The Dynamics of Emotion: Practical Application Within Stoic Thought

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read *The Dynamics of Emotion: Practical Application Within Stoic Thought* by Emory Rhodes, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Philosophy at San Francisco State University.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine how a Stoic practitioner interacts with a society or individual who hold differing views regarding the emotions. The Stoic believes that emotions must be removed as they are a type of error stemming from an incorrect judgement. However, it is often the case that members of any given society, as well as society at large, believe the inverse. I.E, that emotions are a necessary, natural, and useful part of our life.

Given the diverging trains of thought, I hope to examine how a Stoic navigates in a world holding such a view, as well as the various methods that a Stoic uses to convince others of the merit of the Stoic view of the emotions. I also hope to access if the Stoic believes that any good can come from emotions, through the use of secondary goods. Furthermore, I determine the practical applications of these methods in conjunction with Stoic theory.
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The Dynamics of Emotion: Practical Application Within Stoic Thought

1 Introduction

Within the Stoic system of thought, much consideration has been given to the issue of emotions. To the Stoic, emotions are viewed as a type of error stemming from an incorrect judgement. Furthermore, the Stoics hold emotions do not enhance our wellbeing, but actually serve to both undermine and endanger it. In this way, it can be said that to allow our emotions to take hold or to be guided from them, is a choice that runs the risk of leading us astray. The emotions are maladies of the mind to the Stoic. To indulge them is not far removed from a thirsty person willingly drinking deeply from a tainted well, imagining that the experience may perhaps be a positive one. We do not have the capacity to determine the fine line between ‘enough’ and ‘too much’ in the domain of the emotions. The poison is so potent and fast acting as to spread and debilitate us quicker than we realize. To imagine that we can discern the amount of emotional poison that is helpful or harmful is a conceit, and to imagine that there is value to making the attempt, a delusion. The safer option is to avoid the poison entirely.

While this conception is non-controversial to the Stoic, it was not without dispute from their ancient interlocutors and the societies in which they lived. This is a division in thought which continues to this very day. Many believe that emotions are both natural and essential to our lives, and to suggest otherwise is often met with doubt and disagreement. Simple observation of our friends, family, or random strangers on the street would no doubt provide ample evidence. Even if we were to suppose that such a view is not the majority, it is certainly not a rarity.
The aim of this paper is to examine how the Stoic practitioner interacts with a society or individual who holds that emotions add value to our lives, as opposed to the contrasting view of the Stoics. In section one of this paper, I examine the methods in which the Stoics advise themselves, and other Stoics on the view of emotions. Additionally, I examine why this often differs from the advice offered to non-Stoics, and why this is essential to accomplishing the goals of the Stoic. In section two, I examine how the Stoic interacts with society at large, and how the Stoic gazes upon the values of society with a skeptical and discerning eye. I also argue that despite this skepticism, the Stoic considers the possibility that there may be a grain of truth within how society perceives concerns regarding justice and injustice. I also examine the difficulty the Stoic faces in attempting to alter the values held by a society in which the Stoic view of the emotions is in the minority.

In section three, I examine how the Stoic interacts on a smaller level, that of individuals or small groups. I examine how the Stoic interacts with their intimates and acquaintances, and whom the Stoic chooses to keep close, at a distance, and their reasoning for this. I also examine how the Stoic attempts to guide certain individuals towards the good, and the various approaches they take based upon the characteristics of those they are trying to aid. I also explore the necessity of this individual being open to change. Finally, in section four, I explore a pragmatic thread of the Stoics, and how they may use the emotions of others to bring about positive results as a type of secondary good. Additionally, I examine how certain feelings held by the Stoic may be choiceworthy when approaching indifferents, and how a good may come about by the Stoics choice to pursue or refrain from said indifferent.
2 Stoic Advising

In this section, I will examine how the Stoic conceives of the emotions, what they view the causes of harm to be, and the role that incorrect judgements play in such things. I will also discuss how the Stoic uses this understanding in their own lives and how this knowledge informs the guidance they grant to other Stoics. Lastly, I see how the Stoic will use this knowledge on the non-Stoic, and the various methods used quell emotion within them.

Although it is well known that the Stoics are critical of many emotions, and generally view them in a negative light, is it important to highlight why they believe this is so.¹ Within Stoic thought, attempting to create a union of emotion and reason, is akin to trying to blend two incompatible substances together such as oil and water.² According to the Stoic theory of emotions, even a miniscule bit of emotion is hazardous and corrupting to our peace of mind, much like even trace amounts of extremely potent drugs are hazardous to our life:

For although my friends the Peripatetics are the best of all for eloquence, for erudition, and for seriousness, their theory of “moderate amounts” in emotions or in sicknesses of mind does not seem to me very convincing. If a thing is bad, it is bad also

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¹ For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the type of emotions accessible to the average person, known as ‘pathe’ or passions, which are not grounded in proper reason to the Stoics, and include grief, anger and other emotions standardly thought of. (Graver, Stoicism and Emotion, 3-4). This is opposed to the eupatheiai, or emotions grounded in proper reason, which the Stoics hold to be good, yet accessible only to the truly wise (Graver, Stoicism and Emotion, 51). Any reference to emotions within this paper refer exclusively to pathe.

² “This, then, is Zeno’s definition of an emotion (which he calls a pathos): ‘a movement of mind contrary to nature and turned away from right reason.’ Others say, more briefly, that an emotion is “a too-vigorous impulse,” where “too vigorous” means “having deviated too far from the consistency of nature.” (Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 4.11)
in a moderate amount. We, however, are endeavoring to make sure that the wise person
does not experience anything bad at all. For just as the body, when moderately ill, is not
healthy, so also what they call “moderation” in the mind falls short of actual health.

(Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 3.22)

Emotion, to the Stoic, is contrary to reason and never brings about a positive affectation within
the person experiencing them. What perhaps seems like the correct course of action when under
the influence of emotion, is later found to have been an error that stemmed from said influence.
This is to say that had we not been experiencing the emotion, and were thinking rationally, we
would have chosen otherwise. Or perhaps the course of action taken was somewhat correct, but
our emotions have caused us to misjudge key aspects of what should be done.

For example, a father is holding hands with a child who walks slightly off a curb before
their turn at an intersection. The father spots a car fifty yards away, coming forward at a brisk
but reasonable pace. Like any decent father would, this one prefers his child not be injured
unnecessarily and takes the rational course of action, gently guiding his child back onto the
sidewalk. In another city, a father and child are having a similar experience, the child over the
curb, and the father seeing the car. However, this father feels a great deal of fear at the sight of
the car and judges his child to be in greater danger than they are. He pulls the child back with a
strength borne of desperation. The child is flung back onto the sidewalk, the unnecessary jolt
causing some sort of injury.

Although both fathers made similar judgements regarding the appropriate action, one
misjudged the severity the situation, taking an action more severe than was warranted. This
was one that he would not have taken, had he correctly judged the danger his child was in without the influence of fear overwhelming him. To the Stoics, the differing reaction this father had, stems from the dual issues of impression and assent. Impressions are instances in which the mind registers a sensation or an awareness in response to a stimulus. Assent is a judgement following from our impression, in which we decide our impression to be accurate or inaccurate.³

Even though the actions this father took were justified, the intensity was not. He went further than the situation warranted. To the Stoics, this occurred because of several factors. Firstly, he had an impression that something evil was about to occur. My child is about to be hit by a car this instant and I should be scared by this and react in a certain way. Secondly, he assented to this impression, acknowledging it as accurate in some manner. I must pull them away with all my strength lest a harm come to them.

One may argue that the previous scenario is not ‘that’ bad. We went a bit further than we should have, but the harm the child experienced was minor when compared to being hit by a car. So, although the influence of emotions produced a suboptimal result, it did not produce the worst result. The emotional father did what he sought to do, and more or less accomplished his goal. Although this may be true, the Stoics hold that this is not always the case. It is not unusual for our emotions to compel us to act in certain ways, which that we would never choose normally. Furthermore, even granting that the father accomplished his general objective, he did so in a way that caused unnecessary harm. This stems from the strength of his emotions

³ For further discussion of this account, see Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 24-26
stripping him of his ability to accurately assess the situation. The Stoics argue that this occurs
during any emotional reaction. Emotions are seen as far more likely to have adverse effects than
to work as intended, or get things ‘just right’ as in the Aristotelian conception of virtue and the
emotions:

The ordinary persons external attachments, taken seriously in the way that
many ordinary ethical views (and Aristotle’s with them) recommend, commit the agent
to emotional conditions that by their very nature can be neither moderated nor adjusted
to the requirements of reason; indeed, that cannot reliably be stopped from taking the
agent straight into an excess, a cruelty, and a monstrousness that most ordinary people
(and Aristotelians) themselves condemn and flee. (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 318)

Put simply, to be attached to something leaves one susceptible to a reaction. If my love for my
favorite mug is intense, and my mug is taken away or destroyed, it follows that the emotions I
feel at this loss will be severe. This is simply by the nature of the attachment I held towards it.
The more something is cherished, the more deeply its loss is felt. I cannot promise that my
anger towards this loss will be couched by the fact that this is simply a mug, because the
attachment that I held towards it was so immense. By this same token, I cannot promise that
reason will be able to mitigate my reaction to this loss.

