Introduction

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Stoicism remains one of the most significant minority reports in the history of Western philosophy. Unfortunately, however, the precise nature of its impact on later thinkers is far from clear. The essays in this volume are intended to bring this picture into sharper focus by exploring how Stoicism actually influenced philosophers from antiquity through the modern period in fields ranging from logic and ethics to politics and theology. The contributing authors have expertise in different periods in the history of philosophy, but all have sought to demonstrate the continuity of Stoic themes over time, looking at the ways in which Stoic ideas were appropriated (often unconsciously) and transformed by later philosophers for their own purposes and under widely varying circumstances. The story they tell shows that Stoicism had many faces beyond antiquity, and that its doctrines have continued to appeal to philosophers of many different backgrounds and temperaments.

In tracing the influence of Stoicism on Western thought, one can take either the high road or the low road. The high road would insist on determining the ancient provenance of Stoic and apparently Stoic ideas in the work of medieval and modern thinkers, using the writings of the ancient Stoics to grade their proximity to the genuine article; this would require paying close attention to the particular questions that exercised thinkers such as Zeno and Chrysippus, in order to determine the extent to which later figures contributed to their solutions. The low road, on the other hand, would focus less on questions that interested ancient Stoics and more on broader tendencies and trends, looking at the way Stoic doctrines were employed in new settings and against different competitors, becoming altered or “watered-down” in the process. The
high road is the one traditionally taken by historians of philosophy; the low road is sometimes referred to, derisively, as “intellectual history”.

The present volume takes the low road. But that is not just because we believe it to be the right approach. Where the history of Stoicism is concerned, it turns out to be the only approach. Because no corpus of writings or teachings by a major Stoic figure survived antiquity, later authors tended to learn about Stoicism in a piecemeal fashion, through fragments of texts and secondhand reports. There was no genuine article for them to be acquainted with, as there was for both Aristotle after the twelfth century and Plato after the fourteenth. Later authors read the surviving materials as best they could, which is to say that they recontextualized them, borrowing Stoic distinctions to solve their own problems, usually in complete innocence of the way they had been originally used. Needless to say, this has methodological implications. Our assumption throughout this volume is that we are going to have to adjust to the nature of the evidence if we are to have any hope of tracking Stoicism beyond ancient Greece and Rome. In particular, we are going to have to shift our criteria for what counts as Stoic away from the possession of a definitive set of doctrines or their use in certain well-defined contexts to a looser, somewhat more impressionistic reading of Stoicism and what it means to be a Stoic. Hypotheses will be confirmed along the low road, though perhaps not well confirmed, and certainly not decisively demonstrated. But the looser approach will make it possible for us to understand what it was about Stoicism that gripped some later authors but not others, and why Stoic ideas have continued to resonate in Western philosophy despite the predominance of more recognized schools and approaches. That there are Stoic notes in the writings of medieval, modern, and contemporary philosophers is undeniable to anyone who reads them. The problem with taking the high road is that there is no clearly discernible path of transmission to connect the Stoic subtexts of the medieval and modern periods to the main text in antiquity, such as it is. As a result, such an approach would leave the history of Stoicism after antiquity exactly as it is today: a series of vaguely familiar echoes.

That said, the essays collected here approach the question of the impact of Stoicism from multiple angles, some of which do follow the high road while others happily depart from it, again as the nature of the evidence dictates. They are organized chronologically because a thematic approach seemed misleading – as if to suggest that later authors simply picked up where the ancient Stoics left off and added to the topics they discussed. Hence, our subtitle emphasizes the traditions of Stoicism, in
the plural. There are essays addressed to how Stoic doctrines were understood in different historical periods and within specific philosophical traditions, as well as essays on the way Stoic ideas were transformed by historical and political circumstances, a process of appropriation that continues to this day, as the essays by Martha Nussbaum and Lawrence Becker suggest. We hope that the present volume helps to set historical parameters for further discussion of the traditions of Stoicism, or, rather, of its traditions and transformations.

