A History of Habit

From Aristotle to Bourdieu

Edited by Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published by Lexington Books
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

10 Thornbury Road, Plymouth PL6 7PP, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

TO COME.
Aesthetics and modernity : essays / by Agnes Heller ; edited by John Rundell.

p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7391-8198-0 (cloth : alk. paper) -- ISBN 978-0-7391-8199-7 (electronic)
test 1. Aesthetics. 2. Postmodernism. I. Rundell, John F. II. Title.
test BH39.H445 2011
test 111'.85--dc22
test 2010037457

♾™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

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habit."[9] Finally, it is more than apparent that a keystone in the history of habit is the translation of the Greek *hexis* into the Latin *habitus*. A proper linguistic study of this important transition is absent from our collection, and bridging this gap would require a close inspection of the work of Quintillian and Cicero, among others.

Despite these lacunae—born certainly of necessity rather than neglect—readers will find in these pages a representative tour of the philosophy of habit. While it is inevitable that some reviewers will find our omissions scandalous (such is the fate of endeavors such as this), we are confident that the rough texture of philosophical thinking about habit has not been smoothed out. In other words, we hope to help generate a more historically informed discussion of habit, *not* provide a definitive history of it as a subject.

2. THE CHAPTERS

The book is divided into three historical periods. Each chapter is written by a specialist. Part I showcases some classical thinking on the role that habit plays in the determination of character. A concern with the cultivation and maintenance of ethical integrity (taken in the structural sense) is the red thread that runs through this set of essays. The opening chapter by Thornton Lockwood lays the groundwork for each of the chapters that follow it by providing a close textual analysis of the concept of *hexis* in Aristotle, who forms a central reference point for every philosophy of habit that comes after him. In an attempt to contest the view that what Aristotle bequeaths to us is a non-philosophical, mechanistic view of character formation Lockwood explores the Greek vocabulary of habit which attends Aristotle's thinking of ethical character. Lockwood works to dissociate the repetitive interpretation of habituation from Aristotle's less mechanistic understanding of ethical character. He argues that Aristotle's notion of ethical excellence is best formulated in terms of *hexis*, rather than *techne* or *ethos*, precisely because the former bears a moral connotation lacking in the latter. The ethically virtuous person is not defined by the skills she possesses, but by the habits she embodies and, with a certain virtuosity, summons in the appropriate circumstances.

In chapter 2, William O. Stephens turns his attention to the teaching of the Roman Stoics Seneca, Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus, whose ethics prescribe a way of life organized by the rigorous rejection and cultivation of habits of thought, action, and emotion. The advantageously organized life only results from careful attention to the metaphysics of human action, and consistently sound judgments about the good, the bad, and the indifferent. Consistency of judgment leads to consistent—that is, habitual—actions, which ultimately pave the way to happiness. Not unlike Aristotle, who understood virtue and, consequently, happiness to be a product of long-established habit, the Stoics regard happiness as something achievable for most people only after a lifetime of training (*askēsis*). In addition to outlining the accounts of habit provided by three major figures in the history of Roman Stoicism, Stephens surveys the diverse habits to be shunned or adopted by the Stoic who aspires to live a life of virtue, that is, to live a life in accordance with nature and reason.

Robert Miner's essay on Aquinas (chapter 3) explores the supposed contradiction between habituation and freedom of the will, a topic that arises again and again in the essays that follow. Miner demonstrates how, for Aquinas, *habitus* actually conditions "freedom in its most desirable form." He provides readers with a non-technical presentation of the Scholastic's analysis, proceeding in four steps which clearly articulate the principle, subject, cause, and distinction of habit as Aquinas understands it. He helpfully contrasts habit and its cognate, disposition, and concludes by comparing Aquinas with Nietzsche's remarks on habit in *The Gay Science* §295 (referenced above) in order to evince the compatibility of habit and freedom, as conceived by both philosophers.

Margaret Watkins (chapter 4) closes Part I with a close look at the *Essays* of Montaigne, a figure who synthesizes ancient and medieval thinking on habit in a subtle ideal of personal integrity. Watkins picks up on Montaigne's suspicion of habit as an artificial and settled custom, a "second nature," before going on to adduce Montaigne's ambivalent reflections on the reliability of character. She argues that what Montaigne calls "custom" bears a complex relation to the late-medieval (Aristotelian) understanding of "habit," one that raises certain paradoxes of freedom and necessity. Montaigne does not settle with a paradox, however, but prescribes a paramodern form of self-stylization that strives for excellence by balancing the force of habit with the force of reflection freely undertaken. Liberation from custom as second nature, Watkins shows, is perhaps achievable via the self-cultivation of a virtuous character or, alternatively, via an engagement with Montaigne's *Essays* themselves.

Part II considers some of the many ways that habit is taken up in modernity, sometimes for intellectual and sometimes for practical purposes. Toward the end of the modern period the concept of habit is systematically and famously mobilized by the American pragmatists, who find habits at work in every domain of existence. This is not surprising given that their predecessors had already articulated the place of habit in methodology (Descartes), epistemology and moral philosophy (Hume, Adam Smith), educational theory (Locke, Rousseau), as well as metaphysics (Maine de Biran, Ravaisson, and Bergson). Dennis Des Chene (chapter 5) examines the consequences of the replacement of the late-medieval notion of *habitus* with that of "trace" in the early modern period. Specifically, Des Chene is keen to demonstrate that,

Chapter Two

The Roman Stoics on Habit

William O. Stephens

The ancient Stoics believed that the cultivation of proper habits is indispensable for making progress toward virtue. They maintained that the goal of life is to live in agreement with nature.[1] For human beings, they insisted, this entails living in agreement with reason. The perfection of reason they understood to be virtue. Consequently, according to Stoic theory, rehearsing rational judgments about what is good, what is bad, and what is neither good nor bad, and consistently applying these judgments in our daily circumstances to decide what to do and how to live, enables us to become virtuous and thereby live happily. But these rational judgments and the appropriate actions that flow from them require vigilant practice and discipline to maintain in the face of life's challenges, which non-Stoics mistakenly believe are debilitating hardships. Such so-called "hardships" are conceived by Stoics as opportunities to exercise one's virtue(s) by applying the proper judgments to each event that occurs and making the correct decisions in each situation of public and private life. Consequently, the virtues result from disciplining oneself *consistently* to make sound judgments about (a) the actions performed by accountable human agents, (b) the behaviors of children and nonhuman animals, (c) events uncaused by human beings, and (d) one's personal and professional roles and social relationships. This consistency is manifested in habitually acting in accord with those judgments. For virtually everyone, achieving this takes a lifetime of training, or longer. The Stoics called this rigorous, deliberate, and painstaking training *askēsis* in Greek and *meditatio*[2] in Latin. They compared it to the grueling program of exercises adopted by athletes preparing to compete in the Olympic Games, medical treatment of disease, and the boot camp drills and active duty service of soldiers. In this paper I will outline the views on habit of three of the four[3] great Roman Imperial period Stoic philosophers, Seneca the Younger, Musonius Rufus, and Musonius' student Epictetus.

1. SENECA

The corpus of Lucius Annaeus Seneca,[4] more commonly known as Seneca the Younger, is by far both the most diverse in types of writings, and easily double that of the philosophical writings derived from the other Roman Stoics combined. In addition to some epigrams, nine tragedies are attributed to him, a satire on the apotheosis of the emperor Claudius, a kind of scientific treatise, *Natural Questions* (in seven books), nine shorter essays on assorted ethical topics, three essays each written to console a loved one who had suffered a loss, *On Mercy* (in three books), a work Seneca composed to advise his student the young emperor Nero, and seven books on how to give and receive benefactions, or what we could call "favors." Seneca also composed one-hundred and twenty-four letters of varying length, addressed to a friend named Lucilius, which conduct an interpersonal philosophical exchange centering on the moral improvement of both the addressee and the author.[5] While the philosophical remains of Musonius Rufus, the four surviving books of the *Discourses* and the *Handbook* of Epictetus, and the *Memoranda* of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus are in Greek, Seneca's extant prose and poetry is in Latin.[6]

The semantic field of the English word *habit* is not tidily circumscribed by one or two words in classical Latin. Instead, there are a cluster of Latin terms, each of which conveys shades of meaning that intersect, to a greater or lesser extent, with the concept examined in this volume. *Habitus* can mean a habit or state of mind, but Seneca rarely uses the term, and in only a few of these texts of his does it carry this sense. The verb *habitō* can mean to wear habitually, to live in, inhabit, to dwell (in a place), to be housed, to lodge, and to spend all one's time. In its intransitive form, the verb *suēscō* means to be accustomed. In its transitive form, *consuēscō* means to accustom, inure, habituate, while in its intransitive form it means to accustom oneself, to become accustomed. These verbs are related[7] to the noun *consuētūdō* , whose range of meanings include habit, custom, convention, etiquette, (linguistic) usage, or a chronic condition or illness. Seneca uses this family of terms often. *Dispositiō* can have the sense of *habit*, but its use in Seneca is very rare and has the sense of *orderly arrangement*. The Latin noun *mōs*, *mōris* can mean custom, usage, fashion, established practice, rule, law, or ordinance in the singular. The meaning of the plural form of the word, *mōres*, is immediately recognizable to English speakers, and the Latin term means conduct, behavior, manners, morals, or character. Seneca generally uses the term in these senses, and not so much in the sense of *habits*. Lastly, Seneca deploys *soleō* (*solitus*) to mean variously to be accustomed to, to be in the habit of, to be used to, to be wont to, to be prone to, to be apt to, to be likely to, often, general, usual, characteristic.[8]

In what follows in this section of the chapter, I do not offer a canvas of all instances of these terms. Instead, I select those texts which display Seneca's remarks about habit that I find characteristic of his thought, insightful, and most philosophically interesting. I have grouped them in a sequence designed to provide a particular narrative that illustrates a sensible analysis and progression of ideas on habit, its relation to virtues and vices, and the work it does for wisdom's guidance in the good life. Alternative groupings of these texts, as well as the inclusion of additional ones, would each yield alternative philosophical analyses, which would be not only possible, but probably also legitimate. My route through these texts, however, proceeds as follows.