To the Stoic, to attempt to use both logic and emotion in tandem is to walk a line too fine
for us to consistently and confidently accomplish. It is very easy for our emotions to pervert our
logic allowing the thoughts and feelings that flow through us to lead to actions that are
inappropriate. This is often with the justification being little more than it felt appropriate, due to
an impression. Our Emotions often cut off our ability to reason correctly. To the Stoics, to flirt with emotion is simply to flirt with madness, and we run the very real risk of slipping into its grasp before we realize it:

Yet these, at any rate, were striving for something good; they did not go astray voluntarily so much as they were deceived by the meanderings of the path. What about those whose minds are so troubled by emotion that they are not far from insanity? And this happens to everyone who is not wise. Are these not in need of healing? Shall we say that the infirmities of the mind are less harmful than those of the body? For they judged that *sanitas* or “health” for the mind consisted in having a serene and consistent temper. Consequently, the state of mind that lacked such a temper was called by them *insania* or “insanity,” on the grounds that health cannot be present in a disturbed mind, any more than in a disturbed body. For a mind which is sick in some way cannot be healthy, just as a body cannot, and, as I said, philosophers apply the word “sickness” to all such emotional movements. (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.9-10)

To Cicero, the sign of a healthy mind is one in possession of tranquility. Possession of this is the baseline to be considered well mentally. Conversely, to be unwell—insane— is to have a mind that is unable to maintain this stable, tranquil disposition. To be prone to attacks of emotion is to be unwell to the Stoic, and to be deeply affected by emotion can be thought of as the inverse of wellness. While one may feel that the emotion prone person is better off than the one suffering a deep affectation, neither one is considered well or healthy by the Stoic.
One may wonder what remains when we attempt to heed Stoic advice and remove emotions from ourselves. What remains is a person who acts with a stable disposition untethered by external circumstances. They do not fall into madness and are not pushed along and tormented by the delusions of their mind. What remains is a being who acts in accordance with human nature as an essentially rational being and leads a life of tranquility within their soul. This is compared to one besieged by their emotions which forces them to and fro, unable to truly gain their bearings. To the Stoics what remains is a person who has achieved \textit{apatheia}, or a freedom from emotional passion.4

Cicero does—along with Stoics such as Seneca—make an allowance that the truly wise individual can partake in the volatile elixir of emotions without being overcome. This is while also employing them appropriately as the Aristotelian suggests. However, the truly wise person is a once in a lifetime rarity. As such, it should be clear that in the vast majority of cases, emotion is unwise and harmful at best, and an actual act of madness at worst.

In a sense, emotions can be seen as a type of duress, forcing us to act in a certain manner despite ourselves, perhaps contrary to our interests or values. To the Stoic, the danger of the emotions lies in the force they have over us, subverting our reason entirely, and placing our will within their thrall.5

Having established the problem that the Stoics have regarding the emotions, we can better understand the ways in which a Stoic would advise both themselves as a rational agent,

\footnotesize{4} Stoicism and Emotion, 35
\footnotesize{5} Seneca, \textit{Epistulae}, 85.8. \textit{On Anger}, 1.7. 2-4
and other practitioners of Stoic thought. The Stoics find it as exceedingly unlikely for any individual to consistently navigate their emotions with neither error nor suffering, except for the rare and mythical sage.\(^6\) Maintaining proper control of our emotions to the Stoic, is an uphill battle of an enormity that can scarcely be overstated:

> These are the emotions which folly has stirred up against human life, unleashing them and setting them upon us like Furies. We must resist them with all our strength if we truly wish to spend our allotment of life in peace and tranquility. But we can deal with the others elsewhere; for now, let us do what we can to drive away distress. In fact, let that be the point at issue between us. You said that you think the wise person is subject to distress. I strongly disagree. For distress is a terrible, sad, hateful thing, something we should avoid by every effort we can—oars and sails together, as the saying goes. (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.25)

To the Stoic, mental health must be maintained with great effort, more so than even the requirements of physical health. Just as proper nutrition, diet, exercise and avoidance of harmful substances is required for physical health, mental health requires the avoidance of ignorance and emotion, and an adherence to reason. Anyone who fails to make these efforts and suffers the consequences of this choice, cannot be considered in good health.

> It should be noted that Cicero seems to make a distinction between emotion and distress. Emotion can be considered as a short-term judgement based off on an impression

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\(^6\) Seneca, *Epistulae*, 116.4-5
resulting from a stimulus. Said impression generates an emotion that can last for an undefined span of time but is likely to dissipate sooner rather than later. Distress, by contrast seems to be a long-term affective condition similar to emotion, with the caveat that our faculties lead us to consciously believe it is appropriate to assent to a certain impression. This can be unpleasant at the lighter end of the spectrum, to outright debilitating to our mental capacities at the further end:

For every emotion is a misery, but distress is a very torture-chamber. Desire scalds us; wild delight makes us giddy; fear degrades us; but the effects of distress are worse: gauntness, pain, depression, disfigurement. It eats away at the mind and, in a word, destroys it. This we must shed; this we must cast away, or else remain in misery. (Cicero. _Tusculan Disputations_, 3.27).

If emotion obscures or overpowers reason, distress drains reason of its potency little by little, until only a husk remains. If we describe someone having an emotional outburst as in the grip of their emotions, the person who feels distress is imprisoned entirely within their emotions as their mind wastes away. They are slowly crushed by it. If the father in my scenario was overwhelmed with fear after his child’s imagined brush with death; if every car or vehicle caused him to imagine specters of disaster to the point he was consistently and endlessly

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7 “Of all the assertions Stoics make about emotion, the one that has attracted most attention in recent years is the claim that emotions are defined by their propositional content, i.e., that every instance of emotion is in its very essence a judgment concerning some present or potential state of affairs.” (Graver, _Stoicism and Emotion_, 4)
overwhelmed with terror, one can only imagine the impact such prolonged torment would have upon such a mind.

To the Stoics, the pitfalls of emotion are immense. Not only will one inevitably fail to hit the mark in the Aristotelian sense, but there is a very real possibility of these emotions short-circuiting our ability to adhere to reason. Even moderate emotions are painful and unpleasant, and to experience them consistently is to experience distress which leeches away at our ability to reason properly and disrupts a tranquil life. This is to say nothing of the long-term affective state of distress which descends from emotions, which has the real possibility of doing irreparable damage to our psyche if left unabated. What little good emotion may bring about by acting as a motivating force is entirely overshadowed by the list of detriments.

Within the Stoic conception, the generation of emotions and the distress that follows both also stem from the idea that something that has transpired is either good or bad. Once we affirm this impression in our minds, emotions come forth, and we are distressed as a result. Often, this impression, once assented to overlooks all manner of salient factors that may have played a role in the scenario which has affected us in one way or another. Or, as Seneca writes:

Consider also the fact that many of the things that make us angry offend us rather than harm us. It makes a big difference, however, whether someone foils my intention or lets me down, wrests something from me or doesn’t give it to me. And yet we regard it as all the same whether someone takes something or refuses it, whether he

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8 Seneca, *Epistulae*, 59.4
9 *Therapy of Desire*. 370, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.24-25, 71
cuts my hope short or postpones its fulfillment, whether he’s acting against me or in his own interest, from affection for another or hatred of me. (Seneca, On Anger, 3.28.4)

To Seneca, emotion impairs our ability to see things accurately. This accuracy often determines how we react to certain events. There is a difference between one spilling coffee on my shirt against their will because they stumbled on a tree root, and one who abhors me, spilling coffee on my shirt to display their contempt. My anger convinces me that the difference is negligible. A rational being can discern the difference between the two, and act accordingly. One under the grip of emotion lacks this ability to see accurately, somehow seeing these two events as one and the same.

To Cicero, the process which heralds my anger, along with my anger itself is not only unsurprising, but also to be expected to a certain extent:

The fact is that the experience of distress has more than one cause. First, there is the belief that what has happened is a bad thing. Once a person has this impression, and decides that it is true, distress necessarily follows. (Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 3.72)

By assenting to my impression of the situation as accurate, emotion and distress are expected to come about. In this same light, assenting to my impression of what is an appropriate action on my part— I should be upset—it is no surprise I act as I do. My impression may not have been remotely accurate. I failed to evaluate things critically and to rebuke my emotional impulses, and things have gone awry.
This encounter did not harm me in any important way. It certainly did not harm my ability to live virtuously, and thus to live well. Had reason been present in my mind, I would have realized these things. Yet, my anger was such that I did not focus on the truth or lack thereof within my impressions. I focused only on what I felt was appropriate given the intensity of the feeling present. To the Stoics, our emotions are indeed like high proof liquor, intoxicating and highly combustible in even the slightest amounts. They are simply too potent for anyone to prudently partake in.

I believe the most Stoics would agree that this incident failed to constitute an actual harm, and even if it did was certainly not worth my anger. They would likely believe that anything that followed from my impression was pointless:

None of the transactions we conduct with severe looks is serious, none of them is great: that’s why (I stress this point) anger is also a form of insanity—you assign great value to paltry things. This man wanted to deprive me of an inheritance, that one denounced me to a man I’d long courted in the hope of being named in his will. This other one lusted after my concubine: the thing that should be a bond of affection—a community of desires—is a cause of dissension and hatred. (Seneca, On Anger, 3.24.2)

10 “Such behaviors, says Chrysippus, show something important about the nature of emotion. For emotions are ‘irrational’: while they are going on, we find ourselves ‘blinded,’ unable to prevent ourselves from doing things our calmer selves would not approve. It is, he says, “as if we had become different people from those who were previously conversing.” (Stoicism and Emotion, 62)

11 Therapy of Desire, 413
By placing an unjustified value upon externals, I am deeply affected by their status. The Stoic holds that externals have no true worth, and we should be indifferent to them. By failing to be indifferent we open ourselves up to great harm, and disruption of our tranquility.

I have established the standard by which the Stoic operates in the context of emotions, distress, and why they should be avoided. This in addition to the way a Stoic would attempt to guide both themselves and their fellow Stoics away from such things. I now focus on how this Stoic, knowledgeable regarding all that I have mentioned, would seek to advise someone who is decidedly non-Stoic. Following this, I shall explain why these methods should differ greatly from those used on similar minds.

