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# The Stoic Roots of Christian Asceticism and Modern Psychotherapy: Similarities and Differences

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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
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Stoic Roots of Christian Asceticism and Modern Psychotherapy:  
Similarities and Differences

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty of the School of Divinity  
Of the University of St. Thomas  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree  
Master of Arts in Theology

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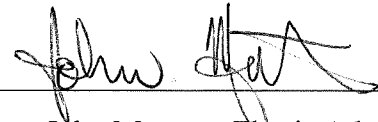
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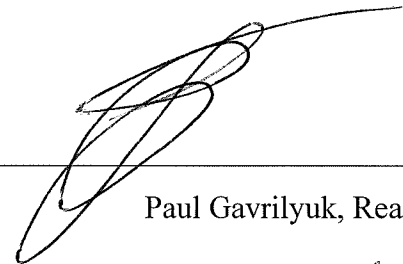
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This thesis by Mitch Mueller fulfills the thesis requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theology approved by Dr. John Martens, PhD, as the thesis advisor, and by Dr. Paul Gavriyuk, PhD, and by Dr. Paul Vitz, PhD as readers.



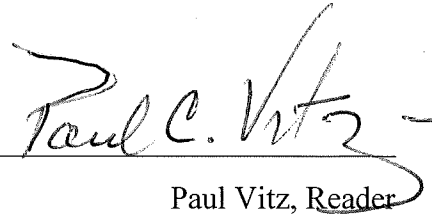
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## Abstract

In its modern forms, psychotherapy often plays a secularizing and sometimes even anti-theistic role. Yet the Stoic philosophy which inspired the creation of modern Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) had a substantially theological view of human nature and human flourishing. While the idea and practice of creating behavioral and emotional change through cognitive change was appropriated from Stoicism into modern CBT, the idea of morally grounding such practices in a normative conceptualization of human nature was not. By contrast, early Christian spirituality, was also profoundly influenced by the Stoic conceptualizations of achieving emotional and behavioral change through cognitive change, yet the Christian appropriation of these concepts retains and adapts the original Stoic normative conception of human nature. This paper will present the similarities and differences in how Stoicism influenced both early Christian Spirituality and Modern CBT. It will argue that both Christian Spirituality and CBT have much to learn from each other.

Existing published research already compares CBT with its Stoic antecedents,<sup>1</sup> shows the influences of Stoicism on early Christianity,<sup>2</sup> and even compares modern CBT with ancient Christian Ascetic Spirituality.<sup>3</sup> But there does not appear to be any published work that presents the broad similarities and differences in how Stoicism influences CBT and early Christianity. This paper aims to fill that void. It accomplishes this by identifying the Stoic influences in the thought of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck as well as in authoritative Christian sources of spirituality, the Old and New Testaments, St. Anthony of the

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy* (London: Karnac, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Tuomas Raisimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Father Alexis Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012).

Desert, Evagrius Ponticus, and St. John Climacus. It then compares and contrasts how Stoic ideas influenced each of these sources in different ways. Because of these differences and their shared pedigree in Stoicism, CBT and Christian Spirituality, are well-positioned to learn from one another in ways that can be mutually beneficial.

## **Chapter 1: History, Theory, and Moral Shortcomings of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

“How shall the story of psychology be told?... In the beginning-1879-psychology was born as the science of mental life, studying consciousness with introspection. Then, in 1913, the dominance of mentalism was challenged and shattered by the rude and simplistic behaviorists, who made a revolution against the ancient regime mentalists. They slew the science of mental life and replaced it with the science of behavior, creating a decades-long rule of behavior study with behavior theory. However, in 1956, a new revolution began, its makers waving the banner of cognition, aided by outside forces from linguistics and artificial intelligence. After two decades of struggle, the ancient regime of behaviorism was defeated, or at least repressed, and the rule of information processing cognitive psychology began.”<sup>4</sup>

The above passage introduces and summarizes the contents of this chapter. In this chapter, we will trace the rise of cognitivism out of the dominant Freudian and Behavioristic paradigms which preceded it. We will discuss various forms of therapy associated with each of these paradigms. We will show how Cognitive forms of therapy were invented to compensate for theoretical and clinical weaknesses of Behaviorism and Freudian Psychoanalysis. It will, however, also show weaknesses in CBT as it is practiced today, in that it lacks an integrated theory of human flourishing or normativity.

### **Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Psychiatry and Psychology were competing disciplines. Psychiatry, a branch of medicine, traced its roots through the history of treating the mentally ill and insane back to ancient times.<sup>5</sup> Psychology, on the other hand, was a new discipline which sought a fresh start on understanding human behavior through the rigorous

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<sup>4</sup>Leahey, Thomas H. “The Mythical Revolutions of American Psychology,” in *Evolving Perspectives on the History of Psychology*, eds. Wade E. Pickren and Donald A. Dewsbury (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2002), 191.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Ducey and Bennett Simon, “Ancient Greece and Rome,” in *World History of Psychiatry*, ed. John G. Howells (New York: Brunner/Mazel Inc., 1975), 1-38.

application of experimental methods for observing, testing, and predicting human behavior.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) was born out of the conflict between these two disciplines.

Psychiatry tried to cure or alleviate mental illness through a variety of means. Some were analogous to other common medical interventions (e.g., the use of pharmaceuticals), and some were mysterious yet appeared effective (e.g., hypnosis and mesmerism),<sup>6</sup> and some were downright desperate (e.g., bloodletting and primitive electrocution therapies).<sup>7</sup> As a psychiatrist,<sup>8</sup> Freud had experimented with cocaine and was trained in hypnosis,<sup>9</sup> but constantly searched for new means of treating psychiatric patients. In one particular hypnotherapy session the patient rebuked Freud for interrupting her train of thought. Freud found this event highly significant and came to develop a brand of talk-therapy based on the idea of “free-association,” a process wherein the patient spontaneously verbalizes his or her thoughts to the therapist without reservation or censorship.<sup>10</sup> Freud came to believe that through spontaneous, uncensored verbalization of one’s stream of consciousness, the patient would eventually lay bare certain patterns which connect a patient’s present symptoms with early childhood traumas and primal human drives (most notably the sex-drive). According to Freud, repressed drives, inherited archetypes, and unresolved traumas recapitulate themselves throughout a person’s life. Once a person has come to understand these patterns and is induced to have a “corrective emotional experience” through their relationship with a therapist, the cycle of recapitulation would be

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<sup>6</sup>A. A. Roback, *History of Psychology and Psychiatry* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1961), 63-65.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric, and Repression* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1978) 43-97.

<sup>8</sup>Freud is widely regarded as having been a psychiatrist although his medical training was in Neurology.

<sup>9</sup> J.N. Isbister, *Freud: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985), 34-54.

<sup>10</sup>Isbister, *Freud*, 63.

broken and the problems were expected to resolve.<sup>11</sup> Freud called his new method *psychoanalysis*.

Psychoanalysis became famous for its complex and esoteric methods such as dream interpretation, analysis of transference (i.e. the way in which a therapist comes to symbolize childhood or developmental problems in the mind of the patient),<sup>12</sup> doctrines of universal archetypes (such as the *Oedipus complex*)<sup>13</sup> as motivators of human thought and behavior, and its insistence on an animalistic anthropology based on primitive drives (e.g., drives towards self-preservation, sex, and death).<sup>14</sup> The process by which Freud came to develop his theories of the human mind was largely the result of his own personal introspection and speculations, making his claims particularly difficult to confirm or falsify scientifically.<sup>15</sup> However, for many they seemed to offer hope where other interventions had failed. With Freud's success, Psychiatry rapidly expanded beyond the asylums to which it had previously been restricted and began to be used to treat the more common mental problems of people who were more-or-less functional in society.<sup>16</sup>

Though less common than it was in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century, psychoanalysis is still practiced today, but it has always been prohibitively expensive. A patient of a psychoanalyst (then and now) might expect to be in therapy multiple times per week for several years before they could expect to reach satisfactory resolution of their problems. Furthermore, to become a

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey J. Magnatavita, "Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy" in *Twenty First Century Psychotherapies: Contemporary Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. Jay L. Lebow (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2008), 227.

<sup>12</sup> Magnatavita, "Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy," 215.

<sup>13</sup> Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy*, 126.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Solms and Margaret R. Zellner, "Freudian Drive Theory Today," in *From the Couch to the Lab: Trends in Psychodynamic Neuroscience*, ed. Aikaterini Fotopoulou, Donald Pfaff, and Martin A. Conway (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49-63.

<sup>15</sup> Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, And What The Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 45-52.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc. 1997), 170-172.



certified practitioner, a prospective analyst must themselves submit to extensive psychoanalysis. All this made psychoanalysis accessible only to the small number of patients who had the means to pay (a point which became important in later competitions between psychoanalysis and faster and less costly therapies such as CBT). Through the establishment of regulating Psychoanalytic Institutes and a mass migration of psychoanalysts into America from Europe,<sup>17</sup> by the 1930s and 1940s, psychoanalysis expanded into a sprawling industry, with psychoanalysts practicing in most of the world's major cities, and claiming nearly monopolistic control of the entire American mental health industry in particular.<sup>18</sup>

## **Psychology and Behaviorism**

About the same time that Freud was beginning to formulate psychoanalysis, the new science of Psychology was coming into being. Wilhelm Wundt established the first experimental psychological laboratory in Leipzig in 1879, followed soon after by a laboratory at Cornell University in America.<sup>19</sup> Psychologists were largely skeptical of psychoanalysis.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Freud, who developed his theories through introspection and reflection on individual case studies, psychologists attempted to understand and explain human behavior through the application of the experimental method. Due largely to its emphasis on experimentation and the scientific method, many psychologists began to work in conscious opposition to psychoanalysis

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<sup>17</sup> John G. Howells, *World History of Psychiatry* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1975), 453.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Cushman, "Psychotherapy to 1992: A Historically Situated Interpretation," in *History of Psychotherapy: A Century of Change*, eds. Donald Freedheim, Herbert J. Freudenberger, Jane W. Kessler, Stanley B. Messer, Donald R. Peterson, Hans H. Strupp, Paul L. Wachtel (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1992) 37-52.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel B. Fishman and Cyril M. Franks, "Evolution and Differentiation Within Behavior Therapy: A Theoretical and Epistemological Review" in *History of Psychotherapy: A Century of Change*, eds. Donald Freedheim et al. (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1992), 162.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Erwin, *Behavior Therapy: Scientific Philosophical, and Moral Foundations* (New York: Cambridge, 1978) 3.

and other forms of therapy based on introspection and intuition.<sup>21</sup> Some began to develop a paradigm for understanding the human mind that eschewed the consideration of internal mental states entirely, contradicting many of Freud's claims. This paradigm came to be known as *Behaviorism*. According to Behaviorism, the scientific study of the human mind can proceed only through the study of observable behaviors.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to its opposition to psychoanalysis, there are two major reasons for the rise of Behaviorism in Psychology. The first was the famous research of Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov.<sup>23</sup> The second was the rise of Philosophical Positivism in scientific research, which rejected the consideration of anything that could not be measured or observed.<sup>24</sup> By restricting phenomena which could not be directly measured, Behaviorist Psychology eliminated internal mental phenomena from its scope. Behaviorists supported the view that human behavior is purely a function of positive and negative reinforcements and is therefore almost limitlessly changeable, contrary to Freud's view which held that human behavior is motivated by primitive complexes and drives universal to human nature. The Behaviorist idea was further reinforced by developments in American anthropology<sup>25</sup> which emphasized theories that denied the existence of a universal, immutable human nature, asserting instead that people are essentially malleable, and devoid of stable, consistent structures of thought or behavior across time and culture.<sup>26</sup> By

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<sup>21</sup> Donald Gillies, *Philosophy of Science in the Twentieth Century: Four Central Themes* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 154-155.

<sup>22</sup> Erwin, *Behavior Therapy*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Richard E. Zinbarg and James W Griffith, "Behavior Therapy" in *Twenty First Century Psychotherapies: Contemporary Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. Jay L. Lebow (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2008), 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> George Graham, "Behaviorism", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015) at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/behaviorism/#3>

<sup>25</sup>E.g.,Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa; a Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization Foreword by Franz Boas* (New York: W. Morrow &, 1928).