(§A) To begin, certain features of human beings are implanted in us by nature, are intransigent, and thus limit those of our behaviors that are subject to change through re-habituation. Dimensions of our physicality cannot be amended by the intervention of reason. (§B) Within these limits, however, habit has the power to alleviate what we initially experience as disasters, as some people adapt better than others to the constraints imposed by fortune. What fortune inflicts as necessity, habit can transform into contentment. (§C) Poverty, grief, and ambition are experienced differently by different people, because our minds are colored by the habits and beliefs we adopt. False beliefs spawn bad habits. True beliefs about that which is unconditionally good (virtue), that which is really bad (vice), and that which is neither (e.g. wealth, poverty, prestige, infamy, health, illness, prolongation of life, death) free us from jealousy, resentment, anxiety, fear, panic, anger, intemperance, and mental disorder. (§D) Consequently, we imperil ourselves by neglecting to banish false beliefs about what is good, what is bad, and what is neither good nor bad. Rehearsing false beliefs about such things ingrains the beliefs in our thinking, thereby corrupting our minds, and inculcating the mental disorders known as vices. (§E) Several types of bad habits and the vices they entrench are discussed. The evil habits and mental illnesses of some people are incorrigible. Those of others can be remedied. (§F) Physical illness, sleeplessness, love pangs, and liquor can provoke the passion of anger. We cannot overcome our physical frailties related to these conditions, but the right kind of stern upbringing and the formative power of good habits can ameliorate them to some degree. In contrast, the soul is weakened by coddling and softened by luxury, spoiling the temperament and enflaming irascibility. Imbibing immoderately causes irritability that can trigger wildness, which can boil up into insanity. Moderate use of alcohol is not an evil habit. Illness hampers performance of physically active tasks, but a well habituated mind remains unhampered though the body is bed-ridden. (§G) Habit returns us to nature and natural pleasures. Attention to utility allows us to measures our true needs, but habitually indulging in unnecessary pleasures risks deforming them into what people (wrongly) feel are indispensable needs. This explains the birth of perverse gratifications like cruelty and criminality. Dear attachment to our family, home, and the like is benign and arises partly from old habit and long familiarity. (§H) Perseverant philosophizing provides the wisdom needed to distinguish good habits from bad, and to become good persons. (§I) We must learn how to live reasonably on only what we genuinely need, instead of succumbing to the pressure to conform to custom and live as our consumptive, unreflective neighbors do. Seneca's own intellectual habits include appropriating items of wisdom found in other authors. (§J) I conclude with his discussion of the human habit of dividing the self in order to engage in self-evaluation.

A. Intransigent Nature and the Limits of Reform via Re-habituation

Seneca reports having had a conversation with one of Lucilius' friends and notes the man's ability, intelligence, and the self-improvement he had already made. Speaking without forethought, at one point the man was caught off guard and blushed out of modesty. Seneca tells Lucilius that this hue of modesty is a good sign in a young man, as the blush seemed to well up from deep inside. Seneca expresses his confidence that the man's propensity to blush will stick with him after he has fully strengthened his character, stripped off all his faults, and grown wise.

> For by no wisdom can natural weakness of the body be removed. That which is implanted and inborn can be toned down by training (*arte*), but not overcome. The steadiest speaker, when before the public, often (*solet*) sweats profusely, as if he had exhausted or over-heated himself. The knees of some shake when they rise to speak. I know of some whose teeth chatter, whose tongues falter, whose lips quiver. Training and experience can never shake off this habit; nature exerts her own power and through such a weakness makes her presence known even to the strongest. I know that the blush, too, is a habit of this sort, spreading suddenly over the faces of the most dignified men.[9]

Seneca adds that blushing is more prevalent in the young, due to their warmer blood and more sensitive faces, yet seasoned and elderly men blush as well. Seneca instances Sulla, Pompey, and Fabianus, who reddened when he appeared as a witness before the senate. Seneca finds this embarrassment entirely apt given the gravity of the setting, and thus quite becoming to Fabianus. This kind of habit is due not to mental weakness, but to the novelty of the situation. An inexperienced person is not necessarily confused by the novelty, but is nonetheless affected by it, because he slips into his habit of blushing as a natural tendency of his body. Seneca observes that certain people are full-blooded, and others have quick, mobile blood that swiftly rushes to the face.[10] He insists that

> wisdom can never remove this habit, for if she could rub out all our faults, she would be mistress of the universe. Whatever is assigned to us by the terms of our birth and the blend in our constitutions, will stick with us, no matter how hard or how long the soul may have tried to master itself. And we cannot forbid these feelings any more than we can summon them.[11]

Consequently, no amount of habituation can erase our indelible genetic make-up. What nature implants in us at birth and knits into the very fabric of our physicality is permanent. The mind can neither summon nor vanquish the blush response that inheres in our flesh. "It comes and goes unbidden as a law unto itself."[12]

Passions, on the other hand, are a different, more complex matter. Seneca explains that the passion of anger, as it begins, grows, and gets carried away, unfolds in three stages or movements. The first movement is an involuntary preparation for the passion, like a kind of threat. The second movement is voluntary, but is not insistent. The third stage is out of control and has completely overcome the power of reason.[13] He writes:

> The first movement is a mental jolt which we cannot escape through reason, just as we cannot escape those physical reactions which I mentioned—the urge to yawn when someone else yawns, or blinking when fingers are flicked at the eye. These cannot be overcome by reason, though habituation and constant attentiveness may perhaps lessen them. The other sort of movement, generated by decision, can be eliminated by decision.[14]

Seneca allows for the possibility that concerted attempts to train ourselves not to yawn when others do or not to blink when someone suddenly thrusts his fingers toward our eyes may lessen the first stage reaction in the birth of anger. But it is the second stage that is generated by decision. This is the decision to assent to the judgments that (a) I have suffered an undeserved injury by another, (b) *and for that reason* it is right for me to (or I should) retaliate. To reject judgment (b), even if we assent to (a), is to issue a new decision "I will not retaliate" which eliminates and replaces (a) + (b). Seneca believes that the power of reason enables us to train ourselves to decouple (b) from (a), and for more advanced Stoics, perhaps even reject (a) at the outset. Strategies for how to cultivate the habit of not conjoining (b) with (a), and how to rethink and discard (a) whenever (a) suggests itself to us, occupy much of *On Anger*. The violent horrors that all too often result from anger[15] make it abundantly obvious that anger is a plague on the human mind that must be totally eradicated. Fortunately, we can decide to commit ourselves to the sturdy, vigilant practices needed to achieve this eradication.

B. Habit Has the Power to Alleviate Disasters

Habitually training oneself to arrest the second stage of the three stage cognitive mechanism that produces anger requires repeating the same decision over and over again daily, monthly, or perhaps for years. But Seneca believes that even habits which we had no part in choosing to live with can alleviate our suffering. Indeed, conditions imposed upon us against our will that are initially onerous can gradually become lighter thanks to the effects of habit.

> Bear in mind that it is only at first that prisoners are worried by the burdens and shackles upon their legs. Later, when they have resolved not to chafe against them, but to endure them, necessity teaches prisoners to bear their shackles bravely, habit to bear them easily. In any sort of life you will find that there are amusements and relaxations and pleasures if you are willing to consider your evils lightly rather than to make them hateful. On no score has Nature more deserved our thanks, who, since she knew to what sorrows we were born, invented habit as an alleviation (*mollimentum*) for disasters, and thus quickly accustoms us to the most serious ills. No one could endure adversity if, while it continued, it kept the same violence that its first blows had. All of us are chained to Fortune."[16]

Young men with rapid blood are chained to Fortune in that they have no control over their blush response. We are all chained to Fortune when an object hurtles toward our eyes and we cannot help but blink. Fortune chains us to our skin's pigmentation, our sex, a host of allergies, astigmatism, macular degeneration, deformities of the teeth, skeleton, vital organs, limbs, and face, all the peculiarities of our phenotypes, and all the frailties of our biology.[17] Seneca reflects that our daily routines deceive us into believing that we can always postpone hard work another week or longer and just relax. There always seems to be more time, so why rush? What is it which makes us so lazy and sluggish? None of us thinks that some day we must depart from this house of life. Just so, Seneca notes, tenants are kept from moving by fondness for a particular place and by habit, despite bad treatment by their landlord and neglect of the properties they rent. Tenants such as these, like the shackled prisoners, are stuck in a rut they can no longer feel. The more familiar the rut, the cozier it feels.

Seneca offers the insight that necessity, despite how unpleasant it feels at first, can, given enough time, gradually become pleasant. "There is no unhappiness for those whom habit has brought back to nature. For what they begin from necessity becomes gradually a pleasure."[18] Nature is relentless. Yet those who struggle and strain against Her, striving to escape the gravitational pull of Nature's norms, are relieved of their misery by simply letting go and returning home to Her. Those habits in accord with the best parts of our human nature deliver us to this happy reunion.

