Dripps' approach is neither particularly historical nor critical, but is more poetic and, as suggested initially, religious. While he has not invoked particular deities, his reverence for myth colors the work. One senses in the pragmatic approach his need for grounding practice in more transcendent principle, even if the principle itself be grounded only in human need for it. This pragmatic tautology may not be rationally compelling, and one may dismiss invention of myths as merely the comforting therapy of religion, but Professor Dripps' poetic intuitions surmount this sort of criticism. He conveys deep concern and sensitive perceptions in fine, if occasionally inflated, prose. His text is complemented by evocative drawings, equally poetic. Readers of this journal who are not architectural specialists may react favorably to these qualities, but may find most relevant the relation of the work and its representation of current architectural issues to the classical tradition. Readers interested in a more scholarly study of many theories and myths about the origin of architecture in antiquity may turn to Joseph Rykwert's work.[22]

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A Stoicism for Our Time?

Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 217 pp.

Stoicism is hot these days. When Epictetus' Stoicism provides the deliverance of two of the three main characters in the most recent work of novelist Tom Wolfe,[1] it is evident that its impact has reached beyond scholarly circles and into the literary imagination of popular culture. Within academe, Stoicism has won a new convert: the contemporary moral philosopher Lawrence C. Becker. In *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, 1998), Becker makes a daring, creative use of the ancient Graeco-Roman heritage of the Stoa to outline a rigorously conceived, technically sophisticated, contemporary version of stoicism (deliberately uncapitalized by Becker). His project is not an attempt to reconstruct any ancient version of stoicism, but rather is "an investigation of neglected possibilities, written by a stoic who is merely trying to show a skeptical audience that his ethical theory is philosophically viable" (7). Notice that Becker openly declares his allegiance to stoicism. This approach has three salutary effects.

First, he can embrace most of the tough doctrines of the ancient Stoic tradition. This imparts refreshing candor and unusual directness to his project. In contrast to Becker's explicit identification with the stoic camp, classical scholars whose studies of

22. Dripps mentions *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* and other Rykwert works in his bibliography, and in his Acknowledgements recognizes Rykwert's influence, but absence of reference to Rykwert's studies in the narrative itself is a conspicuous omission.

1. *A Man in Full* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998). Charlie Croker, the principal character, is converted to Stoicism by Conrad Hensley. The third main character, Roger 'Too' White, pursues political power, not Stoic wisdom.

ancient Stoic philosophy show an appreciation for its theoretical strengths invariably either implicitly or explicitly disavow stoicism.[2]

Second, Becker is free to reinterpret or modify other ancient Stoic doctrines, and even to abandon those few that have been scientifically discredited and, he believes, are eliminable from stoic ethical theory. For instance, he rejects stoic theology altogether by abandoning the metaphysical doctrine that the universe should be understood as a purposive, rational being. By modern scientific consensus, a teleological physics and biology is insupportable. Consequently Becker needs no doctrine of cosmic *telos* to prop up his neostoicism. On the other hand, he defends the eudaimonist basis of stoic ethical theory while rejecting the fashionable claim that ethics is autonomous, being derived from either *a priori* principles, sentiment, utility, rights, duties, or contractual arrangements. Becker also commendably attacks the rampant caricature of the stoic sage as emotionally detached, capable merely of endurance and resignation, but quite incapable of joy.[3]

Third, Becker can employ sophisticated logical notation to construct a calculus for normative logic that perspicuously demonstrates how normative propositions can be generated, and thus how stoic practical reasoning might operate *in concreto*. Serious attention to logic testifies to Becker's fidelity to the Chrysippan tradition within the Stoa, though on most doctrinal controversies Becker sides with Posidonius. The neostoicism that emerges is a challenging secularized form of ethical naturalism informed by contemporary cosmology and by developmental psychology, and advanced with vitality and flair.