<sup>26</sup> Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 143-156.

the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, this idea of human malleability became the dominant paradigm of the social sciences, sometimes referred to as the “standard social science model” or SSSM.<sup>27</sup>

Despite its truncated scope, Behaviorist Psychology produced a large body of controlled experimental research. Behaviorists were able to show how a surprising variety of animal behaviors could be predictably and reliably trained through the controlled environmental conditioning and reinforcement administered by laboratory scientists. The first landmark in this regard was Ivan Pavlov’s experiments with dogs wherein he accidentally discovered that he could train dogs to salivate at the ringing of a bell by ringing it at feeding time; he could additionally un-train them by ringing the bell without pairing it with food.<sup>28</sup> This methodology of pairing an unconditioned stimulus (i.e., food) with conditioning stimuli (i.e., a ringing bell) to create a conditioned response (i.e., salivation at the ringing of a bell), became known as *classical conditioning*. This methodology opened new scientific vistas by making it possible to perform highly controlled experiments testing behavioral patterns with various animals under many different situations in a systematic and replicable way. It was not long before these methods were applied directly to human subjects.

One of the earliest behaviorists experiments on a human subject was the infamous study performed on a subject who has come to be known as “Little Albert.” In this experiment, psychologists took Albert, an infant child, and exposed him to furry lab rats. Initially the child showed no fear of the animal, but after exposure to the animal was repeatedly paired with loud distressing noises, Albert eventually started to wail whenever he saw a rat or other furry creature such as a dog or even a stuffed animal. Experimenters were then able to desensitize Albert by

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup>Zinbarg and Griffith, “Behavior Therapy,” 10-11.

exposing him to the furry creatures repeatedly in the absence of distressing stimuli, or in the presence of calming or pleasurable stimuli. Many saw in this study potential implications for treating mental health problems such as trauma.<sup>29</sup> This and other successes increased behaviorists confidence in their theories and methodology. John Watson, a famous behaviorist boasted,

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors.<sup>30</sup>

Behaviorist psychologist B.F. Skinner expanded on the stimulus-response model. He designed the “Skinner Box,” a specially designed chamber wherein he would place a rat or a pigeon and administer various stimuli aimed at reinforcing specific behaviors. The box allowed stimuli to be administered in highly controlled environments at variable rates to test for different response patterns.<sup>31</sup> Stimuli came in the form of food pellets, painful electric shocks, and various lights and sounds. This kind of process came to be known as *operant conditioning*, or the gradual shaping of behavior through continual reinforcement of behaviors that approximate the behavioral response desired. This form of conditioning played a large role in subsequent psychological research through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup>

Behaviorist theory and research led to the creation of two highly related clinical therapies, Behavior Therapy and Behavior Modification. These methods were used to treat

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<sup>29</sup>John Watson and Rosalie Rayner, “Conditioned Emotional Reactions” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 3, no. 1 (1920), 1-14.

<sup>30</sup> John B. Watson, *Behaviorism*, Revised Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930),82.

<sup>31</sup> Roger R. Hock, *Forty Studies that Changed Psychology: Explorations into the History of Psychological Research* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999), 75.

<sup>32</sup> Fishman and Franks, “Evolution and Differentiation Within Behavior Therapy,” 163

problems such as addictions, trauma, and criminal behavior through the strict application of classical and operant conditioning.<sup>33</sup> Based on studies like “Little Albert” and others, the first Behavioral Therapy, known as Systematic Desensitization, was formulated by Joseph Wolpe.<sup>34</sup> It sought to un-train traumatic and otherwise maladaptive responses to various objects and stimuli through progressively exposing people to them without reinforcing the maladaptive behavior and while reinforcing opposite behaviors. For instance, someone traumatized in a car accident could gradually be exposed to cars and driving again with comfort, encouragement, and reinforced relaxation. Just as Pavlov’s dogs could be un-trained to salivate at the ringing of a bell by repeatedly ringing the bell without reinforcing it with any natural food reinforcement, a person who had a trauma history that was triggered by a certain everyday event (e.g., a car horn, or thunder), could be gradually exposed to that stimuli in a safe environment that did not reinforce the traumatic response until eventually the traumatic response would extinguish itself. Similar treatments were used with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder with considerable success.<sup>35</sup>

Behaviorist Psychology and Psychoanalytic Psychiatry continued to compete with one another into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning in the 1940s the landscape of mental health research and clinical practice changed with the advent of a new paradigm known as Cognitivism in a series of events that have come to be known as the Cognitive Revolution.<sup>36</sup>

## **The Cognitive Revolution**

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<sup>33</sup>Alan E. Kazdin, *History of Behavior Modification: Experimental Foundations of Contemporary Research* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978), 197-204.

<sup>34</sup>Joseph Wolpe, “Variants of Systematic Desensitization,” in *The Practice of Behavior Therapy* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1969), 150-168.

<sup>35</sup>Edna Foa, “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder,” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* vol. 12 (2), June 2010. 199-207.

<sup>36</sup>George A. Miller, “The Cognitive Revolution: A Historical Perspective,” *Cognitive Sciences* 7 no. 3 (2003): 141-144.

In short, Cognitivism is the idea that thought, affect, and behavior are all mutually influential. According to Cognitivist theory internal cognitions and emotions are critical for understanding behavior. Cognitivists showed that it was not only possible, but deeply enlightening to study internal mental states (even though they could not be directly observed). There were many factors involved in catalyzing the Cognitive Revolution. For the purposes of this paper, I have selected the work of five scientists: Edward Tollman, Hans Eysenck, Leon Festinger, Albert Bandura, and Noam Chomsky.

Edward Tollman<sup>37</sup> was one of the first psychologists to produce experimental results that conflicted with the prevailing Behaviorist paradigm through his study of animal learning. Tollman studied the behavior of lab rats in mazes. Through his investigations, he discovered that their behavior could not be explained by behavioristic principles of stimulus and response alone but appeared to indicate that animals must have some mental or cognitive “maps” of their terrain that help them navigate and choose their paths. He concluded the rats continuously processed mental information and updating their mental maps regardless of stimulus reinforcement.

Tolman concluded,

We agree with the other school [behaviorism] that the rat in running a maze is exposed to stimuli and is finally led as a result of these stimuli to the responses which actually occur. We feel, however, that the intervening brain processes are more complicated, more patterned and often, pragmatically speaking, more autonomous than do the stimulus-response psychologists [i.e. behaviorists]. Although we admit that the rat is bombarded by stimuli, we hold that his nervous system is surprisingly selective as to which of these stimuli it will let in at any given time.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Since writing, I have learned that, Wolfgang Köhler, a founder of Gestalt Psychology, generated findings that conflicted with the behaviorist paradigm through his studies of insight-based learning in Chimpanzees. Cf. K. Jensen, “Memoir Wolfgang Köhler,” no date. [http://wkprc.eva.mpg.de/english/files/wolfgang\\_koehler.htm](http://wkprc.eva.mpg.de/english/files/wolfgang_koehler.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Edward Tollman, “Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men,” *The Psychological Review* 55, no. 4 (1948): 189-208.

The rodents showed signs of having internal cognitive structures which selectively prioritized certain stimuli over others and allowed them draw on tacit knowledge of their past experiences to inform their decisions in the present. Subsequent animal research continued to support these findings over the following years.<sup>39</sup>

Our second scientist is Hans Eysenck. His research compared the improvement of neurotic psychotherapy patients to neurotic patients who received no psychotherapy at all. Eysenck concluded that on the whole, psychotherapy as practiced in the early 1950s was ineffective: “The figures fail to support the hypothesis that psychotherapy facilitates the recovery from neurotic disorder.”<sup>40</sup> Eysenck was a titan in the field of empirical Psychology, having established a reputation based on his landmark contributions to intelligence and personality theory in addition to work on behavior therapy.<sup>41</sup> This research did great damage to the prevailing *status quo* in psychotherapy, and was particularly damaging to the reputation of psychoanalysis which was dominant in clinical practice at the time. This research eroded practitioners’ confidence in the old methods in which they were trained and created room for new forms of psychotherapy to be attempted and studied.<sup>42</sup>

Our third scientist is Leon Festinger. In the mid-1950s, Festinger presented his theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Festinger theorized that people have many internal beliefs and cognition which play a critical role in determining behavior independent of any conditioning models. In particular, he theorized that people have a natural motivation to maintain consistency among

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<sup>39</sup> Roger R. Hoch, *Forty Studies that Changed Psychology*, 113-114.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Eysenck, “The effects of Psychotherapy: an Evaluation,” *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 16(5) (1952), 323.

<sup>41</sup> S.J. Rachman, “Hans Eysenck’s contributions to Clinical Psychology and Behavior Therapy,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 103 (2016), 91-92.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Erwin, “Psychotherapy and Freudian Psychology,” in *Hans Eysenck: Consensus and Controversy*, eds. Sohan Mogdil and Celia Mogdil (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1986), 179-204.

their beliefs and behaviors, and that when inconsistencies do arise, people will try to resolve them by changing either their beliefs or behaviors to re-establish consistency.

“The Basic Hypotheses I wish to state are as follows:

1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.
2. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.”<sup>43</sup>

His most famous experiment investigated how dissonance can cause self-deception.<sup>44</sup>

The experiment involved two groups of subjects. In one group, each subject would come into a lab and perform boring, pointless tasks for a period of time. When the time was up, they were told that they were engaging in an experiment on how expectations influence performance. The experimenter then told them that he needed the subject to tell the next person in the waiting area outside the lab (who was actually a confederate pretending to be a subject) that the experiment was a lot of fun and offered the subject \$20 (a substantial amount in the 1950s) to do so. The second group was the same, except they were offered only \$1 to tell the next person in line that the experiment was a lot of fun. Finally, Festinger had the subjects come in for a debriefing and asked them whether they had in fact enjoyed the tasks in the experiment. Unexpectedly, the group that was paid more said they had not enjoyed the tasks, but the group that was paid only \$1 said they did enjoy them and were even willing to volunteer to do similar tasks in the future.

Festinger theorized that the person paid \$20 had no difficulty being honest in the final debriefing because they were paid enough money so that when they told the confederate in the

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<sup>43</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1962), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Leon Festinger and James M. Carlsmith, “Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 58, no. 2 (1959), 203-210.



waiting area that the task was fun, they understood that they were only saying this for the money and not because they actually found the tasks fun. But the group that had received only \$1 did not have this excuse for lying and saying that they had enjoyed the tasks, so they experienced dissonance. They had to make sense of why they would tell someone that something was fun which they actually found boring. To resolve this unpleasant discrepancy, the \$1 subjects simply changed their mind. This landmark experiment in Psychology explained a significant behavioral change in terms of cognitive mechanisms.

Our fourth scientist is Albert Bandura. Bandura's research gave rise to an entire field within psychological research called "social cognitivism." Bandura's most famous experiment, now fondly remembered as "The Bobo Doll Experiment," demonstrated that children who simply watch videos of actors performing aggressive behaviors are far more likely to engage in the behaviors they see the actors perform (*monkey-see-monkey-do*). Specifically, children who were shown videos of adults violently beating a Bobo Doll toy were more prone to be violent with the toy when they were shown violent behaviors than when they were shown neutral behaviors. The violent behaviors tended to generalize beyond just the specific behaviors performed by the models, and male children were shown to be far more sensitive to learning aggressive behaviors by imitation than female children. This important change in behavior was difficult to square with the Stimulus-Response models proposed by the behaviorists at the time, and did not cohere well with theories of human malleability which downplayed the influence of biological sex differences in human psychology.<sup>45</sup> Instead, Bandura proposed a theory which gave room for "vicarious learning" through observation and symbolic representations.

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<sup>45</sup> Albert Bandura, Dorothea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross, "Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models" *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 66, No.1(1963), 3-11.

A theory that denies that thoughts can regulate actions does not lend itself readily to the explanation of complex human behavior. Although cognitive activities are disavowed in the operant conditioning framework, their role in causal sequences simply cannot be eliminated. Therefore, adherents of operant theory translate cognitive operations into behavioristic terms, and ascribe their effects to the direct action of external events... In the social learning view, people are neither driven by inner forces nor buffeted by environmental stimuli. Rather, psychological functioning is explained in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction of personal and environmental determinants. Within this approach, symbolic, vicarious, and self-regulatory processes assume a prominent role.<sup>46</sup>

The idea that symbols can precipitate learning and behavioral change, and that people can learn vicariously did not fit well into a reductive stimulus-response paradigm. Bandura's alternative social-cognitive theories became highly influential for the entire field of Psychology.<sup>47</sup>

Our fifth and final scientist is Noam Chomsky. Chomsky and other linguists, through a combination of experimental methods and analysis of the natural use of language, began to discover that certain consistent structures which they called *grammars* were common to all human language. This discovery seemed to evade explanation on the ground of behavioristic principles. Stephen Pinker, a student of Chomsky, summarizes the influence of Chomsky's findings:

In the 1950s the social sciences were dominated by behaviorism, the school of thought popularized by John Watson and B.F. Skinner. Mental terms like "know" and "think" were branded as unscientific; "mind" and "innate" were dirty words... But Chomsky called attention to two fundamental facts about language. First, virtually every sentence that a person utters or understands is a brand-new combination of words, appearing for the first time in the history of the universe. Therefore a language cannot be a repertoire of responses; the brain must contain a recipe or program that can build an unlimited set of sentences out of a finite list of words. That program may be called a grammar... The second fundamental fact is that children develop these complex grammars rapidly and without formal instruction and grow up to give consistent interpretations to novel sentence constructions that they have never before encountered. Therefore, he argued, children must innately be equipped with a plan common to the grammars of all

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1977), 10-12.