C. Different Strokes for Different Folks: How False Beliefs Lead to Bad Habits

Some prisoners feel the weight of their chains more heavily than others, just as some tenants are more tightly moored to their old, familiar, shoddy apartments than others. Different people are attached more or less strongly to different kinds of things. Some have sensitivities and vulnerabilities that others either largely or entirely lack. Thus, Seneca remarks that poverty, grief, and ambition are felt differently by different people as determined by how their minds are colored by the habits they happen to have, and a false presumption. This false presumption arouses in them a fear of things that are not to be feared and makes them weak and unresisting."[19] For example, Stoics deny that poverty is an evil. Stoics reject grief as a mental disorder that results from the false belief that a truly bad thing has occurred that robs one of a good life. Stoics also discredit ambition aimed at fame, glory, or accumulating riches, since these things are fleeting, the pomp of empty names, and ultimately worthless. Non-Stoics, in contrast, are weak in the face of popular opinion and cannot resist the false opinions that poverty is bad, grief over the death of a loved one is proper and "natural," and fame, status, glory, wealth, and health make a life good or even contribute to happy living.[20] These false opinions are the false presumptions Seneca has in mind.

Take wealth. Suppose you consider wealth to be a good. If so, Seneca explains, then poverty will distress you. This is because, though you may be rich, since your neighbor is richer, you will suppose that you are poor by the exact amount in which you have less wealth than him. Take social position. If you judge that an elite job position is a good, you will be troubled at someone else's appointment to an office higher than yours. You will be jealous when another receives the renown or material blessings you don't. Take death. You may rate death as the worst of evils, despite the fact that only the fear that precedes death's approach is evil. If so, Seneca argues, you will be terrified out of your mind, not only by real dangers, but also by merely imagined ones.[21]

> For peace itself will supply more fears. Even in the midst of safety you will have no confidence if your mind has been shocked once. Once it has acquired the habit of blind panic, it is incapable of providing even for its own safety. For it does not avoid danger, but flees. Yet we are more exposed to danger when we turn our backs.[22]

Consequently, the repetition of false beliefs about poverty and wealth, good repute and ill repute, high and low social rank, death and life, and generally what is bad and what is good, harms a person's mind. The habit of blind panic induced by the fear arising from not knowing any better cripples our ability to make ourselves safe. And we are endlessly exposed to the dangerously false beliefs of the ignoramuses, the non-Stoics, who vastly outnumber and surround us.

Given how false beliefs lead to bad habits, and how bad habits, namely, those contrary to nature, guarantee misery, Seneca advises his friend Lucilius to act, in all their plans and conduct, just as they are in the habit of acting whenever they approach a huckster who offers to sell them certain wares. Seneca cautions: let's see how much we have to pay for what we want. All too often the commodities that cost nothing (i.e., no money), cost us the most heavily, that is, in the only currency that purchases happiness, that is, a free, virtuous mind supplied with true beliefs. Seneca promises that he can show his friend many baubles the quest for which, and the acquisition of which, have ripped freedom from our hands.[23] *Caveat emptor* is a time-tested, prudent policy. Seneca shrewdly applies it to the beliefs we cart home from the marketplace of opinions. The peddler's false opinions about what is good, bad, and neither, are too pricey. Freedom and peace of mind are worth far too much to barter over.

D. Bad Habits that Ossify Cannot Be Broken and Ruin the Soul

In *Letter* 112 Seneca enacts a conversation with Lucilius by anticipating his friend's responses. The topic at hand is Lucilius' eagerness for a friend of his to be shaped and trained by the methods of self-improvement Seneca rehearses throughout the *Letters*. Seneca doubts that this can be achieved. Lucilius' friend has degenerated into a very hardened state, or rather what is worse, a very soft state, due to having been broken down by bad and inveterate habits.[24] To illustrate how this can happen both to human beings and to other living things, Seneca describes from his own experience how the technique of grafting vines varies according to the age and strength of the vines involved.[25] By analogy, the man in question has no strength to draw upon in order to receive the graft of a healthy, new habit. The problem is that he has pampered his vices. He has simultaneously become flabby and ossified. He can neither receive reason nor nourish it. "But," Lucilius protests, "the man desires reason of his own free will." "Don't believe him," Seneca replies. The flab-hardened fellow doubtless really *believes* that he desires the reason required to purge his bad, unhealthy habits. But this belief will be short-lived because gorging on luxury has merely upset his stomach for the moment. He will soon become reconciled to luxury again, Seneca assures Lucilius.[26] "But he says that he is annoyed by his former way of living," Lucilius replies. Seneca grants that this is quite likely. "People love and hate their vices at the same time. It will be the proper season to pass judgment on him when he has guaranteed us that he really hates luxury. As it is now, luxury and he are merely not on speaking terms."[27] The sick pleasures that vicious conduct gives to those who develop a taste for them are strongly seductive. That is why people love their vices. But the damage vicious behavior inflicts on their souls is severe. Healing these injuries requires reform of character, and this takes effort and time. Some cannot muster what it takes to reverse the degeneration. They hate their vices, but have become addicted to them.

In contrast, there are also certain men possessed of unusual qualities who reach without prolonged tutoring that which is ordinarily gained only by means of extensive teaching. These gifted individuals welcome honorable things as soon as they meet them. Their superior minds seize quickly upon virtue, or else they manufacture it from within themselves. But Lucilius' dull, sluggish friend who is hobbled by his evil habits, Seneca explains, must have the rust on his soul incessantly scraped off. As the former sort of people, who are inclined towards the good, can be raised to the heights of virtue more quickly, so the weaker spirits will be assisted and could be freed from their wicked opinions if Seneca and Lucilius entrust to them the accepted principles of philosophy.[28] The philosophical principles of Stoicism can elevate both those with a natural talent for virtue and the slow-learners wallowing in bad habits of mind. A Stoic has ideals to strive for. Seneca remarks that life without ideals is erratic, and as soon as an ideal is to be set up, doctrines become necessary. Adherence to these doctrines, habitual application of them to one's daily life, demands attention, commitment, and perseverance. Progress in approaching Stoic ideals also requires courage. Seneca writes to Lucilius: "I am sure you will admit that there is nothing more shameful than uncertain and wavering conduct, than the habit of frightened retreat."[29] This is why Seneca is so pessimistic about the moral improvement of Lucilius' sluggish pal. He complains about his vicious habits and thinks he wants to shed them one day, but then wavers and fearfully retreats from an effort to put those bad habits to rout. The crud that accretes to his soul nourished by his diet of disgusting habits must be scoured again and again, so the likelihood he can burnish his soul into a condition of gleaming virtue is nil.

Yet assistance in breaking a bad habit can come from someone else too. Seneca suggests that if one person can help another put a halt to a fault—can get him to check his piece of bad behavior for a time—and he gets into the habit of stopping it on his own, then it's possible to make the fault cease altogether.[30] Perhaps this is the help Lucilius had hoped to give his sluggish friend. Seneca thinks that the sluggish fellow's "habit of frightened retreat" back into his vices undercuts the man's desire for self-help. If a person doesn't genuinely want to dispel his fault, the prompting of a friend who wants to help will fail.

E. Two Harmful Habits

Two specific bad habits mentioned by Seneca are noteworthy. One is the harmful tendency to hear nothing that we don't like.[31] This habit is dangerous because when it is pierced it invites the false judgment that someone has wronged us, which we will recall is the judgment complicit in the first stage of the origin of anger. If we habituate ourselves to be happy only when what we hear pleases us, we will crave the company of toadies. Toadies cannot promote our self-improvement. Instead, we must teach ourselves to handle the truth about everything, not least of all ourselves.

Credulity is another risky habit of mind. Seneca thinks credulity is a source of great mischief. "We should believe only what is thrust under our eyes and becomes unmistakable, and every time our suspicion proves to be groundless we should chide our credulity. For this self-reproof will develop the habit of being slow to believe."[32] Diligence in examining evidence for a belief before adopting it increases the chances that the belief is true.[33] I will return to the importance of self-reproof for Seneca in §J below. Insofar as credulity and hearing nothing we dislike make us prone to judge that we've been wronged by another, they are clearly perilous. For Seneca sees anger as "the most hideous and frenzied of all the passions."[34] Human beings in the grips of rage are insane.[35]

F. Sickness, Sleeplessness, Love, Liquor, and Anger

While some people have an angry disposition by nature, Seneca believes that many circumstances can have the same effect as nature. Some grow angry due to disease or physical injury. Others are led to ire by exertion or prolonged sleep deprivation. Still others are inclined to get angry as a result of attacks of anxiety during the night, yearnings, or pangs of love. But Seneca regards all these circumstances as just the initial causes of anger. He writes that the most powerful factor in the genesis of wrath is habit. If habit is oppressive, it fosters the fault.[36] Seneca opines that the best way to keep people from developing an angry temperament is to give children a sound upbringing from the cradle.[37] What a child needs is to learn how to compete without losing his cool. In contests with others of his age, we should urge him to do his best neither to be defeated nor to grow angry. We should encourage him to become a close friend of his regular opponents, so as to give him the habit, in sporting contests, of wanting not to hurt those whom he respects, but to win fair and square.[38] Exposure to luxury, a soft, coddling education, and material prosperity make people ill-tempered.[39] Seneca advises against ever flattering children. They should be told the truth, respect everyone, and rise for their elders. Children must never be allowed to get their way through tantrums or tears.[40] But the more prosperous one gets, according to Seneca, the more subject to anger one gets. Ill-temper is especially prevalent in the affluent, the privileged, and those in high positions in society.[41] Seneca is deeply suspicious of the supreme regard most people have for acquiring showy furnishings and mansions, accumulating expensive toys, and the race to keep up with the latest fashions, as I will discuss below in §I.

Excessive consumption of alcohol warrants caution as well. Seneca believes that just as a lingering illness makes people whiny and irritable and drives them wild at the least crossing of their desires, so too frequent, continued bouts of drunkenness bestialize the mind. For when people are often beside themselves in a fit of pique, the habit of insanity endures. Consequently, Seneca thinks that the vices which liquor generated retain their power even when the alcohol is gone.[42] Yet he does not prescribe teetotalism.

