

Some people may reject that there is such a thing as human nature. It would be very difficult to reject human nature on the biological level—we feel pleasure, pain, and have bodily functions that are difficult to deny. What is potentially suspicious about the concept of human nature is the distinction between natural desires and artificial desires. What is really important is that Stoicism doesn't force us to deny our possibly instinctual desires to live social lives and care for children. If these desires are not really natural, then we can still make the distinction between desires good-for-virtue, bad-for-virtue, and neither good nor bad for virtue. What is important is that Neo-Aristonism does not require us to reject our social instincts, assuming that we have any. We do not have to endorse that social instincts exist in order to become Neo-Aristonians.

Some may reject the idea of human nature on the grounds that it encourages acts that are oppressively judgmental. If we *normalize* human nature, then we say that some people's desires are abnormal. Some abnormal desires, such as being antisocial, would be seen as bad. Stoicism is not oppressive in its conception of human nature as long as it does not accept that there is one ideal human nature. Only those who accept an ideal human nature have a reason to judge those

<sup>29</sup> Although most sociopaths may have had an environment that lead to their pathology (and would therefore be irrelevant to instincts), it is possible that some people have the biology that guarantees sociopathy. Some sociopaths could be people who lack social instincts (a concern for other people).

<sup>30</sup> It is imaginable that some antisocial instincts could be beneficial to virtue. Earlier, I argued that violence can be used to protect people.

who deviate from what is considered normal. Some allegedly abnormal desires, such as homosexual attraction could still be perfectly compatible with virtue. Any desire we have can be evaluated independently of the fact that it is natural or not. What is important is that Stoicism is not oppressive to potentially important natural desires—it does not tell us not to love children, or to refrain from sexual relationships.

Stoicism could be somewhat burdensome insofar as it discourages desires that are bad-for-virtue. If this is a unique problem for Stoicism, then perhaps we should reject it. Fortunately, almost all moral codes are repressive against destructive desires and actions, so Stoicism certainly would not uniquely have this problem. It may indeed be necessary for a good moral system to be oppressive to some extent. If we don't oppress people who are destructive (or irrationally oppressive), then even more people could be oppressed.

#### **2.4 Neo-Aristonism Is Intuitive**

Neo-Aristonism gives us a promising way to keep our common sense values. We don't have to value human life in terms of being a means to an end—that of virtue or universal nature. Human life is not only good-for-virtue (necessary in order to attain virtue, and helpful to virtuous people), but human life is also worth seeking as something good in itself whenever it *is* a virtuous life. Unlike Ancient Stoicism which only values perfect virtue, Neo-Aristonism can value degrees of virtue. We have two choices. Either we can say that everyone is virtuous to a certain degree; or we can say that some people are virtuous, some people are vicious, and others are neither. It is possible to decide that some people are completely without virtue, or are even vicious in the sense of having a negative amount of virtue. If we decide that everyone has

virtue, then a coward would be someone who has very little courage. If we decide that some people completely lack virtue, then a coward is someone who completely lacks courage, and may even have a negative amount of courage. If we decide that everyone has virtue, then human life is always a good because human life guarantees virtue. If we decide that only some people have virtue, then only some people's lives are good. Our decisions about the value of human life will give us different answers to controversial issues. If we decide that certain people have a negative value, then it will be much easier to justify the death penalty. If we decide that everyone has value, then the death penalty will be more difficult to justify.<sup>31</sup>

One final challenge against Neo-Aristonism is that it does not encourage us to protect animals (unlike Ancient Stoicism). If virtue is the only good, then what good are animals? We should protect animals insofar as we need animals to survive, and could therefore be good-for-virtue, but this might allow inappropriate abuse of animals, such as in cosmetic experimentation. One way to solve this problem would be to grant that animals share some rationality with human beings, and could therefore have some degree of virtue. Apes, elephants, and dolphins are particularly intelligent and could have something similar to human virtue.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Neo-Aristonism is that it can be very attractive to people skeptical of intrinsic values. Even if intrinsic values do not really exist, we could accept Neo-Aristonism on pragmatic grounds if it provides the best ethical system with minimal appeal to intrinsic values. The only good, virtue, is justified in terms of the necessary components of any conception of virtue. These components (human life, higher levels of

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<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, it is possible to justify the death penalty for its usefulness to virtue whether or not all people have virtue, and therefore value. If the death penalty deters criminals and saves the lives of virtuous people, then it might be justified.

consciousness, a level of health high enough to continue virtuous actions, and a level of suffering low enough to continue virtuous actions) are arguably important to every conception of virtue. It can also be argued that virtue is necessary for every moral system, since without virtue, no one will be capable of intentionally acting morally. Therefore, we have reason, at least pragmatically, to treat virtue as the highest priority and to treat the four components of virtue as being preferred indifferent considerations. It may not be possible for Neo-Aristonians to leave the concept of intrinsic value behind, but any values can be accepted as pragmatically motivated preferences.

### 3. Common Sense Stoicism

Common Sense Stoicism is meant to be a view that is as sensitive to intuitive and common moral beliefs as possible. Common Sense Stoicism is similar to Neo-Aristonism with two important distinctions. One, it will allow that some things are good for their own sake other than virtue. Two, it will re-define virtue in terms of certain values. This view is not as skeptical as Neo-Aristonism because most people are optimistic about knowing moral truths and values. Common Sense Stoicism has more than one legitimate ethical goal, but virtue is still the highest priority. Other legitimate ethical goals can include positive or negative intrinsic values.<sup>32</sup> It will be argued that pleasure, pain, and consciousness have a positive or negative intrinsic value independent to the value of virtue.

Common Sense Stoicism can define virtue the same way that Neo-Aristonism does in

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<sup>32</sup> Common Sense Stoicism has many similarities to another contemporary kind of Stoicism that was developed in [New Stoicism](#) by Lawrence C. Becker. It is there that Becker maintains that Stoicism does not require that we reject intrinsic values (29). Later, I will explain that Common Sense Stoics will not always avoid suffering, and they can be justifiably passionate. Becker's Stoicism agrees that the Stoic will never be invulnerable to suffering (146-148) and that Stoics can be justifiably passionate (108-109). The main difference between Becker's project and mine is that Becker is more interested in theory and beliefs; and I am more interested in the practical relevance of Stoicism, which includes defending Stoicism.

terms of values that are necessary for virtue to exist, but with the addition that *virtue is also the ability to promote intrinsic values*. Virtue requires that we are willing and able to promote any goals necessary for virtue to exist, and a secondary concern of virtue is that we are willing and able to increase pleasure, decrease pain, and promote consciousness. Common Sense Stoicism is much like classical utilitarianism, except Common Sense Stoics agree that virtue is an uncompromising priority and cannot be sacrificed for any other goal.

### 3.1 Intrinsic Values

We have reason to endorse intrinsic values. Certainly intrinsic values would describe how people think about goals in everyday life, such as the goal to attain happiness. Why is a goal justified? Because the goal is good; perhaps because the goal promotes a positive intrinsic value. We do not expect people to justify their behavior beyond intrinsic values. It would be strange for someone to refuse to touch a hot stove because it would be painful, then for someone else to ask, “So what? What justifies your behavior beyond the pain?”<sup>33</sup> Pain really does matter and it is true that it is wrong to cause pain without a good justification. At the same time, we find that intrinsic values are good no matter who achieves them.<sup>34</sup> All things being equal, pleasure is good no matter who attains it, and pain is bad no matter who suffers it.

We have evidence of intrinsic values in our experience. A phenomenological study could provide a description of our experience of value, but such a study is beyond the limited scope of this essay. Instead, evidence of intrinsic values will be described in terms of our unexamined

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<sup>33</sup> A Neo-Aristonian could appropriately ask this question because pain should only be avoided when it relates to virtue.

<sup>34</sup> This may be different from Aristotle’s conception of final ends. Aristotle found happiness to be a final end, but he never said that happiness is good no matter who has it.

experiences and intuitions.<sup>35</sup>

How do we experience the value of pleasure and pain? The experience of pleasure presents us with positive intrinsic value. We know pleasure is good because we know what it feels like. What exactly is pleasure? Pleasure designates several different experiences, such as bodily pleasures from eating, drinking, sex, as well as emotional pleasures from general excitement (e.g. adrenaline rush), laughter, and joy.<sup>36</sup> When a friend wants to eat candy and you ask, “Why?” and your friend replies, “Because it tastes good,” it would be very strange for you to then ask, “Yeah, but why really? Who cares about what tastes good.” Anyone who doesn’t understand why your friend wants to eat candy clearly does not know what pleasure is.<sup>37</sup>

Common Sense Stoicism does not endorse a simple kind of hedonistic understanding of pleasure. To explore how complex pleasure can be, one should study John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism, the classical authoritative text that explores the various kinds and qualities of pleasure. For our purposes, pleasure is treated here as an intrinsic good in general.

Pain is experienced as having a negative intrinsic value. We know that pain is bad because we know what it feels like. What exactly is pain? Pain designates bodily pain as well as suffering caused emotionally, such as distraught (misery), sadness, fear, and anger. Stoics

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<sup>35</sup> I am not going to solve the problem about how to get “ought” from “is” in this paper, but much of what I say does imply that we know about moral reality by knowing about intrinsic values, and we know about intrinsic values through experiences. If it makes sense to say that pain feels “bad”, then we have got an ought (evaluative judgment) from an is (fact about our experience). This account is not reductive. We do not get moral reality from a completely nonmoral reality (i.e. atoms).