A Stoic, who has taken these concepts to heart would be advised in a manner quite different than someone who is unaware or not quite in agreement with the Stoic doctrine of the emotions. By this, I mean that one Stoic addressing another could simply state ‘This is not a harm’ or recite some syllogism to both remind and reinforce what is known yet briefly forgotten in a moment of psychological duress. Such techniques would possibly fall on deaf ears among a non-Stoic. Or, even worse, this would have a negative effect, causing offense and inflaming a situation. To this end, the Stoic is aware that while the words they speak may be true, they must be delivered in such a way that they can be heard. How it is said, when, and for what reason are all pertinent to how a Stoic attempts to advise one away from unnecessary distress and pain.

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12 Stoicism and Emotion, 196
13 Seneca, Epistulae, 49.7,9
The necessity of these considerations should be self-evident to one who is seriously attempting to guide someone towards the proper path for their own betterment. The Stoic must admit that there is a very real risk of undermining one’s efforts by failing to acknowledge the state of the person they are advising. It is not enough to simply give right advise, but to give it in such a way that accomplishes one’s goal: To give advice which is heeded. Simply telling one of the pitfalls of emotion and how they are in error does not quench the emotional fire within us; it often enhances it. Although the theory may be correct, the implementation may fall short by lacking an awareness of what was best in a specific situation. Furthermore, a person that can be corrected by this method is not suffering from distress, so much as they are simply acting foolishly or shamefully:

I pass over the method of Cleanthes, since that is directed at the wise person, who does not need consoling. For if you manage to persuade the bereaved person that nothing is bad but shameful conduct, then you have taken away not his grief, but his unwisdom. And this is not the right moment for such a lesson. (Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 3.77)

Cicero suggests that what the average person, and what the wise person needs to curtail their behavior, are not necessarily the same thing. A person who is grieving feels an emotion based on the value they hold for an external, and an impression of what actions are appropriate to take in light of this. He argues that this method misses the point, as although they would not display their grief externally, they are still grieving internally and are affected by emotions,

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14 Stoicism and Emotion, 197-198
suffering quietly. As such, they are not being consoled, so much as they are being instructed on how to act in a more becoming manner. Although Cicero speaks mostly on grief in this passage, I believe the idea translates faithfully to all manners of distress. If one can irradicate my behavior by pointing out that I am failing to act well, this does not remove my impressions that I have been harmed or the internal distress within. I am still suffering, even if I have ceased to act shamefully.

Now, what if our Stoic had taken a different approach? They are fully aware that I am under a false impression, and that I am undergoing a failure of reason, and overcome by emotion. However, the person attempting to console me realizes that the strength of my emotions is such that making me aware of my irrational state is a fruitless endeavor. They instead try sympathizing with me, or at least present an outward appearance of doing so. Perhaps they do not go so far as to suggest that I am right to be upset over spilled coffee, but they acknowledge that—at least given my training and the types of impressions I have—that it is understandable that I am upset. They do not attempt to stifle the pressure building, but instead seek to gently release it until I am returned to a more reasonable state.

When dealing with others, the Stoic is aware that despite our natures being disposed towards reason, when we are under emotional distress an attempt to help by restoring reason can be seen as an attempt to harm, exacerbating symptoms. This is doubly so when one crudely expounds on the Stoic view that the feelings one possesses are wrong. Although this is

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15Seneca, Epistulae,99.1
no doubt true to the Stoics, it is very important to choose the way one attempts to heal, and when to heal. Although all these methods are useful, not all methods are useful in all moments:

But with sicknesses of the mind, no less than with those of the body, it is important to choose the right moment for treatment. And yet, Prometheus, I think you know that reason may be doctor to your wrath. Yes, if it chooses well the time for treatment, and does not probe the wound that is inflamed. (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.76)

The only harm that has truly occurred is the one created within your own mind in the Stoic view. However, saying this as one mourns the loss of a loved one, or feels anger at how a friend was unjustly treated is perhaps an inopportune moment for this lesson. Ironically, the attempt to restore another to reason by direct methods, often has the effect of pushing reason further away. To accomplish the greater goal of removing the passions and the suffering that stem from them, the Stoic must often take a long-term view, using a pragmatic approach to accomplish their aims and help the person in question.

As I have said, it is unwise to attempt to directly extirpate the passions of another while they are running rampant like a frenzied beast, poised to trample over your efforts with renewed strength and vigor. However, this does not mean that there is nothing within the Stoics arsenal which can be used to ensnare or soothe these passions despite their strength. One such tool for the task is the use of consolation. Often, what non-Stoics hold to be good or ill is often a matter of limited perspective. Although things may seem to be a certain way due to our
impressions, we are not omniscient; nor are we prophets who know the future. As such, it is foolish to declare an event as fortuitous or the inverse from the offset.

While the Stoics reject the standard idea of what constitutes a proper harm (only that which affects one’s ability to live virtuously is harmful) they can still appreciate how another is suffering under an inaccurate impression of what is harmful. They understand the feelings such things create, resulting in an outpouring of emotions. In some instances, it may be appropriate for a Stoic to commiserate—or rather give an appearance of commiseration. Although a failure to commiserate is perhaps not as counterproductive as directly disputing the validity of another’s impression, we often stand out by the way in which we are different. A failure to ‘appropriately’ grieve a loss or see something as lamentable is not far removed from implying someone is acting inappropriately, or their feelings are incorrect. To avoid this, the Stoics often advocate an external appearance considerate of the occasion and feelings of others, which differs from the internal stillness.

One may have some qualms about the appearance of commiseration. One may quite reasonably find such actions to be disingenuous or even heartless without further discussion. Epictetus speaks on the idea of commiseration thusly:

When you see someone weeping in sorrow because his child has gone away, or because he has lost his possessions, take care that you’re not carried away by the impression that he is indeed in misfortune because of these external things, but be ready at once with this

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16 Seneca, *Epistulae*, 91.13, 13.10-12
17 Seneca, *Epistulae*, 106.5-11
thought, ‘It isn’t what has happened that so distresses this person—for someone else could
suffer the same without feeling that distress—but rather the judgement that he has formed
about it.’ As far as words go, however, don’t hesitate to sympathize with him, or even, if the
occasion arises, to join in his lamentations; but take care that you don’t also lament deep inside.
(Epictetus, Handbook,16)

Within Epictetus’ view, it is entirely appropriate to have an appearance of sympathy towards
another individual, or to display that you can understand their pain. However, understanding
their pain and understanding why they suffer are separate things. To Epictetus, we are
distressed because of our attitude—the impression we have that this is bad, and our assent in
favor of this impression—towards external factors. The suffering we feel as a result of externals
stem from our attachment to them. As such, two people can bear a loss differently, with one
avoiding distress as a result of a lesser value on external things. As such, Epictetus suggests that
we should feel concern for this person because they are suffering. We should find it unfortunate
that they are unable to value things correctly and are experiencing distress as a result. However,
we should not feel sympathy because they have lost something.

Put simply, we recognize the affective condition which plagues them, without ascribing
to their impression. To the Stoic, this is genuinely lamentable, the pain they are experiencing is
an unfortunate state of affairs. The Stoic in this situation is not heartless; they genuinely
understand the havoc that impressions and passions can bring upon us if left unchecked. This is
not considered a good thing to the Stoics, and it is proper for a Stoic to interact with those who
are suffering, with this in mind. However, although we recognize that this is unfortunate, we
should be cautious that we do not allow the impressions of others to affect our own
impressions. The Stoic knows that the external is not the cause of suffering, the reaction to it is.
By being exhorted to avoid inward lamentation, Epictetus is not suggesting we deceive. He is
suggesting we do not bring suffering upon ourselves by assenting to the same impressions that
have harmed others.

As I have mentioned previously, it is a delicate art to attempt to diffuse emotions while
someone is suffering intensely under their influence, and often fails to have the effect that we
would hope. Sometimes it is more prudent to allow these emotions to run their course or wait
until the brunt of the storm has passed, so to speak. 18 It is the rare individual who has
boundless rage or limitless sorrow. As such, patience is always an option. Much like the snared
beast thrashing for its freedom until it exhausts itself, so too can emotions be worn out to a
certain extent.

If the Stoic wishes to effectively advise non-Stoics, they should recognize the need for a
variety of methods to accomplish this task. It is not enough to bluntly challenge the impressions
and reject the emotions of another. This may help to quell the emotions of an individual in the
grip of their passions, but this is not always the case, and it may even undermine the Stoics
goals. Solving this problem is a matter of both timing and method. Just as sometimes a direct
challenge may be effective, an appearance of sympathy will accomplish the most good. Other
times, patience will win out, allowing the emotions to take their course, with an attempt at
correction following later.

3 The Stoic and The Macro: Interacting with an emotion-prone society

In this section I discuss how the Stoic is often skeptical of the sentiments held by society at large, and how value is often incorrectly placed within them. I also discuss how, although these societies often get many things wrong to the Stoic, it is important to remember that this does not mean they get all things wrong. Sometimes the views of the masses may be useful to draw attention to certain injustices within a respective society. Lastly, I argue that it would behoove the Stoic to be mindful of the difficulties involved in changing the views of society towards the Stoic view, along with how the Stoic should attempt to interact with said society.

As I have mentioned previously, societies in possession of a view that is very different from that of the Stoics are hardly unheard of. On average, many societies tend to view emotions in a more positive light, seeing them as both useful and necessary, an inversion of the Stoic ideal. This presents certain problems for a Stoic in such a society. The Stoic cannot—or according to their own view, should not—simply retreat to the mountains to live out their days in self-imposed exile. Or rather, given the interconnectedness of humanity in their conception of Oikeiosis, they would be very hesitant to take such an action.