<sup>47</sup>Stephen J. Haggblom, et al. "The 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *Review of General Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2002) 139-152.

languages, a Universal Grammar, that tells them how to distill the syntactic patterns out of the speech of their parents.<sup>48</sup>

In a highly influential and scathing review of behaviorist B.F. Skinner's book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Chomsky took Skinner and Behaviorism to task. Chomsky accuses Skinner of imposing "certain arbitrary limitations on scientific research which virtually guarantee continued failure,"<sup>49</sup> and of purveying theories that are "vacuous," and "pure dogmatism." Chomsky was especially sensitive to the political ramifications of Behaviorist theory, and worried that they would be used to justify fascist power structures that use public policy as a means to control citizens, "There is little doubt that a theory of human malleability might be put to the service of totalitarian doctrine. If, indeed freedom and dignity are merely relics of outdated mystical beliefs, then what objection can there be to narrow and effective controls instituted to ensure 'the survival of a culture'?"<sup>50</sup> A public debate ensued between Chomsky and Skinner.<sup>51</sup> Though there was no formal winner in this debate, the credibility and dominance of strict Behaviorism as a science was diminished, opening the field for new ideas and avenues of study and practice.

Tollman, Eysenck, Festinger, Bandura and Chomsky were just a few of the major players who contributed to the decline of behaviorism and psychoanalysis, and the concomitant rise of Cognitivism. As more scientists began subscribing to Cognitivist views the battle between Behaviorist psychology and psychoanalytic psychiatry petered out. Behaviorism's theory and methodology were shown to be insufficient and psychoanalysis continually drew criticism for its

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<sup>48</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1994), 9.

<sup>49</sup>Noam Chomsky, "The Case Against B.F. Skinner," *The New York Review of Books*, December 30, (1971), 1. At <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/12/30/the-case-against-bf-skinner/>

<sup>50</sup>Chomsky, "The Case Against B.F. Skinner," 1.

<sup>51</sup> Erwin, *Behavior Therapy*, 87-97.

lack of experimental support or demonstrable clinical efficacy.<sup>52</sup> Psychoanalysts had increasing difficulty justifying their claim that only medical doctors should be allowed to practice psychotherapy, and eventually Psychologists, Social Workers, and other professions were admitted into the field of clinical psychotherapy as well.<sup>53</sup> This created an influx of new psychotherapists into the field of clinical practice with a wide variety of new approaches.<sup>54</sup> Some of these approaches were completely independent of preceding paradigms, such as the Person-Centered approach devised by Carl Rogers.<sup>55</sup> But some new therapies were clearly connected to the new paradigm. The first person to create such a therapy was Albert Ellis.

### **Ellis, Beck, and Linehan: Rational, Cognitive, and Dialectical Therapies**

Albert Ellis is the founder of Rational Therapy (now known as Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, REBT). Like Freud and Carl Rogers, the inspiration for Ellis's new form of therapy came more from his experience and intuition than as an application of clinical or experimental research. Nonetheless, connections between Ellis's therapy and cognitivist psychology are self-evident, as we shall see.

Ellis suffered from intense social anxiety early in life.<sup>56</sup> An avid reader of Philosophy, he discovered that reading the Stoic philosopher Epictetus helped him to overcome his problems. What he learned from Epictetus was that by translating his emotions into verbal statements that

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<sup>52</sup> Cushman, "A Century of Psychotherapy Economic and Environmental Influences," 83.

<sup>53</sup> Cyril M. Franks, "Behavior Therapy and its Pavlovian Origins: Review and Perspectives" in Cyril M. Franks. ed. *Behavior Therapy: Appraisal and Status* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), 21-41.

<sup>54</sup> Fishman and Franks, "Evolution and Differentiation Within Behavior Therapy," 167.

<sup>55</sup> Alberta E. Pos, Lieslie S. Greenberg, and Robert Elliott, "Experiential Therapy" in *Twenty-First Century Psychotherapies*, ed. Jay L. Lebow (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2008), 82-83.

<sup>56</sup> Michael E. Bernard, *Rationality and the Pursuit of Happiness: The Legacy of Albert Ellis*. (Chichester: Wiley and Sons, 2010), 1-18.

made definite truth claims, and then disputing those truth claims, he could gain control of his emotions and significantly reduce his distress.<sup>57</sup>

Originally, Ellis had been trained in psychoanalysis, but he quickly became dissatisfied with the results it gave to him and his patients.<sup>58</sup> As an alternative, he began to use the Stoic principles that he had used to treat his own anxiety with his clients. He found that this approach was more efficient and more effective, they too were able to increase the control they had over their emotions by identifying and disputing the tacitly held beliefs that were sustaining their problems. Ellis developed these observations into his own theory and method of psychotherapy and called it Rational Therapy (RT). Ellis describes his therapy:

The central theme of Rational Therapy (RT) is that man is a uniquely rational as well as uniquely irrational, animal; that his emotional or psychological disturbances are largely the result of his thinking illogically or irrationally; and that he can rid himself of most of his emotional or mental unhappiness, ineffectuality, and disturbance if he learns to maximize his rational and minimize his irrational thinking. It is the task of the psychotherapist to work with individuals who are needlessly unhappy and troubled, or who are weighed down with intense anxiety or hostility, and to show them (*a*) that their difficulties largely result from distorted perception and illogical thinking, and (*b*) that there is a relatively simple, though work-requiring, method of re-ordering their perceptions and reorganizing their thinking so as to remove the basic cause of their difficulties.<sup>59</sup>

In RT, the client need not spend endless hours rehashing childhood misgivings (*a la* Freud), or be placed into a reinforcement regimen (*a la* Behaviorism). Instead, the client could take control over his or her own healing process quickly and effectively by observing and rationally challenging his or her own emotionally-charged thoughts in real time. Ellis devised a simple but powerful technique to help people quickly learn how to practice Rational Therapy on themselves. Ellis summarizes this technique,

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<sup>57</sup> Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (Secaucus: Lyle Stuart, 1962), 54.

<sup>58</sup> Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, 3-4

<sup>59</sup> Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, 36.

Sparked by philosophy, I worked on my psychotherapeutic theory from 1953 to 1955 and finally came up with what I called Rational Therapy (RT) in January 1955. In it, I presented the rather unique ABC theory of emotional disturbance. This held that when people were confronted with Adversity (A) and reacted with disturbed Consequences (C), such as severe anxiety and depression, it was largely their Belief System (B), together with A, that led to their dysfunctions. Thus  $A \times B = C$ . This theory significantly differed from psychoanalytic, conditioning, and other theories of emotional disturbance that were popular in 1955.<sup>60</sup>

To illustrate the A-B-C technique, one may consider the case of an alcoholic. The alcoholic experiences stress and a strong desire to drink (A). In the end, he gives in to this pressure and falls back into his addiction (C). In between A and C is his belief (B): “I must have a drink.” Ellis would treat this person by arguing against the B: “What evidence is there that you must have a drink? Will the world end if you don’t have a drink? Will you die? Might there be any benefit to you not having a drink?” By eroding the man’s confidence in this irrational belief and replacing it with more nuanced, rational beliefs like “I am really tempted to drink right now, but it will probably be harmful. It may be uncomfortable right now, but I can survive without it,” the man is expected to have less stress and greater control over his drinking habits.

Ellis believed that most emotional and behavioral problems could be explained as the result of patterns of well-rehearsed or tacitly accepted belief statements like the ones above. Ellis noted that this process happens similarly in animals and human, but that humans have a stronger capacity for “self-signaling.” He writes, “For whereas the Pavlovian dog is obviously able to signal himself on some rudimentary level, once the bell is rung in juxtaposition with the meat he enjoys eating, and to convince himself that the sound of the bell equals eating time (and in the extinguishing process, that the sound of the bell *without* the presentation of food equals

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<sup>60</sup>Albert Ellis and Catharine MacLaren, *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: A Therapist’s Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Atascadero: Impact, 2005), 10 quoted in Donald Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy* (London: Karnac, 2010), 115.

non-eating time), his self-signaling tends to be very limited and largely to be at the mercy of *outside* circumstances.”<sup>61</sup>In RT, patients repeatedly and vigilantly practice noticing the momentary beliefs underlying emotions and behaviors, holding them up to rigorous scrutiny, and searching for more rational alternatives.

Ellis was certainly not the first to discover how helpful Stoic Philosophy could be to those suffering from psychological distress. Stoics like Epictetus and Seneca had inspired an earlier generation of psychotherapists. Very early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French therapists such as Paul Dubois and Charles Badouin openly quoted and prescribed Stoic texts including the *Enchiridion* as a treatment of choice for many of their patients.<sup>62</sup> The similarity between Ellis’s method and these earlier psychotherapists’ has been noted by Ellis himself, though unlike Ellis Dubois and Badouin were working during the hey-days of Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism, which may explain why their work never gained the audience and appeal that Ellis’s did.

Very soon after Ellis developed RT, Aaron Beck, a Psychiatrist, developed his own form of cognitive therapy. Like Ellis, Beck was originally trained in Psychoanalysis, but was dissatisfied with the progress of his patients. Looking to improve his methods, Beck studied his patients and began to subject to empirical scrutiny some of the psychoanalytic theories he had been taught. Judith S. Beck summarizes the story:

In the late 1950s and early 1960s. Dr. Beck decided to test the psycho-analytic concept that depression is the result of hostility turned inward towards the self. He investigated the dreams of depressed patients, which, he predicted, would manifest greater themes of hostility than the dreams of normal controls. To his surprise, he ultimately found that the dreams of depressed patients contained *fewer* themes of hostility and far greater themes of defectiveness deprivation, and loss. He recognized that these themes paralleled his patients’ thinking when they were awake. The results of other studies Beck conducted

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<sup>61</sup> Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, 14-15.

<sup>62</sup> Donald Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy: Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, (London: Karnac, 2010), 19-38.

led him to believe that a related psychoanalytic idea – that depressed patients have a need to suffer – might be inaccurate... At that point it was almost as if a stacked row of dominoes began to fall. If these psychoanalytic concepts were not valid, how else could depression be understood?

As Dr. Beck listened to his patients on the couch, he realized that they occasionally reported two streams of thinking: a free-association stream and quick, evaluative thoughts about themselves. One woman, for example, detailed her sexual exploits. She then reported feeling anxious. Dr. Beck made an interpretation: “You thought I was criticizing you.” The patient disagreed: “No, I was afraid I was boring you.” Upon questioning his other depression patients, Dr. Beck recognized that all of them experienced “automatic” negative thoughts such as these, and that this second stream of thoughts was closely tied to their emotions. He began to help his patients identify, evaluate, and respond to their unrealistic and maladaptive thinking. When he did so, they rapidly improved.<sup>63</sup>

Beck came to believe, contrary to his Psychoanalytic training, that it was not unconscious drives and unresolved childhood crises that fueled patients’ depression, but specific, present-tense ways of thinking about themselves and the world. Beck called his therapy Cognitive Therapy (CT). Like Ellis, Beck also attributed his insights to the teachings of the Stoics,

Nevertheless, the philosophical underpinnings of this approach go back thousands of years, certainly to the time of the Stoics, who considered man’s conceptions (or misconceptions) of events rather than the events themselves as the key to his emotional upsets. This new approach – cognitive therapy – suggests that the individual’s problems are derived largely from certain distortions of reality based on erroneous premises and assumptions. These incorrect conceptions originated in defective learning during the person’s cognitive development. Regardless of their origin, it is relatively simple to state the formula for treatment: The therapist helps a patient to unravel his distortions in thinking and to learn alternative, more realistic ways to formulate his experiences.<sup>64</sup>

Beck’s CT and Ellis’s RT were very similar in their theories and methods. Ellis and Beck acknowledged these similarities.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Judith S. Beck, *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and beyond*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Guilford, 2010), 5.