It is well known that the Stoics were the first philosophers to call themselves “Socratics,” but there has been relatively little study of the influence of Socrates on individual Stoic philosophers. In “The Socratic Imprint on Epictetus’ Philosophy,” A. A. Long investigates the importance of Socrates as portrayed in Plato’s early dialogues for Epictetus’ Discourses. Socrates is Epictetus’ favorite philosopher, whom he treats as a model for his students not only for the Stoic theory of the preeminence of virtue over all other values but also for the practice of life, in self-examination, and in methodology. It is especially in the appropriation of Socrates’ characteristic method that Epictetus stands apart from earlier Stoics, as Long shows. He is able to provide numerous illustrations from the Discourses of Epictetus’ use of the figure and method of Socrates, and especially of the striking portrait of Socrates and his protreptic and dialectic in Plato’s Gorgias. This allows us to see that the theory of preconceptions (prolepsis) or natural notions in Epictetus’ epistemology can help provide a solution to some notorious problems about the workings of Socratic elenchus, along the lines of the interpretation proposed by the late Gregory Vlastos.

Steven K. Strange, in “The Stoics on the Voluntariness of the Passions,” provides a fresh reconstruction and defense of Chrysippus’ view of the emotions and his unitary philosophical psychology. This defense is important, he maintains, if we are to properly understand the dispute between Posidonius and Chrysippus about the passions and its implications for Stoic ethics and psychotherapy. The rejection of Chrysippus’ unitary psychology, which holds that the only motivational function of the human soul is reason, is common to almost the whole tradition of moral psychology, but some of its virtues may have been missed, and its influence, especially on the history of the concept of the will, may have been obscured. Strange argues that the Chrysippean view is that the motivating factor in human action is always the judgment of reason, an assent to something’s being good or bad in relation to the agent, but at the same time, an emotion – either a passion or, in the case of the wise person, a “good emotion.” This judgment of reason, of course, may be, and often
is, false and even irrational (in which case it is also a passion), in the
sense that it goes against things that the agent has good reason, and even
knows that he has good reason, to believe. The element of self-deception
in such passional judgments is crucial. The nature of passions such as
anger or grief as due to such passional judgments is illuminated by com-
paring them with the so-called good feelings, the emotions of the sage,
and by examining the Stoic account of incontinence, which turns out to
lie much closer to Aristotle than has generally been appreciated.

In “Stoicism in the Apostle Paul: A Philosophical Reading,” Troels
Engberg-Pedersen shows how important it is to read between the lines
when looking for Stoic influences in a text. For the Apostle Paul, like
his younger contemporary Philo Judaeus, uses Stoic ideas to articulate
his Jewish message, although its powerful, apocalyptic character makes
the influence of Greek philosophy harder to see. Engberg-Pedersen
focuses on Galatians 5:13–26 as his proof text, wherein Paul tells the
Galatians that they have no need of Mosaic law because Christian faith
and possession of the spirit are suffi-
cient to overcome the selfish, bodily
urges that would otherwise enslave them. The influence of Stoicism
emerges in the structural similarity between Paul’s notion of faith (pistis)
and the Stoic conception of wisdom (sophia): just as the Christ-person
is free in his obedience to the will of God – an obedience that is, para-
doxically, self-willed – so in oikeiôsis the Stoic comes to see himself as
a person of reason, liberated from the body in his agreement with “the will
of him who orders the universe.” In both cases, the person who is truly
free is able to reject the bonds of external law because the law has in an
important sense been fulfilled in him. Engberg-Pedersen concludes with
the suggestion that Paul is best understood as a “crypto-Stoic” thinker
because, although he did not think of himself as a philosopher, he used
Stoic ideas very effectively in presenting the gospel of Christ.