<sup>36</sup> Marcus Aurelius was not opposed to bodily pleasure and praised Emperor Antoninus for enjoying pleasures appropriately. Emperor Antoninus utilized “all the lavish gifts of Fortune that contribute towards the comforts of life when present as a matter of course, and, when absent, [he did not] miss them” (Aurelius 15). Some Ancient Stoics mention that bodily pleasure is something to avoid because it can be harmful to virtue. If this is true, then pleasure should still be avoided because virtue is more important than pleasure. This possibility will not be resolved here.

<sup>37</sup> My point is only that pleasure is a legitimate consideration. Of course, it is very possible to question the justification of a pleasurable experience if it will cause problems in the future. Perhaps eating candy now will lead to pain from cavities in the future.

claimed that it is possible to feel bodily pain without actually experiencing suffering (emotional pain), but this distinction will not be further considered.<sup>38</sup> If it is possible to give someone pain without damaging their body, then we still have reason to believe that it was wrong to give the person pain, even if we do not harm that person's ability to become virtuous. If virtue is the only value, then pain is only bad insofar as it is bad-for-virtue. Relating virtue to pain is simply not necessary for a person to have good reason to find pain to be a bad thing.

Furthermore, masochism is not proof that pain can be intrinsically good. Masochists either do not feel pain, or pain often gives them emotional pleasure of some sort. It is possible for a person to find that a certain amount emotional pleasure outweighs a certain amount of pain. Most masochists are unwilling to feel pain when it arises outside of a certain context.<sup>39</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that pain isn't bad just because we often find it useful. Pain is bad when we separate it from any particular situation, but we could say it sometimes has instrumental value that outweighs its intrinsic disvalue. We have evolved a capacity to feel pain for good reason. Pain can be good-for-virtue. We know to *avoid pain* because it was important to our health and survival. Intrinsically, pain is bad, but sometimes it can be necessary in order to promote other goals. We go the dentist and dentist regardless of the fact that we may feel pain because we know that if we don't go, then we could end up in a lot more pain.

Consciousness is also something intrinsically valuable. Consciousness designates the capacity to have experiences, which could be described as having a first-person point of view. In general, we would prefer to have consciousness rather than the alternative, even if we would not

<sup>38</sup> Marcus Aurelius states that perhaps we cannot control physical pain, but we can control our response to the pain. "Let the ruling and master Reason of thy soul be proof against any motions in the flesh smooth or rough. Let it not mingle itself with them, but isolate and restrict those tendencies to their true spheres" (Aurelius 121).

<sup>39</sup> Sexual masochism requires pain to be part of a context such as in the form of an enacted scene, and pain outside of that context is not enjoyed (Weinberg).

promote virtue or pleasure by doing so. This could partially account for people's fear of death. Death could mean that people don't exist anymore and lose their consciousness. We do not have to pretend that we can fully describe our experience of consciousness as having intrinsic value but our preferences seem to refer to such an experience.

Imagine that we could be replaced with unconscious androids that would simulate a perfectly virtuous person. The android would do whatever physical actions a virtuous person would do, but the android would completely lack consciousness. The android would not have any thoughts, feelings, or experience. In this situation we would have reason to prefer to exist as we currently do, as imperfect conscious beings, than to be replaced with "virtuous" unconscious androids.<sup>40</sup> We would generally not prefer to replace any human being with an unconscious android of this kind because we realize how valuable consciousness is.

Additionally, the fact that we do not always want to be conscious does not provide evidence that consciousness lacks intrinsic value. If we want to sleep because we are tired, then we understand that sleep plays a role in our health, and becoming tired leads to a kind of pain that we would rather avoid. If we want to become unconscious in order to avoid pain during a surgical procedure, then we are also making a value judgment that we would rather avoid pain than be conscious. In the most extreme case a person may wish to die in order to avoid pain. Clearly, the people who commit suicide decide that a certain amount of physical or emotional pain outweighs the value of consciousness.

The fact that someone might prefer to die rather than feel pain is evidence that pain is intrinsically bad, but could a person ever value consciousness more than pain? Yes. We know

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<sup>40</sup> In my view an android cannot be virtuous. I have defined virtue in terms of a conscious life. Virtue would have to be explained in fully instrumental terms in order to truly describe an unconscious android as virtuous.

that consciousness is valuable because we usually prefer to live than die, even when we are in pain. This is not just because we hope to feel pleasure in the future, or hope to make the world a better place. Many people would choose to live even knowing that they will experience more pain than pleasure. It is only when pain is unbearable that a person would find pain more important than life.

Many people are suspicious of intrinsic values because they might not be useful for making decisions. Classical utilitarianism endorses the intrinsic values of pleasure and pain, and many people have criticized classical utilitarianism because intrinsic values, such as pain and pleasure, are (3.1.1) immeasurable and (3.1.2) incommensurable. How could we use intrinsic values to help us make decisions if they are incommensurable or immeasurable?

### **3.1.1 Intrinsic Values Are Immeasurable**

If values are immeasurable, then how could we use an understanding of values to make evaluative judgments or decisions? We typically use values to justify our decisions with some kind of common sense appeal. We never needed to quantify the importance of intrinsic values in particular in order for us to have an understanding about what situation is preferable. People usually prefer to be unconscious during painful surgical procedures, and people usually prefer to spend some of their life awake even when in a war. Both of these decisions seem intuitively correct, but they are taking the side of different values. Sometimes we would prefer to be unconscious rather than to experience pain, and sometimes we would prefer to feel pain than to be unconscious. We remember various experiences of pain and various experiences of choosing to be unconscious and it is not unusual for us to make such value judgments *based on our*

*experiences*. Although we cannot quantify competing values, that never stopped us from making value judgments about what course of action is preferable. Is it possible that we make the wrong value judgments in this way? Yes, but currently this is the best way for us to make decisions. Any theory that tells us what value judgments to make would be arbitrary and we would have no reason to find it to be more reliable than relying on our experiences.

Arguably, Kant's categorical imperative is exactly the right kind of theory to use in order to help us avoid having to rely on intrinsic values, but the categorical imperative also implies the existence of intrinsic values. Someone could argue that the categorical imperative is justified in a completely pragmatic way. According to the categorical imperative, whatever actions invalidate morality are impermissible and whatever actions are necessary in order for morality to exist are obligations. If we lived in a world where everyone murdered or committed suicide, then people would cease to exist and therefore morality would cease to exist. That is why murder and suicide are impermissible. If we lived in a world where no one ate food or reproduced, then people would cease to exist and morality would also cease to exist. Therefore, eating and reproduction are obligations. This pragmatic view of the categorical imperative describes a kind of minimal requirement for morality, but it also requires us to accept that intrinsic values exist. Why? Because we must accept that morality has an intrinsic value. If nothing matters, then we have no reason to prefer that morality continues to exist. Morality is meaningless unless something matters and intrinsic values tell us that certain things matter—certain states are good and bad no matter who experiences them.<sup>41</sup> If there are no intrinsic values, then Hume would be correct to say, "Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the

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<sup>41</sup> This is why I admit that Neo-Aristonism might also require us to accept that virtue is intrinsically valuable.

scratching of my finger” (Hume 62).

The categorical imperative cannot be used as a method to replace all personal value judgments. If we are committed to the categorical imperative, then we will still find that it is an inadequate method to decide what actions are preferable. The categorical imperative requires us to answer the question, “Can my action be willed as a universal law of nature?” If your action becomes a law of nature, then everyone else will do the same action whenever they have the same reason to do so. After the question is answered, we will know if an action is an obligation or if the action is impermissible. We will not be allowed to kill people when it is found to be profitable, but we are also required to preserve our own lives. Imagine being on a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean. Some people are not on the lifeboat and will drown, but the people on the lifeboat will be saved in a few days. Now imagine that there are too many people on the lifeboat and it will sink. We have to decide if it is preferable to let everyone stay in the lifeboat and let the lifeboat sink or if we will have to throw someone off the boat. We aren’t allowed to kill people, so we aren’t allowed to throw anyone off the boat, but we also are required to preserve our own life and therefore we have to throw someone off the boat. This is a dilemma that requires a value judgment. Is it better to kill someone in a fight to survive, or is it better for everyone to die? The categorical imperative will be unable to provide us with a value judgment to help us choose what decision to make.

### **3.1.2 Intrinsic Values Are Incommensurable**

If intrinsic values are incommensurable, then how can we make use of values in order to make evaluative judgments and decisions? It may very well be that we lack a non-arbitrary

method to weigh the importance of values. Sometimes values conflict. Again, this is why common sense is currently the best method to make value judgments and decide what actions are preferable.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that common sense is the best method to make decisions does not mean that we shouldn't critically assess our preferences. We have good reason to find virtue to be our highest priority because it is necessary for us to promote any intrinsic value. If any value conflicts with virtue, then we should always side with virtue. If we have to choose whether we should go to college or spend more time watching television, it is morally preferable that we realize that going to college is more important because it would promote our virtue. We may have to decide whether we want to spend time making jokes with our friends, or whether we want to go home to take an aspirin to get rid of our headache. If neither of these options will be good-for-virtue, then it might be impossible to fully justify one of these options over the other. In this case the important thing is not which choice we make, but that we do something that promotes an intrinsic value to the best of our ability. Judgment calls will have to be made without an absolute way to know if it is the right choice.

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<sup>42</sup> What I call the "common sense method" allows us to make use of common sense assumptions and our personal experience, as was explained earlier. See footnote 22 for a detailed definition of common sense.