> As in freedom, so in wine there is a wholesome moderation. It is believed that Solon and Arcesilaus were fond of wine, and Cato has been reproached for drunkenness. But whoever reproaches that man will more easily make reproach honorable than Cato base. Yet we ought not to do this often, for fear that the mind may contract an evil habit, nevertheless there are times when it must be drawn into rejoicing and freedom, and gloomy sobriety must be banished for a while.[43]

Thus, Seneca believes that wholesome moderation in consuming liquor saves it from degenerating into an evil habit. Both gloomy sobriety without respite on the one hand, and alcoholism on the other, must be avoided.

Comments about illness and sick people are scattered throughout Seneca's *Letters*.[44] He talks about his asthma[45] and on two occasions being ill.[46] But when Lucilius complains that an illness prevents him from performing any of his duties, Seneca replies that illness hampers one's body, but not one's soul. "If your soul be habitually in practice, you will plead and teach, listen and learn, investigate and meditate."[47] Consequently, Seneca assures his friend that he has the ability to condition his soul to overcome the illness of his body. Even when laid up in bed, a Stoic can converse with others and thereby teach and learn from them. When alone in his sick bed,[48] a Stoic can read, remember, study, and contemplate on his own.[49] Indeed, Seneca thinks that illness is no excuse to stop caring about one's personal concerns and to forget one's professional affairs. Rather, one should try to recover as soon as possible.[50]

G. The Needs of Nature: Pleasure, Pain, and Perversion

In *On Providence*, Seneca argues that frequent struggles with adversity toughen us up. Familiar exposure to danger will train us to have contempt for danger. Sailors' bodies are hardy from rough sea voyages. Farmers' hands are callous from working their fields. Soldiers' brawny arms can hurl heavy spears. Runners' legs are nimble. Regular exercise of a body part or faculty makes it strong and sturdy. Seneca reflects that the Germanic tribes along the Danube, oppressed by gloomy skies and eternal winter, eke out their sustenance scratching up meager crops from barren soil and ranging over icy marshes hunting wild beasts, and shelter in thatch-roofed hovels. Yet he imagines them happy, because their austere habits have returned them to nature. "For what they begin from necessity becomes gradually a pleasure."[51] His idea is this: what we get used to, we come to like. If what we get used to conforms to what our human nature really needs, then our way of life will be healthy, fit, and excellent. But if we indulge in superfluity so often that we develop a taste for it, our luxurious habit will make us sickly, reduce our bodies to flab, and infect our minds with disease.

Seneca argues that utility, not superfluity, measures our needs. But once people immerse themselves in unhealthy pleasures habitually and become so accustomed to them that they depend on those pleasures as crutches they cannot manage without, they have sunk into a most wretched condition.[52] In this way what once provided pleasure becomes an obsessive affliction. Withdrawal from what one has grown addicted to is torture.

Pretense is another kind of torture, according to Seneca. There are those who are bent on striking a pose. They never reveal themselves to anyone frankly. If you are candid with no one, your anxieties have no outlet. Many live a false life that is staged only for show, and it is torturous to be constantly watching oneself and to fear being caught out of one's usual role.[53] If you live your life constantly acting the part of a *dramatis persona* who is not you, worries about your theatrical mask slipping and revealing the real person underneath it will consume you. The habit of pretense takes you hostage and subjects you to agony.

Seneca thinks that everyone enjoys his own crimes. One person delights in an intrigue, because the very difficulty of pulling it off was an attractive challenge. Another enjoys forgery and theft and is only displeased with his sin when it fails to hit its target. All such vicious gratification is the result of perverted habits, according to Seneca.[54] Yet the consequences of this corrupt gratification are inevitably painful. So, people love and hate their vices at the same time.[55]

How do we measure our needs when it comes to what and how we eat? Food must be our most familiar source of pleasure. What does Seneca say about choice of diet? We read in the *Letters* that his teacher Sotion explained to him that Pythagoras and Sextius had different reasons for the same regimen of abstaining from animal food. Sextius believed that we have enough sustenance without resorting to blood, and that a habit of cruelty is formed whenever butchery is practiced for pleasure. Seneca recounts that after a year of abstaining from meat, his vegetarian habit was as pleasant as it was easy and that he was beginning to feel that his mind was more active. Unfortunately, during this time certain foreign rites were being inaugurated, and abstinence from certain kinds of animal food was adduced as evidence of interest in the strange foreign cult. Seneca explains that his father detested philosophy, and so presumably also the philosophical reasons that Seneca presented in defense of his vegetarianism. He confides to Lucilius that, at the request of his father, he abandoned his meatless diet.[56]

Seneca realized he could live well, perhaps even better, without meat. But some things we cannot live without. He divides necessary, as opposed to useful, favors (*beneficia*) into three groups: (1) those without which we are unable to live, (2) those without which we are able to live but ought not to live, and prefer to die than to lack them, and (3) those without which we are unwilling to live. Things in this third group are "dear to us through kinship and blood, through old habit and long familiarity, such as children, wives, home, and anything else that the mind becomes so attached to as to make it harder to be robbed of it than to be robbed of life itself."[57] Clearly Seneca regards these sorts of things as healthy attachments rather than unhealthy addictions. Seneca's remarks arguably conform to Stoic orthodoxy in grouping life itself and the human beings we marry or parent within the class of things that are neither good nor bad. How we *treat* our family members is very much either good or bad. Therefore, to be unwilling to lose your family or home, and to accept your own death more lightly than their deaths or the loss of your home, in no way betrays your virtue. Virtue alone counts as a Stoic's only true good.

H. Love of Wisdom, its Benefits, and the Happy Life

Seneca asserts that (1) no one can live an endurable life without studying wisdom and beginning to achieve it, and that (2) a happy life is reached only when one's wisdom is brought to completion. These commitments must be strengthened and implanted by daily reflection. Seneca urges Lucilius to persevere and develop new strength by continuous study until that which is only a good intention (*bona voluntas*) becomes a good, settled purpose (*bona mens*).[58] Whether fate chains us with inexorable law, or God as arbiter of the universe ordains everything, or chance impels and tosses about human affairs without method, Seneca argues that philosophy ought to be our defense. Philosophy will encourage us to obey God cheerfully, but Fortune defiantly. Philosophy will teach us to follow God and endure chance. Seneca cautions Lucilius against allowing his spirit to weaken and chill, and instead to hold fast to it and establish it securely, in order that what is now impulse may become a habit of the mind.[59]

To love and seek wisdom is to be a philosopher. To attain wisdom is to become a sage.[60] The Stoics taught that virtue is a single state of mind of the sage, and that what we may think are many different, separate virtues—justice, courage, temperance, generosity, equanimity, beneficence, cheerfulness, honesty, patience, diligence, etc.—are actually only different names of this single, unified, right state of mind, wisdom. Thus, the Stoics defended the view that only the sage has this right state of mind. Seneca wonders,

> What is more gentle than a human being when he is in a right state of mind? But what is more cruel than anger? What is more loving to others than a human being? What more hostile than anger? Human beings are born for mutual help; anger for mutual destruction.[61]

Anger is a kind of insanity. Ordinary people get angry. Hence, ordinary people suffer from a kind of insanity. A human being in the right state of mind is calm, gentle, and completely free of the insanity that is anger. His habits of mind over years of practice have extirpated all mental disorder and replaced it with abiding wisdom and philanthropy. The wise person is sane, loving, helpful to others, a mensch—the perfected human being.

I. Conforming to What Reason Says We Need Rather than to Custom

Seneca tells Lucilius that no one can have whatever he wants, but one can have this truth: that it's possible not to want what one doesn't have and to make cheerful use of what is on offer.[62] In order to experience this cheerful use, however, the philosopher must discipline himself with frequent tests. Seneca explains his practice of austerity to Lucilius in the following text worth quoting at length.

> You see, I have undertaken a kind of impromptu trial of my mind; this kind of test is more candid and revealing. For when the mind has prepared itself and commanded itself to endure, then it is not so obvious how much real firmness it has. The most reliable proofs are those which the mind gives without warning, if it contemplates troubles not just with equanimity but with contentment; if it does not flare up in anger, does not quarrel; if it makes up for the lack of something which it ought to have been given by not wanting it and if it reflects that although there might be something missing from what it is accustomed to, the mind itself lacks nothing. With many things we don't realize how superfluous they are until we begin to lack them. We made use of them not because we needed them but because we had them. And how many things do we acquire just because others have done so, because most people own them! One cause of our troubles is that we live by the example of others; we do not arrange our lives by reason but get swept away by custom. If just a few people did something we wouldn't want to imitate it, but when many start to do it, then we conform and do it too, as though it were more honorable because it is more popular. Once a mistake becomes widespread we treat it as being right.[63]

Seneca is no fan of fads, vogues, trends, or novelties. He encourages Lucilius, and himself, to guard against being bewitched by the ubiquitous refrain that everyone needs things that they don't already have. But Seneca doubts that satisfaction can be reached by grasping for what our neighbors tire themselves out trying to obtain. Rather, contentment comes from eschewing the practices of consumerism, materialism, ownership, and money-grubbing, which were as customary in the upper class Roman society of Seneca's day as they are in much of American society today. Seneca and the Stoics believed that wisdom is rare and ignorance is common, so the fact that many people value and pursue certain things is no good reason for thinking that those things are actually good and worth pursuing. That would be to commit the informal fallacy of appeal to popular belief.