<sup>64</sup> Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Albert Ellis, “Discussion of Christine A. Padesky and Aaron T. Beck, “Science and Philosophy: Comparison of Cognitive Therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy,” *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy* 19, no.2 (2005),



As Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism waned, and interest in new therapeutic approaches grew, publications and trainings for the new therapies spread rapidly. Although some behaviorists vehemently opposed the induction of any “mentalist”<sup>66</sup> concepts into behavioral therapy, in practice, behavioral therapists and cognitive therapists often borrow techniques from one another.<sup>67</sup> Behaviorists argued that cognitivism implied a metaphysical mind-body dualism, which they charged was unscientific, as B.F. Skinner lamented, “By attempting to move human behavior into a world of nonphysical dimensions, mentalistic or cognitive psychologists have cast the basic issues in insoluble forms. They have also probably cost us much useful evidence...”<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding, the borrowing and integration of techniques persisted, and prominent behavioral psychologists such as Hans Eysenck and Joseph Wolpe lent their support for an integration of cognitive and behavioral approaches to understanding and treating behavioral problems. Eysenck writes,

It is our conviction that stimulus-based and representation-based accounts are necessary for any adequate explanation of behavior. But it would be wrong to equate conditioning explanations solely with stimulus control and cognitive theory with representational knowledge structures. It would be equally inappropriate to oppose a theory of conscious control with one that emphasizes unconscious processes. Far from being a matter of simple competition between conditioning and cognitive accounts, or between conscious and unconscious processes, the approach we wish to adopt emphasizes points of integration and investigated the nature of the interaction between them rather than assuming total dissociation.<sup>69</sup>

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185. And also Christine A. Padesky and Aaron T. Beck, “Response to Ellis’ Discussion of “Science and Philosophy: Comparison of Cognitive Therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy,” *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy* 19,no. 2 (2005), 187-189.

<sup>66</sup> Michael J. Mahoney and Alan E. Kazdin, “Cognitive Behavior Modification: Misconceptions and Premature Evacuation” in *Psychological Bulletin* 86, no. 5 (1979), 1044-1049

<sup>67</sup> Jack Rachman, “Eysenck and the Development of CBT” Hans Eysenck Memorial Lecture at the 2003 Conference of the British Psychological Society in Bournemouth at <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-16/edition-11/eysenck-and-development-cbt>

<sup>68</sup> Mahoney and Kazdin, “Cognitive Behavior Modification,” 1045.

<sup>69</sup> Irene Martin and A. B. Levey, “Verbalizable Knowledge and Awareness,” in *Theoretical Foundations of Behavior Therapy*, eds. Hans J. Eysenck and Irene Martin (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 135.

CT and RT eventually blended with Behaviorist principles of operant and classical conditioning, resulting in Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Eventually, even B.F. Skinner, the stalwart opponent of what he called “mentalism” adapted his theories to account for the importance of internal thoughts and emotions as biological processes embedded into observable behavior.<sup>70</sup> Presently, therapies based on the basic insights of Ellis, Beck, and the Behaviorists—i.e. that emotional and behavioral change can be accomplished though mental change and vice versa – are commonly lumped together under the umbrella term “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies.”<sup>71</sup>

CBT has continued to be studied and adapted by researchers and clinicians to treat a growing range of problems and continues to prove its effectiveness. It is currently the most widely practiced and most widely applicable form of psychotherapy today.<sup>72</sup> It has been proven effective in treating difficult problems such as criminal behavior,<sup>73</sup> addiction, anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and many other problems.<sup>74</sup> A number of studies have concluded that of CBT can be as effective or more effective than medications.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps CBT’s greatest success is the therapy developed by Psychologist Marsha Linehan known as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy or DBT. Linehan was a therapist working with patients diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), a notoriously complex and difficult to treat diagnosis. Patients with BPD often present with extreme emotional sensitivity

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<sup>70</sup> Mecca Chiesa, *Radical Behaviorism: The Philosophy and the Science* (Boston: Author’s Cooperative, 1994), 187.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Keith S. Dobson, *Handbook of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* (New York: Guilford, 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Amanda M. Epp and Keith S. Dobson, “The Evidence Base for Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy” in *Handbook of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies*, Keith S. Dobson, ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>73</sup> Mark W. Lipsey, Nana A. Landenberger, and Sandra J. Wilson, “Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Programs for Criminal Offenders.” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 6, no. 1 (2007): 27.

<sup>74</sup>Deborah Dobson and Keith S. Dobson, *Evidence-Based Practice of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 239-240.

<sup>75</sup>Robert J. DeRubeis et. al, “Medications Versus Cognitive behavior Therapy for Severely Depressed Outpatients: Mega-Analysis of Four Randomized Comparison,” *American Journal Of Psychiatry* vol. 156, no. 7 (July, 1999), 1007-1013.

and a very high risk of self-destructive behaviors and suicide. Prior to the creation of DBT, there was no proven treatment for BPD.<sup>76</sup> Linehan took many of the tried-and-true principles of CBT, and adapted them to work with the unique problems of BPD patients.

“Although DBT borrows many principles and procedures from standard cognitive and behavioral therapies, the development and evolution of DBT over time came about as I tried – and in many ways failed – to get standard CBT to work with the population of clients I was treating. Each modification I made came about as I was trying to solve specific problems I could not solve with the standard CBT interventions available at the time. These modifications have led to DBT’s emphasizing 10 areas that, though not new, had not previously received as much attention in traditional CBT applications... Many, if not most, of these are now common in many CBT interventions.<sup>77</sup>

The most significant adaptation which DBT adds to CBT is the emphasis on dialectical processes. In DBT treatment focuses on the importance of paradox and the synthesis of opposite extremes. For example, while standard CBT is focused on helping patients change their thoughts and behaviors and solve their problems, DBT alternates between helping patients change and helping them accept themselves as they are, sometimes without change. The paradox or synthesis of change with acceptance is the central concept that gives DBT its name.<sup>78</sup> At present, DBT is the treatment-of-choice for BPD and other disorders that are considered especially difficult to treat.

### **The Moral Shortcomings of CBT**

CBT is not without its problems. In particular, it is morally deficient in that it fails to include any conceptualization of human flourishing. Some conceptualization of human flourishing is necessary in any kind of medicinal treatment. The treatment for diabetes, for

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<sup>76</sup>Allen Frances, “Foreword” in Marsha M. Linehan, *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*. (New York: Guilford, 1993), v-vi.

<sup>77</sup>Marsha M. Linehan, *DBT Skills Training Manual*. Second Edition. (New York: Guilford, 2015), 16.

<sup>78</sup> “Dialectical and Biosocial Underpinnings of Treatment” in Marsha M. Linehan, *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder* (New York: Guilford, 1993), 29-65.

example, involves adding either insulin or sugar into the bloodstream. Whether to add insulin or sugar, however, depends upon one's conceptualization of normative blood-sugar levels. A doctor with an incorrect conceptualization could end up harming the patient. Likewise, CBT works by helping people substitute distress-causing beliefs and behaviors for less distress-causing beliefs and behaviors. But distressing psychological symptoms may have a variety of beliefs underlying those symptoms, and the therapist must determine which belief is pathological, and what alternative beliefs are healthy. Without any account of what thoughts and beliefs humans *ought* to have, CBT is in a precarious moral position: the patient and practitioner must decide for themselves what constitutes normative and pathological beliefs and behaviors. As Father Alexis Trader points out, “[Albert] Ellis claims that there is not such thing as right and wrong, or even good and bad, but only thoughts, feelings, and actions that further or sabotage one's goals and purposes, which ultimately translate into maximizing the amount of pleasure a person receives in life.”<sup>79</sup> This would be like treating diabetes with sugar or insulin by arbitrarily injecting one or the other without any objective understanding of healthy blood-sugar or blood-insulin levels. A thoroughly narcissistic patient, for instance, might not wish to feel guilt for cheating or abusing others. But therapist may treat this patient by resolving the distress through helping him or her overcome their feelings of guilt, but in the long-run such an arrangement is likely to cause more harm than good. A conceptualization mental and behavioral normativity is required to help guide the therapist and patient to correctly identify which issues as pathological.

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<sup>79</sup> Father Alexis Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 39. In this passage, Father Trader is referring to the following book: Albert Ellis and Robert A. Harper, *A Guide to Rational Living* (Woodland Hills: Wilshire Book Company, 1997), 245-246.

CBT's lack of any integrated concept of normativity in human psychology has led to concerns, especially among Christian counselors. One standard text on Christian Counseling describes the problem in detail:

Because cognitive therapy lacks a comprehensive personality theory that accounts for human motivation, it also tends to be sketchy about defining normalcy and abnormalcy... cognitive therapy is characterized by what Woolfolk and Richardson (1984) call 'amorality,' a tendency to go along with the individual definitions of normalcy and abnormalcy. If a client comes into a clinic complaining that a pattern is a problem, then for that person it is a problem. This usually meshes well with common sense. No one is going to disagree that agoraphobia or suicidal depression is abnormal. But it leaves open to the individual decision of the therapist and client the normalcy or abnormalcy of various adjustment problems.

A perhaps extreme example is Lazarus's (1980) work with a woman who reported having married her husband only for the financial rewards he gave her. She had had numerous sexual affairs. She came to therapy because of a developing aversion to sexual relations with her husband. Lazarus's response was not to confront the obvious narcissism of the client or to urge her to work on the marriage. Rather he deemed her aversion to sex in a loveless and pragmatic marriage a worthwhile target for therapy and taught her cognitive techniques to allow her to 'turn herself off emotionally' so that she could continue to tolerate sex with her husband while continuing to enjoy her adulterous affairs. While this is an extreme example, it points to the risks of an obscure definition of normalcy<sup>80</sup>

One may argue that this is an extreme example that is not representative of CBT as a whole. But on the contrary, this basic point has been raised by some philosophers as a problem not just with CBT, but with modern psychotherapy in general. Philip Rieff, Thomas Szasz, and Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>81</sup> have all argued that psychotherapy's failure to explicate its moral implications has led it to become an insidious force for manipulation, subtly usurping and privatizing the role of other cultural institutions in the lives of large numbers of patients. Sociologically this results in the development psychotherapeutic communities and institutions that behave as *de facto* religions. Such an effect has far-reaching moral and sociological

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<sup>80</sup> Stanton Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 224-225.

<sup>81</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 23-35.

consequences that threaten the integrity of explicitly religious institutions in particular.<sup>82</sup> Rieff has argued that psychotherapy is only as moral as the culture in which it is being practiced,

Ultimately, it is the community that cures. The function of the classical therapist is to commit the patient to the symbol system of the community, as best he can and by whatever techniques are sanctioned (e.g., ritual or dialectical, magical or rational). All such efforts to reintegrate the subject into the communal system may be categorized as “commitment therapies.” Behind shaman and priest, philosopher and physician, stand the great community as the ultimate corrective of personal disorders. Culture is the system of significances attached to behavior by which a society explains itself to itself. A culture that is not thus self-explicative must be undergoing, in the measure of the negative condition, a profound change. What happens, however, if the community itself is disordered?”<sup>83</sup>

The wide-spread privatization of the moral components of this treatment process leads to a subjectification of morality in the culture – creating exactly the kind of disordered community that loses the power to heal.

One might still argue that other common medicinal treatments are not expected to contain intrinsic theories of normative biological functioning, and so it is not reasonable to expect this of psychotherapy. For example, in the treatment of diabetes, there is no relationship between the tools of treatment and the morals of the treatment. But other medical treatments do not have moral implications in the same way that psychotherapeutic treatments do. The very nature of psychotherapy requires it to have moral implications. In a classic text on the topic, Perry London admits this much, even defending this as the professional *status quo* of psychotherapists:

It is probably correct to declare that every aspect of psychotherapy presupposes some implicit moral doctrine, but it is not necessary to seek this level in order to say why it is important for therapists to recognize the moral concomitants of patients’ problems and the implied moral position of some of their solutions. Some problems are inevitably moral ones from the perspective of either client or therapist, and some can be viewed as

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<sup>82</sup> Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How America Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2013), 211-241.