### **3.2 What Could Not Have Intrinsic Value?**

Food, laws, and power are extrinsically, not intrinsically valuable because they are purely a means to an end. That isn't to say that they aren't justified to have as goals. Food is good-for-people, so it is justified to attain food insofar as food can increase intrinsic value by helping people survive and preserve consciousness. Food in a world without living organisms will have no value. Laws are often good-for-people and can increase the intrinsic value of the world by rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior. This helps people decide to act virtuously to some extent and helps people avoid a lot of pain and suffering. Laws are not intrinsically valuable because they are only good when they are good for people, but they could not do any good in a world without people. Power is also often good for people, but we have no reason to find it intrinsically valuable. Power helps virtuous people achieve any goals they have, such as staying alive and helping other people stay alive. Power would have no value when someone attains power and does not use it for the pursuit of good.

It is possible for extrinsic values to be abused. Overeating is an unjustified use of food; some laws can be harmful to people; and, power could be used to harm people.

### **3.3 What Else Could Have Intrinsic Value?**

There are some potential intrinsic values that we have reason to agree are intrinsically valuable, but a strong case could also be made that they are only instrumentally valuable. What might also be an intrinsic value that have not been mentioned? (3.3.1) Higher levels of consciousness, (3.3.2) knowledge, (3.3.3) good will, and (3.3.4) virtue. It is unclear whether or not these goods are intrinsically valuable in and of themselves, or if they are merely complex

mixtures of pleasure, pain, and consciousness. All of these goods are valuable for pragmatic considerations due to their instrumental value. These goods will not be sufficiently proven to be intrinsically valuable through personal experience, but we might have pragmatic reason to agree that they are high priorities (or even intrinsically valuable).

### **3.3.1 Higher Levels of Consciousness**

Higher levels of consciousness could be considered to be intrinsically valuable because it is either a higher quality of consciousness, or a higher quantity (concentration) of consciousness. If higher levels of consciousness are merely a higher quantity of consciousness, then we have reason to believe it is intrinsically valuable because we have reason to find consciousness in general to be found to be intrinsically valuable. We must consider that there can be various qualities of consciousness just as Mill argued that there are various qualities of pleasure and pain.

What exactly does it mean to argue that there are various qualities of consciousness? It could mean that the first person perspective itself could be in a better or worse state. Human beings have a higher quality of consciousness than dogs, and dogs have a higher quality of consciousness than lobsters. Dreaming sleep is also seen as having a lower quality of consciousness than being awake. We could say that we are conscious even while dreaming because we continue to have experiences, but a dreaming state could also be seen as a lower level of consciousness. It would make sense for a person to prefer to live life awake rather than in a dreaming sleep, even if the dreams are more enjoyable than life while being awake. People living in a war zone could decide to spend most of their time sleeping and they could hook each other up to life support systems at a hospital in order to stay alive. (Some people would have to

remain awake, but this decision would be against common sense.)

How exactly do higher levels of consciousness relate to moral judgments? They could help explain why certain animals are generally agreed as having more intrinsic value than others. Human beings are generally agreed to have a higher intrinsic value than dogs, and dogs are generally agreed to have more intrinsic value than lobsters. At the same time we can understand that beings could exist with higher levels of consciousness than human beings that could have more value than human beings. Two, people might be able to increase their own level of consciousness. This level of consciousness might be something like being more awake, and it would not be reducible to knowledge.

When Mill gave us the thought experiment that “[I]t is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig being satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied,” Mill wanted us to think that this is reason to believe that intellectual pleasures are better than bodily pleasures, but it could also be used as an argument that higher levels of consciousness have more intrinsic value than lower levels of consciousness (Mill 10). Even if human beings attain little to no intellectual pleasures, we might still have reason to prefer being a human than a pig. The same could be said about why we would have reason to prefer being someone like Socrates (who has higher levels of consciousness), even if Socrates attains little to no intellectual pleasure.

What exactly would it mean to have a higher level of consciousness (perhaps like Socrates)? This might have to do with intelligence (creativity, pattern recognition, problem solving etc.), or it might have to do with the actual experience of having the first person point of view. Perhaps the consciousness of children and dogs have a kind of dreamy mind state and adults (and especially enlightened people) lack this kind of a dreamy mind state.

It is possible to dismiss higher levels of consciousness as intrinsically valuable because higher levels of consciousness are clearly instrumentally valuable. It is easier for humans, adults, and wise people (such as Socrates) to achieve their goals and attain pleasant states of mind than it is for dogs, children, and fools. Perhaps people with higher states of mind are simply very intelligent and are very good at figuring out how to satisfy their desires. Without intelligence it might be impossible to achieve any goal.

### 3.3.2 Knowledge

Knowledge (or certain kinds of knowledge) could be argued to be intrinsically good.<sup>43</sup> We might have a good reason to know the truth about the world, even if it does not help us achieve any goals. Perhaps knowledge gives us a higher quality of consciousness, and we become more awake than people without knowledge can become. According to A. A. Long, the Stoics used Plato's Socratic dialogue *Euthydemus* as an argument that knowledge is the only good and ignorance is the only evil, but two challenges will be considered against this argument (Long 23-34).<sup>44</sup> Within the *Euthydemus*, Socrates argues that everyone wants to fare well and that certain goods can help us to fare well, but knowledge is the only unconditional good because it cannot be misused. The fact that goods other than knowledge, such as food, can be misused is taken as evidence that they are not truly good. (Overeating is a misuse of food.) If knowledge is the only good and is worthy of seeking for its own sake, and if knowledge is good no matter who attains it, then knowledge could have intrinsic value.

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<sup>43</sup> Plato's dialogue *Philebus* provides a discussion about what kinds of knowledge could be unconditionally good or conditionally good.

<sup>44</sup> The kind of knowledge referred to by Socrates could be specific kinds of knowledge. The dialogue lists kinds of knowledge required in order to know how to properly use goods. We must know how to best use money and food, or these goods can become harmful.

We should consider at least two challenges to this argument of the *Euthydemus*. First, it is not explained how happiness (to fare well) itself can be misused. It could be argued that Plato assumed happiness was good for its own sake, and knowledge was only instrumental to achieve happiness. However, happiness was never mentioned as being a good. It is possible that to “fare well” only meant to live a good life, and a knowledgeable life *is* a good life.

Second, it is unclear why goods must be unconditionally good in order to be truly good. It was earlier admitted that pain could have intrinsic disvalue despite the fact that causing pain is sometimes necessary in order to accomplish important goals, such as when a dentist has to remove a tooth. In other words, the conditional goods mentioned in the *Euthydemus* could include intrinsic values. If this is the case, then we must decide if knowledge has intrinsic value as well. Evidence that knowledge has intrinsic value could be that knowledge is necessary to live a good life. Even if knowledge only guarantees a good life when we have the necessary goods for survival, the fact that no other goods with intrinsic value are necessary to live a good life could be evidence that knowledge must have intrinsic value.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that knowledge is only associated with intrinsic values because it involves pleasant states of mind. Attaining knowledge could lead to intellectual pleasure, and once knowledge is attained we may attain a sense of security. It can be concluded that we will have reason to prefer knowledge as one of our greatest priorities whether or not it is intrinsically valuable because knowledge is necessary to accomplish any of our goals.

### **3.3.3 Good Will**

To have good will, a person must not only have good intentions and be willing to do the

right thing, but the person must be willing to do whatever is necessary to decide what the right thing is. Good will is a person's willingness to do what is right whether or not they are emotionally drawn to the right thing. Good will is certainly good-for-virtue. Without good will a person would not attempt to become virtuous in the Stoic sense of the word. Virtue requires that a person do the right thing, even if the right thing is not good-for the virtuous person.

If we define virtue as knowledge, we seem to miss part of what virtue is—to be *willing* and able to do good.<sup>45</sup> The fact that someone knows how to do good was usually taken to be a motivation to do good, but the willingness to do good is separable from knowledge (at least abstractly). The fact that you know how to do good would be meaningless without the willingness to do good. We can argue that the willingness to do good itself is an unconditional good, just like knowledge.

Good will is certainly instrumentally valuable to virtue because its sole purpose is to promote what is good or moral. Without good will morality would be impossible. It is not necessary that we find good will to have intrinsic value because it will be a very high priority whether or not it has intrinsic value.

### 3.3.4 Virtue

We have reason to believe that virtue is unconditionally good, and we may then say that we have reason to agree that virtue has intrinsic value. If we accept that knowledge and good will have intrinsic value, then the consequence is that virtue (a combination of knowledge, and good will) will also have intrinsic value.<sup>46</sup> As stated earlier, virtue is arguably a necessary

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<sup>45</sup> It is possible that we aren't always able to be willing to do the right thing. For example, if you falsely believe something else is the best action.

<sup>46</sup> Although virtuous people are not always described as having a higher level of consciousness, that is a strong

condition to the existence of morality. This does not mean that it is necessary to find virtue as having intrinsic value. Virtue is our highest priority whether or not it has intrinsic value simply because of its instrumental value. Virtue is required in order for any good goal to be achieved and in order for any person's life to make a moral difference in the world. Without virtue a person would act exactly how a person would act if morality never existed.

Kant argues that virtue does not have unconditional value because virtue can be used for evil. A person can certainly have many skills and abilities and use those for evil, but that is not what the Stoic means by "virtue." Stoic virtue requires that we are willing to do the right thing (and therefore that we have good will).

### **3.4 Challenges to Common Sense Stoicism**

There are at least three important challenges to the theory behind Common Sense Stoicism that will be addressed: (3.4.1) Perhaps intrinsic values do not improve Stoicism, (3.4.2) intrinsic values might always conflict with virtue, and (3.4.3) Common Sense Stoicism might be too different from Ancient Stoicism to be considered "Stoic."