Seneca shares with Lucilius the idea that "contented poverty is an honorable estate" and explains that he discovered this pearl of wisdom when reading Epicurus. Though he is an avowed Stoic, Seneca says that he is accustomed to cross over even into the enemy's camp, the camp of the Epicureans, not as a deserter, but as a scout.[64] Elsewhere Seneca mentions his habit of trying to extract and make useful some element from every field of thought he encounters, no matter how far removed it may be from philosophy.[65] Wisdom must be recognized and embraced no matter where we read or hear it.

J. The Habit of "Dividing" the Self and Putting Oneself on Trial

An orthodox doctrine in Stoic philosophy of mind is that a person's mind is unitary, not divided into parts that can function separately or conflict with one another, as Plato[66] and Aristotle seem to have believed. While not rejecting this psychological monism, Seneca notes that "the instances in which habit leads us to divide ourselves into two persons are countless; we are accustomed to say: 'Let me converse with myself,' and 'I will give my ear a twitch.'" By the latter he means "I will jog my memory." He contends that just as it makes sense for us sometimes to get angry with ourselves, blame ourselves, cause ourselves loss, and injure ourselves, it makes equal sense for us sometimes to thank ourselves, praise ourselves, bring our ourselves gain, and benefit ourselves.[67] Seneca sees this routine self-evaluation, self-critique, self-congratulations, self-recrimination, and self-help as integral to the quest of self-improvement. Thus, Seneca does not think that the human mind splits itself into two parts, but that it can, and regularly ought to, inspect and assess its own cognitive activities recursively.

Seneca elaborates on this practice of self-scrutiny in a final text in the third book of *On Anger* in which he admires this daily habit of a Roman philosopher in the reign of Augustus named Sextius.

> All our senses must be trained to endure. They are naturally capable of endurance, once the mind stops corrupting them. It should be summoned each day to give an account of itself. Sextius used to do this. At the end of the day, when he had retired for the night, he would interrogate his mind: "What ailment of

> yours have you cured today? What failing have you resisted? In what way are you better?" Anger will cease or moderate itself, if it knows that each day it must appear before a judge. Could anything be finer than this habit of sifting through the whole day? Think of the sleep that follows the self-examination! How tranquil, deep, and untroubled it must be, when the mind has been praised or admonished, and this secret sentinel and self-critic has taken stock of its own habits. I make use of this opportunity, daily pleading my case at my own court. When the light has been taken away and my wife has fallen silent, aware as she is of my habit, I scrutinize my entire day and review what I have done and said. I conceal nothing from myself. I omit nothing. For why should I fear any of my errors when I can say: "See that you never do that again. I pardon you this time. In that dispute, you spoke too pugnaciously. In the future don't have anything to do with ignorant people—those who have never learned don't want to learn. You were franker than you should have been in admonishing that person, and as a consequence you didn't mend him, you offended him. In the future, don't just consider the truth of what you're saying, but whether the person to whom you're saying it can handle the truth. While a good man is glad to be admonished, the worse a man is, the more bitterly he resents anyone correcting him."[68]

Seneca's self-examination continues with more examples in this vein for several paragraphs. Much could be said about this fascinating homily to himself which space does not permit. A brief point to make is to emphasize the importance for Seneca of this introspective method of being his own sentinel, his own prosecutor, defendant, and judge rolled into one. The habit of thoroughly inspecting his own words and deeds, and his reactions to the words and deeds of the people he encounters, at the end of each day when he and his wife go to bed and his wife drifts off to sleep, and conscientiously tracking his moral progress, is ingredient in not only calming his mind and achieving sound sleep, but gaining wisdom and living well.

2. MUSONIUS RUFUS

Gaius Musonius Rufus was born before 30 CE in Volsinii, an Etruscan city of Italy. A member of the Roman equestrian order, he belonged to the class of aristocracy ranked second only to senators. He was highly respected, a teacher famous in Rome by the time of Nero, and had a considerable following of students during his life, including Epictetus. Musonius conceived of philosophy as nothing but the practice of noble behavior. He called for austere personal habits in order to achieve a virtuous, sturdy life in accord with the principles of Stoicism. He taught that philosophy must be studied not to cultivate brilliance in arguments or an excessive cleverness, but to develop good character, a sound mind, and a tough, robust body. Either Musonius wrote nothing himself or what he wrote was lost because none of his own writings survive. His philosophical teachings survive as thirty-two apothegms and twenty-one longer discourses, all evidently preserved by others.[69]

In a lecture titled "Whether habituation or reasoning is more effective" Musonius contends that habituation is more effective in the acquisition of virtue. He presents this argument. Suppose there are two doctors. One can speak about medicine as though he was experienced in it, yet he has no practical experience treating the sick. The other doctor is unable to speak about medicine, but is experienced in providing treatment in accordance with medical theory. Clearly, we'd choose the latter physician to provide us care. Further, suppose there are two men. One has sailed on many voyages and captained many ships, and the other has sailed a few times and never captained a ship. Suppose the latter can speak eloquently about captaining a ship, but the experienced captain gives a terrible speech on the topic. Plainly, we would hire the experienced captain when we sail. Finally, suppose there were two musicians. One knows music theory and speaks fluently about it but cannot sing or play the kithara or the lyre. The other is ignorant of music theory, but is a virtuoso on the kithara and the lyre and sings beautifully. Clearly, the one we'd want as a music teacher for a child who doesn't know music is the one good at the practice of music. Given our preferences in examples like these, Musonius reasons, when it comes to self-control and temperance it's much better to *become* self-controlled and temperate in all one's actions than it is to be able to *talk about* self-control and temperance and *say* how one should act. Therefore, he concludes, practice and habituation give us the ability to act, whereas knowing the reasoning and theory behind the action give us the ability to speak. Reasoning contributes to action by teaching us how one should act, and it precedes habituation in time. One cannot be habituated to anything good and honorable unless one is habituated in accordance with reason. But habituation remains prior to reasoning in its impact, Musonius observes, because it is more effective in getting people to act than reasoning is.[70]

Since Musonius understands philosophy to be nothing but the practice of noble behavior,[71] he asserts that anyone who claims to study philosophy must practice it even more diligently than someone studying the art of medicine or some similar skill, inasmuch as philosophy is more important and more difficult to master than any other pursuit. Since a human being is a composite of soul and body, Musonius holds that both must be trained.

The body must be trained for work and properly nourished. The proper diet, according to Musonius, is lacto-vegetarian.[72] These foods are least expensive and most readily available: raw fruits in season, certain raw vegetables, milk, cheese, and honeycombs. Cooked grains and some cooked vegetables are also suitable for humans, whereas a meat-based is too crude for human beings and is more suitable for wild beasts. Those who eat lots of meat seem slow-witted to Musonius. We are worse than brute animals when it comes to food, he thinks, because we obsessively embellish the presentation of our food and fuss about what we eat and how we prepare it, merely to amuse our palates. Moreover, too much rich food harms the body. For these reasons, Musonius thinks that gastronomic pleasure is undoubtedly the most difficult pleasure to combat. Consequently, he rejects gourmet cuisine and delicacies as a dangerous habit. He judges gluttony and craving fancy food to be most shameful and a lack of moderation. Indeed, Musonius opines that those who eat the least expensive food can work harder, tire less when working, get sick less often, tolerate cold, heat, and lack of sleep better, and are stronger, than those who eat expensive food.[73]

Musonius also insists on the simplest, least expensive footwear, clothing, and houses built to keep out cold, excessive heat, and the elements. Couriers do not wear sandals on the roads and competitive runners would be slowed if they wore sandals. So, if possible, better to go shoeless and let one's feet breathe. Money should be spent on people, not on colonnades, gilded ceilings, or fancy architecture. The protection afforded by our dwelling should be what we would expect from a cave.[74]

A different type of training is appropriate for the soul, but we train both soul and body when we accustom ourselves to cold, heat, thirst, hunger, scarcity of food, hardness of bed, thin clothing, cave-like houses, abstention from pleasures, and endurance of pains. Through these methods of habituation, Musonius contends, the body grows strong, fit for every task, and inured to suffering. At the same time, this training in toughness (*askēsis*) strengthens the soul, trains it for courage by enduring hardships which frighten the soft, and trains it for self-control by abstaining from pleasures. Musonius defends the central ethical doctrine of Stoicism that pain, death, poverty, ill repute, sickness, and other things devoid of wickedness are in no way bad, and that pleasure, life, wealth, fame, health, and other things that have no share in virtue are not good. Virtue and the things pertaining to virtue are the only good, whereas vice and the things pertaining to vice are the only evil, according to the Stoics. Pain, death, poverty, and the like, as well as pleasure, life, wealth, and the like, are indifferent. It is how all such things are *used* that is good or bad. Yet, Musonius explains, because of the corruption ingrained in us from the cradle by non-Stoics, and because of the wicked behavior caused by this corruption, we have been brainwashed into thinking it is a bad thing when pain happens and it is a good thing when pleasure happens. We cringe at death as the worst misfortune and we cling to life as the greatest good. When we lose or give away money, we are distressed as if we are injured. When we receive money, we rejoice as if we are benefited. In too many circumstances, Musonius thinks, we fail to deal with our affairs with correct assumptions and instead we follow thoughtless habit. The person practicing to become a Stoic must overcome these thoughtless habits ingrained in his mind, heal their corrupting effect on his character, and thereby free himself from false, widely popular beliefs about pleasure, pain, life, death, money, honor, and happiness.[75] Stoic philosophy is thus the remedy for anti-Stoic propaganda about what is good, what is bad, and what is indifferent. But the Stoic remedy requires daily doses, as it were, to restore soundness of mind. New habits in accord with sound Stoic understanding must replace the noxious habits deeply ingrained in us over many years and repeatedly reinforced by the non-Stoics who surround us.