The first chapter, scarcely longer than a page, galvanizes the reader from the outset. Becker decries how, after enjoying five centuries of prominence in Greek and Roman antiquity, "stoic ethics was pillaged by theology and effaced by evangelical and imperial Christianity" (3). He explains how the only shards of stoic doctrines that survived into the Middle Ages were the analgesics used in pastoral counseling, the military, and what then passed for medicine and psychotherapy.[4] Later, the significant challenges to stoic metaphysics were presented by modern science and by the rise of ethical theories hostile to eudaimonism. Philosophy in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Becker laments, ultimately scuttled the stoic project by fobbing off the fact-value distinction to the social sciences and by ushering in nonnaturalism, noncognitivism, intuitionism, constructivism, the coherentist interpretation of moral truth, pluralism, relativism, irony, and dogmatism about natural duties and the intrinsic moral worth of human beings. He concludes Chapter 1 by bemoaning the fact that the only groups that now say anything in favor of stoicism are soldiers who prefer stoic psychotherapy to morphine and mood enhancers, logicians who appreciate stoic work

2. A. A. Long, for example, declares "I am not . . . offering neo-Stoicism as the philosophy for our time," *Stoic Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 177.
3. For more balanced studies, see G. B. Kerferd, "What does the wise man know?" in J. M. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 125–136; Margaret E. Reesor, "The Stoic Wise Man," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* V (1989): 107–123, with respondent's "Commentary" by Wolfgang Haase, ibid., 124–134; A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies*, 85–106 and 167–171; and William O. Stephens, "Epictetus on How the Stoic Sage Loves," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XIV (1996): 193–210.
4. See Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic tradition from antiquity to the early Middle Ages*, 2 vols., Studies in the history of Christian thought 34–35 (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1985; 2nd ed. ibid. 1990).

on the propositional calculus, and Hellenists who argue that the ancient stoics' ethical doctrines were not (for their time) foolish (3–4).

A modernized neostoicism that strips away those features of ancient Stoicism long since discredited by science and philosophy is outlined in Chapter 2. Becker imagines a treatise in which virtue, happiness, and the good life are identified with living well in terms of the available resources. Living well in this sense is the product of following the final, all-things-considered normative propositions of practical reason. These normative propositions cannot be constructed *a priori*, but rather depend crucially upon the fullest available knowledge of the natural world. Construction of these propositions always begins with what is possible for a particular agent with a particular history, character, and range of choices. Thus such particulars are generalized only to the extent that agents have a common history, nature, and situation. These propositions, such a book would show, rarely ratify the agent's narrow self-interest; rather, in typical cases following them means realigning or overriding many of one's dearest wishes. The book would describe a character-building regime for this purpose which emphasizes control of one's mental states as a means of overcoming obstacles to living well. It would also discuss how natural endowments and circumstances determine whether living well is compatible with intense longing, passionate commitments, grand gestures, and reckless adventure, or whether it always requires the bland, cautious existence described in contemptuous essays on stoicism. Becker writes:

> That book would be in the stoic tradition, in the sense that it put forward a cluster of doctrines traceable to central elements of classical stoic ethics. It would be eudaimonistic, in identifying the good life or happiness with flourishing—with being excellent-of-one's-kind. It would be intellectualistic, in identifying virtue with rationality—with carrying out the normative propositions of practical reason. It would be naturalistic, in its insistence that facts about the natural world were the substance of practical deliberation. And because the book would argue that virtuous conduct was always the same one thing (namely, conformity to practical reason), the book, like the stoics, would propound the formal unity of the virtues. Moreover, the book's focus on the full particularity of each agent could be seen as a remnant of the stoic notion of a role for each of us in the grand system of nature. The emphasis on self-mastery would also be familiar. (5–6)

Becker adds that his book "is less ambitious than the one we have just imagined, but it is in the same line of work" (6). This two-and-a-half-page chapter ends with the warning that he is offering neither an exposition nor a defense of ancient stoic texts. Instead, his examination of such texts so as to justify calling his project stoic is placed in commentaries appended to subsequent chapters. Toward the end of this article I will return to discuss the success of his attempted justification.