#### **3.4.1 Do Intrinsic Values Improve Stoicism?**

One potential objection would be that Common Sense Stoicism has extraneous intrinsic values. Neo-Aristonism also promotes pleasure, helps people avoid suffering, and endorses people to save lives insofar as these goals are good-for-virtue. Perhaps intrinsic values don't give us additional reason to do anything good. This objection fails to recognize how intrinsic

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possibility as well. What the Buddhists call "enlightened" (awakened) seems to include a kind of virtue and higher level of consciousness. In Buddhism it is a goal to become a buddha or "awakened one," which is a metaphor for someone more awake or aware than people usually are. At the same time a buddha is someone who is described as having impeccable moral actions.

values can be promoted beyond justification in terms of virtue. People's highest priority should be to promote virtue, but Common Sense Stoicism also maintains that we should promote intrinsic value *as long as our actions aren't inappropriate* (by going against demands of virtue).<sup>47</sup>

A Neo-Aristonian would find pleasure, pain, and consciousness to all be morally irrelevant considerations, except to the extent that they can contribute to virtue. When exactly would a Common Sense Stoic argue that the Neo-Aristonian is wrong to make such a judgment? Here are two illustrations of these possibilities.

One, a Neo-Aristonian can only do good by increasing virtue, but a Common Sense Stoic can do good in several other ways. Therefore, a virtuous Common Sense Stoic will have more justified goals than a Neo-Aristonian. For example, we can have fairly irrational experiences that are ethically justified, such as telling jokes with friends. It may be that telling jokes with friends is often good-for-virtue by reducing stress and suffering necessary in order to be able to devote more energy to virtue, but it could be that perfectly virtuous people without stress or suffering still want to tell jokes with their friends *for good reason*. The enjoyment gained by such experiences could really be good, even when it does not promote virtue. It could be said that we would live in a better world with more enjoyment in it and an equal amount of virtue.

Two, Common Sense Stoicism gives us clear reasons to protect animals. Imagine that spiders and lobsters have some degree of consciousness. They might experience the world through sight and taste, but sometimes they might have no use to us in terms of our virtue (or

<sup>47</sup> The word "appropriate" is used to designate what is appropriate in terms of virtue. Neo-Aristonianism may find that promoting intrinsic values beyond a justification in terms of virtue is permissible as long as it isn't inappropriate, but it doesn't encourage such behavior. Common Sense Stoicism will justify and encourage behavior that promotes intrinsic values. If we do not promote intrinsic values beyond virtue, then we could be greatly limiting what actions are considered good.

survival), and these animals probably have nothing resembling virtue. Neo-Aristonism will have a hard time explaining why we should protect these animals. Even if spiders and lobsters feel no pain, we could still protect them from unjustifiably being killed because they might have consciousness, and consciousness has value beyond pleasure or pain.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.4.2 Do Intrinsic Values Always Conflict with Virtue?**

Although we should promote intrinsic values whenever they don't conflict with virtue, we must still ask the question, "Do intrinsic values always conflict with virtue?" Perhaps any time we spend devoted to promote an intrinsic value is time we could have spent devoted to becoming virtuous. One answer to this possibility is, no, intrinsic value does not always conflict with virtue. Virtue requires us to be able to accomplish good goals. Spending our time becoming virtuous is to spend our time achieving skills used to promote any good including survival, knowledge, and intrinsic values. Therefore, being willing to promote intrinsic values is part of the definition of virtue. If we spend time to promote an intrinsic value that would harm our virtuous skills, then that goal would be self-defeating, but it is implausible that all goals are self-defeating in this way. Additionally, an attempt to promote a good would be necessary in order to develop virtuous skills in the first place. We can't become virtuous and develop our skills without trying to accomplish various goals.

### **3.4.3 Is Common Sense Stoicism Really Stoic?**

Some people may criticize Common Sense Stoicism for no longer being "Stoicism."

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<sup>48</sup> We have reason to believe that consciousness evolved before pain. Without consciousness, pain couldn't be experienced.

Common Sense Stoicism's affirmation that suffering could be based on true beliefs could be viewed as a drastic difference between itself and Ancient Stoicism, but Common Sense Stoicism does make use of many Stoic principles (virtue is the highest priority) and it does not lead to many counterintuitive conclusions. The main weakness of Common Sense Stoicism is that it requires us to accept that intrinsic values really exist, and some people may be skeptical about this possibility.

## **Part II: The Moral Psychology of Each Stoic Perspective**

Epictetus's moral psychology tells us that emotions are often a result of our beliefs. Ancient Stoicism will insist that if we have true beliefs, then we will have the appropriate emotions. Ancient Stoicism maintains that no beliefs that lead to suffering will ever be true. So, passions that lead to suffering, such as anger, depression, fear, compassion, and erotic love are all emotions based on false beliefs. Neo-Aristonism and Common Sense Stoicism affirms that true beliefs could lead to suffering, so emotions that lead to suffering could be based on true beliefs. It would still be inappropriate to be emotionally tied to false values, and much needless suffering could be avoided. Part 2 will (1) provide a description of Epictetus's moral psychology, and then it will provide a description of the three different Stoic perspectives based on the moral psychology: (2) that of Ancient Stoicism, (3) that of Neo-Aristonism, and (4) that of Common Sense Stoicism. Each Stoic perspective will find different emotions to be appropriate when Epictetus's moral psychology is considered. All emotions associated with suffering will be inappropriate for an Ancient Stoic, such as grief; but Neo-Aristonians and Common Sense Stoics will find grief to be appropriate.

## 1. Moral Psychology of Epictetus

The moral psychology of Epictetus is divided into three sections: Section (1.1) provides a description of Epictetus's moral psychology, section (1.2) provides a discussion of criticisms to his moral psychology, and section (1.3) provides an argument that his moral psychology is attractive.

### 1.1 Description of Epictetus's Moral Psychology

Epictetus's moral psychology is based on the Socratic argument found in Plato's Protagoras.<sup>49</sup> It states that evaluative beliefs determine our emotions and actions.<sup>50</sup> This can be understood as a three-step process: the discipline of assent, the discipline of desire, and the discipline of action. These psychological disciplines are part of one causal process because beliefs are just the first part of a causal chain. If we change our beliefs, then we change our desires; and if we change our desires, then we change our actions. These psychological disciplines are related to ethics because ethics provides us with evaluative beliefs, and we can determine what emotions and actions will be motivated by that system.

It will be suggested that Epictetus's moral psychology is missing a discipline that is necessary to decide what evaluative beliefs are appropriate. Therefore, we should add a fourth step to the moral psychology: the discipline of speculation. This fourth discipline would allow us

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<sup>49</sup> Socrates observed that our desires are caused by our beliefs, and that our actions are caused by our desires. Socrates concluded that it is impossible for a person to know what action is best and to fail to do it. I agree that value judgments cause our actions, but I do not find this kind of weakness of will to be relevant. It might be possible for us to choose to not do what we find to be good (perhaps an altruistic action), but we do tend to desire whatever we believe to be good in some sense, and we tend to seek to satisfy our desires.

<sup>50</sup> "Cannot a man, then think that something is profitable to him, and yet not choose it?" He cannot" (Discourses Books I-II 175). "[T]he measure of man's every action is the impression of his senses (now this impression may be formed rightly or wrongly)" (Discourses Books I-II 177). Epictetus agreed with Socrates that weakness of will is impossible.

to decide what the appropriate evaluative judgments are, and what actions are appropriate once we consider those judgments. Before beliefs change our desires and actions, we can first decide what beliefs to have.

The discipline of assent requires that a person view the world the right way. People often have an impulse to view the world using false value judgments, which leads to the wrong emotions and behavior.<sup>51</sup> Again, if our impulse is to think that losing our wallet is bad, then we will also feel bad about losing our wallet. All forms of Stoicism find losing our wallet to be an unnecessary reason to suffer. If we impulsively view the world using false value judgments, then we can remind ourselves of the right value judgments. We can have an inner dialogue and think to ourselves, “Losing my wallet is not bad. The only thing that is bad is lacking in virtue.” The discipline of assent requires that we assent to the right way of looking at the world. Marcus Aurelius described anyone who mastered the discipline of assent as someone who has the virtue of truth because that person sees the world as it really is (Hadot 234).

The discipline of desire requires that we feel appropriate emotions and seek what is truly valuable.<sup>52</sup> Once we change our value judgments from false to true ones, we will also change how we feel. Once we decide it is not bad to lose our wallet, we will not feel bad when it happens. We would no longer have an inappropriate desire for retrieving our wallet. Marcus

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<sup>51</sup> “So you conclude that such great and terrible things have their origin in this—the impression of one’s senses? In this and nothing else” (Discourses Books I-II 177). Epictetus includes our judgment and interpretation of our sense impressions as part of our sense impressions, so we can change our sense impressions by deciding what our experiences really mean. People who say, “My father doesn’t give me anything” are not saying that anything bad has happened unless they add to this impression, “that to receive nothing from [their] father is an evil” (Discourses Books II-III 111-113).

<sup>52</sup> “[W]e must picture the work of the philosopher as something like this: He should bring his own will into harmony with what happens, so that neither anything that happens against our will, nor anything that fails to happen fails to happen when we wish it to happen. The result of this is for those who have so ordered the work of philosophy is that in desire they are not disappointed, and in aversion they do not fall into what they would avoid” (Discourses Books I-II 299).

Aurelius described anyone who mastered the discipline of desire as someone who had the virtue of temperance because that person would only desire what is truly desirable (Hadot 234).