<sup>83</sup> Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 57.

strategic or technical ones and treated without reference to particular value systems. In the one case, the therapist must fulfill a moral agency in order to function at all, whereas, in the other he may restrict himself to the impartial helping or contractual function with which he is usually identified. But if he does not know the difference, then his own moral commitments may influence his technical functioning so that he willy-nilly strives to mold men to his own image, or his technical acts may imply moral positions which he might himself abhor.<sup>84</sup>

As London asserts, it may not be strictly necessary to resolve the fundamental moral dilemmas of psychotherapy as a prerequisite to effective and ethical clinical work, nonetheless, his very argument illustrates the precarious moral position of the therapist. How can it be that a therapist has an obligation to “fulfill a moral agency,” and it not be necessary for them to recognize the “implied moral positions of some of their solutions?” Psychotherapy appears to be on shaky moral ground.

Psychotherapists who use such therapies have needed to supplement them with forms of moral reasoning from sources outside of the psychotherapies themselves.<sup>85</sup> In fact, the professions which are licensed to practice psychotherapy (in the United States these are Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Nurses, Psychologists, Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Professional Counselors) are generally expected to develop their own clinical judgement on such matters.<sup>86</sup> This creates a major risk for psychotherapists on the whole, as it places within the realm of the subjective judgement of the therapist and patient, decisions involving deep philosophical problems that are outside the scope of most psychotherapeutic training programs. Unlike the practice of modern medicine, which relies on the discipline of

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<sup>84</sup> P. London, *The Modes and Morals of Psychotherapy*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, (1964), no page number, cited in Joseph Wolpe, *The Practice of Behavior Therapy*(New York: Pergamon Press, 1969), 21.

<sup>85</sup>Wolpe, *The Practice of Behavior Therapy*, 20.

<sup>86</sup>For example, the American Counseling Associations *2014 Code of Ethics* limits itself mainly to guidance on how to avoid violations of civil and criminal laws. See American Counseling Association, *2014 Code of Ethics* (Alexandria: American Counseling Association, 2014), 1-24.

*Bioethics* for moral guidance, there is no analogous discipline guiding the practice of psychotherapy.

There is no inherent barrier to a psychotherapy having an integrated conceptualization of human flourishing, indeed some psychotherapies are built around such conceptualizations.<sup>87</sup> But is it possible for CBT to be built this way? As we have seen, CBT was inspired by Stoic thought and practice, but unlike modern CBT, the Stoics placed emphasis on the moral dimensions of their ancient form of psychotherapy. Thomas Szasz points out,

The idea that the philosopher's function is to be a physician of the soul is taken for granted by many post-Socratic philosophers, especially by the Stoics. Cicero (106-43 B.C.) provides what may be one of the earliest articulations of the idea that the person suffering from a sick soul cannot be his own healer but must entrust himself to the care of an expert: "The soul that is sick cannot rightly prescribe for itself, except by following the instruction of wise men." These wise men, or physicians of the soul, should, of course, be philosophers, experts in the use of words. In summarizing the duties of comforters of the soul, Cicero recommends the use of "healing words," what Aeschylus (*ca.* 525-456 B.C.) called *iatro logoi*. Veritably, like pure water issuing from a spring that becomes contaminated as it courses downstream toward the oceans, we see psychotherapy as healing rhetoric here in its pristine purity, before it becomes contaminated and unfit for its function as it courses through history and empties into modern medicine.<sup>88</sup>

Unlike modern CBT, the Stoic forms of cognitive therapy were embedded in a broader theory of the Natural Law. Is it possible for CBT to import these concepts? If so, what might such a CBT *look like*?

In the next chapter I summarize the doctrines of the Stoics and the role that Natural Law played in their thought, including their use of ancient cognitive therapy. In chapter three I argue that early Christians were also profoundly influenced by Stoic thought and adapted Stoic forms of cognitive therapy to suite their theistic and messianic world view. I also argue that the

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<sup>87</sup> E.g. Jungian Psychoanalysis.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy* (New York: Anchor Press), 29.



Christian appropriation of Stoic thought in this regard, unlike the appropriation of Stoic thought by modern CBT, retained the Stoic norms for guiding therapeutic practice, and therefore avoided the moral problem of modern psychotherapy discussed in this chapter.

## **Conclusion**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapies originated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century out of conflict between behavioristic and Freudian schools of thought. The new therapies were directly inspired by ancient Stoic philosophy, and supplanted both Freudian psychoanalysis and Behaviorism to become the dominant form of psychotherapy used in clinical practice by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though offering powerful and proven techniques for helping people overcome or deal with problems, CBT, like many other psychotherapies, lacks a moral center and offers no explicit guidance as to how these tools and techniques ought to be applied. However, the Stoics whose philosophy inspired the development of Cognitive Therapies did include a theory of human flourishing that informed their application of cognitive therapeutic techniques, and the moral problems of modern CBT may represent another opportunity to learn from these ancient thinkers. The next chapter treats this in more detail.

## Chapter 2: Stoicism

This chapter will present a general overview of Stoicism. The thrust of this chapter is that the Stoics practiced cognitive therapy<sup>89</sup> within the context of a broader conceptualization of human flourishing which they called Natural Law.

Stoicism is an ancient Graeco-Roman school of philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium. It flourished from approximately 300 BC to 300 AD. Its hallmark teaching is that Philosophy's ultimate purpose is to help people reach moral perfection by overcoming emotional weaknesses through the exercise of reason.<sup>90</sup> Its main contribution to current psychotherapy was the idea that emotions can be formulated as propositional beliefs.<sup>91</sup> Inspired by this insight, modern cognitive therapists such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck developed systems of psychotherapy to help people overcome emotional distress by refuting the beliefs that undergirded their negative emotions. But while modern cognitive therapies generally lack any normative theory of human flourishing, as pointed out in chapter one, the Stoics considered cognitive self-regulation as inseparable from a metaphysical worldview replete with normativity.

After the trial and execution of Socrates, philosophy flourished in Athens. New philosophical schools were established, each with a unique worldview and style of argumentation. Plato founded the Academy, Aristotle founded the Lyceum, Epicurus founded the Garden, and so on. The Stoic school was founded by Zeno of Citium and takes its name

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<sup>89</sup> While some may argue that the use of the term "cognitive therapy" in this case is an anachronism, authoritative scholars of Stoicism often freely employ the term as it aptly describes their most characteristic practices. Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice Within Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Margaret Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). In this chapter and the next I will refer to use the words 'cognitive therapy' or 'cognitive intervention' to refer in a generic way to the cognitive techniques and practices ancient Greeks and Christians used to achieve emotional self-mastery and alleviate distress.

<sup>90</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," *Apeiron* 20, no. 2 (1987), 129.

<sup>91</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 4.

from the *Stoa Poikile*, or “Painted Colonnade” in Athens where Zeno and his students met to discuss philosophical questions.

Zeno was originally trained in Cynicism, another philosophy of the time, by his mentor Crates.<sup>92</sup> The philosophy which Zeno came to develop had much in common with that of his teacher. Both philosophies emphasized the importance of self-mastery and trained people to overcome their desires for comfort and pleasure, as well as their fears of pain and hardship. But their motives were different. For the Cynics, self-mastery was an expression of their disdain and disregard for social conventions,

The Cynics break with the world ... was radical. They rejected what most people considered the elementary rules and indispensable conditions for life in society: cleanliness, pleasant appearance, and courtesy. They practiced deliberate shamelessness – masturbating in public, like Diogenes or making love in public, like Crates and Hipparchia. The Cynics were absolutely unconcerned with social proprieties and opinion; they despised money, did not hesitate to beg, and avoided seeking stable positions within the city. ... They did not fear the powerful, and always expressed themselves with provocative freedom of speech.<sup>93</sup>

Their ideal was to be utterly self-reliant and heedless of wealth, privilege, social standing, or material well-being. It was believed that these things only hindered someone from the one true good: living in complete harmony with Nature.<sup>94</sup> Their disrespect for commonly accepted social conventions led some to insultingly refer to them as “cynics” derived from “kyne,” the Greek word for dog.

But while the Cynics held that wealth, possessions, and social conventions necessarily prevented one from living in accordance with Nature, the Stoics believed that they could be

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<sup>92</sup> David Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*. Brad Inwood, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>93</sup> Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*. trans. Michael Chase (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), 109. Cited in Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)*, 127.

<sup>94</sup> Massimo Pigliucci, “Stoicism” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, no date, at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicism/>

brought into harmony with it, so long as one maintained detachment or indifference to these things. This idea became very important for the Stoics, and is now referred to as the doctrine of *indifferent things*.<sup>95</sup> Epictetus illustrates this doctrine in his *Discourses*:

“Epictetus, we can no longer stand being tied to this hateful body, giving it food and drink, resting it and cleaning it, and having to associate with all manner of uncongenial people for its sake.” Such things are indifferent are they not, and as nothing to us; and death no evil thing? Aren’t we akin to God, having come from him? Let us go home, then to be free finally, from the shackles that restrain us and weigh us down. Here we find robbers and thieves, and law-courts, and so-called despots who imagine that they wield some power over us precisely because of our body and its possessions. Allow us to show them that they have power over precisely no one.”<sup>96</sup>

The ascetic rigors of Cynicism made it something to which few were willing to aspire, especially the affluent classes who prized their wealth and social standing. Many Stoics, on the other hand, were among the most wealthy and influential people in the Roman Empire. Their practiced indifference to material wealth and social standing is illustrated by the roster of influential Stoic philosophers which includes Emperor Marcus Aurelius and the Roman senator Seneca alongside Epictetus, a freed slave.

The Stoic idea of Nature was deeply theological. They believed in God, conceived of as a supremely rational, omni-present, and benevolent being who created and cares for humanity, and governs all events and all movements of matter in the Universe bringing it ever closer to perfection. They had counter-arguments to common objections to the existence of a provident God, such as the Problem of Evil.<sup>97</sup> The importance of theology to Stoicism therefore cannot be

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<sup>95</sup>Nicholas P. White, “Stoic Values” in *The Monist* 73, no. 1 (1990), 42-58

<sup>96</sup>Epictetus, *discourses* Book I, 9:12 in *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert Dobbin (New York: Penguin, 2008), 26.

<sup>97</sup>A.A. Long, “Freedom and Determinism in the Stoic Theory of Human Action” in *Problems in Stoicism* ed. A.A. Long (London: Athlone Press, 1971), 179.

understated: “The existence of God, or what comes to the same thing in Stoicism, the divinity of Nature, is a thesis which the Stoics devoted great energy to proving.”<sup>98</sup>

For them, God was the *Logos*, or the literal personification of perfect reason, the primordial and cosmic rational principle which governs all things. They were not Theists, like Jews, Christians, or Muslims, but Pantheists. Their conception of God was materialistic.<sup>99</sup> For them “God,” “Nature,” and “the Universe” were all synonyms, “God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names.”<sup>100</sup> For them the whole Universe was the personal and physical embodiment of God, which God providentially directed down to the smallest bits of matter. The human soul was also material, which they called *Pneuma* due to their beliefs that the air was the essence of life.<sup>101</sup> The *Pneuma* was the seat of human reason, the possession of which made them a shareholder of divinity, granting humanity with intrinsic dignity, and making moral perfection possible.<sup>102</sup> This is seen in the opening of Epictetus’s

*Discourses*:

“Well, what does Zeus say? ‘Epictetus, if it were possible I would have made your little body and possessions both free and unrestricted. As it is, though, make no mistake: this body does not belong to you, it is only cunningly constructed clay. And since I could not make the body yours I have given you a portion of myself instead, the power of positive and negative impulse, of desire and aversion – the power, in other words, of making good use of impressions. If you take care of it and identify with it, you will never be blocked or frustrated; you won’t have to complain, and never will need to blame or flatter anyone. Is that enough to satisfy you?’”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 149.

<sup>99</sup> Dirk Blatzly, “Stoicism,” at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/stoicism/>.

<sup>100</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1925), vii., 135 in Maryanne Cline Horowitz, “The Stoic synthesis of Natural Law” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 1 (1974): 10 at JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708739>.

<sup>101</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 22.

<sup>102</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 20.

<sup>103</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1:1, 10-13, in Epictetus: *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert Dobbin (New York: Penguin, 2008), 6.