In Chapter 3 Becker aims to convince readers who are dubious of the idea that a contemporary revival of stoic ethics should be undertaken at all. He begins by arguing that ethics is independent of religion (8) but is not an autonomous discipline because it has no unique method or subject matter. He argues that neostoic ethics is subordinate to all branches of rational inquiry and science because it cannot do its normative work until all relevant empirical descriptions of the facts of the natural world are in hand. Hence, since the natural sciences reject the anthropocentric view of the cosmos, neo-

stoics follow the scientific consensus that the universe is unimaginably large and old, and in constant evolutionary change. Neostoics also grant that there is no evidence that our galaxy, planet, or species is central to any cosmic process, and that there is no evidence that the natural history of earthly life is of any cosmic significance. From these and other facts about existing values, preferences, projects, commitments, and conventions, human agents construct normative propositions about what we ought to do or be all-things-considered. Thus, in its general purpose, stoic ethics is like other advice-giving endeavors, such as etiquette, coaching, medicine, and psychotherapy. So although ethics does not have its own special subject area or form of reasoning—and so is the last and least branch of human inquiry—Becker contends that it is also the first and foremost human enterprise since only its normativity is all-inclusive (9). For Becker, "stoic moral training aims to develop in each agent the disposition to seek social roles, conventions, and institutions in which she has more rather than less control of her own life, unless having less can be shown to make a countervailing contribution toward a good life for her" (19). Moreover, stoic training aims to enable agents to salvage some form of good life under adversity, and to handle sudden, massive changes in our circumstances. Since full integration of our many commitments, projects, and endeavors requires superlative development of our agency powers, practical reasoning all-things-considered necessarily plays a dominant role.

In his commentary to Chapter 3, Becker explains that he chooses not to use Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius because of their preoccupation with quasi-theology, moral training, therapy, and the notion that everyone has a 'role' in a cosmic plan (22–23). Becker's choice to discard Epictetus and Marcus on this score is unfortunate because, among other philosophical strengths a closer reading of these thinkers can provide, it overlooks a powerful distinction between what is 'up to us' and what is 'not up to us'. This fundamental dichotomy is entirely devoid of unwanted theological taint and was used by Epictetus with tremendous leverage in illustrating how a Stoic reflects on practical matters. Becker examines the relationship between physics and ethics in ancient Stoicism, and argues for a non-reductive physicalism as the modern version of the ancient Stoics' particularism and corporealism. Moreover, he reminds readers that "stoics are perfectly aware of the importance of all of the things people ordinarily count as goods" and "are not committed to the position that pleasurable affects, friendship, and so on are merely instrumental or 'extrinsic' goods" (29). The stoics, Becker explains, have a unitary rather than a plural conception of the good life. Stoics hold that whether goods are diverse or not, there is only one set of them sufficient for making a life good. This set, the final end, stoics hold, is virtue, and is alone what is necessary and sufficient for a good life. Yet at the same time Becker allows that stoic sages in different circumstances and ages will organize their virtuous lives and pursue their chosen projects and activities in quite diverse ways.

Chapter 4 contains a formal description of the normative practical logic sketched informally in the first three chapters. Becker identifies four axioms that he claims make his normative logic definitively stoic. The Axiom of Encompassment: the exercise of our agency through practical intelligence, including practical reasoning all-things-considered, is the most comprehensive and controlling of our endeavors. The Axiom of Finality: there is no reasoned assessment endeavor external to the exercise of practical reasoning all-things-considered. The Axiom of Moral Priority: norms generated by the exercise of practical reasoning all-things-considered are superordinate to all others. The Axiom of Futility: agents are required not to make direct attempts to do (or be)

something that is logically, theoretically, or practically impossible. Becker could have strengthened his account of the Axiom of Futility by linking it to the ancient Stoic doctrine of what is 'up to us' and what is 'not up to us'.