Naturally, Musonius believes that kings should also study philosophy. Philosophy—that is, *Stoic* philosophy—he conceives of as the knowledge which diagnoses what is good and evil, useful and useless, helpful and harmful. Philosophy teaches us what justice is. It is philosophy which draws us to self-control and teaches us to be above pleasure and greed. Philosophy teaches us to love frugality and avoid extravagance, Musonius argues. It accustoms us to be modest and tactful. Philosophy brings about discipline, order, decorum, and fitting conduct in action and in habit. These qualities make a person dignified and self-controlled. Any king who has these qualities is most like a god and worthy of reverence, according to Musonius.[76] The discipline of Stoic philosophy trains us to develop the virtues that result from good habits of living. These good habits have the power to transform an ordinary ruler into a kingly person of virtue. Such a kingly paragon is godlike.

3. EPICTETUS

Epictetus was born into slavery as the son of a slave woman in the city of Hierapolis in the province of Phrygia between 50 and 60 CE. At some point he traveled to Rome, where he was owned by Nero’s freedman and administrative secretary Epaphroditus, who allowed him to be a pupil of Musonius. After he was manumitted, Epictetus set up his own school in the city of Nicopolis in northwest Greece to teach Stoicism to adolescent Romans preparing for public service. The influence of the master on the pupil is evident on many topics, including habit and its vital importance in making progress in living well.[77]

Epictetus explains to his students that each professional expertise is augmented and preserved by the corresponding actions. The carpenter is made by his carpentry. The grammarian is made by his grammatical exercises.

> But if someone falls into the habit of writing ungrammatically, his expertise must be undermined and demolished. In the same way the respectful person is preserved by respectful actions, and undone by disrespectful ones.[78]

Epictetus generalizes this point about the habituation of activities producing skills and establishing the quality of a person’s mind and character.

> Every habit (*hexis*[79]) and capacity (*dunamis*) is preserved and strengthened by the corresponding actions, that of walking, by walking, that of running, by running. If you want to be a reader, read; if a writer, write. But if you fail to read for thirty days in succession and turn to something else, you will see the consequence. So also if you lie down for ten days, get up and try to go on a fairly long walk, you will see how wobbly your legs are. In general, then, if you want to do something, make it a habit. And if you want not to do something, abstain from doing it, and accustom yourself to something else in its place. This is also the case when it comes to things of the mind. Whenever you are angry, be assured that this is not only a present evil, but that you have strengthened the habit, and added fuel to the fire. When you yield to someone in sexual intercourse, do not count it a single defeat, but know that you have fed, that you have strengthened, your incontinence. For habits and capacities must necessarily be affected by the corresponding actions, and become implanted if they were not present previously, or be intensified and strengthened if they were.[80]

The Stoics regarded anger as one of the very worst of all passions.[81] Each instance of anger is a present evil for the angry person, but each instance of ire disposes us to get angry that much more easily in the future, the next time we judge we've been provoked by another. Outbursts of wrath add fuel to the fire, compounding the mental disorder and exacerbating the vice of irascibility. Similarly, each time we succumb to lust, Epictetus explains, we ought to regard it not as an isolated failure, but as a bad decision that will bring with it in the future more bad decisions in the face of sexual temptation.

If we recognize that anger is bad and we don't want to be hot-tempered, Epictetus offers this advice: Don't feed the habit. Give the habit of irascibility nothing to promote its growth.

> Keep quiet to begin with, and count the days on which you have not been angry. I used to be angry every day; now every other day; then every third and fourth day: and, if you avoid it as many as thirty days, offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to god. For the habit is first weakened, and then entirely destroyed.[82]

Anger results from the double judgment that we have been wronged by another and that we ought to retaliate against this wrongdoer.[83] Epictetus advises us to banish this base and sordid double judgment and introduce a fair and noble judgment to replace it. What might such a judgment be? Perhaps that all human beings err and that, as our kinfolk, we ought to foster fellowship with them instead of discord.[84] If we become habituated to this exercise of replacing base judgments with noble ones, we will in effect be starving the monster that is rage inside us, and it will weaken, wither, and die. Meanwhile, we will become true athletes and watch our shoulders, sinews, and vigor grow mighty.[85] What he means is that we will develop brawny virtues. We will become athletes of character who have eliminated their ravenous vices.

The method of countering bad, old habits with good, new ones is also effective in battling other anti-Stoic beliefs. Consider the hugely popular belief that death is bad. People are in the habit of regarding death as evil. Epictetus urges his students to discover as an aid against that habit the contrary habit.

> You hear ignorant laymen say, “That poor man! He is dead; his father died, his mother died, he was cut off before his time and in a foreign land.” Listen to the contrary arguments, draw away from these expressions. Oppose to one habit the contrary; to sophistic arguments, the art of reasoning, and the frequent use and exercise of it. Against specious appearances we must have clear preconceptions, polished and ready for use. When death appears an evil, we ought immediately to remember that evils may be avoided, but death is a necessity.[86]

Epictetus cautions his students about hanging around with ignorant laymen because their false beliefs might rub off onto them and impede their progress as Stoics. Associating with non-Stoics who talk about death being terrible can thus be dangerous.

Like his master Musonius, Epictetus is sensitive to the corrupting influence of anti-Stoics on impressionable Stoics in training. The environment in which one strives to adopt the healthy habits of Stoic thinking matters. Non-Stoics disbelieve the truths of Stoicism. Some non-Stoics are Epicureans, Skeptics, or Peripatetics who are familiar with the arguments for Stoicism, but reject them nonetheless. Other non-Stoics are “laymen” who just haven’t thought things through. Both types of non-Stoics suffer from the mental illness of their false beliefs. What is worse, their noxious non-Stoic beliefs can infect those whose newborn Stoic beliefs are not yet firmly fixed. Until those new judgments of the Stoic student have become so strongly fastened inside him that they become part of him, and he has developed the ability to guarantee the security of his convictions, which will be routinely ridiculed by laymen who far outnumber him, Epictetus urges caution about disputing with such antagonists. Otherwise, he explains, whatever lecture notes his student writes down on his wax tablet,[87] intent upon assimilating them, will instead melt away like wax left out in the boiling sun. To avoid this, Epictetus recommends that his student withdraw to a sheltered, shady spot as long as his new Stoic conceptions are as squishy as fresh wax. Epictetus says that it is for this reason that the philosophers even advise us to leave our country, because old habits distract us, and prevent us from beginning to develop new ones.[88]

> Thus physicians send patients with chronic disorders to a different place and a different climate, and rightly so. And you too should adopt different habits. Fix

> your opinions, and exercise yourself in them. No, but from here you go to the theater, to a gladiatorial combat, to a gymnasium colonnade, to the circus, and then back here again, and then back there, remaining just the same persons all the time. No sign of any good habit, no regard or attention to yourself. You do not watch yourself closely.[89]

The goal Epictetus upholds before his students is to be mindful about every event and deal with it appropriately, in accordance with Nature as a whole, and one's special nature as a rational being. The target is to regard everything that lies outside our volition (*prohairesis*[90]) as of no concern to us. Only our judgments, beliefs, and acting as we should ought to concern us. This is a lofty goal, but it secures for us freedom of mind, peace of mind, and invulnerability to the vicissitudes of events and to coercion by others. For Epictetus, it is the *only* goal worthy of a human being. If you are not yet in this state of mind, he says, flee from your former habits, flee from all laymen, if you ever want to make a start on becoming somebody.[91]

Our former, non-Stoic habits are a plague from which we must flee if we want our minds to heal. To acquire Stoic habits, one must train oneself to have the right desires and the right aversions. Since we have countless desires and aversions daily, the *askēsis* of the Stoic is unrelenting. In a discourse titled "On Training" (*Peri askēseōs*) Epictetus explains:

> For, without severe and constant training, it is impossible to ensure that our desire should not fail or our aversion should not fall into what it would avoid. So you should know that if you allow your training to be directed towards external things that lie outside volition, your desire will neither gain its object, nor your aversion avoid it. And because habit has a powerful influence, when we have become habituated to apply our desire and aversion to externals only, we must oppose one habit to another, and where impressions are most liable to make us slip, there resort to training to counter the risk. I am inclined to pleasure. I will move to the opposite side of the deck to a greater extent than usual for the sake of training. I have an aversion to suffering. I will train and exercise my impressions to ensure that my aversion is withdrawn from everything of this kind. For who is the man under training? The man who practices not exercising his desire, and directing his aversion only to things that lie within volition, and who practices the hardest in the things most difficult to achieve. So, different people will have to practice harder in different respects.[92]

Each Stoic-in-training has his own peculiar susceptibilities to non-Stoic behaviors. To use the medical analogy: each self-doctoring patient must know what maladies he is susceptible to in order to tailor his remedies accordingly.[93] This course of treatment, Epictetus insists, must be administered aggressively and continually. To use the gymnastic analogy: each athlete must know which of his muscles are underdeveloped and call for targeted weight lifting exercises. Is he a poor runner? Then he must practice harder to run longer and faster. Is he a weak swimmer? Then he needs harder workouts doing laps in the pool. For the Stoic athlete of character, it is his desires, aversions, beliefs, judgments, and decisions—the bones, muscles, and sinews of his mind—that must be closely examined, tested for firmness, and ceaselessly trained.

Concentration is indispensable for successful Stoic habituation. Epictetus argues that the Stoic may never relax or take even a short break from his practice of vigilant, mental focus.