Oikeiosis, or familiarity, can be thought of as the sphere of concern held by an individual. To the Stoics, this explains how one grows to care for other individuals, groups and communities, rather than oneself alone. The Stoics hold that humans are naturally sociable and disposed towards cooperation, and it is natural to have concern for one another. Under

19 “It is impossible to cut a branch from the branch to which it is attached unless you cut it from the tree as a whole; and likewise, a human being cut off from a single one of his fellows has dropped out of the community as a whole.” (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 11.8) See Also: Seneca, Epistulae, 60.4
Oikeiosis, the Stoics hold we will treat others with the same level of concern we treat ourselves and our intimates, with little distinction. While the ideal Stoic city may exist somewhere, its location is well hidden, and we find ourselves in a world filled with vice, irrationality and emotion. It is simply wishful thinking to imagine that the Stoic will not encounter such things.

A concern that arises from living among a society that holds incorrect beliefs, is the possibility of these beliefs coming to have an influence on us in some way if we are not mindful of this fact, constantly on guard. If we fail to do so, our views will slowly slip away from us without realizing it. We may come to see the values that the majority hold as, if not bad then possessing more merit than we might have thought originally. Our view softens as a result of the social effects of our peers within society. Exacerbating this further is the high likelihood that we may have held similar values to the majority before we realized that these values were misinformed in some manner. This is unsurprising when one remembers that the Stoic person raised in a Stoic commune is likely the exception, rather than the rule. It is more likely that we were raised among those whose values have stronger similarities to each other, than to the Stoic line of thought. Or, perhaps our habituation from a lifetime of reinforcement of certain values have left us more prone to one way of thinking, over another:

Seeds of the virtues are inborn in our characters, and if they were allowed to mature, nature itself would lead us to perfect happiness. But as it is, no sooner are we born and received into the family than we are surrounded by all kinds of corrupting influences, and the most wrongheaded beliefs. We are steeped in such a variety of errors

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that truth gives way to foolishness, nature itself to hardened belief. But it is when we meet with society at large—that is, with the people, who with one accord give approval to our faults, and are what I might call the greatest of all our teachers—it is then that we become thoroughly infected with corrupt beliefs and secede from nature absolutely.

(Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 3.3)

Cicero argues that human nature is naturally disposed toward virtue, and if this disposition was allowed to grow unimpeded, we would all lead tranquil, wise lives filled with reason and devoid of emotion. Unfortunately, before this disposition can be solidified and fully brought forth into our lives, other influences stymie the sprouting of these virtuous seeds. These seeds of virtue are supplanted with beliefs that are contrary to our nature as human beings, leading us astray and into lives filled with suffering and ignorance.

In this way of thinking, it should be somewhat obvious to us that there is a certain danger to the Stoic who lives in such a society and has yet to fully master themselves. Much like those who have suffered from addiction or has yet to break an old habit, the possibility of relapse is possible if one is not vigilant. When one has been habituated fully into a certain manner of seeing the world, referent impressions often occur instantaneously, and our assent to them come to us as reflexively as breathing does. It is a long and arduous task to retrain our minds to both question the accuracy of our impressions, and to withhold our assent to them.

To the Stoics, such a struggle is unsurprising. It is in fact, natural, in the following sense.21 If one was to be taught what is to be treasured, and what is to be disdained—regardless

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21 Seneca, *Epistolae*, 60.1, 69.2-3
of if it is correct or incorrect— from infancy onwards, one can easily imagine how such training will color the ways in which we see the world.\textsuperscript{22} By this same token, we can imagine the immense difficulty required to do away with such habituation, in effect rebuilding the way we see the world. We must relearn what is good, what is evil, and what is unnecessary from the ground up. Upon consideration of these facts, one comes to realize several things, when one considers the plight of the non-Stoic. The incorrectness of their views and the misery of their lives is merely the unsurprising consequent of an affliction that has not been tended to properly. This affliction is made worse due to a misunderstanding of what constitutes healing or health.\textsuperscript{23} This ignorance also extends towards good and evil.\textsuperscript{24}

However, as understandable as it may be, it does not solve our problem. Namely, how do we deal with a society that is made up of confused, unhealthy minds. In the Stoic view, it is our duty to aid them, to help them find the path of reason if we can. However, this is easier said than done. If I were to inform someone that their goals, their way of thinking, their values—essentially their life—were in error, and the illusions of a diseased mind, I would not be surprised to be met with great skepticism. Nor would I be surprised to find that their reaction to this charge is to be greatly offended. If I were to decide to proclaim this to society at large, one can imagine various scenarios. In one, I am ostracized, in another I am dismissed as a loon. Perhaps in another I have managed to invoke the violent tendencies of the mob. So strong is this

\textsuperscript{22} Therapy of Desire,327-328
\textsuperscript{23} “Call to mind the doctrine that rational creatures have come into the world for the sake of one another, and that tolerance is a part of justice, and that when people do wrong, they do so involuntarily” (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations,4.3)
\textsuperscript{24} Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 10.13
claim, that to simply blurt out such notions is not only counterproductive, but to engage in folly. We inadvertently become the target of the emotions, vice, and outrage of others if we are not cautious.

This in part informs us of how the Stoic interacts in such a world filled with vice and maladies of the mind: Not with fear, nor loathing, but caution that flows from reason. However, this does not impact their positive feelings for their fellows. They simply accept this reality in the same manner in which one would (or should) react when dealing with an environmental disaster. It would make little sense to resent a Tornado, in that there were several factors at play, and this was the result produced. As things are, it simply cannot be helped.25

In the gymnasium, someone may have scratched us with his nails or have collided with us and struck us a blow with his head, but, for all that, we do not mark him down as a bad character, or take offence, or view him with suspicion afterwards as one who wishes us ill. To be sure, we remain on our guard, but not in a hostile spirit or with undue suspicion; we simply try to avoid him in an amicable fashion. So let us behave in much the same way in other areas of life: let us make many allowances for those who are, so to speak, the companions of our exercises. For it is possible, as I have said, to avoid them, and yet to view them neither with suspicion nor hatred. (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 6.20)

Put another way, we may think of those we interact with in society as our partners in a game in which certain actions often come about. Although my partner may seek to block my advance in

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25 Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 12.16
a game of checkers, while seeking victory for themselves, it does not follow that they hate me. Nor should it follow that I despise them. It is simply the nature of the game, the context of the activity we share. I may keep a wary eye out for any tactics they bring about and move to accomplish my own agenda. However, I do not allow myself to take their maneuvers personally, nor move with ill intent on my end.

In the view of the Stoics, many people within a society have been influenced to think and act in a certain manner and have lost sight of what is actually in accordance with human nature. They are confused and misled. It is an unfortunate situation, yes. But one that should invoke understanding from the Stoic, not resentment and hatred. This knowledge of how lost and confused they are should also aid to insulate the Stoic from societal influence and peer pressure:

He remembers, furthermore, that all rational beings are akin, and that while it follows from human nature that he should care for all of his fellows, he should pay heed to the opinion not of all of them, but only of those who live a life that accords with nature. As for those who live otherwise, he is constantly mindful of what they are like, at home and abroad, by night and by day, and what sort of scum they mix with; and accordingly, he sets no value on praise from such people, who are not pleasing even to themselves. (Marcus Aurelius. Meditations. 4. 3.)

As previously mentioned, the Stoic conception of Oikeiosis is one in which we should show concern for our fellows with little distinction, it does not follow that what our fellows say or do is correct, or right. If the actions they take are vile, the plans they make vicious and steeped in
ignorance, it would be preposterous for the Stoic to take unqualified council from such individuals. Naturally, those who are virtuous, working towards good ends in accordance with reason are the type of individuals who possess the insight which the Stoic acknowledges and would accept guidance from.

As mentioned previously, although most inhabitants within a society may be wrong on any number of things which define their life, it does not follow that all members within the society are wrong about all things. They can be likened to sane inhabitants of an insane asylum. As rational beings, regardless of where they are located, the points that they make are worthy of consideration. Conversely, one who has a more tenuous understanding of what constitutes choiceworthiness, or what it means to live well as a result of being unable to grasp the reality of human nature can be said to have faulty or unclear reasoning abilities. It simply makes no sense to the Stoic to have animosity towards partially mad individuals, any more than it would make sense to adhere to prescriptions made by them, which to the Stoic are incoherent at best, or wrong at worst. One should simply accept that this is the state of things within the environment in which we find ourselves, while at the same time remembering that we are by nature disposed to cooperate with all of our fellows, if it can be helped. As such, to take umbrage with one another or act in a way that disregards that is to in a sense act outside of the dictates of reason.

26 “In using the word ‘insane,’ then, the Stoics mean to say that the common intellectual and moral condition of humans is disposed toward episodes of irrational behavior, even though ordinary people are at other times fully capable of reflective reasoning and at all times accountable for their activities.” (Stoicism and Emotion, 119)
27 On Anger, 2.6.1-4, 2.7.2,2.9.1
28 Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 9.11
As I have indicated, we should have a spirit of cooperation where we can afford it in our dealings with others. By ‘afford’ I mean in instances where it is appropriate to do so, without forcing us to engage in vice, or act contrary to reason. Ideally, our actions with others should be towards benign or virtuous ends. However, we should also be aware of the necessity of employing caution in our endeavors. This caution rests upon two spectrums. On one side, this caution is an awareness of how immersing oneself in society without limit will enact a type of pressure to conform to it, caused by a type of relapse to a previous habituation, or the simple tendency to ‘Do as the Romans do in Rome’ as the adage goes.