The discipline of action requires that we do the right thing.<sup>53</sup> Once we feel the right way and only desire what is truly valuable, good actions follow. Once we lose our wallet and we realize that this situation isn't bad in any significant sense, we would certainly not try to hunt down the muggers who stole our wallet and kill them. At the same time we would do what satisfies our social instincts and whatever we can do to help people. Social instincts are part of virtue, so we can legitimately desire helping people. Marcus Aurelius described anyone who mastered the discipline of action as someone with the virtue of justice because that person would only help others and never harm others without an appropriate justification (Hadot 234).

The discipline of action requires us to know what appropriate actions are. The mere fact that our wallet is stolen and our judging such an event as a bad thing does not necessarily motivate us to seek out the thieves and punish them. We would only do this if we somehow decided that it was an appropriate response. If we decide that it is preferable to help people, then we have to know how to best help people. For example, when we care for our children, we should seek the best parenting methods to help our child survive, become self sufficient, and attain virtue.

The discipline of speculation was never mentioned by Epictetus because many Ancient Stoics thought they already knew the right way to view the world. Once we admit that our view of what is valuable is fallible, we will all be responsible to fully challenge and understand the best ethical theories and intrinsic values. We need to speculate about what ethical theories we

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<sup>53</sup> “[E]at as a man, drink as a man, adorn yourself, marry, get children, be active as a citizen; endure revilings, [and] bear with an unreasonable brother, father, son, neighbour, fellow-traveler” (Discourses Books II-III 125).

should accept, and what actions are appropriate. The discipline of speculation requires that we do our best to speculate about what the right values are. Once we have been honest about what we have reason to accept as valuable, we can attempt to see the world using the right values. The discipline of speculation is necessary in order for us to attempt the discipline of assent because otherwise we would have no reason to reject our impulsive evaluative beliefs. People who have mastered the discipline of speculation have the virtue of thoughtfulness because they must understand their own fallibility, but still keep an open mind about what facts could be true. Such a person would be skeptical in the appropriate degree by understanding that some common sense assumptions may be helpful, and that we have reason to consider the beliefs and experiences of others. Being dogmatic is one kind of speculative vice, which is to be immoderately open minded about one's own beliefs, but overly skeptical about the beliefs of others.

The discipline of speculation requires us to know facts about the world. We cannot decide what is appropriate without deciding what is good-for-virtue. How we raise our children will have an impact on our children's virtue, and we have to find out what parental methods are good-for-the-virtue of our children. Once we know that survival is good-for-virtue, we must then decide what is good-for-survival. We know, for example, food and shelter are essential for survival.

## **1.2 Criticisms to Epictetus's Moral Psychology**

There are at least two major challenges that must be considered against Epictetus's moral psychology: (1.2.1) Many people have decided that desires can be rationally controlled. Some people reject that emotions follow from beliefs, and instead believe that we can control our

emotion using willpower. (2.2.2) We can question that indifferent value judgments can't cause passions. Indifferent value judgments can be that it is preferable to survive, but why couldn't this value judgment cause passions?

### 1.2.1 Must Desires Be Rationally Controlled?

Plato suggested that our emotions are irrational, but could be placed under rational control.<sup>54</sup> For Plato, we can know what the right thing to do is, but we could fail to do the right thing if our emotions don't motivate us to do the right thing. This is a clear contrast to Epictetus's moral psychology that claims that emotions rationally follow from our beliefs, and always motivate us to do whatever rationally follows from the belief.

It can be maintained that that anyone who says that they know that something is bad but desires that bad thing is living in denial. People don't believe that whatever they passionately desire is indifferent. If our wallet is stolen and we feel bad, then why should anyone accept that we truly believe that our wallet being stolen *wasn't* a bad thing? If we truly understand why our wallet being stolen isn't a bad thing, then we will not feel bad when it is stolen.

People who are confronted with addiction will have an experience similar to Plato's.<sup>55</sup> A person addicted to cigarettes will tend to desire the cigarette no matter how good of a reason they

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<sup>54</sup> Plato's argument can be found in book IV of the Republic. Plato argues that there are three parts of the soul: the reasoning, desiring, and appetitive parts; and it is possible for one of these parts to dominate the others. Plato expands his description of the soul in book IX where he argues that tyrants have a small ruling part. Tyrants are passionate about satisfying their appetites, but rarely use reason to overrule their destructive appetitive desires. The Stoic would find Plato's description of the soul to have unnecessary distinctions between various interests (eg. our own appetites and the appetites of other people). People's general selfishness only reveals their general over-valuation of their own interests.

<sup>55</sup> Some people might argue that we are never truly "addicted" to anything because that would be to claim that we lack self-control. People who considered themselves addicted to a substance would then avoid personal responsibility. I find this to be a misunderstanding of the word "addicted," which generally means that people feel coerced into making bad decisions due to withdrawal symptoms.

have to believe that cigarettes are bad. Addiction could be explained as a kind of coercion. We are threatened to feel pain when we refuse to satisfy certain addictions. The person who is addicted to cigarettes will feel pain (go through withdrawal) when they decide to stop smoking. The person could decide that smoking is good because it avoids pain, and pain is bad. Ancient Stoics would judge that pain is not bad, so the decision to keep smoking would be based on a wrong value judgment. Of course, it is preferable to avoid pain if it becomes too distracting to continue a journey towards virtue. A person could at least temporarily have a reason to prefer to continue smoking as long as smoking is required in order to continue appropriate actions. A person who quits smoking could become too distracted by pain to continue their duties. A person virtuous enough might no longer be distracted by pain whatsoever. If so, a sufficiently virtuous person might prefer never to smoke.

We may find that it is very difficult to overcome our passions using Epictetus's moral psychology, and many would find this to be evidence that passions must be placed under rational control. This is false because the most difficult times to give up our passions are when we become addicted to our passions. Passions give us a chemical pay-off and could be just as chemically addictive as taking drugs.<sup>56</sup> People who get angry often may look for reasons to get angry, and perhaps reasons to get into fights because it makes them feel good. People who fall in love will also find some enjoyment in their passionate state, and could become obsessive for this reason. This often continues even when they have unrequited love, and have considerable

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<sup>56</sup> It is controversial whether or not emotional addictions should be called "addictions." What we might call a "gambling addiction" or "nymphomania" are accepted as clinical pathologies, but the chemical basis to these pathologies has not convinced the scientific community to call them "addictions." What is clear is that these pathologies can give us withdrawal symptoms, as is stated in the DSM-IV. The DSM-IV's diagnostic criteria for gambling is found at section 312.31, and includes one criteria of having a gambling addiction to be "restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling."

emotional pain associated with their love. People who get depressed are often rewarded, through getting sympathy and attention from their friends. It is difficult to change our passions because they give us pleasure and discontinuing them could lead to pain (withdrawal). People generally view pleasure as intrinsically good, but people who no longer accept pleasure and pain as intrinsically valuable could decide that their passion isn't a good thing to have after all.

### 1.2.2 Why Can't Indifferent Evaluations Cause Passions?

The Stoics decided that any goal a person takes to have an excessive kind of value could cause passions, but all other values would fail to cause passions. For example, if we believe that human beings have an irreplaceable value, that belief could cause us to feel grief when a person dies. Goals that are considered to be indifferent could include our preference for survival, but even this preference could not cause passion. It must be realized that the common understanding of indifferent evaluations might *only* include morally irrelevant actions and events: such as walking on our hands, or putting on our pants starting with the right leg first. We experience these events as being completely valueless. The Ancient Stoics will also include many ethically justified actions into their indifferent values, so survival will also be indifferent—even though survival is clearly preferred. It is also possible that survival would be considered to have positive value, but the important thing to note is that all indifferent values were considered to have equal value because they were equally willed by divine reason.<sup>57</sup> If all indifferent values are considered equal, then it is not surprising that they could not cause passions. Currently the best way to understand why indifferent values fail to cause passion is to consider our own personal experience. Whenever someone does an action we consider to be indifferent (a valueless action),

<sup>57</sup> See footnote 4 for more information about Divine Reason.

we feel no passion.

### 1.3 Why Is Epictetus's Moral Psychology Attractive?

The reason why Epictetus's moral psychology is attractive is because it explains why people can be motivated to do the right thing without needing a personal pay-off to do so, and because it does not require character ethics. Once we know what the right thing to do is, we will have reason to want to do the right thing. We don't need a reward or bribe to be motivated to do the right thing. Character ethics is not very helpful when deciding how to become virtuous, and there is evidence that people have little to no moral *character*.<sup>58</sup> Here, "character ethics" is defined as the doctrine that moral behavior should become habitual and will somehow determine our tastes. A virtuous person will want the right thing at the right place at the right time without having to think about it. The Stoic has little to no reason to rely on character ethics. Instead, the Stoic could have a terrible character but still be virtuous. We can have the wrong impulses and tastes, but still think about our impulses and make sure that they do not determine our destiny.

## 2. Moral Psychology in Ancient Stoicism

The Ancient Stoics tell us that all passions are based on false beliefs, but there are some appropriate emotions based on true beliefs. In order to better understand the moral psychology of Ancient Stoicism, we should understand (2.1) the Ancient Stoic rejects intense emotions or "passions," (2.2) what emotions are appropriate, (2.3) three challenges to Ancient Stoic psychology.

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<sup>58</sup> We have good reason to be skeptical of character metaphysics thanks to considerations given by John M. Doris in [Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior](#) that correctly shows that what we call "character" is very unpredictable.

## 2.1 The Ancient Stoic Rejection of Passions

The Ancient Stoics find passions to be artificial desires because passions are based on false beliefs. People don't have passions instinctively. Sometimes the Stoics seem as though they reject *all* "desires." This is false. It could be said that certain value judgments lead to *immoderate* desires. Since the Ancient Stoics reject the assignment of differentiated value to external things, there can be no reason to have a strong desire for an external thing. The word "desire" is ordinarily used loosely, so it does not always designate the kind of strong desire that could be described as a "passion." We often call hunger and thirst desires, and the Stoics would certainly not tell us to stop being hungry and thirsty.