In Chapter 5, Becker wisely reinterprets the stoic slogan 'follow nature' to mean follow the facts. All the discernible facts about the physical and social world we act in, and all the available facts about the particular situation of individual agents must be had prior to deliberation about norms. Normative conclusions are constructed, then, *a posteriori* from this plethora of facts. As our empirical knowledge of the facts changes, so too must our normative propositions be adjusted to fit those changes. Becker's case for neostoicism is again compelling.

> Stoic ethical theory is not enslaved by nature, gods, emperors, or the status quo. Stoics have been slaves (and emperors), but have opposed the institution of slavery. Stoics have lived in parochial settings, but have argued for cosmopolitan politics and universal moral norms. Stoics have accepted the facts of oppression and danger for what they are, but have fought to the death. Stoics have adjusted to a changing world, but have also committed suicide as a matter of principle. Following nature—following the facts—is not quietism, conformity, or passivity.
>
> Nor is it romanticism. Stoics do not confuse virtue with genius, heroism with metaphysical rebellion, nobility with contempt for the mundane, emotion with passion, passion with loss of control, loss of control with largeness of spirit, victory with triumph, or tragedy with death. (43–44)

The remaining sections of this chapter are packed full of dense, conceptually rich, often suggestive but highly technical discussion. The discussion of heteronomous endeavors, autonomous agency, and freedom would have been better illuminated had Becker been more generous with examples. But his explication of how stoics can avoid fatalism "by taking human freedom to consist in the determinative effect we have, through the exercise of our agency, on what happens in our lives—*including what happens with regard to the exercise of our agency itself*" (65) is appealing. Becker emphasizes the considerable causal powers of human agency and maintains that, on the stoic view, a life without metaphysical liberty can still be a life of undiminished virtue and happiness. Consequently, the riddle of causal determinism is rendered unimportant given the aims of stoic ethics.

In articulating the sense in which stoicism is a form of ethical naturalism, Becker follows Annas[5] in his commentary to Chapter 5. He also characterizes as the linchpin of the stoic account of moral development the concept of *oikeiosis* and the cradle argument—the psychological process by which humans develop from initial narrow self-interest in infancy to being motivated by universal moral theory in adulthood. Becker persuasively contends that neostoic psychology is congruous with contemporary 'textbook variety' psychological theory.

The many wonderfully illustrative examples in Chapter 6 make for almost sprightly reading compared to the theoretical thickets of Chapter 5. Neostoics hold that virtue consists in perfected agency, which does not admit of degrees, while the exercise of agency (virtuous activity) does admit of degrees. Becker attributes the seemingly in-

5. Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

tractable disputes between Kantians, utilitarians, contractarians, intuitionists, and other non-stoic theorists to their overly simple or even formal accounts of agency. He proceeds to offer a schematic description of agency as a material reality that "emerges in the normal course of psychological development, beginning with the behavior of infants in the cradle" (83). This cradle argument emphasizes the recursive, hegemonic nature of agency and suggests the futility of using extremely reductive or abstract notions of its constitutive elements for the purposes of ethical theory. Becker's account shines. The lucidity of the following passage is characteristic of the analysis of this chapter.

> Consider the response of a toddler who trips and falls suddenly, skinning his knee. What will he do if his mother shows happy surprise, scoops him up encouragingly in her arms in a way that reinforces his interest in playing, distracts him momentarily by straightening his shirt, and then helps him examine the wound with clinical interest? By contrast, what will he do if his mother shrieks in alarm, scoops him up protectively in a way that focuses his attention on his pain, and mirrors his fear and pain by responding sympathetically to his cries? We have all seen the difference, and it is a remarkable one. It is a difference not only in how much (or whether) the toddlers cry and stop playing to devote themselves to this new endeavor, but evidently in how much pain they experience as well. (97)