> When you relax your attention for a while, do not expect you will recover it whenever you please. But remember this: that because of your fault of today your affairs must necessarily be in a worse condition on future occasions. First, and this is the gravest matter of all, a habit arises in you of not paying attention, and next a habit of deferring attention, and so you get into the habit of putting off from one time to another the happy and befitting life that would enable you to live, and continue to live, in accord with nature.[94]

Epictetus grants that it is impracticable to be altogether faultless, but holds that it is possible to *strive* never to commit faults. Constant perseverance in paying attention is the only safeguard against slipping into a habit of not paying attention. Postponing our dedication to attentiveness is deadly, because it ushers in the habit of delaying living a happy life agreeable to nature. Attention to the cognitive fitness of consistent Stoic thinking, desiring, and averting, is urgent for Epictetus. It cannot be put off, or we will never live happily.

Stoic training is certainly not for the faint of heart. Epictetus describes it as the greatest of contests, and those engaged in it must not shrink back from the many blows they can expect to receive. It is not an Olympic contest like wrestling or the *pankration* but rather a contest for good fortune and joyfulness. Those who compete and lose in the Olympic Games must wait four years for their next chance to compete. But he who falters in the contest of character that is Stoic *askēsis* is not prevented from picking himself up, renewing his zeal, and rejoining the contest. Epictetus teaches his students not to make light of each of their stumbles. When someone indulges a bad desire, like feeling lust when one sees a pretty girl, or the desire to disparage somebody, the bad desire itself is a kind of punishment. He likens the bad desire to disobeying one's physician's orders and as a consequence contracting a fever or suffering a headache.[95]

> So, when you disparaged somebody the other day, did you not act like an ill-natured person? Was it not foolish nonsense that you spoke? And did you not feed this habit of yours by setting before it the example of other actions akin to it? And when you were overcome by the pretty girl, did you get off unpun-

> ished? Why, then, do you talk of what you were doing just recently? You ought to remember it, I think, as slaves do their whippings, so as to refrain from the same faults again. But the case is not the same, for with slaves it is the pain that brings back the memory, but what pain, what punishment, follows on your offenses? And when did you ever acquire the habit of shunning evil actions?[96]

The athlete of character needs to cultivate feeling pain when he succumbs to a bad desire or un-Stoic aversion. In this way he punishes himself for each of his offenses, for each mistaken desire. If the misstep along the journey to virtue is not attended by a self-punishment, then Epictetus thinks there will be no impetus for the person to self-correct. The habit of feeling shame[97] when one acts badly is essential for a Stoic's progress.

Following their intellectual forebears, the Cynics, the Stoics emphasized the virtue of self-sufficiency. This is particularly true of Epictetus, who scolds one of his students for falling into the habit of looking to others and lamenting, groaning, and eating in fear of not having food tomorrow, and hoping for nothing from himself.[98] Moreover, proper habits also create proper relationships with others.

> Appropriate actions are generally measured by our social relationships. He is a father. This implies, taking care of him, giving way to him in everything, putting up with him if he abuses you, or hits you. . . . Do not examine what he is doing, but what you must do to keep your volition consistent with nature. No one will hurt you, unless you want that. You will be hurt when you think you are hurt. In this way, then, you will discover the appropriate action to expect from a neighbor, a citizen, a general, if you acquire the habit of observing relationships.[99]

Epictetus believes that by focusing on fulfilling *our* familial roles as child, parent, and sibling, *our* social role as neighbor, and *our* civic roles as citizen, leader, etc., and the activities flowing from those roles which are up to us, we won't make the mistake of worrying about how other people in our lives are behaving toward us. How *they* behave is ultimately not up to us. If we perform the tasks we are responsible for, do our duties, and fulfill our social roles, and thereby observe *our* relationships habitually, then we will discover the appropriate actions to expect from others. Making a habit of playing our social roles well and being content with that protects us from ignorantly believing that we are harmed when others play their social roles poorly[100] . Our concern must be on making our own judgments rational, making our own decisions wise, and keeping our own volition in harmony with nature, every single day.

CONCLUSION

Stoic habits—the habits of mind required to make progress in the lifelong project of becoming a fully realized, free human being free of distress—are incompatible with ambivalence, laziness, lapses in attention, procrastination, dependence on others, excuses, forgiving one's own faults, and tolerating one's own mistakes. The Roman Stoics were convinced, however, that striving to adopt Stoic habits can earn oneself a happier life.

NOTES

1. See G. Striker, "Following Nature: A Study in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1991): 1–73.

2. For a magisterial study of the *meditatio* in the Roman Stoics, see R. J. Newman, "*Cotidie meditare*. Theory and Practice of the *meditatio* in Imperial Stoicism," *ANRW* II. 36.3: 1473–1517.

3. In his *Memoranda* Marcus Aurelius Antoninus has little to add to his predecessors' comments on habit. My reasons for departing from the popular custom of labeling Marcus' collection of philosophical writings *Meditations* are explained in *Marcus Aurelius: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2012), 2. Seneca's contemporary Lucius Annaeus Cornutus could be counted as a lesser Roman Stoic. He wrote on rhetoric in Greek and Latin and authored a treatise on Greek mythology as interpreted using etymologies and the lens of Stoic physics.

4. For his life and career, see M. T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1976). For an overview of his philosophy, see K. Vogt, "Seneca," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2012 Edition) , ed. E. N. Zalta. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/seneca/

5. See Brad Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xii–xxi.

6. The extant letters of correspondence of the rhetorician Marcus Cornelius Fronto with his student Marcus Aurelius Antoninus are also in Latin.

7. *Mānsuēsco* means to tame, literally "to accustom to the hand" (of mastery, discipline), and *mansuētus* means gentle, mild, or tame. *Adsuēsco* = accustom to, train; *adsuētus* = customary, accustomed.

8. I thank Gregory S. Bucher for his comments on this paragraph.

9. *Epistulae morales* 11. 1–3. For translations of Seneca's letters I have consulted, and freely modify, R. M. Gummere, *Seneca. Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1917).

10. *Ep*. 11. 4–5.

11. *Ep*. 11. 6.

12. *Ep*. 11. 7.

13. *De ira* II. 4. 1.

14. *De ira* II. 4. 2. Translations of *De ira* are by J. M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), rarely modified.

15. For a discussion of Seneca on anger in public life, see M. C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Ch. 11.

16. *De tranquillitate animi* 10. 1–3. For translations of Seneca's *Moral Essays* I have consulted J. W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) and an anonymous author whose new translations are in press at Hackett Publishing.

17. At *Ep*. 53. 5–6, after very slowly recovering from a case of seasickness Seneca reflects on how we forget or ignore the frailties of our body and describes a slight ague growing into a fever, pain in the foot, tingling in the joints, swollen ankles, and gout.

18. *De providentia* IV. 15.

19. *Consolatio ad Marciam* 7. 4.

20. Thus the Stoics reject Aristotle's more nuanced position (*Nicomachean Ethics* Bk I. Chs. 8–10) that external goods and goods of the body make a virtuous life *better* or more blessed.

21. *Ep*. 104. 9–10.

22. *Ep*. 104. 10.

23. *Ep*. 42. 8.

24. *Ep*. 112. 1.

25. *Ep*. 112. 2.

26. *Ep*. CXII. 3.

27. *Ep*. 112. 4.

28. *Ep*. 95. 36–37.

29. *Ep*. 95. 46.

30. *Ep*. 29. 8.

31. *De ira* III. 8. 7.

32. *De ira* II. 24. 2.

33. See W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," *Contemporary Review* (1877) and in print in *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 1999).

34. *De ira* I. 1. 1.

35. *De ira* I. 1. 3.

36. *De ira* II. 20. 1–2.

37. *De ira* II. 21. 1.

38. *De ira* II. 21. 5.

39. *De ira* II. 21. 6.

40. *De ira* II. 21. 8.

41. *De ira* II. 21. 7.

42. *Ep*. 83. 26. At *Ep*. 59. 15 he notes that a single hour of hilarious, crazy bingeing can leave a hangover that lasts for many days.

43. *De tranquillitate animi* 17. 9.

44. See 6, 7, 17, 25, 28, 52, 56, and 64.

45. *Ep*. 54.

46. *Ep*. 65 and 104.

47. *Ep*. 78. 20. See Newman, 1483–1496.

48. In *Ep*. 9 Seneca states that even the wise man, when in his sick bed, prefers to have someone sit by him.

49. Seneca shares his views on mind and body in more detail in *Ep*. 15. In *Ep*. 14 he says that we have an inborn affection for our body and are its guardian. For this reason Seneca doesn't believe that the body is never to be indulged at all, but only that we must not be slaves to it. Elsewhere, however, in *Ep*. 24 he speaks of the "clogging burden of a body to which nature has fettered" him. According to the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*, love of self begins in infancy as the love of one's body and what benefits it, but matures into love of one's mind in upon development of rationality in adolescence, and later expands to love of all rational beings, philanthropy, in (virtuous) adulthood. See T. Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of* Oikeiosis (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1990) and R. Blondell, "Parental Nature and Stoic *Oikeiosis*," *Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1990): 221–242.

50. *Ep*. 53. 9.

51. *De prov.* IV. 12–15.

52. *Ep*. 39. 6.

53. *De tranquillitate animi* 17. 1.

54. *Ep*. 97. 12.

55. *Ep*. 112. 4.

56. *Ep*. 108. 17–22.

57. *De beneficiis* I. 11. 4 (Cooper and Procopé's translation modified).

58. *Ep*. 16. 1.

59. *Ep*. 16. 6.

60. See Julia Annas, "The Sage in Ancient Philosophy" in *Anthropine Sophia*, ed. F. Alesse et al. (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2008), 11–27, esp. 17–27 on the Stoic sage.

61. *De ira* I. 5. 2.

62. *Ep*. 123. 3.

63. *Ep.* 123. 5–6. For this translation I consulted and freely modified Brad Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95–96; his comments on this text are on 356–357.

64. *Ep.* 2. 5. On Seneca's appropriation of Epicurus, see *Ep.* 21. 3-10.