Any emotion that leads to suffering is based on a false belief, and these emotions will be called "passions." What emotions in particular lead to suffering? Anger, grief, envy, lust, greed, and fear all are based on our own unsatisfied desires and feelings of inadequacy. All of these emotions are clearly distressing and we would prefer to have them less rather than more. Anger is an emotion based on the belief that someone has committed an evil and perhaps that the person deserves punishment. Until that person is appropriately punished, our desires will be unsatisfied. Grief is an emotion based on the belief that we have lost something of importance (usually someone or something we believe to be unique and irreplaceable) and represents the disruption of our desire to keep that person or object. The Ancient Stoics would ask us to give up these passions and many people would be glad to be rid of them.

Martha C. Nussbaum argues that the Ancient Stoic rejection of passions also requires us to reject the unique and irreplaceable value of human beings as well as the emotion of passionate love that would accompany such beliefs (385). To the Ancient Stoic, such passionate love

indicates the belief that a person has an excessively high value, and that could make us vulnerable to suffering. Unrequited love and the loss of loved ones certainly causes suffering. Nussbaum's acceptance of certain beliefs (i.e. the irreparability of loved ones) predictably leads her to reject the Stoic conclusion that passionate love is based on false beliefs.

Nussbaum discusses Seneca's play *Medea*, which provided some reasons to find passionate love to be dangerous, but the play was not meant to justify the fact that passionate love is inappropriate in all cases.<sup>59</sup>

## 2.2 Appropriate Emotions of Ancient Stoicism

Although Ancient Stoics rejected passions, instinctive and well-reasoned emotions were found to be appropriate. Instinctual or well-reasoned desires are considered to be kinds of *wishes*. Wishing does not lead to suffering as passions do. People can wish that certain things happen or don't happen without suffering when their wishes are unfulfilled. The different kinds of emotions based on wishing were said to include benevolence, affection, friendliness, caution, joy, modesty, delight, and cheerfulness.<sup>60</sup> Here "wishing" is meant to indicate our experience of having a preference without adding a value judgment. We do not draw a line and say, "It is bad to lose a wallet, and it is good to have a wallet."

Martha Nussbaum argues that passions are required for rich emotional experiences. She argues that two passions in particular are important: (2.2.1) Passionate love and (2.2.2) anger.

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<sup>59</sup> *Medea* could not be used to justify why all kinds of passionate love are always wrong because it only introduces one specific case of passionate love.

<sup>60</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius, the Stoics' taxonomy of emotions says, "[T]here are three emotional states which are good, namely, joy, caution, and wishing. Joy, the counterpart of pleasure, is rational elation; caution, the counterpart of fear, rational avoidance... And they make wishing the counterpart of desire (or craving), inasmuch as it is rational appetency" (Laertius 221). Due to limited space, a detailed account of these emotions will not be given, but it should be clear that these emotions are not as strong as passions.

### 2.2.1 Is Passionate Love Appropriate?

Nussbaum argues that passionate love is important. She insists that when we love passionately, we love someone who we believe to be unique and irreplaceable.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps she worries that if we do not love someone in this way, then we believe the person to have less value than they really have. This worry can be appeased by two considerations. One, a detailed account of wishing-based emotions could help us understand the rich emotional life of the Stoic. The Ancient Stoic would reject passionate love (and erotic love), but would make it clear that people can still love each other in terms of friendship and can enjoy sex. Such a friendship can involve great devotion, and would certainly not have to be a superficial passing fancy. Nussbaum is not happy with that option, but it is not clear why. What exactly is better about erotic love than a strong sexual friendship? Such a friendship will require that both people care for each other and wish for the best. (In fact, erotic love need not imply as much.)

The Stoic does not deny that anything in the universe has great value or should be loved. The Stoic merely wants us to love everything equally. We should not love one person to the extent that we believe that person is more important than anyone else, and we must realize that death is a necessary part of life.<sup>62</sup> Rather than insist that it is a tragedy when someone dies, the Stoic insists that we should be grateful that the person ever existed in the first place.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Nussbaum admits that this kind of love will lead to grief when the beloved dies. A woman with passionate love “does not tell herself that the person who died was not uniquely beloved. She never alters her fundamental commitment to that love... [S]he will not go over to Seneca’s flattened view, and she will probably continue to find it a shocking view” (Nussbaum 385).

<sup>62</sup> Martha Nussbaum admits that the Stoics do not deny the value of life, but rather “prolongation of life is not important for virtue: more life is not always better, and can sometimes be worse” (362).

<sup>63</sup> “Whenever you grow attached to something, do not act as though it were one of those things that cannot be taken away... [R]emind yourself that the object of your love is mortal; it is not one of your own possessions; it has been given to you for the present, not inseparably nor for ever” (*Discourses Books III-IV* 213). When Marcus Aurelius said to “execute every act of thy life as though it were thy last,” he reminds us of the immense value of our own life and everything else (31). We should appreciate that anything ever existed in the first place.

### 2.2.2 Is Anger Appropriate?

Martha Nussbaum also suggests that anger can be appropriate and gave an example of healthy anger. We can experience a kind of righteous indignation and rage against horrific catastrophic events, such as the holocaust.<sup>64</sup> It seems that such righteous indignation can be a sign of humanity and compassion. Nussbaum explains how the Stoic sage would deal with criminals only by trying to reform the criminal.<sup>65</sup> Although the Stoic has explained why the sage can punish criminals, the sage has devalued the importance of victims and their suffering (Nussbaum 418). “[I]f the sufferings of the victim are of no real importance in the overall scheme of things, then the act that caused them seems to lose their serious badness” (Nussbaum 418).

The Ancient Stoic will certainly not agree that anger is important because everything that happens is guided by divine reason. Admittedly, righteous indignation of this kind appears as a counterexample against Ancient Stoicism, but this follows because most people reject Stoic metaphysics.<sup>66</sup> Ancient Stoic metaphysics requires us to understand natural disasters as part of divine reason, as well as other people’s harmful actions. Once people have fully endorsed Ancient Stoicism, they would no longer accept righteous indignation.

The Ancient Stoics will argue that Nussbaum has not charitably characterized their evaluative beliefs. The fact that a Stoic sage would want to help a criminal shows that the sage

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<sup>64</sup> Nussbaum describes the horror and righteous indignation a soldier felt when he saw a concentration camp after World War II; she describes a Jewish child who was glad to see such a compassionate anger (403).

<sup>65</sup> “The good man is concerned about his fellow citizens in the manner of a doctor. When he administers a punishment for wrongdoing, he does so not because he himself takes any personal interest in the infliction of pain, but in order to improve the offender (Nussbaum 417).

<sup>66</sup> Seneca does provide a practical argument (divorced from metaphysics) that also concludes that righteous indignation cannot be appropriate, and I will examine his argument in the next two sections.

does take suffering seriously, and as much so for the criminal than the victim. The sage would not only have reason to punish criminals, but also to do whatever is necessary to protect potential victims from future injury. Suffering and death might not be bad to the Ancient Stoic in the sense of having special disvalue, but the Stoic will prefer to avoid them because it is instinctual to do so.

### **2.3 Two Challenges to Ancient Stoic Moral Psychology**

There are at least two important questions Ancient Stoic moral psychology must be able to answer. (2.3.1) If virtue has an uncompromising value, then why wouldn't we be passionate about virtue? (2.3.2) Passions help motivate us to action, so how will the Stoic be motivated to do good things?

#### **2.3.1 Why Aren't Stoics Passionate About Virtue?**

In *A New Stoicism* Lawrence Becker reminds us of an objection given by Posidonius: Why isn't the Stoic sage passionate about virtue?<sup>67</sup> If value judgments cause our emotions (and the Stoics view virtue as having uncompromising value), then Stoics should have immoderate fear about committing vicious actions.<sup>68</sup> Stoics would be overjoyed at achieving a virtuous action, and they would suffer great despair from doing any action that falls short of virtue. We can also imagine that the death of a virtuous person would be viewed as a bad thing. If virtue is

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<sup>67</sup> Posidonius's argument is the following: If beliefs of good and evil cause passions and people believe that vice brings them great harm, then "they ought to have been carried away by fear and to have fallen victim to immoderate distress, but this... does not happen" (Becker 129).

<sup>68</sup> Becker agrees with Posidonius that Stoics will have passions because of their value judgment that virtue is good, but argues that such passion is not always immoderate. "It may be that when Ancient Stoics (even Posidonius) tried to imagine what kind of affective life would follow from the sage's beliefs, they were too quick to think that it would be a tranquil one" (Becker 132).

good, then the more people who are virtuous, the better. To lose people who are virtuous would be a loss to the world.

There are at least two reasons that why Ancient Stoics could argue that their value judgments about virtue would not lead to immoderate passions, but it will be explained why neither of these reasons will be satisfying. Once it is clear why the value of virtue could cause immoderate passions, it will be clear why Neo-Aristonism will admit that passions can be appropriate.