Becker forcefully propounds stoic physicalism in holding that the circumstances of healthy agency are a subset of the circumstances of physical health. And just as an agent is routinely motivated to preserve her or his health, so too will he or she endeavor to perfect her agency. Becker introduces a helpful distinction between health, fitness, and virtuosity. Whereas fitness is excellence for a given circumstance or purpose, virtuosity is the maximization of various properties of fitness. He quite plausibly maintains that agents persistently prefer fitness to health and virtuosity to fitness. Fitness in the case of agency, he explains, results from increasing the scope, strength, speed, accuracy, stability, control, and effectiveness of one's powers of deliberation and choice for practical purposes generally. Virtuoso agency, in turn, is as versatile and adaptable as is required for the optimization of the agent's practically possible endeavors. Ideal agency is this virtuoso agency—an ability developed to the limit of human capability, not merely to the limit of a given agent's capability. Becker convincingly argues that virtuoso agents are made, not born. They are made by having to learn to cope with passion, fear, pain, loss, depression, disappointment, malevolence, failure, and their opposites. So even a loose approximation of ideal agency will require a long, full, complex, challenging, and worldly life (108). To exercise one's agency one must aim, through practical reasoning, at the global optimization of one's current and future projects. Developing the strong norms corresponding to the usual notions of wisdom, justice, benevolence, courage, temperance, and other such traits is a necessary condition for developing one's agency from health to fitness to virtuosity. Becker concludes that for a healthy agent, regardless of her circumstances, virtue as a set of dispositional powers is unconditionally a good, right up to the moment of death. Moreover, virtue is the *only* unconditional good. This is because over the course of their psychological development, healthy agents develop a superordinate affection for virtue—for the exercise of the sort of agency that optimally coordinates, integrates,

and implements their endeavors. And once virtue becomes healthy agents' most comprehensive and controlling endeavor, its value for them will be incommensurable with that of other good things in the sense that nothing will be an adequate substitute for virtue (121–122).

Commenting on Chapter 6, Becker contends that stoic moral psychology satisfies Flanagan's account of minimal psychological realism.[6] I think Becker succeeds in showing that the motivational structure needed to pursue the ideal of the sage is practically possible, and that achieving the ideal is theoretically possible. Yet he dodges a tough question when he concedes that "it is of course true that it is impossible to exercise agency at all when our stock of external goods falls below some minimum level" (128). What, we must ask, counts as a 'minimum level'? If tennis is one of my endeavors and I lack either a partner to play with or enough money to buy indoor court time through the winter, is my agency partially thwarted? Or is Becker's 'minimum level' the fewest possible calories of food per day I need to avoid persistent fainting while pursuing a couple of very low energy, solitary endeavors? Becker neglects to even approximate what minimum stock of external goods is required to exercise agency at all. And when a stoic's stock of external goods *does* fall below this unspecified minimum, does suicide then become required, advisable, or indifferent? Some account of the criteria that recommend suicide in Becker's neostoic framework is needed in this discussion but is provided neither here nor elsewhere.

His appropriation of a Dickinson poem,[7] on the other hand, is quite effective in the defense of his view that passions generated by true beliefs are not ruled out by stoic doctrine. Only passions that are infantile, bestial, unintegrated, or incapacitating preclude perfecting one's agency. Indeed, Becker's contention that stoic sages ought to be passionately affected by virtue, and surpassingly so, since they perceive it to be surpassingly valuable (132), is intriguing.

In Chapter 7 Becker argues that happiness as understood by mature and fit agents is a property of whole lives, not of transient mental states. The sage, he supposes, will want the biological completion of her life to coincide with its biographical completion. The good life for the sage is unified and replete with activity that exemplifies the virtuosic exercise of practical intelligence in every context, from local to global. Becker softens the stoic doctrine that pleasure adds nothing to the virtuous, happy life by holding that pleasures add no *virtue* to the virtuous life, but they do add nonagency goods to it. Thus the virtuous life with nonagency pleasures is reasonably enough preferred to the virtuous life that lacks them. Becker uses an aeronautical analogy to illustrate how agency "is a balance between our dispositional ability to maneuver effectively toward our goals, responding with practical intelligence to salient events along the way, and our dispositional resistance to being deflected by the shifting winds of impulse and circumstance" (142). He presents a fine example of how a grieving nurse can quickly release her despair in the face of an emergency in order to act from her healthy agency. Neostoics endorse the ability to exercise or recapture such control whenever practical intelligence calls for it, though luxuriating in passion is sometimes perfectly harmless. The ancient Stoics demanded extirpation of all violent passions (*pathe*) while sanctioning what they called *eupatheiai* or 'good emotional states'. So Becker is not beyond the pale, as some may think, in rejecting the idea that

6. Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
7. T. H. Johnson (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), poem 249.

the sage is unfeeling.[8] He concedes that sages suffer on the rack, but they differ from the rest of us in their virtuosic abilities to resist the defeat of their agency under conditions that would defeat merely fit agents.