In his essay “Moral Judgment in Seneca,” Brad Inwood investigates
Seneca’s use of the metaphors of judicial deliberation and legal judgment
to illustrate the concept of moral judgment. He is able to show that this is
a particularly rich analogy in Seneca’s moral thought, which he develops
in an original way. It has been argued that Stoics developed different
codes of moral conduct for sages and for ordinary moral progressors,
but Seneca’s use of the juridical metaphor strongly suggests that this
may be a misinterpretation. For, in a number of places, as Inwood shows,
Seneca contrasts a strict or severe judge with a more flexible and merciful
one, and claims that only a sage or wise person could be justified in
imposing judicial severity, because everyone else (and indeed the sage
herself before gaining wisdom) could be held guilty of infringing upon the law in some way, were it to be strictly enforced. By analogy, one is obligated to apply the same moral standards to oneself as one does to others in making moral evaluations, and if one does so fairly, and one is not a sage, one will have to grant that one is a moral sinner like everyone else. The same standards therefore apply to all, sages and fools, but mercy or clemency, a looser application of the same moral laws, to ordinary nonsages. Inwood demonstrates the importance of the juridical metaphor for Seneca by pointing to and discussing a number of key passages in his Dialogues and Letters.

Richard Sorabji’s essay, “Stoic First Movements in Christianity,” is concerned with the transformation, by a new tradition, of a particular moment of Stoic influence. Emotions are judgments for the Stoic, acts of rational assent to involuntary first movements of the soul (iectus in Seneca), such as shivering, blushing, sexual irritation, and so on. The Stoic sage trained himself to interrogate these movements so that he could decide whether it would be appropriate to assent to them (most non-Stoics, by contrast, were thought to assent readily to appearances without realizing that assenting is distinct from appearing). Some two centuries after Seneca, however, the Christian thinker Origen borrowed the expression “first movements” and gave it a fateful interpretation by connecting it not with involuntary appearances but rather with the “bad thoughts” mentioned in Mark 7:21 and Matthew 15:19. As Sorabji points out, this blurred the original Stoic distinction so that it was “no longer clear whether a beginning of emotion is distinct from emotion or whether it is a little bit of emotion.” A little more than a century later, the Christian writer Evagrius discusses eight such bad thoughts, including gluttony, fornication, and avarice (the list, slightly modified, was to reemerge as the seven deadly sins of the Western tradition). But bad thoughts could not be viewed as mere incitements. Rather, they were temptations, and sin became our assent to them, or to the pleasure of having them. Thus, Sorabji concludes, the Stoic doctrine of how to combat emotion developed into the Christian doctrine of how to resist temptation.

Sten Ebbesen examines the medieval fate of a number of Stoic teachings in “Where Were the Stoics in the Late Middle Ages?” The Stoics, he argues, were everywhere and nowhere during the scholastic period – everywhere in the sense that their tough-minded rationalism and analytic methods became the hallmark of scholastic philosophy, nowhere in the sense that hardly anyone during the Middle Ages understood what Stoicism was or recognized particular doctrines as having come from the
Stoics. This makes it difficult to trace Stoic influences. Still, Ebbesen shows that Stoicism is unmistakably present on several fronts: in the widespread use in medieval logic and grammar of the distinction between a “signifying thing” and “thing signified,” which shaped the eleventh- and twelfth-century debate between the “thing-people” and “word- or name-people” (a.k.a. realists and nominalists); in certain “un-Aristotelian” additions to Aristotelian logic, such as the properties of syncategorematic words and the notion of logical consequence, the terminology of which is almost certainly derived from the Stoics; and in the Stoic doctrine of assent, which emerges in a variety of places, from Peter Abelard’s account of moral goodness to John Buridan’s definition of knowledge. Like the Stoics, scholastic thinkers also had a penchant for “crazy examples” that tested the limits of their philosophical systems and, by the late thirteenth century, a conception of the sage-philosopher as embodying the life of virtue. In the end, though, it was what Ebbesen calls their “community of spirit” that best explains the preservation and development of Stoic ideas by medieval philosophers in the absence of authoritative texts and teachings.

In “Abelard’s Stoicism and Its Consequences,” Calvin Normore identifies an important strand of Stoic ethical theory preserved in Abelard’s idea that the locus of sin is intention or consent. Just as the Stoics were drawn by their assumption of a world determined by fate to hold that moral responsibility consists in assent, so Abelard, recognizing that the world cannot be otherwise than God willed it, ascribes moral goodness and badness primarily to intentions and only secondarily or derivatively to actions. The prescription is similar in both cases: for the Stoics, we should live in accordance with nature; for Abelard, we should will what is objectively pleasing to God. Normore takes Abelard’s Stoicism to be embodied in the Philosopher of the Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian. Although his internalist conception of sin proved unpopular in the thirteenth century, it was kept alive by critics such as Peter Lombard, eventually to be taken up again in the fourteenth century by William of Ockham – although this time without the crucial Stoic idea that the actual world is in itself the best possible.