First, the Ancient Stoic might appeal to a divine fatalism. Divine reason decides everything that will happen including that most people will be vicious, so the lack of virtue is necessary and not a bad thing. Perhaps the reason that the death of virtuous people isn't bad is because we have to look at value beyond virtue itself, such as divine reason. This appeal is not very satisfying because it doesn't recognize the fact that people die or are vicious for reasons outside divine reason. If divine reason cannot ensure people always do the right thing, then a virtuous person could be murdered. It would be seen as a failure of divine reason (because divine reason didn't save his life). We have good reason to believe that the murder of a virtuous person is a bad event that even divine reason would wish avoid. The Stoic belief in virtue itself forces us to admit that divine reason is not omnipotent because virtue itself is defined as living in accordance to divine reason. If a person could not fail to live as part of divine reason, then all people and animals would be virtuous no matter what.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> We should not exclude the possibility that everyone lives in accordance with Divine Reason, but to different degrees. A virtuous person could live in accordance to Divine Reason to a much higher degree than vicious people. This could be merely a result of Divine Reason's failure to be omnipotent. Divine Reason can use our help because it lacks the power to assure that everything that happens is perfect. This line of reasoning should cast doubt on our assurance that everything that happens is done for the best reason possible. We cannot just assume that everything will happen for the best. We have to make sure to do our part to assure that everything happens for the best.

Second, the Stoic could view value judgments in a more pragmatic way, and decide that it doesn't seem useful to ever have a value judgment that could lead to suffering. This pragmatic solution would lead to an egoistic ethics that asserts that virtue does not have uncompromising value. We have little or no control over other people's virtue, so it would make sense to only value our own virtue, and not the virtue of others.

There is evidence that some Ancient Stoics supported this kind of pragmatic egoism. Seneca argued that we cannot suffer from our value of virtue because virtue cannot be lost.<sup>70</sup> Non-Stoic values are emotionally risky, such as the special value of money. If we believe that money has special value, then we will feel bad if we lose money. This level of risk is not involved with virtue. No values could be said to be Stoic in Seneca's perspective if they are risky, and that includes the virtue of other people. The virtue of others is risky because we do not have control over attaining them.<sup>71</sup>

The pragmatic solution is unreasonable because it fails to motivate people to help each other. When we see virtue as good no matter who has it, it gives us a good reason to help other

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<sup>70</sup> Seneca argues that happiness depends on being philosophers. "It is clear to you, I am sure, Lucilius, that no man can live a happy life, or even a supportable life, without the study of wisdom; you know also that a happy life is reached when our wisdom is only begun" (Epistles 1-65 103). Why is philosophy important? Because philosophy requires that we only consider the demands of nature (virtue), which are limited. Unnatural demands are much more difficult to achieve: You will never have enough money, you will never have enough security, you will never have a way to avoid death, etc. "Nature's wants are slight; the demands of opinion are boundless" (Epistles 1-65 107). In other words, Seneca is arguing that we should invest our happiness in what is possible to achieve (virtue) rather than something impossible to achieve (the goods of opinion). This interpretation of Seneca's argument would suggest that happiness is valuable and that virtue is important insofar as it is compatible with happiness.

<sup>71</sup> I am not personally convinced that Epictetus was an egoist, but sometimes he says things that could lead one to that conclusion. Consider how Epictetus tells us not to worry about the virtue of other people. "When someone consulted Epictetus as to how he could persuade his brother to cease being angry with him, he replied, Philosophy does not profess to secure for man any external possession...—Well, what about my brother's life?—That again is the subject-matter of his own art of living, but with respect to your art of living it comes under the category of externals, like a farm, like health, like good repute. Philosophy promises none of these things, but rather, 'In every circumstance will keep the governing principle in a state of accord with nature'" (Discourses Books I-II 105). Epictetus later admits that when a person "grieves... [it] lies within the sphere of moral purpose, it is an evil" (Discourses Books III-IV 61).

people attain virtue. We cannot control the virtue of everyone, and it is true that no one can make other people virtuous, but that doesn't mean that we can't help to a great extent. It might be impossible to become virtuous without the appropriate life experience and help from others. Children certainly won't survive without the help of their parents, so their virtue requires help from others.

### **2.3.2 Why Are the Stoics Motivated to Action Without Passion?**

The fact that Ancient Stoics do not completely reject emotions is cause for them to be motivated to action. The Ancient Stoic can wish that preferable things happen, and wishing involves an emotion that could cause the Ancient Stoic to want to help the world attain whatever is good-for-virtue. A Stoic is not a completely emotionally dead person who has no desire to do anything. The fact that Ancient Stoics believe that virtue is good is cause enough for them to want what is good-for-virtue. Whatever is good-for-virtue will not be viewed as important as virtue itself, but what is good-for-virtue is justified as being important.

## **3. Moral Psychology of Neo-Aristonianism**

Moral psychology of Neo-Aristonianism will endorse the arguments of Ancient Stoicism with one exception: It will accept passions insofar as they are caused by true beliefs about virtue. If people can suffer from their value of virtue, then the suffering is appropriate. Neo-Aristonians will neither try to convince us that there are metaphysical reasons that explain why we should never suffer from our value of virtue, nor will they tell us that we should accept some kind of pragmatic egoism. One simple solution is the following. *We can appropriately suffer from*

*valuing virtue*. For example, a Neo-Aristonian could argue that it is appropriate to suffer from the untimely death of virtuous people.<sup>72</sup> We can say that the world is a better place for every virtuous person that lives in it, so we have good reason to want virtuous people to stay alive. Whenever a virtuous person dies an untimely death, we have reason to suffer from the loss. Neo-Aristonianism allows us to feel a powerful desire to attain virtue for ourselves, to help others attain virtue, and to help people survive who have virtue. Everyone might be virtuous to some extent, so it will always be appropriate to suffer from their deaths insofar as these people are virtuous.

Neo-Aristonians will admit that it can be appropriate to suffer because suffering can be based on true beliefs, such as the death of a virtuous person. Suffering will still indicate false beliefs and artificial desires *except* when it is caused by the belief that virtue is has an uncompromising value.

The possibility of being passionate whenever the passion is appropriately related to the uncompromising value of virtue is intuitive. It would be counterintuitive not to feel passionate grief when a virtuous person dies. If we feel grief because the person who died was a good person (virtuous), then there seems little reason to find fault with such a passion. The virtuous person made the world a better place, and the loss of that person made the world a worse place.

Three challenges to the moral psychology of Neo-Aristonianism will be considered. (3.1) There are some reasons to doubt that bad things really happen in the world. (3.2) Allowing passions can be dangerous. Passions can lead to destructive behavior. (3.3) Neo-Aristonianism has inappropriate metaphysical commitment: Neo-Aristonianism requires us to deny that the

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<sup>72</sup> The phrase “untimely death” is used to suggest that death must be appropriate given some time in each person’s life, but there are also unfavorable times to die, such as at an early age, or from murder.

world is guided by divine reason.

### **3.1 Do Bad Things Really Happen?**

Perhaps not everyone will be convinced that we have a good reason to suffer from the death of virtuous people. Everyone dies, so why should we all inevitably suffer whenever a virtuous person dies? It is perfectly natural to die, and we should not feel the need to become immortal. It may be that people have to die as part of the world's natural process. If people became immortal, then they would likewise become parasitic and require more and more resources. Ultimately, the world would run out of resources.

Despite reasons to believe the death of virtuous people should not be viewed as a bad thing, we have a good reason to believe that the loss of virtuous life is sometimes untimely. An untimely death is unnecessary, and should be viewed as a bad thing. An evident case is when a person is murdered. In this case the world has lost value without the justification that the death was necessary as part of the natural process of the world.

In order for us to judge death as a bad thing we have to admit that people might not have afterlives. If virtuous people who die don't exist anymore, then their virtue is lost. If virtuous people who die still exist, then they never really left and the world might still contain their virtue.

### **3.2 Are Passions Dangerous?**

Is the moral psychology of Neo-Aristonism too passionate? Seneca finds that passionate beliefs are intertwined and easily lead to anger, which will easily motivate destructive actions.<sup>73</sup> If people feel grief because a virtuous person is murdered, then they are likely to feel

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<sup>73</sup> Nussbaum maintains that Seneca's *Medea* provides an argument that all passions can lead to anger (439-484).

anger at the murderer. This anger could motivate them to seek vengeance and harm the murderer without the appropriate appeal to reason. Although most people accept that torture is completely impermissible, the murderer could be tortured because passionately angry people seeking vengeance are prone to such irrational behavior.

One solution is to accept that people are products of their biology and environment, and that unjust actions such as murder are either done out of ignorance of true values or insanity. This position is implied by the moral psychology, which states that our value judgments motivate our actions. Seneca appealed to this point of view when he proposed that people should be merciful to criminals.<sup>74</sup> Once we adopt this point of view, we find that the criminal is not truly evil, and the criminal does not *deserve* punishment. We can punish people insofar as punishment might be necessary to keep people safe, such as when we keep criminals imprisoned just so that they can't harm people anymore. It could also be argued we should also punish people if we find out that it is necessary as a deterrent. There is no reason that we need an additional appeal to vengeance and desert in order to justify punishment.

Some people use the word “blame” to merely mean “this person did it.” This kind of blame is not at issue here.

If we find people to be products of their environments, we will have no reason to be angry at people or feel vengeance. It might be that people who feel grief about murders will have an impulse to also get angry at murderers, but this is because of indoctrinated false beliefs. A Stoic who has rejected false values will no longer accept this impulse. Stoics-in-training should also

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<sup>74</sup> “Diseases do not make us angry—we try to cure them; yet here too is a disease, but of the mind; it requires gentle treatment, and one to treat it who is anything but hostile to his patient... [H]e ought not to be too quick to give up hope or to pronounce the symptoms fatal” (Moral Essays Volume I 407).

learn to take time to reflect upon their emotions before deciding upon what actions are appropriate. Such students would feel anger, but should often be able to realize that the anger is inappropriate. Then the students can change their emotions by changing their beliefs.