The commentary to Chapter 7 contains lengthy quotations from Long and Sedley[9] on Stoic eudaimonism and from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* Book V on the thesis that virtue is sufficient for happiness. Becker rejects a very robust form of the idea of the connectedness of all parts of the sage's life that would preclude spontaneous fun or morally indifferent hobbies. While he holds that sages are attentive to, and act on, the norms generated in all the contexts in which their lives are embedded, from local to global, he insists that nothing in his neostoicism entails that a virtuous life must be an abundantly social or political one.

On this point Becker's neostoicism has drawn criticism for failing to prescribe any particular solutions to the question of how societies and their economies should be organized so as to be just. The complaint continues that both Becker's neostoic and the ancient Stoics suffer from this dearth of political theory because both emphasize reforming individuals as moral agents functioning within institutions *rather than* criticizing those institutions themselves.[10] Becker might reply by insisting that social institutions are derivative since "all actual endeavors, no matter how complex and social, are at bottom facts about the conduct and character of individual agents" (47). Yet I think he has an even better reply. Becker appears to have missed another opportunity to avail himself of Epictetus' basic distinction between what is 'up to us' and what is 'not up to us.' Individuals, he could argue, are well situated to pursue their own affairs and to try to conduct their own lives justly as things within their power. In sharp contrast, very few (or none) are in a position to reshape entire institutions, rearrange whole economic systems, transform governments, and restructure societies so that they are just. The apolitical stoic could thus maintain that he is not mindlessly embracing the status quo, but rather seriously heeding the Axiom of Futility with regard to large-scale political reform.

Is Becker's neostoicism stoic enough? He has abandoned some stoic doctrines: virtue is the only good; the universe is a providentially organized, rational being; all human emotions must be extirpated. He has also omitted the Stoic doctrine of suicide and the distinction between what is and what is not up to us. Is the system he is left with really stoicism? One critic claims that Becker's is a "Stoicism eviscerated."[11] But in so far as he is firmly committed to an uncompromising rationalism in the conduct of one's life and a naturalism that follows the facts afforded by our best available empirical science, his project is indeed arguably and interestingly *within* the Stoic philosophical tradition. After all, Stoicism was itself reinterpreted and refashioned by its ancient proponents, who occasionally disagreed with one another. Becker has at the very least made a serious case for calling his system 'stoicism' by offering careful rationales for each of the doctrines he retains, revises, or rejects. Critics who disagree cannot simply complain that since his system lacks doctrines x, y, or z, it just isn't Stoicism. The issue is whether what Becker offers is what *a stoicism at the end of the twentieth century* would

8. See my "Epictetus on How the Stoic Sage Loves" (cited in n. 3 above).
9. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
10. R. W. Sharples, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 98.11.12.
11. Victoria Voytko, *Ancient Philosophy* 19: 1 (Spring 1999): 195–199.

look like. His critics must then either enter the debate, engage with the details of his account, wrestle with his arguments, and construct their own alternative versions of neostoicism, or quietly allow Becker to label his system as he pleases.

Though the majority of its opponents from antiquity on typically resorted to caricature in order to vilify stoic philosophy, Becker has done much more than demonstrate that "stoicism does not license stupidity" (157). *A New Stoicism* is a vigorously argued manifesto that explodes this myth—stoics can hope—for good. Becker deserves praise for producing an exciting, sophisticated, and promising outline to be fleshed out by other ethicists similarly emboldened to call themselves stoics.

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