In addition to cosmic *Logos*, or Nature writ large, each being or object in the universe has its own particular nature,<sup>104</sup> writ small, which governs its behavior. For most objects the governance of cosmic Nature entails strict determinism, such as with the behavior of chemical compounds or of irrational animals. But for human beings, whose nature is to be rational, there is *free will*. The Stoics did not conceive of this free will as a complete and immediate control over one's behaviors. Instead, they argued that man can have complete control only over his own character or soul, and since all human behaviors are a function of one's soul, one can have free will via the control one exercises over their own soul.<sup>105</sup>

They explained this by an analogy with geometry. Objects will roll down a hill or when pushed according to their shape: e.g. an egg will roll differently from a cylinder. For human beings, the *shape* (so to speak) of one's soul is one's character. Though the influence of nature must be heeded as gravity causing an object to roll downhill, a person has control of the "shape" of their soul, and therefore over the way they "roll" in response to the pressures of nature. Through shaping one's own soul, one may gain control over how he or she responds to certain circumstances, not as a direct and absolute power, since everything must act in accordance with his nature at all times<sup>106</sup>, but as an indirect power. As Cicero wrote, citing Chrysippus,

Chrysippus offers an analogy to the round shape or "rollability" of some cylindrical object. When given a push, a cylindrical object will roll forward; another shape will behave differently or not move at all. In trying to explain why the cylinder rolls while the other object does not, it hardly seems right to single out the pushing motion, since a very similar push does not yield anything like the same result in the other object. Chrysippus therefore finds it reasonable to designate the push a 'proximate' or 'accessory' cause and to claim that the principal cause of the movement is just the cylinder itself, by virtue of its rollable shape. In the same way, he argues, human action can depend on impressions and yet not be caused in this principal sense by anything other than the agent's own character.

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<sup>104</sup> It is likely that the Stoics borrowed this concept from Aristotle.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 81-82.

<sup>106</sup>A.A. Long "Freedom and Determinism in the Stoic Theory of Human Action," 182.

A similar impression occurring in someone whose character was different could produce a very different impulse, or no impulse at all.<sup>107</sup>

The control one may have over one's own character comes as function of his or her use of reason. Because of the connection between character and reason, "Knowledge and goodness go hand-in-hand."<sup>108</sup> A person who is vigilantly rational, intelligent, and wise has maximal control over his soul and therefore maximal freedom. The one who does not is a slave of his passions - doomed to roll whichever way his impulses and environment carry him.<sup>109</sup>

The Stoics had many ways of describing this ideal. One way was to describe the state one reaches when they become perfectly rational and self-governing. They called this state *apathia*. This is not to be confused with "apathy" in the modern sense, but as a mastery over the emotions by eliminating false beliefs or faulty reasoning.<sup>110</sup> As one writer explains,

The passions or *pathe* are literally 'things which one undergoes' and are to be contrasted with actions or things which one does. Thus, the view that one should be 'apathetic,' in its original Hellenistic sense, is not the view that you shouldn't care about anything, but rather the view that you should not be psychologically subject to anything – manipulated and moved by it, rather than yourself being actively and positively in command of your reactions and responses to things as they occur or are in prospect. It connotes a kind of complete self-sufficiency.<sup>111</sup>

For the Stoics, the passions (roughly synonymous with the modern concept of emotion) were forms of judgment. Without judgement, there is no passion.<sup>112</sup> A person who feels the passions of desire, fear, sadness, or elation is making subtle judgements about themselves and the world

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<sup>107</sup>Cicero, *On Fate*, 41 quoted in Margaret Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 64.

<sup>108</sup> A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 111.

<sup>109</sup>Frede, *A Free Will*, 67.

<sup>110</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 2.

<sup>111</sup>Dirk Blatzly, "Stoicism," <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=stoicism>.

<sup>112</sup> Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 366-367.

which give rise to these feelings. But for the Stoics, being so influenced by one's emotions was believed to be a form of slavery. True freedom could only come as the result of *apatheia*.<sup>113</sup>

Another way the Stoic talked about their idealization of reason was by describing the person who had reached it. When a person reaches the state of *apatheia*, he has become a sage or "*Wise Man*." Seneca describes this Stoic ideal:

The wise man does not need to walk timidly and cautiously; for so great is his confidence in himself that he does not hesitate to go against Fortune, and will never retreat before her. Nor has he any reason to fear her, for he counts not merely his chattels and his possessions and his position, but even his body and his eyes and his hands and all else that makes life very dear to a man, nay even himself, among the things that are given on sufferance, and he lives as one who has been lent to himself and will return everything without sorrow when it is reclaimed. Nor is he therefore cheap in his own eyes, because he knows that he does not belong to himself, but he will perform all his duties as diligently and as circumspectly as a devout and holy man is wont to guard the property entrusted to his protection. When however, he is bidden to give them up he will not quarrel with Fortune but will say "I give thanks for what I have possessed and held. I have managed your property to great advantage, but, since you order me, I give it up, I surrender it gratefully and gladly. If you still wish me to have anything of yours, I shall guard it; if your pleasure is otherwise, I give back and restore to you my silver, both wrought and coined, my house, and my household" Should nature recall what she previously entrusted us with, we shall say to her also: "Take back the spirit that is better than when you gave it. I do not quibble or hang back; of my own free will I am ready for you to take what you gave me before I was conscious-away with it!"<sup>114</sup>

The wise man was a sort of psycho-epistemological superhero who held only true beliefs and therefore had perfectly healthy affectivity at all times.<sup>115</sup> This idealized figure was a critical component of Stoic philosophy. Stoics argued whether such a person had ever in fact existed, and whether certain historical figures might have been "Wise Men." Rival philosophical schools

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<sup>113</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 87.

<sup>114</sup> Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *On the Tranquility of Mind* XI. 1-4 in *Seneca Moral Essays*, vol. 2, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 255.

<sup>115</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 135.



lampooned the Stoics on this point.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, the “Wise Man” played a normative function for the Stoics. He represented the *telos* of Stoic cognitive therapy and was the personification of their theory of human flourishing. The virtues of the hypothetical *Wise Man* inspired and clarified the way towards moral perfection. He represented a role model to be copied – illustrating to those willing to pay attention what ought to be done and what ought to be avoided. He lived in complete agreement with Reason and with Nature at all times, as one scholar notes, “Stoics did, in fact, hold that emotions like fear or envy (or impassioned sexual attachments, or passionate love of anything whatsoever) either were, or arose from false judgements and that the sage – a person who had attained moral and intellectual perfection – would not undergo them.<sup>117</sup> Whatever emotions and passions he did feel, he was not governed by them, “Things do move him, but not in such a way as to disturb his balanced judgement and make him attribute an importance to them which they do not have.”<sup>118</sup>

As an important caveat, not all affective moments were considered by Stoics to fall within the purview of reason. Even a perfectly rational human being would be expected to experience very intense feelings in response to sudden, unexpected stimuli, such as threatening sights or sounds, or sexually provocative images. One cannot help having bodily responses to these kinds of things, regardless of how wise or rational they may be. However, Stoics, especially Epictetus and Seneca, did not regard these experiences as genuine emotions. The stimuli, in virtue of their sudden onset and intensity, leave no opportunity for reason to pass a judgement, and so they are not to be counted as emotions. Only once reason has the opportunity

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<sup>116</sup> John Martens, *One God, One Law: Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 23.

<sup>117</sup> Dirk Blatzly, “Stoicism,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=stoicism>.

<sup>118</sup> Michael Frede, “The Stoic Doctrine of the Affectations of the Soul,” *The Norms of Nature*, eds. Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Stricker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 110.

to engage with and evaluate the stimuli and ones own psycho-physiological response to them, does the person experience what can be considered *bona fide* human emotions.<sup>119</sup> An appropriate analogy could be the body's physical reflexes. When the doctor taps your knee with a hammer, your leg kicks up; it is merely your body doing the action, not you as a reasoning person.

Stoic Metaphysics and Theology played an important role in their understanding of the virtues of the wise man as well as their techniques for self-improvement. As noted before, the Stoics argued that there is an all-powerful, all-rational, cosmic, provident God in charge of the Universe.<sup>120</sup> Their Theology allowed them a degree of detachment from external circumstances; since all things are directed by Providence towards ever greater perfection, there is nothing to be sad, angry, or afraid about (though that is not to say they did not care about the natural world – more on this below). One's confidence in the inherent benevolence and rationality of the *Logos* played an axiomatic role in their use of cognitive therapy, particularly when combating anxious emotions.<sup>121</sup> An example of this is the famous *Hymn to Zeus* by the early Stoic Cleanthes: “Nay thou canst make the rough smooth, bring wonderous order forth from chaos; in Thy sight unloveliness seems beautiful; for so Thou hast fitted things together, good and evil, that there reigns one everlasting Reason in them all.”<sup>122</sup> And the following passage by Epictetus in which he chastises his students:

Now that you know all this, come and appreciate the resources you have, and when that is done, say ‘Bring on whatever difficulties you like Zeus; I have resources and a constitution that you gave me by means of which I can do myself credit whatever happens.’ But no. There you sit, worrying that certain events might happen already

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<sup>119</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 85-87

<sup>120</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* 1:6, 1-25 in Epictetus: *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert Dobbin (New York: Penguin, 2008), 16-18.

<sup>121</sup> A.A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 180.

<sup>122</sup> Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus* accessed online at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hymn\\_to\\_Zeus](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hymn_to_Zeus) on 4/4/2018.

upset an in a state about your present circumstances. So then you reproach the gods. What else can come of such weakness except impiety? And yet God has not merely given us strength to tolerate troubles without being humiliated or undone, but, as befitted a kind and true father, he had given them to us free from constraint, compulsion, and impediment. He has put the whole matter in our control, not even reserving to himself any power to hinder us or stand in our way. And even though you have these powers free and entirely your own, you don't use them because you still don't realize what you have or where it came from. Instead you sit crying and complaining – some of you blind to your benefactor, and unable to acknowledge his existence, others assailing God with complaints and accusations from sheer meanness of spirit.<sup>123</sup>

One author recognizes this as a stock-and-trade technique of cognitive therapy for the Stoics which he calls “the view from above.”

The cardinal meditative technique of Stoic metaphysics is the “View from above,” ... in which the philosopher becomes dispassionate by contemplating the “bigger picture,” expanding his perspective to encompass the whole world, or the totality of space and time. It is this contemplation of cosmology and metaphysics that the Stoics used to induce feelings of serenity and which helps to illustrate the initially surprising link between Stoic “physics” and the practical conquest of irrational fears and desires.<sup>124</sup>

The belief that God providentially orders all things towards the good, and that human beings possess a divine *spark* of reason played a crucial role in understanding their use of the cognitive therapy: “there is nothing of ultimate relevance for you that is not under your power, and the passions or emotions that get in the way of your exercise of that power are therefore not worthy of being held.” Notwithstanding the apparent oversimplification, the Stoics understood that one needed training and practice to reach this ideal, “It is true that no bull reaches maturity in an instant, nor do men become heroes overnight.”<sup>125</sup> The Stoics were sensitive to the fact that cognitive intervention was a skill which required practice to attain mastery. True mastery, or

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<sup>123</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1:66, 37-43 in *Epictetus: Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert Dobbin (New York: Penguin, 2008), 19-20.

<sup>124</sup> Donald Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy*, 64

<sup>125</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1:2, 32 in *Epictetus*, 10.

*apatheia*, was only held by the Sage, whose powers of wisdom, reason, and self-control were preternatural.

Having covered Stoic conceptions of Theology, free will, *apatheia*, and the “Wise Man,” it is now time to discuss the concept of Natural Law within Stoicism. The Stoic philosophy of Natural Law is a concept which ties together Stoic Theology, Anthropology, Ethics, and Political Science, weaving together their doctrines of indifferent things, the Wise Man, free will, and *apatheia*, etc. For the Stoics, law (whether moral, legal, or scientific) was a function of the *Logos*, the Divine Reason governing the universe. The Stoics did not perceive a hard distinction between fact and value that comes naturally to modern philosophers. For them, what is (*physis*) and what ought to be (*nomos*) were deeply interrelated concepts.<sup>126</sup> Since the universe is governed by a Rational Mind and humans possess a *spark* of that Rational Mind, it is possible for humans to observe and understand patterns in Nature, enabling them to engage in Science of all kinds. As A.A. Long puts it, “The faculty in man which enables him to think, to plan, and to speak – which the Stoics called *logos* – is literally embodied in the universe at large. The individual human being at the essence of his nature shared a property which belongs to Nature in the cosmic sense. Cosmic events and human actions are therefore not happening of two quite different orders: in the last analysis they are both alike consequences of one thing – *logos*.”<sup>127</sup> Once the patterns of Nature are firmly understood by a person’s reason, they become morally binding, though not in a *deontological* way but in a *teleological* way. A modern natural law philosopher explains this teleology with a biological metaphor,

An acorn is not *essentially* something small with a point at one end and a cap at the other; it is something aimed at being an oak. A boy in my neighborhood is not *essentially*

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<sup>126</sup> Gerard Watson, “The Natural Law and Stoicism” in A.A. Long, *Problems in Stoicism* (London: Athlone Press, 1971), 216-239.