The second type of caution is perhaps more mundane, being a matter of safety from a pragmatic standpoint. As emotions are unreliable and unreasonable things, formed by impressions and judgements, a wise Stoic will take care not to cause unnecessary strife by attracting certain types of attention and emotions from others. While one cannot reasonably be expected to discern the emotional triggers and vices of every individual in a society, there are certain objects considered desirable or laudable within a society. These things can attract envy or hatred if one is found to be in possession of or lacking such things. To this end, minimalizing the attention we draw, and keeping a low profile serves to help minimalize conflict between those who covet things which have no value, and are spurred to act contrary to reason in pursuit of such things.29

Although, as I have shown the Stoic should try to place some metaphorical distance between themselves and the society at large, this is in fact a balancing act of sorts. For the Stoic

29 Seneca, Epistulae, 36.1, 68, 14.4-7.
holds that we are by are very natures predisposed towards cooperation with one another. Care must be taken to avoid this ‘distance’ leading to disdain towards society or towards their fellow human, for we are all interconnected. As such, detesting one for holding views or vices that are endemic within society, is akin to resenting them for acting contrary to what we should expect of most people and contrary to the regular course of human affairs.

This means that although the Stoic is cautious not to agree with the masses, nor to adopt their point of view, and in a sense rejects their feelings, this is not done in a disdainful manner. The Stoic does not ‘throw out the baby with the bath water’. Although society often is wrong, their feelings chaotic, misguided and erratic, it is not impossible for them to realize certain realities which the Stoic would see as correct. If not fully correct, these realizations may still be salient in several key aspects.

A clear example of when a Stoic will pay attention to others, is when trying to determine whether an injustice has occurred. A group of non-Stoics may have an impression that an injustice has occurred, and that it is appropriate to act and feel in a certain way in response to said injustice. It is entirely possible that the Stoic may also agree that there is an injustice. While they would no doubt reject the idea that it is appropriate to feel a certain way, the appropriateness of an action in response to injustice, or the accuracy of the impression of injustice, can be something condoned by the Stoic, nevertheless. Although a group may be confused about many things, it does not follow that they are confused about everything. The Stoic wisely evaluates each claim and impression put forth on their merits.
To reiterate, the Stoic is aware that humankind is built with an innate disposition towards cooperation and reason, disrupted by societal influences. Although this is unfortunate, the Stoic does not react with hostility, they simply accept this as the consequent of various circumstances and will do their part to help their fellows when they are able. Although the Stoic is not hostile towards society, the Stoic is cautious in how they interact with the world, both to avoid unnecessary tension between themselves and society, and to avoid the influence of society from disrupting their path towards virtue. Finally, the Stoic is aware that the masses get many things wrong and should perhaps be ignored. However, in certain domains such as that of injustice, it is possible for them to be correct. As such, the Stoic will study these claims and others put forth by these groups.

4 The Stoic and The Micro: Dealing with the Emotions of individuals

Previously, I have turned my attention to how a Stoic would choose to deal with society in a general sense. However, a society is composed of its people, of individuals. While I may have addressed how to navigate the perils that come about from proximity to the masses and how they are to be avoided, I have thus far said nothing of how the Stoic interacts with others on a more intimate level. Individuals such as would-be-friends, and acquaintances, and the risks that such things entail for the Stoic. I also discuss the methods employed by the Stoic to guide those close to the Stoic towards the good, through use of rhetoric, and directing the emotions of non-Stoic individuals towards beneficial ends. I also discuss the need for a variety of approaches to accomplish this, based on the dispositions of those the Stoic interacts with. Lastly,
I discuss the importance of internal motivation within the non-Stoic, if they are to be guided towards ends which the Stoic considers to be correct.

To the Stoic, a poor choice of friends is far more dangerous than a mob storming forwards to rip us asunder, or a bandit who pilfers from us our possessions. While these actions are wrong, misguided and perhaps appear to be harmful by the conventions of society, the Stoic believes that such actions are indifferent. Or perhaps these actions harm the offender and not necessarily the victim. Although a murderer may take our lives, and a thief may take our treasure, what they take is not of true value, nor does it affect what is valuable in actuality. This thing which is truly valuable is something that our friends and acquaintances can alter in some way: Our virtue\textsuperscript{30}, and the strength of our character.\textsuperscript{31}

The Stoics were keenly aware of the influence that our peers and other associates may have upon us. We often adopt certain mannerisms and turns of phrase from them with enough exposure. While this sort of osmosis may be harmless enough, we also may find ourselves adopting certain points of view. This is in addition to quirks of personality or other attributes that may either make us better or worse.\textsuperscript{32} As such, choosing well in our associations can fortify

\textsuperscript{30} Seneca, \textit{Epistulae}, 21.1-2, 29.4, 123.7-8, 109.4

\textsuperscript{31} “If it had been possible, Epictetus, I would have ensured that your poor body and petty possessions were free and immune from hindrance. But since I couldn’t give you that, I’ve given you a certain portion of myself, this faculty of motivation to act and not to act, of desire and aversion, and, in a word, the power to make proper use of impressions; if you pay good heed to this, and entrust all that you have to its keeping, you’ll never be hindered, never obstructed, and you’ll never groan, never find fault, and never flatter anyone at all. This is what it means to train oneself in the matters in which one ought to train oneself, to have rendered one’s desires incapable of being frustrated, and one’s aversions incapable of falling into what they want to avoid. (Epictetus, \textit{Discourses}, 1.1)

\textsuperscript{32} Graver, \textit{Stoicism and Emotion}, 154
our mind and ability to stay on the path of virtue. Inversely, choosing poorly in a sense enfeebles our mind, and may lead us astray from this path, often without our realizing it.

To the Stoics, we are not immune from a sort of social osmosis, in which the values and the judgements of our peer’s seep into our minds, filling them like a crevice. In this way, if one is surrounded with those who are negative, of an eternally gloomy, spiteful, or avaricious disposition, it is to be expected that we over time adopt the same ways of thinking and behaving, unbeknownst to ourselves at the time. Although we think of them as a friend, and perhaps they consider themselves to genuinely be our friend in turn, they are doing an immeasurable harm to us. Even worse, because we mistake them to be friends (or at least the type of friend we should have) we often fail to maintain the same level of caution we would maintain during our dealings with one who directly opposes or sought to undermine us through more conventional means.

When we consider the inadvertent wound that a poorly chosen friend can inflict, it should be expected that a Stoic is exceedingly selective in whom they choose to interact with beyond what is dictated by necessity. As such, the type of friend that a Stoic would choose must be one that does not hinder their path to progress.33 This selectiveness serves to protect the Stoic from being impeded on the path to virtue, while also serving to ensure that the person whom the Stoic wishes to lead towards virtue and free from the torment of their emotions is the type of being who can be freed. Seneca, for instance speaks extensively on the importance of choosing those who bring forth our best selves; or at the very least do not subtract from it:

33 Stoicism and Emotion, 178
Our intimates should be very calm and easy to get along with, not nervous and cross-grained. We pick up habits from our companions, and just as some disorders are transmitted by bodily contact, so the mind passes on its defects to those closest at hand.

It’s the same way with virtues, but in reverse. (Seneca, *On Anger*, 3.8)

This passage highlights the importance of choosing well who one associates with. Much like pathogens, certain traits can infect us, for better or for worse. While the telltale signs of disease are often hidden until it is too late to be avoided, the traits of our companions can often be discerned from the onset, and steps can be taken to avoid those who expose us to detrimental traits, in favor of those whose presence is more conducive to traits beneficial in the eyes of a Stoic.

These habits of mind help to shape or reshape our worldview, affecting the nature of our impressions and our orientation towards virtue, and against vice, or vice-versa. As such, we will avoid the emotional and the vicious to avoid becoming vicious ourselves, to aid our development away from such infirmities of mind. Much like an alcoholic would be properly served by avoiding places where alcohol flows freely with other alcoholics, those who often fall prey to anger, grief, or other forms of distress when in contact with certain people or situations would be wise to limit their proximity and contact. It may often be that the very idea of such people shall hinder our path to virtue.

As mentioned previously, we should take care not to allow the negative traits of our friends, associates and family to impair us and our ability to act virtuously and with unclouded minds. However, while this is very important—essential, even—it is only one piece of the
puzzle. While the Stoic holds that the only thing that they truly are in control of is their own choices and their own character, we are all interconnected and should cooperate and assist one another. As emotion is considered a type of madness that robs us of reason, which is a part of our very nature, it is plain to see why the Stoic regards assisting one along these lines to be a worthy goal. Having established the worthiness of said goal, the Stoic must then ask themselves how this goal is accomplished. Thus, they must ponder how does one guide another away from vice and suffering, and towards the good.