The Reformation brought tremendous social and political upheaval to Western Europe, and in its wake Stoic ethics enjoyed a brief, but intense, revival in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Jacqueline Lagrée’s essay, “Constancy and Coherence,” is addressed to this encounter between Christianity and Stoic ethics. For Renaissance thinkers inspired by Seneca, constancy was a virtue pertaining to the
military man in the heat of battle, not to the private citizen. But everything changed with the appearance in 1584 of the treatise *On Constancy* by the Flemish philosopher Justus Lipsius. Lipsius showed that Stoicism was compatible with Christianity and that Stoic constancy manifests itself in the coherence and immutability of truths in the soul of the wise man, who, in the midst of political turmoil, cleaves to universal law in the form of divine providence. This kind of Stoicism fit with the austere, rationalistic conception of religion being advanced by the reformers. The resonance was probably not accidental – John Calvin had himself published a commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia* in 1532. In any case, Lipsius must have struck a chord in many of his readers, weary of decades of religious conflict, because he soon became the most popular author of his time. Other thinkers followed in his footsteps, the most successful being Guillaume du Vair (1556–1621). Du Vair took Stoicism in a decidedly more Christian direction, transforming pagan constancy into Christian consolation by means of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. But Christians always viewed the paganism of ancient Stoicism with a certain ambivalence. Eventually, Christian Stoicism fell out of favor and the Stoic virtue of constancy came to be seen as illusory and idolatrous, completely put to shame by the virtue of patience with hope that fortified the Christian martyrs. In the end, modern Stoicism became more of an ethical and juridical attitude than a philosophy properly speaking.

In his essay “On the Happy Life: Descartes vis-à-vis Seneca,” Donald Rutherford looks at the reaction to Seneca’s work *On the Happy Life* in Descartes’ correspondence with Princess Elisabeth, and the light that it throws both on Descartes’ attitude to the ancient Stoics and on the influence of their eudaimonism on his ethical thought. Descartes develops the latter at length in his letters to Elisabeth in critical reaction to Seneca’s work, claiming that his ethical theory represents a compromise between Stoicism and Epicureanism. By identifying happiness with tranquillity and distinguishing it from virtue and its cultivation, Descartes is led to abandon eudaimonism in favor of a proto-Kantian view, although his claim that the crucial component in the exercise of virtue is not rationality but freedom differs both from the Stoics and Kant. Importantly, Descartes also breaks ethics free from the dependence on divine providence that one finds in Stoicism, for an important factor in human freedom is that divine providence is inscrutable to us, a theme familiar from Descartes’ rejection of Stoic providentialism in science. Descartes also rejects the Stoic ideal of extirpation of the passions, both in this correspondence and in *The Passions of the Soul*. 
“Of all the great classical philosophers,” writes Alexandre Matheron, “Spinoza is the one whose teaching best lends itself to a point-by-point comparison with Stoicism.” Firmin DeBrabander follows up on Matheron’s suggestion by comparing the concept of moral perfection in Spinoza’s *Ethics* with traditional Stoic views in his essay, “Psychotherapy and Moral Perfection: Spinoza and the Stoics on the Prospect of Happiness.” He finds that despite numerous similarities in their conception of the natural order as an expression of divinity, their insistence that the instinct for self-preservation is the seat of virtue, and their recognition of a cognitive element in the passions, Spinoza ultimately rejects the kind of moral perfectionism embodied by the Stoic sage because his tranquillity seems more otherworldly than natural. According to Spinoza, self-control is an ideal we would do well to avoid because it prevents us from seeing ourselves as we truly are: aspects of Nature absolutely and ineluctably determined by its laws. Paradoxically, he would insist that “individual power is augmented by the recognition of impotence, and that freedom is attained in the acceptance of necessity.” Likewise, the Stoic notion of freedom of judgment is an illusion. Unlike the Stoic sage, the resignation of Spinoza’s philosopher is complete; indeed, he is “only separated from the unhappiness of the common people by a few degrees of intellectual clarity, and he is certainly no stranger to their sufferings.”