<sup>127</sup> A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 108.

something with baggy pants and a foul mouth; he is something aimed at being a man. In this way of thinking, everything in Creation is a wannabe. We just have to recognize what it naturally wants to be. Natural law turns out to be the developmental spec sheet, the guide for getting there. For the acorn, nature isn't law in the strictest sense, because law must be addressed to an intelligent being capable of choice. For the boy though, it is. The acorn can't be in conflict with itself. He can.<sup>128</sup>

Because there is a universal human nature and universal Reason, this "spec sheet" entails certain consistent principles for human flourishing as though they were divine imperatives, as Diogenes Laertius quotes from Chrysippus,

Therefore, living in agreement with nature comes to be the end, which is in accordance with the nature of oneself and that of the whole, engaging in no activity forbidden by universal law, which is right reason pervading everything and identical to Zeus, who is the director of the administration of existing things, And the virtue of the happy man and his good flow of life are just this: always doing everything on the basis of concordance of each man's guardian spirit with the will of the administrator of the whole.<sup>129</sup>

Failure to observe these conditions will result in damage to one's human nature as well as to the natural and social order as a whole.<sup>130</sup> The damage to one's human nature takes place through the loss of virtue and the eventual slavery to the passions. For instance, Epictetus explains a case of someone who becomes a slave of the passion of greed,

When once you have desired money, if there is an application of reason which will lead you to recognize the evil the desire stops and our directive faculty governs as at the start, but if you do not apply anything in the way of [cognitive] therapy, it no longer returns to the same condition but when it is again stimulated by the corresponding impression it is kindled in to desire more quickly than before. And if this keeps happening, it thereafter becomes calloused, and the infirmity gives stability to greed.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2003) 23.

<sup>129</sup>Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 7:88 in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 63C quoted in Phillip Mitsis, "The Stoics and Aquinas on Virtue and Natural Law" in *The Studia Philonica Annual* 15 (2003), 40.

<sup>130</sup>Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "The Stoic Synthesis of Natural Law" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 no. 1 (1974): 10 at JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708739>.

<sup>131</sup>Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2:18, 8-10 quoted in Margaret Graver, *Stoicism Emotion*, 165.

Only through continuous<sup>132</sup> practice could one preserve his reason, nature, and freedom:

Repeated episodes of desire give rise to greed, and repeated episodes of fear give rise to timorousness. I suggest here that such repeated episodes exercise their influence specifically in their character as judgements, by altering our long-term views about matters of value and importance. In this way they lead us gradually to a point where even the most trivial provocation seems inevitably to produce a powerful emotional response. However, it is also possible to reverse the process of entrenchment through the exercise of reason by means of self-coaching and various techniques of cognitive therapy.<sup>133</sup>

In tandem with the concept of Natural Law, the Stoics recognized a gradation of contingent *goods* ranking below the single unqualified good of Virtue. To explain how such contingent goods relate to the non-contingent good of Virtue, they had a concept called *kathekonta*<sup>134</sup> or “appropriate acts.” The *kathekonta* were actions that had the primary goal of preserving or increasing one’s virtue. While many things were considered good or indifferent in themselves, actions that were not chosen for the unconditional purpose of exercising one’s virtues were ultimately harmful to one’s nature, their virtue, and their reason. The *kathekonta* were those things which were indifferent to virtue *per se* but, all other things being equal, were preferable.

In order to make the value of virtue sharply distinct from that of natural advantages like wealth, the Stoics confined the reference of the ordinary Greek words for ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ advantageous and ‘disadvantageous,’ ‘useful,’ and ‘useless’ to virtue and vice versa respectively. [‘The good’ and ‘the profitable’ are logically equivalent...] Everything else is indifferent so far as moral judgements are concern. But within the category of indifferent’ things, the natural advantages are marked off as ‘preferred’ or ‘preferable’ and their opposites are similarly classified as ‘things to be rejected.’<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Anthony A. Long, “Freedom and Determinism in the Stoic Theory of Action,” in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A. A. Long (London: Athlone Press, 1971), 185.

<sup>133</sup> Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 151.

<sup>134</sup> John Martens, *One God, One Law*, 151-158.

<sup>135</sup> A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, vol. 1, 193.

It was indifferent, though preferable to be wealthy, to be healthy, clothed, and free of distress. But if at any point these things conflicted with Virtue, they were to be abandoned without worry or complaint.

Failure to obey the dictates of reason and nature did damage not only to the individual, but to society. For the Stoics health, politics, and cosmology were all interconnected.<sup>136</sup> For them, whole societies, just as much as anything else in the universe, were formed according to Reason and violation of the Natural Law in one area could impact the proper functioning of another area. To the extent that individuals and societies functioned in accordance with Nature and Reason they would flourish, but the more they lived at odds with Nature and Reason, the more they would fail.

Like the other Hellenistic philosophies, Stoicism came into being at a time when old localized nations were being absorbed into sprawling empires, and people with vastly differing customs and views of the world were expected to function alongside another as citizens of the same Empire. Prior to this people were governed by local ethnic and national customs which helped them understand their roles and discern appropriate behaviors. But the assimilation of peoples with conflicting customs and worldviews into these empires created a problem. In a pluralistic society, how were disputes to be settled when the culture or customs of one people group in the empire, clashed with those of another? Which customs were to be honored, and which ones were to be forsaken?

Stoics aspired to be *cosmopolitan*, citizens of the cosmos, over and above any regional, tribal, or familial memberships. This was part and parcel of their Cynic heritage. As one scholar puts it, “The Cynics were natural opponents of those who held pleasure to be the end of life. In

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<sup>136</sup> A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, vol. 1, 171.

their deprecation of the civic community and of civic virtue, the Cynics were the proponents of the idea of the natural equality of all men and of the membership of all men in one single society.”<sup>137</sup> They argued that all men were created equal because they shared the same divine spark and the potential for rational thought. This sharing of divinity entailed a common bond of all men and women<sup>138</sup> (and even in some cases of animals<sup>139</sup>) that runs deeper than any distinctions of culture, nationality or ethnicity.<sup>140</sup> As such, Natural Law superseded all local and particular customs, and was the criterion by which civil laws were judged; civil laws not in accord with the cosmic Natural Law were *de facto* not laws, but aberrations from law. Philo of Alexandria, a Greek-speaking Jew, identified the Natural Law with the Torah: “Philo creates a new story that magnifies the Greek Jewish scriptures as the vehicle through which ‘each nation would abandon its peculiar ways, and, throwing overboard their ancestral customs, turn to honoring our laws alone.’”<sup>141</sup> Their deviance from Nature meant they were to be avoided and corrected. Failure to obey the Natural Law within a society could lead to that society to devolve into base irrationality, overdependence on contingent things, and slavery to the passions.

Disobedience of the Natural Law contained its own punishments. As Cicero says,

[Natural Law] Summons to duty by its commands and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither have any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at

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<sup>137</sup> William A. Banner, “Origen and the Tradition of Natural Law Concepts,” 57.

<sup>138</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum “The Incomplete Feminism of Musonius Rufus, Platonist, Stoic, and Roman” in *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 283-326.

<sup>139</sup> John R. Kroeger “The Philosophical Foundations of Roman Law: Aristotle, the Stoics, and Roman Theories of Natural Law” in *Wisconsin Law Review* (2004), 905-944

<sup>140</sup> Massimo Pigliucci, “Stoicism,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, No date, at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicism/>

<sup>141</sup> Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 130.



Rome and at Athens or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler that is, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly considered punishment.<sup>142</sup>

But the Stoics did not believe that everything that happened “in nature” was automatically “*natural*,” otherwise Natural Law would lose any normative force, merely describing things that happen, rather than prescribing how they *ought* to happen. It was an axiom for the Stoics that what was natural was inherently patterned, consistent, harmonious, healthy, and good. For instance, we commonly think of diseases as natural events, but such an idea would have sounded strange to the Stoics, for they were signs of disruption and chaos, the exact opposite of the harmonious patterns built into the Universe by the *Logos*. There appears to have been some awareness of the problem of theodicy among the Stoics. One possible explanation offered for the existence of disorder is that human free will allowed people to disobey the patterns of nature, creating room for events in the Universe that *appeared* natural, but really aren’t, as Margaret Graver points out, quoting Diogenes Laertius, “The rational animal is corrupted sometimes by the persuasiveness of things from without, sometimes through the teaching of our associates. For the starting points which nature provides are uncorrupted.”<sup>143</sup> But ultimately the Stoics, in contrast with Christianity and Judaism, did not seem to feel pressed to explain these problems, and simply accepted them as tragic yet inevitable consequences of Fortune.<sup>144</sup> And these were not to be complained of, but taken as opportunities to develop heroic virtues, “A man of his mettle is not one to accuse God, who chose him, of unfairness in making

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<sup>142</sup> Cicero *De Re Publica* iii, 22, 33 in Alonso, F.H. “Cicero and Natural Law” *Archives for Philosophy of Law* vol. 98, no.2 (2012), pp. 160.

<sup>143</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 7.89, quoted in Graver, 154.

<sup>144</sup> Kavin C. Rowe, *One True Life: the Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 206-238.

him ill. He positively prides himself on his hardships and is bold enough to be a roadside attraction. What would be blame God *for*? That he cuts such an admirable figure? What would the charge be? That his virtue is too glaringly bright?”<sup>145</sup>

Looking back on CBT, we saw how it was inspired by Stoic philosophy, and adopted the Stoic view of behavioral and emotional regulation through cognitive change. But in Stoic Philosophy, the idea of cognitive therapy was inseparable from their theology, their metaphysics, and their views of Natural Law. CBT, on the other hand, does not include any normative theory of human flourishing, but rather relies on the individual client and therapist to decide for themselves what does or does not constitute “mental health.” To illustrate the difference, consider how Epictetus counseled a man caught in adultery, and how this episode differs from the case of the CBT counselor and the cheating woman presented in chapter one.

Epictetus was saying that, as human beings, we are born to be faithful to one another and that whoever denies this denies their humanity. Just then, a well-known scholar entered the room – one who had been caught in adultery while in Rome. So Epictetus continues, ‘But what are we really doing when we throw away our innate faithfulness, to intrigue with our neighbor’s wife? We are ruining and destroying – well, what? How about the man of trust, principle and piety that once was? And is that all? Aren’t we also ruining the idea of neighbourliness, friendship and community? What position are we putting ourselves in? How am I supposed to deal with you now? As a neighbor? A friend? Some friend! A fellow citizen? But how can a fellow citizen like you be trusted?’<sup>146</sup>

For Epictetus, human virtues are objective and have their basis in human nature. This very fact is what makes them useful guides to ethical conduct and human flourishing. The flourishing of the individual and the flourishing of society are inseparable, for both are based in human nature, and the same virtues will lead to happiness and health for both.

## Conclusion

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<sup>145</sup> Epictetus *Discourses* III, 22, 59.

<sup>146</sup> Epictetus *Discourses* II, 4, 1.

This chapter summarized some of the history and belief of Stoicism as it pertains to the ideas of cognitive therapy. It has shown how their psychotherapeutic practices were mediated by their normative, metaphysical, and theological views of Nature. Their teachings about regulation of the passions by Reason were regulated by the idea of the cosmic *Logos* and Natural Law. Next we discuss how Christians modified these ideas and incorporated them into their Christological and Theistic worldview. Following this, I will present how the Christian appropriations of these ideas compares and contrasts with the modern psychological appropriations in CBT.

### **Chapter 3: Christianity**

Chapter one examined the history of CBT and how it was inspired by Stoic philosophy. I showed that CBT, though inspired by Stoicism, is not grounded in any conception of morality or human flourishing. Chapter two examined Stoicism, and how the Stoic philosophy and practice which inspired CBT was morally grounded in Natural Law and an ethics of virtue. In this chapter we will examine how early Christian ascetics was also inspired by Stoic concepts of cognitive, but unlike CBT, retained its grounding in normative concepts of morality and human flourishing.