65. *Ep.* 58. 26.

66. Or rather, some of the characters in some of his dialogues.

67. *De beneficiis* V. 7. 6.

68. *De ira* III. 36. 1-4 (translation by Cooper and Procopé modified).

69. See C. King, trans., *Musonius Rufus: Lectures and Sayings* (Lulu, 2010), 13–19, and C. E. Lutz, "Musonius Rufus," *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947): 32–147.

70. Stobaeus 2.15.46. Chapter 15: about seeming and being and that one must judge a person not by word but by character, for without action all words are useless. King & Irvine, Lecture #5, 34–35.

71. Stobaeus 2.31.123. Chapter 31: on training and education. King & Irvine, Lecture #4, 33.

72. Compare Seneca's vegetarian experience discussed above in the penultimate paragraph of §G above.

73. Stoabaeus 3.17.42. Chapter 17: on self-mastery. King & Irvine, Lecture #18, 71–75.

74. Stobaeus 3.1.209. Chapter 1: about virtue. King & Irvine, Lecture #19, 76–77.

75. Stobaeus 3.29.78. Chapter 29: about love of hard work. King & Irvine, Lecture #6, 36–37.

76. Stobaeus 4.7.67. Chapter 7: advice about kingship. King & Irvine, Lecture #8, 40–41.

77. For a study of Epictetus' conception of happiness as mental freedom, see W. O. Stephens, *Stoic Ethics: Epictetus and Happiness as Freedom* (London: Continuum, 2007).

78. *Discourses* 2. 9. 10–11 (Long's translation, modified). See Long 2002, 225–226 on lack of integrity as self-inflicted.

79. For discussion of the Stoics' account of traits of character and their concepts of *hexis* (which she translates "condition"), *diathesis*, *epitēdeumata* ("habitudes"), "proclivities," "sicknesses," and "infirmities," see M. R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, Ch. 6.

80. *Disc.* 2. 18. 1–7 (Hard's translation, modified), 119–120.

81. Seneca's *De ira* is a *tour de force* analysis of the pathological passion of anger, the psychological mechanism that produces it, the harms that it brings to the angry person, the horrors it inflicts on those around the angry person, and therapies for eradicating it.

82. *Disc*. 2. 18. 12. Hard & Gill, 120.

83. This is Seneca's analysis of the cognitive mechanism of anger in *De Ira*, but there is no evidence in the *Discourses* that Epictetus would object to it.

84. For a discussion of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius on the virtue of tolerance, see Andrew Fiala, "Stoic Tolerance," *Res Publica* 9 (2003): 149–168.

85. *Disc*. 2. 18. 25–26. Hard & Gill, 121. On this discourse compare A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 214–215.

86. *Disc*. 1. 27. 5–7. Hard & Gill, 60. Cf. *Disc*. 4. 1. 137.

87. In Epictetus' time, pupils inscribed lecture notes on wax tablets.

88. *Disc*. 3. 16. 9–11.

89. *Disc*. 3. 16. 12–15 (Hard's translation modified), 182. The self-attention Epictetus urges here is suggestive of Seneca's nightly self-scrutiny in *De ira* III. 36.

90. See R. Dobbin, "Προαίρεσις in Epictetus," *Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1991): 111–135.

91. *Disc*. 3. 16. 16.

92. *Disc*. 3. 12. 5–8. Hard & Gill, 174. See Long 2002, 241.

93. For the importance of the medical analogy in the Stoics see M. C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Ch. 9.

94. *Disc*. 4. 12. 1–2. Hard & Gill, 281 (modified).

95. *Disc*. 3. 25. 7.

96. *Disc*. 3. 25. 8–10; Hard & Gill, 218–219. This text is also discussed by Long 2002, 195–196.

97. The Greek word is *aidōs*. See Rachana Kamtekar, “ΑΙΔΩΣ in Epictetus,” *Classical Philology* 93, no. 2 (April 1998): 136–160.

98. *Disc*. 3. 26. 11–12.

99. *Encheiridion* 30. Hard & Gill, 296.

100. For a discussion of the concepts of station (*taxis*) and role (*prosōpon*) in Epictetus, see B. E. Johnson, “Socrates, Heracles and the Deflation of Roles in Epictetus,” *Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2012): 125–145.

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About the Contributors

Jeffrey Bell is professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University. He is the author and editor of numerous books, including *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos: Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Difference* (Toronto, 2006), *Deleuze's Hume: Philosophy, Culture and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2009), and, with Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze and History* (Edinburgh, 2009). In addition to working and writing on Deleuze, Bell has written articles and chapters on Spinoza, Whitehead, intellectual history, and Nietzsche. He is currently at work on a manuscript on metaphysics and the principle of sufficient reason.

Clare Carlisle is lecturer in philosophy of religion at King's College London. She studied philosophy and theology at Trinity College, Cambridge between 1995 and 2002. She is the author of three books on Kierkegaard, and the translator of Félix Ravaisson's *De l'habitude*. Her next book, *On Habit* (Routledge), is forthcoming in 2014.

Edward S. Casey is distinguished professor of philosophy at Stony Brook University and former president of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division). He has published widely on phenomenology, philosophical psychology, aesthetics, the philosophy of space and place, and other topics. His most recent books are *The World at a Glance* (Indiana, 2007) and *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscapes* (Minnesota, 2005). He is currently writing *The World on Edge*.

Nick Crossley is professor of sociology at the University of Manchester (UK). He has published widely on issues of embodiment and habit. His latest book is *Towards Relational Sociology* (Routledge, 2011).

Dennis Des Chene is professor of philosophy at Washington University. He is the author of *Physiologia* (Cornell, 1996), *Life's Form* (Cornell, 2000), and *Spirits and Clocks* (Cornell, 2001), and of articles on mechanism, Suárez, Régis, Bayle, and late Aristotelianism. In 2007 he was awarded fellowships by the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the American Philosophical Society. He is now working on seventeenth-century theories of emotion and on the history and philosophy of mathematics.

Peter S. Fosl is professor of philosophy at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, where he is chair of both the Philosophy and the PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economic) programs. Co-author of *The Philosopher's Toolkit* with Julian Baggini (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Fosl's articles on Hume, skepticism, philosophy of religion, and ethics have appeared in *Hume Studies, Journal of the History of Philosophy,* and *1650–1850*. His essay on military suicide, "American Despair in a Time of Hope," appears in the Fall 2012 issue of *Salmagundi Magazine.*

Adam Hutchinson is a PhD candidate in philosophy at Duquesne University. He works mainly in American pragmatism, the history of materialism, and critical theory (especially questions of race). Currently he is completing a manuscript on the body, materiality, and force in the writings of Newton, Kant, and Fichte.

David E. Leary is former co-director of the History and Theory of Psychology Graduate Program at the University of New Hampshire, where he also served as professor of psychology, history, and the humanities and chairperson of psychology. He is fellow and past president of the Society for the History of Psychology. From 1989 to 2001 he was Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Richmond, where he is currently university professor.

Thornton C. Lockwood is assistant professor of philosophy at Quinnipiac University. He has published articles on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* in *Phronesis*, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, *History of Political Thought*, *Ancient Philosophy*, and *Oxford Bibliographies On-line*. He is the associate editor (book reviews) at *POLIS: The Journal of Ancient Greek Political Thought*.

Terrance MacMullan is professor of philosophy and honors at Eastern Washington University. His essays on pragmatism, the philosophy of race, and the relationship between public intellectuals and democracy have been published in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, and *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. His book *The Habits of Whiteness: A Pragmatist Reconstruction* was published by Indiana University Press in May 2009. He is currently researching a book on the affinities between pragmatism and Latin American philosophy.

Robert C. Miner is associate professor of philosophy in the Honors College at Baylor University. He is the author of *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of* Summa Theologiae *1a2ae qq. 22 – 48* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), as well as articles on Nietzsche, Vico, Hobbes, Pascal, and Suarez.

Tom Sparrow teaches in the Department of Philosophy at Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania, where he works primarily in continental and modern philosophy. He is the author of *Levinas Unhinged* (Zero Books, 2013) and *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

William O. Stephens is professor of philosophy and classical and Near Eastern studies at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He has published articles on topics in Stoicism, Epicureanism, ecology and vegetarianism, ethics and animals, sex and love, and the concept of a person. His books include an English translation of Adolf Bonhöffer's work *The Ethics of the Stoic Epictetus* (Peter Lang, 1996), the edited collection *The Person: Readings in Human Nature* (Prentice Hall, 2006), *Stoic Ethics: Epictetus and Happiness as Freedom* (Continuum, 2007), and *Marcus Aurelius: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2012). He is currently working on a manuscript titled *Lessons in Liberation: Epictetus as Educator*.

Shannon Sullivan is head of the Philosophy Department and professor of philosophy, Women's Studies, and African American Studies at Penn State University. She teaches and writes at the intersections of feminist philosophy, critical philosophy of race, American pragmatism, and continental philosophy. She is author of *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism and Feminism* (Indiana, 2001) and *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Indiana, 2006). She is coeditor of *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (SUNY, 2007), *Difficulties of Ethical Life* (Fordham, 2008), and Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems : Expanded Edition by Josiah Royce (Fordham, 2009) . She currently is finishing a book on transforming whiteness.

Margaret Watkins is assistant professor of philosophy at Saint Vincent College in southwestern Pennsylvania. After graduating from the College of William and Mary, she earned her Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. Her research focuses on ethics and early modern philosophy, with a particular emphasis on the moral philosophy of David Hume. She has published several articles on the relationship between literature and philosophy, exploring the resources of Jane Austen's novels for questions in ethics generally and virtue theory in particular. She is currently working on a book on Hume's *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*.