In “Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero’s Problematic Legacy,” Martha Nussbaum compares Cicero’s views on justice in his Stoic-influenced work *On Duties* to modern discussions of the justice or injustice of the distribution of basic human goods such as clean water, health services, sanitation, and adequate nutrition in societies around the world. She mentions some contemporary accounts of the just distribution of goods in theories of international law and morality but admits that this topic has not been much discussed by philosophers, in contrast to questions of international law and justice in relation to commerce, treaties, and warfare. She lays part of the blame for this situation at the door of Cicero, and particularly his distinction in *On Duties* between duties of justice and duties of material aid to needy persons, particularly foreigners. Cicero thinks the latter duties are much less demanding than duties of justice and require us to give more consideration to the needs of family, friends, and fellow citizens than to citizens of other societies. Cicero’s influence is very real because of his role in shaping the thoughts of both philosophers and statesmen down through the centuries. Nussbaum provides a spirited critique of the Stoic theory she sees lying behind Cicero’s pernicious and, in her judgment, indefensible distinction between duties.
of justice and of material aid, which also helps illuminate some obscure areas of Stoic social thought. She closes with some interesting remarks about the relevance of this dispute for the notion of property rights in international justice.

In his essay, “Stoic Emotion,” Lawrence C. Becker reinforces and completes the argument of his important recent book, A New Stoicism, with an account of how his contemporary revival of a Stoic ethics would deal with the important topic of emotion. Becker maintains that the proper Stoic position, going back to the ancient Stoics, is that one’s ethical perspective should be shaped and determined by the best available scientific account of the natural world and of human nature. He grants that advances in science require the Stoic to give up some important elements of the ancient Stoic world view, in particular providentialism and a teleological conception of the universe, but argues that this does not really undercut the Stoic approach to ethics and the good life. It may even reinforce it. He compares ancient Stoic accounts of the nature of emotion with those of contemporary psychological research and shows that they are not incompatible. Chrysippus’ claim that emotions are judgments will have to be modified in the direction of Posidonius’ claim that there are standing irrational sources of motivation in humans, but this does not undermine Stoic cognitive therapy of the emotions. A proper Stoic view of the emotions would incorporate the best available account of their role in human psychological health. And such an account might well be more compatible with a fundamentally Stoic approach to emotional life than the more popular “romantic” view, which tends to overvalorize the emotions.
The honorable and good person neither fights with anyone himself, nor, as far as he can, does he let anyone else do so. Of this as of everything else the life of Socrates is available to us as a paradigm, who not only himself avoided fighting everywhere, but did not let others fight either. (1.5.1–2)

Now that Socrates is dead, the memory of what he did or said when alive is no less beneficial to people, or rather is even more so. (4.1.169)

The Stoic Discourses of Epictetus are conspicuously marked throughout by the figure of Socrates. No other philosopher, not even Zeno or Diogenes, is named nearly so frequently. Epictetus views Socrates as the single figure who best authorizes and exemplifies everything he is trying to give his students in terms of philosophical methodology, self-examination, and a life model for them to imitate. This strikingly explicit coincidence between Epictetus’ objectives and Socrates makes the Stoicism of the Discourses particularly distinctive.

In order to take the measure of this point, we need to start from the role of Socrates in the preceding Stoic tradition. The earliest Stoic philosophers had drawn so heavily on Plato’s and, to a lesser extent, Xenophon’s Socrates that members of the school were happy to be called Socratics.¹

¹ A version of this chapter has already appeared as chapter 3 of my 2002 book. Permission from Oxford University Press to reprint this work is gratefully acknowledged. For my excerpts from Plato’s Gorgias I adopt (with occasional changes) the translations of T. H. Irwin (Plato 1979). The translations of Epictetus are my own and, except as noted, are from the Discourses. I also draw on some material included in my article Long 2000; this article formed the basis for the paper I read at Emory University’s Loemker Conference on Stoicism in April 2000.