To begin with, it is important for the Stoic to realize that it is essential that those who they hope to free from—or if this is perhaps too lofty, minimalize—suffering, must in some sense be open to consider the perspective the Stoic has to offer. It is unsurprising to find that when forced to examine values that are held dearly among an individual, among their family, and among society, there is often resistance to ideas that run counter to what we have been taught to value. However, the Stoics rely on several devices that soften that resistance. Some of these device’s stem from logic and contemplation of nature, such as syllogisms, which lead us to agree with a certain conclusion, provided we agree with the premises. Seneca makes note of the following syllogism, for instance:

Zeno, of our school, offers the following syllogism: Nothing bad is glorious. But death is glorious. Therefore, death is not bad. (Seneca, Epistulae, 82.9)

In this syllogism, it is proven that death is not a bad thing, as death is a glorious thing, and bad things cannot be glorious by their very nature. As such, if one were to contemplate this syllogism or others like it, we would be led to think, or to act in a certain way. However, it must
be noted that Seneca, and several other Stoics question the ability of syllogisms to affect one who does not accept their premises, and thus deny their conclusions, or who do not actually believe them to be true within their souls:

Now, that was a big help! You have freed me from fear; after that, I won’t hesitate to offer my neck to the sword! Are you not willing to speak seriously? Do you mean to make me laugh, just when I’m about to die? Indeed, it is hard for me to say who was more perverse—the one who believed this argument would eliminate the fear of death, or the one who tried to refute it as if it had some relevance. (Seneca, *Epistulae*, 82.9)

The problem with these syllogistic methods, stem from how they fail to demonstrate how the propositions they hold are true to the one who hears them. They lack an illustrative component which leads the hearer to understand what is entailed within the propositions. It tells me that death is fine. It does not explain to me why this is, and it most certainly does not lead me to believe it. As such, while these things may be of use to a Stoic who knows the meaning within such things and accepts them, it is of dubious use to a non-Stoic who has not been taught in this manner. Even worse, it may cause the non-Stoic to feel resentment and fail to change their outlook:

To be sure, our school would like Zeno’s reasoning to be correct and the reasoning that runs counter to it to be fallacious and wrong. Speaking for myself, though, I do not reduce these matters to the rules of dialectic and those tired old conundrums of professional logicians. My view is that all that sort of thing ought to be thrown out. All it does is convince
the interlocutor that he is being cheated. He may be forced to concede, but he will be saying something different from what he actually believes. Speeches on behalf of truth should be more straightforward; speeches against fear should be more courageous. My preference would be to take this convoluted reasoning of theirs and lay it out straight so that I can persuade people, not put one over on them. (Seneca, *Epistulae*, 82.19-20)

This in essence captures the problem that many Stoics have come to realize regarding the use of syllogisms towards those who are not adherents to Stoicism. Even if you convince an interlocutor to accept the syllogism is valid, it does not necessarily change anything within them, so much as it simply reasons them into a corner. It creates a dissonance, in which the conclusion reached, and what they feel is correct, are at odds with one another. Even if the non-Stoic agrees with the syllogism from a logical perspective, it is likely mere lip service on their part. To this end, it is essential that the Stoic find methods that can invoke the type of change within their interlocutor that they seek. As such, for most human beings, many Stoics seem to advocate a different approach, one able to provide motivational power to those who are not deeply versed in Stoic thought.34 We must speak to them as people, not logicians. To this end, other methods rely on our experiences as a human being and the experiences of others that have been observed such as through rhetoric. The purpose of rhetoric is to manifest a certain frame of mind within the speaker:

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34 “This means, for the Stoics, that the rhetorical and literary dimensions of an argument are not mere incidental frills: they are part and parcel of what the business of arguing is all about. Thus the criticism that Cicero brings against the excessive compression and dryness of some of the Stoic paradoxes—if correct—is a criticism that should trouble them. On their own terms, they have failed if their arguments really do not succeed in moving and changing the soul” (*Therapy of Desire*, 330). See Also: Seneca, *Epistulae*, 82.6-10, 82.19-24, 83.17-18, 82.27
It is easy to rouse a listener and make him desire what is right, for nature has
given everyone the foundations and seeds of the virtues. We are all born for such things;
and when someone provides a stimulus, the good awakens in our minds as if from
sleep. Have you not observed how applause echoes in the theater when certain lines are
spoken which we, the public, recognize and affirm as true? The vilest criminal applauds
these lines, rejoicing to hear an attack on his own vices. Just imagine the effect when the
lines are spoken by a philosopher, when healthful precepts are imbued with poetic
rhythms to drive them deeper into the minds of the uneducated. (Seneca, Epistulae, 108.8-9)

To the Stoic, rhetoric is a far easier way to motivate change within the listener, than syllogism
could ever be. This is because rhetoric seeks to bring forth our latent disposition, confirming
what we on some level know to be accurate due to human nature. Although this nature may be
rendered dormant by various factors already mentioned, it does not follow that it has been
rendered extinct. By use of rhetoric, the Stoic is able to revive even the virtue hidden deep
within the vicious agent, something not easily accomplished by means of syllogism.
Additionally, as the rhetoric of the Stoic accords with human nature, works in conjunction with
various oratory devices that penetrate deeply into our psyches, one may imagine the Stoic
rhetorician to be exceedingly effective at accomplishing their ends.

When employed by the Stoic, rhetoric can be used both positively and negatively. By
negatively, I mean that the Stoic may use shame or fear to remind the non-Stoic what should
not be done, what is wrong and what the consequences of folly, vice or indiscretion might be.
Or the consequences of allowing one’s rage to overtake reason, or to let envy or jealousy interfere in the way one deals with one’s fellows. In the positive sense, the listener may be imbued with aspects that are similar to virtue. For instance, a consideration for Justice may develop in the midst of a rousing speech discussing the importance of such a thing. It should be noted that this is a similarity or appearance of justice, and not the virtue itself, as to have one virtue is to have them all and vice-versa. As such, one who is not completely virtuous cannot in actuality have virtue. The motivational power of speech, rhetoric and persuasion serves as a trigger to think in a manner that accords with natural reason. Hopefully—and most importantly—this will also trigger the target of such methods to act in a way appropriate for the life they lead, or the situation they find themselves in:

Our strategy must be based on each person’s character. Some are won over by entreaties, while others abuse and harass the submissive. Some we’ll frighten into a calm state, while others are deterred by reproach or confession or shame or delay—a sluggish remedy for a headlong evil, which we must use as a last resort. (Seneca, On Anger, 3. 2)

To the Stoic, in order to bring out the desired result, it is not uncouth to consider the dispositions of an individual—vicious or otherwise—and use this to formulate a method in which their manner of thinking or behavior can be most easily modified. One may argue that this is to play on the emotions of others. If I walk an old lady across the street not because it is

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35 “Anyone who is virtuous exhibits all the virtues together, and not in greater or lesser degree, but each of them entirely. Similarly with vice: it is all or nothing. As long as Achilles is not the Stoic sage, he is, technically, a coward; Aristides “the Just” is technically unjust.” (Graver, Stoicism and Emotion. 134) See Also: Cicero, On Duties, 13-16.3
36 Therapy of Desire, 337
the right thing to do, but because I am cajoled into doing so by a passerby speaking of how shameful it is to refuse to help those in need, I am certainly not acting from reason alone, or because I believe that it is choice worthy in and of itself. I am doing so because of the discomfort I feel in being thought of as such a person and being censured as a result. If the Stoic hopes to free me from emotional pain, it seems contradictory to visit it upon me.

The Stoic would perhaps agree that pain is being given to me but would be unlikely to see this as an extremely pressing issue. This pain is not provided out of spite or malice, but as a requirement to produce a result that is beneficial to myself, even if I do not realize it. The Stoic wishes us to be free of suffering, and to act towards virtue. However, virtue takes precedent, and if a degree of suffering leads us away from vice, this is a choice worthy decision.

Seneca in particular makes note of using the distress of another in order to dislodge certain weaknesses or deformities of character from agents:

Surely scolding is sometimes needed, no?” Of course! But reasoned scolding, without anger; for the point is not to do harm, but to heal under the guise of harming. For just as we heat some twisted metal shafts to straighten them and use wedges to apply pressure not to shatter them but to remove the warp, so we straighten out people’s characters with physical pain and mental distress once they’ve been warped by vice (Seneca, On Anger, 1.6.1).

Here, Seneca makes it clear that pain is not necessarily bad, any more than it follows that pleasure is good. It would be extremely unpleasant to have a broken leg set by a medic, but in order to fix what has been damaged, it is often necessary. To one with an incomplete picture, or lacking knowledge of medicine, it may be difficult to discern the difference between medic and
torturer at first blush. Likewise, it may be difficult for one who lacks an understanding of the
total human mind to realize the necessity of pain to restore ordinary functioning to those who have
been impaired, unable to function in the manner a human being should.

Additionally, while it is ideal to do the correct act with the correct frame of mind free
from emotion, it is a long process to be freed of them. In non-ideal circumstances and in the
midst of life, the Stoic works with the person as they are. Shaming me to act correctly is
sufficient for the moment. Another time will arise to show me how to act correctly without such
tools, and from reason alone. Although these agents—ones spurred by not purely rational or
non-emotional considerations— are perhaps not acting virtuously in the strictest sense of the
term as employed by the Stoics, they can be said to be acting on a path conducive to virtue. If
nothing else, the Stoic would allow that the specific choices made by the agent as a result of the
virtue manifested by rhetoric would be choice worthy. This also has an added benefit of
helping to habituate the person being coached to act in a more virtuous manner, to be able to act
virtuously independently of the cajoling of the Stoic.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the Stoics held that guiding others towards the good
and away from suffering through persuasive means was an inherently personal process, which
often consisted of multiple parts. There was, of course, the argument itself, the manner in which
it was made, and the ability of the Stoic to touch the mind and soul of their audience by things
that they have experienced and have felt—if not known—to be true. However, this all can be
done in various forms. A Stoic could no doubt write, as several have, a book that fulfills all
these requirements and will influence others to act in a manner conducive to their well-being.
But the Stoics are also aware of the impact that a more intimate, in person interaction between Stoic and subject can have upon the latter. Seneca alludes to the benefit of in person study thusly:

One who studies with a philosopher should have some benefit to take home with him every day, either better health or a mind more open to healing. But he will, for the power of philosophy is so great that it aids not only students but even casual bystanders. People who are out in the sun get a tan, even if they didn’t go out for that purpose; people who sit around for a while in a perfume-shop carry the aroma of the place away with them; and those who have been around a philosopher necessarily take away something beneficial, even if they don’t make any effort. Observe: I say “even if they don’t make any effort,” not “even if they resist. (Seneca, Epistulae, 108.4)

Seneca seems to suggest that both philosophy and philosopher—the individual—have a role to play in bestowing benefit upon a specific subject. While it is no doubt true that rhetorical texts themselves would be sufficient to invoke healing, the presence of the philosopher and their methods of instruction are such that even those passively involved are able to benefit, to say nothing of how one who is actively attempting to learn may be benefited by them. This indicates that the presence of a philosopher is a boon, and able to provide additional benefits not easily captured in text.