Seneca's view that people should not be blamed for their actions does not require that we reject free will. Even if we do have free will, there will be little reason to find people to be *evil*, or to blame them for their actions. Stoics find that people's actions are rational. People act in accordance to their beliefs. People who are addicted to heroin can stop taking heroin only if they reject that the pleasure gained has special value, and that the pain of withdrawal lacks special disvalue. Stoics generally agree that "ignorance is the only sin." People do wrong because they are delusional, insane, or ignorant.

It is possible that we can feel passionate anger without blaming people for their actions. If this is the case, then we can be angry at events and situations (false beliefs, irrationality, and the environment that fails to appropriately educate people and care for the mentally ill). This kind of anger would not target human beings and would fail to motivate people to seek vengeance. It can be argued that Stoics cannot feel righteous indignation because anger can only be felt when we blame a *person* for crimes, but the Stoic can only blame events.

Neo-Aristonism can accommodate Martha Nussbaum's belief that bad things can happen and righteous indignation can be appropriate (403). When people die, it could be said that the world loses something good because some virtue was lost. This gives us reason to feel compassion and righteous indignation when death is caused by murder. It is true that the Neo-Aristonians will only appropriately feel righteous indignation if they can feel anger, but what matters most about Nussbaum's counterexample involving righteous indignation is that the

soldier felt compassion. The Neo-Aristonian could feel compassion for those who have been wronged by crimes. Compassion will be appropriate as long as it is (a) based on true beliefs that something bad has happened, and (b) the compassion must not conflict with the person's virtue.

### **3.3 Are There Unnecessary Metaphysical Neo-Aristonian Commitments?**

One challenge against Neo-Aristonianism is that it might take too strong of a metaphysical stance by denying that the universe is guided by divine reason. We have no more right to affirm that the universe is guided by divine reason than to deny it. If we affirm that the universe is guided by divine reason, then shouldn't we deny that we have reason to suffer when people with virtue die? If everything that happens is the best thing possible because it was decided to happen in advance by divine reason, then we could conclude that we should have no reason to ever suffer from virtue-related beliefs. Nothing truly *bad* can happen in a universe guided by divine reason.

Is it possible to be a Neo-Aristonian and believe that the universe is guided by divine reason? Yes. By definition Neo-Aristonianism does not make any ethical claims that require unnecessary metaphysical commitments. It may be true that some metaphysical commitments are unavoidable for ethics, but divine reason does not have to be one of them. (I argued earlier that the belief that there may be no afterlife is necessary for ethics.) If we accept that virtue can be viewed as external because other people have it, then it will be a value that involves risks. We will not have the power to make sure others attain virtue, and we do not have the power to keep others alive. The fact that we lack control over something is insufficient to determine if it is appropriate. Neo-Aristonians reject that suffering is always inappropriate, so the fact that

valuing virtue involves risk will not lead us to reject such a value.

Neo-Aristonians can agree that divine reason guides the universe, and that bad things can happen for two reasons. One, divine reason is not omnipotent. It might be that divine reason cannot assure that the best thing always happens. Instead, divine reason might be incapable of making sure the best thing always happens. Divine reason might assure that the universe is guided in a very intelligent fashion without assuring that we live in the best of all possible worlds. Two, divine reason might allow people to have the freedom to do bad things. If people are allowed to act as they please, then they must choose to be virtuous and make sure other people can become virtuous. This would make it possible for people to murder virtuous people, which could be viewed as a bad thing outside of a perfect divine plan.

#### **4. Moral Psychology of Common Sense Stoicism**

Common Sense Stoicism will agree with Neo-Aristonism that suffering can be inappropriate, but *suffering can also be appropriate even if it doesn't relate to virtue*. Passions based on true intrinsic values are appropriate. Such passions will appropriately cause suffering. This does not mean that Stoicism will fail to prevent needless suffering. Whenever suffering is caused by false beliefs, then the suffering will still be inappropriate.

This means that feeling anger and suffering when we lose our wallet is an inappropriate response because it would be based on the false belief that it is intrinsically bad to lose money. (Money is not intrinsically valuable.) Much of people's passions and suffering is inappropriate in this way. Common Sense Stoicism is devoted to preventing such inappropriate suffering.

Common Sense Stoicism will be the same as Neo-Aristonism in the sense that it can

endorse the belief that *we have no reason to be angry with people* (including murderers), but Common Sense Stoics have additional reasons to be passionate about horrific acts. For example, murder involves the unjustified loss of intrinsic value (consciousness), so we have reason to feel passionately about such acts. A Common Sense Stoic could argue that we can be angry at horrific actions or the system that allows horrific actions, but we shouldn't be angry at murderers. There is no reason to seek revenge against those who commit horrific acts. How this argument can be made will be discussed in the following two sections.

There are at least two difficulties that Common Sense Stoicism will have to face. (4.1) Common Sense Stoicism will be able to accept passions unrelated to virtue, such as erotic love. Such passions could be dangerous. (4.2) If passions are dangerous, then how do we make sure we act in a healthy way? (e.g. People addicted to cigarettes are right to worry about the pain they feel during withdrawal, so they might have reason to keep smoking cigarettes.)

#### **4.1 Aren't Passions Dangerous?**

Martha Nussbaum would likely be satisfied to find that Common Sense Stoicism can endorse erotic love. It could be very debatable that erotic love (or even *being in love*) is a *better* kind of love than strong friendship, but each kind of love can be based on true beliefs. Erotic love is certainly not based on the virtue of the beloved, but passionate love can be based on the intrinsic value of the beloved's consciousness.<sup>75</sup> People are intrinsically valuable with or without virtue, so we have reason to be very passionate about their well-being. This does not mean that we have a good reason to be *possessive* of those we passionately love. People are not

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<sup>75</sup> Admittedly, erotic love is based on the beauty of the beloved's body rather than the value of their consciousness. Nussbaum is also interested in passionate love in general, and passionate love could be based on the value of a person's consciousness.

possessions, and it would be selfish to make too many demands of a beloved.

Seneca greatly challenges the possibility that erotic love and virtue can be compatible. People who have erotic love are so passionate that they can act impulsively and do terrible things. In Seneca's play *Medea*, a husband leaves his wife for another woman, and his wife becomes so furious that she murders her children and her husband. Seneca uses *Medea*, to argue that people who have very passionate erotic love will be unable to control themselves, and will be able to do very destructive actions.

It should be seen as possible to be rational and have erotic love. Virtuous people do not always have the right impulses, but they can take a moment to rethink about their beliefs and make sure that they are appropriate. This is part of the discipline of assent. If Medea believes that her husband's leaving her is a bad thing, then she may have some reason to find this to be correct. Perhaps her husband made certain promises and had obligations to stay with her. This does not mean that Medea has reason to harm anyone because no one in particular will be to blame for the terrible action her husband committed. In particular, Medea would realize that vicious actions are motivated by a person's false beliefs. An understanding of her husband's motivations and past will reveal that what he did was reasonable in his own mind. Medea may have some reason to suffer from her husband's actions, but appropriate reflection will assure that her suffering will be based on true beliefs. The discipline of assent gives a very intuitive answer to Seneca's worry. It would be absurd to believe that virtuous philosophers would run around murdering people no matter how passionately they felt. Such people have the power to feel passion in a way that is based on true beliefs that would not lead to destructive actions.

If Seneca is right that erotic love inevitably causes people to be destructive, then that

would not prove that erotic love is based on false beliefs. It is irrelevant to our values whether or not those values lead to good things. Of course, if one finds that true intrinsic values lead to bad actions, then we could choose to have delusional beliefs. If certain emotions cause inappropriate actions, then we should find a way to no longer have those emotions—perhaps even if that required us to be delusional.

#### **4.2 Can Passions Lead To Healthy Actions?**

Neo-Aristonians find that heroin addicts should stop taking heroin because no intrinsic values are at stake, and the pain of withdrawal does not matter. In contrast, Common Sense Stoics will be more compassionate to heroin addicts and will agree that pain does matter. Common Sense Stoics will argue that it is in heroin addicts' best interest to stop taking heroin because there will be much more suffering if they continue to take heroin than if they quit as soon as possible. The Common Sense Stoic will still find virtue to be the highest priority, so any pleasures that make it too difficult to be virtuous will have to be rejected, such as the pleasures of heroin.

It will also be true that a person in physical pain will have some reason to suffer from it. Pain has intrinsic disvalue, so it could be appropriate that we suffer from pain. Whenever it is true that something bad happens, it is appropriate that we suffer from it. That means it can be bad for us to be in pain, and therefore it makes sense that we would feel bad about it. Suffering from pain could still be found to be inappropriate if it motivates actions that are against virtue.

Imagine that we discover that intrinsic values are destructive to virtue. Perhaps all pleasures and pains will give us addictions that distract us from virtue. If we find intrinsic values

to be destructive to virtue, then how could we be motivated to act in accordance with virtue rather than intrinsic values? This is solvable once we realize that virtue has an uncompromising value. Nothing should be more motivational than virtue. We can evaluate our beliefs and decide that a belief must be rejected whenever the belief puts any intrinsic value above virtue. If intrinsic values are destructive to virtue, then they must be rejected.

Heroin addicts will be said to believe that the pain they feel from withdrawal is truly bad only insofar as the pain has no context. The context must be balanced with all values taken into consideration. This will include pain that would be felt in the future if the addict continues to abuse heroin, and any other actions that the heroin abuse might cause may also be seen as bad. Heroin addicts would have an inappropriately low valuation of pain whenever it causes destructive actions. For the Common Sense Stoic the intrinsic disvalue of pain cannot justify robbery so as to get more heroin.

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