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37 “And Arrian, setting out the words of Epictetus, even feels that he needs to apologize for the fact that he is able to give only the bare words, without the presence and voice of the man himself, which added so much to their practical power” (Therapy of Desire, 330)
To this end, we can see that to many of the Stoics, to properly guide one towards their way of thinking, it is essential to have tailored the proofs one employs to properly speak to human beings and direct them towards the good. It is in error to fail to consider how to accentuate the value of the good, and the worthlessness of the indifferent, and the negative appreciation that comes from vice. It would also behoove the Stoic to be aware of the perils and pitfalls of dealing with both vicious, scornful individuals, enraptured by lust or blinded by greed and envy. The Stoic should also understand their society, so that they may better address the concerns and experiences of those they are attempting to guide to stand apart from these things.

Thus far, I have focused on the methods the Stoic uses to bring the ‘flock into the fold’ so to speak, and to shepherd them towards the good. However, it would be far too naïve to imagine that these methods are foolproof. If changing the minds of people—or rather, restoring their inborn dispositions towards good—were a simple matter, the Stoics would not advise so unceasingly towards accepting what is within our power, and what cannot be done.

This is not a perfect process. It is plausible for the Stoic viewpoint to be rejected for a variety of reasons. On the more rational side of the spectrum, there are those who understand the arguments that the Stoics put forth and disagree philosophically. Perhaps, like the Peripatetics, they find certain emotions, like anger to be empowering and informative, and find the question to be one of finding an appropriate balance in our day to day lives as we operate. Somewhere in the middle, there are also those who do not agree with a world in which the things that they have been taught are good and correct, are not so. This is not out of malice or
denial, so much as simple disagreement. On the other end of the spectrum are those who are too addicted to their vices, or enslaved by their emotions, despite the plight that afflicts them as a result. Perhaps they envision their emotions and vices as a badge of honor, or a source of pride. Or perhaps they do find that their way of life is painful and unpleasant, and do wish to make a change, only for this sentiment to be short lived, vanishing as soon as the pain subsides. Or maybe they are fully vicious, and their habits too ingrained to be undone. We may ask ourselves what the Stoic is to do in order to guide such people towards the good, and free them from their distress. The answer is often simple enough: Nothing. The individual in question is a practitioner of Stoicism, not sorcery.

Discerning who can be helped is often a matter of judgment. While the Stoic may make a preliminary effort to see how amenable one might be to persuasion, rhetoric, punishment, or even emotional coercion—and use these methods to move others towards the good—there is a point at which the prudent Stoic realizes that this person is beyond their ability to change or help, because this person has no wish for it. As helping to do away with passion or leading one towards virtue is a long and difficult process during the best of times, it is wise to attempt to find trees that have the capacity to bear fruit, so to speak. The Stoic is also aware of the importance of choosing one’s intimates wisely, as there is often a subtle transference of traits from person to person, unbeknownst to us in the moment. If we choose calm, tranquil, thoughtful friends, we will be imparted with some of these traits. If we choose chronically

38 Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 10.4
39 Seneca, Epistulae, 29.3
angry, avaricious and vile friends, we should not be surprised to discover that our path to virtue has been impeded, and our growth to this point diminished.

5 Stoic Pragmatism

Within the previous sections, I have focused on how the Stoic views the emotions, as well as how the Stoic avoids emotions, within and outside of themself. I have also focused on the manner in which a Stoic will attempt to guide others towards tranquility and being unmoved by fortune. I will focus on how the Stoic attempts to pursue other goals, as although the extirpation of emotions is a goal, and --a worthy one at that— it is not the only goal held by the Stoic. The Stoic also hopes to live a life of virtue, not just internally, but a life filled with virtuous actions. They hold that virtue is the only good, and vice the only evil. Considering their belief that humans by nature should be helpful and cooperative with one another, it also holds that while freeing one from suffering is a great service, assisting them in getting closer to a virtuous life by even a small degree is also to provide a boon upon them.

Emotions often tend to interfere in this endeavor to a certain extent, both for the Stoic student themselves if they have not fully done away with them, and perhaps even more severely for the layperson who is indifferent or unfamiliar to the Stoic theory of emotions. In instances such as these, when emotion plays some role, we may wonder if the good or something not far removed from it may come about. Does any action that motivated by feeling nullify the worthiness of the act that comes from it. I seek to argue that the Stoic does not think that this is the case. A good is still produced, but one that is perhaps less preferable than one produced from reason alone. The Stoic would find the ability to motivate a subject to act in a manner akin to how a virtuous agent should act, adequate for their purposes. While an
appearance of virtue is never the ideal for which the Stoic strives, it is often a single step out of 
the woods and towards the path of virtue.

However, to accomplish this, it is often the case that pure reason does not motivate 
certain agents enough, due to their previous habituation. In situations such as this, I believe that 
although emotions are dispreferred, they can perhaps act as a spur to motivate others onto the 
right path, even if they do not realize it. To this end, the Stoic should be willing to act upon the 
emotional predilections of others to generate an action conducive to virtue. Furthermore, I 
believe that the inverse is often true. An action done by the Stoic that considers the emotions or 
feelings of others can create a virtuous action where none may have existed otherwise.

I have given an example of how the Stoic may act upon our predilections earlier in this 
text. The individual who shames me into walking an old lady across the street has motivated 
me to act rightly and bring forth a good action even if my primary motivation was the 
avoidance of shame. I will now focus upon how actions done out of consideration for others 
may create a virtuous action.

For instance, let us imagine I discover a small child crying because his soccer ball has 
been stuck in a tree, and he is unable to fetch it himself. I do not think any Stoic would feel that 
what has transpired would constitute actual harm. The harm stems from the child’s impression 
that being unable to access this external object is harmful to them, and their assent to this 
impression. As I do not think what happened was an actual harm, one might argue that I could 
simply shrug and be on my way, and this is in fact an option. However, another interpretation 
is that although this item is in fact an indifferent and it is unfortunate that this child does not
realize it, the suffering that this child is experiencing still exists, regardless of—and admittedly, because of—their confusion. As a Stoic, I realize this and am aware that we should cooperate with one another whenever possible, I acknowledge that although this child is wrong, the most expedient and virtuous way to cease the suffering present in this child is to simply retrieve the ball for them. This is to bring about a virtuous action that stems from the feelings of another person.

When I suggested that certain goods are less pure than others based upon the context which they are found, this draws upon the idea of primary and secondary goods within Stoic thought. A primary good can be considered one that accords perfectly with reason, virtue and our nature as human beings. It grows from ideal soil to produce the ideal bounty. Conversely, a secondary good is something that not only does not accord with nature or virtue but may often be contrary to such things. It comes from much poorer soil than a primary good, but there is still something of worth within it that can bring about a good if properly tended to. However, while these goods are classified as primary and secondary, this does not suggest that the good stemming from a secondary good is any less worthy than a primary good, as any amount of good is equal to another:

On the first day, our topic for discussion was this: how can all goods be equal to one another if they are of threefold status? It is the position of our school that some goods are primary—for instance joy, peace, the safety of one’s homeland—while others are secondary, manifested in unfortunate material, such as endurance under torture or
self-control during serious illness. The former goods we choose for ourselves unconditionally, the latter if it becomes necessary. (Seneca, *Epistulae*, 66.5)

It is perhaps more accurate to consider secondary goods as something of equal value to a primary good yet obscured and concealed by things of lesser or even no value. As a result, we are required to rummage through the refuse to obtain it, while the value of a primary good is instantly apparent. A bar of gold, and another coated in soot are still of equal value. As I have previously mentioned, the Stoics would often use rhetoric or the appearance of certain emotions within themselves to manifest a type of emotion in others and spur them to action. This is considered to be a good and choiceworthy action, both for the Stoic, and the actor who they have influenced. This can be considered guiding the emotions of others towards the good. Emotions are considered both irrational and undesirable to the Stoic and contrary to human nature. However, I believe that one may argue that by exhorting another to act towards the good despite their emotional tendencies, a secondary good is being brought forth. The Stoic would never choose emotions, and they believe that those who choose to embrace them are in error. Nevertheless, it is preferable for one who possesses emotions to display traits that provide a resemblance to virtue in situations where such actions would be appropriate.

However, this is not the only option open to the Stoic. It is entirely possible to use the emotions of others to guide the Stoic towards the good. To the Stoic, many things that are indifferent to our ability to live well and in accordance with reason can be used to generate virtue or virtuous action. It is also possible that certain emotions have a hint of goodness at their

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core, with the honoring of this sentiment bringing about a positive result for all. Seneca illustrates this idea when he resists death—an indifferent to the Stoic—for the happiness of another:

One has to give in, you see, to honorable feelings. There are times when, to honor a family member, one has to summon back one’s dying breath, however painfully, and actually hold it in one’s mouth. A good man should live not as long as it pleases him but as long as he ought to. The person who does not think enough of his wife or his friend to prolong his life—who insists on dying—is thoroughly self-indulgent. When the interest of loved ones demands it, the mind should require even this of itself: even if one not only wants to die but has actually begun to do so, one should interrupt the process and give oneself over to their needs. And so my Paulina succeeds in burdening me not only with her fears but also with my own. (Seneca, Epistulae,104.3-5)

In Seneca’s example, the effort to resist death is described as difficult and painful, and death is certainly within accord with nature. It is explicitly an indifferent to the Stoic, to boot. Nevertheless, to persist despite this for the sake of another is certainly a virtuous act of the secondary kind. By acting in consideration of these feelings, provided that the action is not conductive to vice, the Stoic is able to act in a manner which brings forth virtue. This is while also ending the distress and suffering of another.41 The Stoic would not, for instance, decide to

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41“’Unmoved’ was the Stoics’ standard word for a mentality from which all ‘irrational’ emotions, such as envy, dread, anxiety, or lust, are absent. Epictetus himself uses the word in just this way, so to gauge his meaning in the present passage the crucial words are ‘not like a statue’. He is not advising his students to be emotional in their human relationships, but he is telling them to be open enough to other persons to be affected by the relationships in which one stands to them—not to be stony or impervious.” (A.A.Long, Epictetus: A Stoic And Socratic Guide to Life, 232)
help slay the lover of his dear friend because it would bring make his friends life easier in some manner, ending his fear of her revealing their relationship. The intent that powers the emotion and the good that stems from it are both salient factors, and the mere removal of pain in this situation would be of little concern to the Stoic. This would be a vicious action for concealing vicious ends, and the type of good the Stoic seeks to recover from any situation is entirely absent. A wish worthy of the Stoic would be one that has good intentions and generates a good from its fulfillment. To be clear, the emotions are still based on certain misunderstandings and incorrect judgements within the Stoic conception. Despite this however, the Stoic can detect hints of virtue within these considerations and may attempt to act in service of them despite this fact.

This leads me to believe that a Stoic, within the context of their interactions with others will often attempt two things. Firstly, they will assess the feeling held by others to see if there is anything noble or of value within their sentiments, as incorrect and irrational as they might be. Secondly, they would see if the action required of them may accord with reason. If this is the case, then they will act to draw forth the good from this sentiment and manifest virtue through their actions both through removing the distress of another and through the completion of a virtuous endeavor.

As I have discussed previously, the Stoic would have little issue exploiting the emotional dispositions of others to exhort them towards the good. They also would use the same dispositions to bring out a good and remove suffering when possible. When we consider this, we may begin to see how the Stoic pursues virtue. If, for example we were to consider the
Stoic within the context of an unjust or oppressive situation in which they interact with others who, like the Stoic believe that this certain situation is unjust. However, unlike the Stoic, they believe that anger and/or despair are emotions appropriate the situation in which they find themselves. It seems unlikely that the Stoic would refuse to interact with them to find a solution to said injustice, given their agreement on the most important matter.

The primary concern of the Stoic should be to act in a way which manifests virtue, which in this instance is through the disruption of injustice, and to help rid others of their emotional distress. It is entirely possible that the actions taken to accomplish this are one and the same for the Stoic. As such, the Stoic would choose to ally with those whose reasoning is impaired by emotion—but not entirely incorrect, as the Stoic agrees with the fact there is injustice—to bring about the best result. The fact that they are compromised by emotion is worth noting, to be sure. However, this does not exclude cooperation, so long as a good can be brought forth regardless.

The fact that they feel despair as they attempt to dismantle an unjust system does not disqualify them for the Stoic’s aid. The Stoic will attempt to meet people at the level they are at, working towards improvement from there. As noted previously, the Stoic has no illusions about how people operate as a result of their habituations and has shown a willingness to tolerate such things to an extent. Perhaps the Stoic and their consolation would be even more useful in such instances, helping to keep the emotions from running roughshod over their counterparts.
and leading them to the path nearest to virtue that can be managed at the moment. This idea also extends to the Stoic guiding others, awakening them to act against vice and injustice, by stroking embers of emotion into a flame, giving those who are unable or unwilling to act solely from reason the strength to do what should be done.

Finally, it is entirely possible that a struggling Stoic—one who has not achieved equanimity of spirit—is able to use the feelings they still struggle with to produce a good, despite their considerations not being manifested from reason alone. To the Stoic, there are certain proto-emotions or feelings that precede emotion, serving as an impulsive first reaction to a stimulus. While the Stoic has the ability to reject or assent to the impulse, the impulse will nevertheless still register with the Stoic. Perhaps they may be considered as instincts left over from previous habituation which due to their instinctive nature are not easily rooted out, much like a reflexive reaction to pull our hand away from a hot object. While one could overcome the impulse when focused, it is rather difficult to simply do away with it altogether. Seneca differentiates emotion from this type of impulsive sensation, as one in which the mind does not act upon the impulse, or the impression that follows:

Suppose that someone has reckoned he was harmed, wants to take revenge, and then immediately calms down when some reason urges against it. I don't call this anger,

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42“This is the method proposed by Chrysippus: rather than addressing questions of value, one seeks “to get rid of the person’s belief that mourning is something he ought to do, something just and appropriate. In other words, one persuades the sufferer that even if his circumstances really are evil, still it is not appropriate for him to cry or to experience distress.” (Stoicism and Emotion, 197)
43Therapy of Desire, 391
44A.A.Long, Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life, 245
I call it the movement of a mind still obedient to reason; anger’s something that leaps clear of reason, that snatches reason up and carries it along. (Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.3.4)

Seneca makes a clear differentiation between an individual that feels an impulse to seek vengeance and begins to agree with the impression that such an action is appropriate, before reason convinces them otherwise. This is contrasted by one who feels the same impulse, yet fails to disrupt this impression, and whose emotion overtakes this reasoning leading them astray. In this way, we can see how the psychological mechanisms that produce these proto-emotions are not far removed from physiological ones in that they often happen swiftly and beneath the surface. However, while this part cannot be helped, the Stoic believes that the actual production of emotion can be nipped in the bud:

We cannot avoid that first mental jolt with reason’s help, just as we cannot avoid the other movements that (as I’ve mentioned) befall our bodies, just as we cannot avoid having another’s yawn provoke our own or avoid closing our eyes at the sudden poke of another’s fingers. Reason cannot overcome those movements, though perhaps their force can be lessened if we become used to them and constantly keep a watch for them. That second movement, which is born from deliberation, is eradicated by deliberation.

(Seneca, *On Anger*, 1.4.2)

Simply put, the problem to the Stoic is not that we think that something is good or bad at first blush. It perhaps cannot be avoided without active training and preparation in this regard. The issue is when we fail to critically evaluate the truth of these claims, which are often incorrect to the Stoic. Or, although something may strike me as a positive thing at first glance,
only for me to realize it is not truly a good. Although I should not allow myself to be drawn in by it, I may still ask if it is suitable for my purposes, those I care about, or even society at large.

Perhaps this would explain how Seneca felt it appropriate to stave off death for one dear to him for no other reason that it should please them. Although the Stoic does not fear death, and the emotions of others are not entirely the concern of the Stoic—as they are outside of our complete command—we may feel a certain disposition to ‘humor’ them in a way. When examined on the spectrum of appropriateness, and this action done with the good in mind, should serve to create a good.46

In summation, the Stoic holds no illusions about the world they live in, and the various types of people who inhabit it. This understanding informs the way they proceed to pursue the good, avoid vice, be free from suffering and spur others forward to do the same. I have discussed how the emotions of others may not be ideal, but they can play a role in guiding them towards the good. This is in addition to guiding our own actions through the pursuit of secondary goods, or goods found in things that are not strictly in accordance with human nature. I have also discussed how the Stoics may work with others to bring about a good, such as through an effort to eradicate injustice, and how this cooperation may unfold. Lastly, I have

46 Do not allow yourself* to be wholly carried away by your impressions but help people as best you can and as they deserve, even if what they have lost is of no inherent value. You should not form the impression, however, that any real harm is involved; for that is an unhealthy habit. Rather, you must act like the old man [in the play], who, when he went away, would ask for his foster-child’s top without losing sight of the fact that it was merely a top.” (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 5.36) See also: A.A.Long, Epictetus: Socratic and Stoic Guide to Life, 247
discussed how certain feelings and impulses may inform the conduct of the Stoic. This is by realizing that although these things are often indifferent, choosing them regardless of this fact may help to alleviate suffering in another, and thus bring about a virtuous action.

6 Conclusion

By and large, the Stoics consider emotions to be irrational, pointless, and often detrimental to our well-being. They are contrary to reason, and laden with impressions and values of good and evil that are incorrect, as is the psychological reaction that comes from assenting to these impressions. They are unreliable, pushing us to such heights—or dragging us to such lows—that a reasonable, rational person would never entertain, let alone allow. As such, the Stoic considers how they live their lives in such a society. This is to avoid danger to both their body, and more importantly their spirit. This danger occurs when things are incorrectly coveted or despised because of a misunderstanding of what is valuable, and what constitutes good and evil. By understanding how human beings have fallen short in this regard, the Stoic is better able to exercise caution to avoid needless strife. The Stoic also understands the importance of choosing intimates of quality, as they can help enrich the Stoic as they proceed on their path towards virtue and tranquility. Or they can weaken them, often without the Stoic realizing it, through the subtle strength of influence and the human tendency towards socialization.

The Stoic also has given thought to how one might attempt to rid others of the suffering that emotions generate and the methods most conducive to this, along with the restoration of
reason, and the pursuit of virtue. The Stoic recognizes that sometimes the best tool to
accomplish this, is one that may seem counter-intuitive at first glance. Despite the weaknesses
of emotion, it can also be used to direct the behaviors of others, to guide them towards virtue, or
away from vice. The Stoic holds that acting from reason is more than a match for motivations
stemming from emotions. However, they also recognize how the reasoning of the masses may
be obstructed or perverted by their habituation and uses the emotions within them as one
would a cattle prod to direct a beast. The Stoic will attempt to bring forth a type of good from
this type of person, sifting through the emotional refuse to bring out that which is truly valuable
within. They will also work with such people to accomplish the same within the world at large.
Lastly, although the Stoic rejects the lure of the emotions and false impressions within
themselves, they still recognize the natural impulses that flow from our psychological
responses. As such, they will consider these instincts to see if there is anything of merit to them
in terms of their appropriateness, even if these feelings are indifferent to vice and virtue.
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