Christianity was in many ways a product of Graeco-Roman culture. Despite its Jewish heritage, it readily appropriated concepts and arguments of pagan philosophers to clarify its beliefs and positions to the point that it is nearly as Hellenic as it is Jewish. The influence of Neo-Platonism on early Christianity has been extensively studied,<sup>147</sup> but it would be difficult to overstate the importance of Stoicism.<sup>148</sup> In the first century after Christ, Stoicism was likely the most popular philosophy in the Roman Empire.<sup>149</sup> Stoic notions of cognitive therapy, *Logos*, Natural Law, and the Wise Man all appear in the New Testament and authoritative post-biblical patristic documents. These ideas, with slight modifications, continued to play a normative role in Christianity. But the history of Stoic influence on Christianity goes deeper still, beginning before the birth of Christ, during the Greek occupation of Israel.

#### **Hellenism in the Old Testament**

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<sup>147</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* third edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 391.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. RunarThornsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and TuomasRasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and IsmoDunderberg, *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

<sup>149</sup>Dirk Blatzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Summer 2018 Edition) Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=stoicism>.

After the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Israel and Judah fell victim to a series of invasions, occupations, and exiles by foreign nations: Babylon, Persia, the Ptolemies, the Seleucid Kingdom, Greece, and finally Rome.<sup>150</sup> While it was long a concern for Israelite prophets that Judaism would be contaminated by influence from foreign nations, elements of Greek culture, thought, and language trickled into the Jewish religion (the words *Synagogue* and *Pentateuch* are both Greek). The Torah and other important Jewish religious texts were translated into Greek, forming what has become known as the *Septuagint*. For the growing population of diaspora Jews who did not know Hebrew, this translation provided their only means of reading their scriptures. Despite the translation, many Jews believed the *Septuagint* retained the authority of the original Hebrew texts. It continues to provide some of the earliest and most authoritative versions of portions of Old Testament even today.<sup>151</sup>

Two Old Testament books were composed during this time: The Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach. Each of these books shows evidence of influence from Stoic ideas. The Wisdom of Solomon book is believed to have been composed within one century before or after the birth of Christ.<sup>152</sup> In the first chapter of this book, emphasis is placed the love of wisdom and the discipline of one's thoughts, two very characteristically Stoic ideas:

For perverse thoughts separate people from God, and when his power is tested, it exposes the foolish; because Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin. For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit, and will leave foolish thoughts behind, and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness... (Wisdom of Solomon 1:3-5)<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Stephen L. Harris and Robert L. Platzner, *The Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 57-65.

<sup>151</sup> Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>152</sup> Carol A. Newsom, "Introduction to the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books," in Michael D. Coogan Ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 4 Apocrypha.

<sup>153</sup> All passages quoted from Michael D. Coogan ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Augmented third edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

By comparison, older books of the Torah pay far less attention to categories of wisdom and cognition, focusing more on themes of sin, righteousness, and the will of God. Compare the verse from the Wisdom of Solomon, “The ungodly will be punished as their *reasoning* deserves,” (Wisdom of Solomon 3:10) with the Ten Commandments:

“I am the Lord your God...You shall have no other gods before me...You shall not make for yourself an idol...You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God...Remember the Sabbath Day...Honor Your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You Shall not covet. (Exodus 20:2-17)

In the one case, morality arises from within the person, through the acts of reason and discipline, while in the other, morality descends from above the person, from God’s will, outlining a basic difference between Stoic and Jewish ideas of morality, yet both are in scripture.

In addition, the author references the four Greek cardinal virtues, “If anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues, for she teaches self-control [temperance], and prudence, justice and courage [Fortitude]; nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than these” (Wisdom of Solomon 8:7). This bears resemblance to Cynic and Stoic beliefs about virtue discussed in the previous chapter.

Another Greek-influenced text in the Old Testament is the book of Sirach. This text, is dated to approximately 180 B.C.<sup>154</sup> Like Stoicism and CBT, the author emphasizes the importance of disciplining one’s inner thoughts as a means of moral growth: “Think of his wrath on the day of death, and of the moment of vengeance when he turns away His face. In the time of plenty think of the time of hunger; in the days of wealth think of poverty and need” (Sirach

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<sup>154</sup> Harold C. Washington, “Sirach” in Michael D. Coogan ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 100 Apocrypha.

18:24). The text draws a connection between the idea of cognitive self-control, fulfillment of God's law ("Whoever keeps the law controls his thoughts, and the fulfillment of the fear of the Lord is wisdom." [Sirach 21:11]), and the avoidance of sin ("Who will set whips over my thoughts, and the discipline of wisdom over my mind, so as not to spare me in my errors and not overlook my sins?" [Sirach 23:2]). The Hellenization of Judaism provided an occasion for increased attention to the cognitive side of religion for Greek Jews. This set the stage for an even greater integration of Stoic ideas into the new Christian religion that came into being soon after.

### **Stoicism in the Gospels**

The early Christians had a complex and sometimes ambivalent relationship with Greek thought. They found themselves divided between their Jewish heritage and the Pagan philosophies of the day. Originating in the heyday of the Roman Empire, the early Christians – especially its gentile converts – would have been more familiar with Graeco-Roman thought than with the Torah or the Prophets.<sup>155</sup> While Jesus, the Apostles, and many first generation Christians followers identified with Judaism, often in opposition to Graeco-Roman philosophy and religion, many important Christians showed no hesitation to assimilate Hellenistic and Stoic thought into their religious teachings. We see evidence of this in the teaching of Christ Himself. One of the most unique aspects of Christ's teaching that stood in contrast to the Judaism that preceded him was the special emphasis He placed on the interior mental life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reinterprets the moral commandments of the Torah in cognitive terms of thought and emotion.

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<sup>155</sup> Wayne A Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, second edition (New Haven: Yale, 2003), 32-50.

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’” and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or a sister, you will be liable to judgement... So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:21-24)

Prior to Christ, one only needed to refrain from abusing a neighbor, but what Christ requires goes even deeper: a resolution to abandon any interior resentments or hostilities we might *feel* towards a neighbor. Christ repeats this cognitive shift in his teaching on adultery – proscribing not only the behavior, but the mental state that precedes it: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

In addition to weeding out sinful cognitions, Christ requires His follower to positively cultivate spiritual cognitive dispositions (such as faith and trust in Him) in order to obtain salvation. This occurs most frequently in John’s Gospel:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? (John 10:25-26)

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. (John 14:6-7)

While the Stoics expelled anxieties and anger using arguments predicated on Divine Providence, here Christ takes this role unto Himself. Accordingly, it is not merely trust in the abstract idea of



Divine Providence, but trust in the specific person of Jesus Christ that enables people to attain perfection. Such a claim would have sounded blasphemous to Jews and bizarre to Stoics.

Likewise, the opening of John's Gospel begins with a profound re-interpretation of the Stoic doctrine of the *Logos*.

In the beginning was the *Logos* and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made... And the *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us; we have beheld his glory, glory as the only-begotten Son from the Father. (John 1:1-14)<sup>156</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter 2, for the Stoics the *Logos* was the cosmic principle of Reason embedded into the universe which gave it structure and order: the laws of physics, math, chemistry, biology, and morality. For John the *Logos* is Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, the messiah, come to save humanity from sin, co-existing with God at the beginning of time and assisting God with the creation of the universe. For John, Christ is the *Logos* incarnate. We see in John's Gospel a willingness for Christians to use Stoic ideas to help explain Christian ones, but also the Christian ability to creatively alter those doctrines to better express the beliefs and dogmas of the new religion. This influence continues into other new Testament texts, most especially the letters of Paul.

### **Saint Paul**

The importance of Saint Paul for the early church and for Christianity as a whole can hardly be overstated. This apostle, fluent in both Hebrew and Greek language and thought, shows a startling capacity and willingness to use the pagan philosophers for Christian purposes. As Abraham Malherbe notes,

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<sup>156</sup> Translation of the word *Logos*, not in the original. Translation is by whom?

There can no longer be any doubt that Paul was thoroughly familiar with the teaching, methods of operation, and style or argumentation of the philosophers of the period, all of which he adopted and adapted to his own purposes... The philosophers with whom Paul should be compared... were preachers and teachers who say their main goal to be the reformation of the lives of people they encountered in a variety of contexts, ranging from the imperial court and the salons of the rich to the street corners.<sup>157</sup>

There is a long history of exegesis that perceives Stoic ideas in the apostle's writings, and some Pauline scholars have even gone so far as to describe Paul as a "crypto-stoic."<sup>158</sup> There is good reason for this. Many of the most famous Stoic philosophers - Musonius Rufus, Seneca, and Epictetus – were near contemporaries of Paul and Paul was highly educated; his home town of Tarsus was the site of an important school of Stoic philosophy.<sup>159</sup> In addition Paul used many characteristically Stoic rhetorical devices in his writing, such as the *Diatribes*<sup>160</sup>, and *Paraenesis*.<sup>161</sup> The connection between Paul and Stoicism was so strong that at one point an exchange of letters purporting to be between Paul and Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, was published sometime in the first two centuries A.D. These letters were circulated widely enough that their texts survive today.<sup>162</sup> Though they are now known to be apocryphal a close examination of Paul's actual writings shows his willingness to employ Stoic ideas in the service of Christianity. We shall present four such Stoic ideas in Paul: the idea of cognitive control of the passions, the doctrine of indifferent things, Natural Law, and cosmopolitanism.

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<sup>157</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 68.

<sup>158</sup> Donald Robertson, "St. Paul on Stoicism: From the Acts of the Apostles," *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor* accessed online at <https://donaldrobertson.name/2012/11/10/st-paul-on-stoicism-from-the-acts-of-the-apostles/>

<sup>159</sup> Tiziano Dorandi, "Chronology," in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. Keimpe Algra and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 37-43.

<sup>160</sup> Stanley Kent Stowers, "Reassessment of Sources and Issues," in *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 48-75.

<sup>161</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 124-128.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Berry, *The Correspondence between Paul and Seneca A.D. 61-65* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1999).

Like the Stoics, Paul teaches that the importance of mastering the passions is essential for moral conduct, he writes “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (Romans 6:12). But Paul sees the process of self-mastery as not only cognitive but supernatural, “For though we live in the world, we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). While the Stoics see healthy cognition epitomized by a harmonious relation between the individual and Nature, Paul emphasizes a doctrine of cognitive sanctification that sets the Christian apart from the world, bringing him closer to God: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2-3).

This seems to represent a synthesis for Paul between Stoic ethics and Platonic metaphysics.<sup>163</sup> While the Stoics believed that all things were material, including God, the Platonists argued that the material world was a mere shadow of the perfect, immaterial, eternal and unchanging Forms.<sup>164</sup> For the Platonists, Forms were more real, more pure, and more perfect than any material substance; for matter is subject to change and decay, but abstract Form was eternal and unchanging – my ten fingers are material and subject to change and decay, but the number itself is immune to change or decay. For this reason, the Platonists saw opposition between material existence which tends towards corruption, and immaterial Forms.<sup>165</sup> But for Paul, cognitive obedience to the Law allows the sinful, mortal, fleshly man to transcend his mortality and enter into union with the Divine, for “to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to

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<sup>163</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Setting the Scene: Stoicism and Platonism in the Transitional Period in Ancient Philosophy,” in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1-14.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Plato, *Meno*.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*.

set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:6-8). The mind, though cognitive exercise, bridges this gap between corruptible material existence and the incorruptible transcendent Spirit.

Paul uses the Stoic doctrine of *indifferent things* to explain the proper Christian attitude towards meat sacrificed to idols. He argues that meat sacrificed to idols is not good or bad *per se* but become good or bad depending upon how the person *thinks* about it: "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean" (Rom 14:14). This resembles the oft-repeated quote from Epictetus that inspired Albert Ellis in his invention of Rational Therapy, "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them."<sup>166</sup> This doctrine allows Paul to address certain knotty problems faced by the early Church. Sacrifice to pagan idols was widespread at the time, but eating meat involved in such sacrifices was considered complicity in idol worship. If a Christian ate this meat in public, it could scandalize other Christians or embolden pagans. But it was not always easy to tell which meat had come from a pagan ritual sacrifice and which had not. The doctrine of indifferent things helps Paul explain how it can be acceptable to eat the meat offered in such sacrifices in some cases, and yet harmful in others: the meat itself was indifferent – it was the conscience that mattered – the mind and its cognitions held priority over the behavior *per se*. If one could eat without bringing harm to the conscience of another, then nothing was unclean in and of itself, but if it would lead to scandal, doubt, or confusion for a brother or a neighbor, it was a sin.

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<sup>166</sup> Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 5, quoted in Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (Secaucus: Lyle Stuart, 1962), 54.

Natural Law also appears in Paul's thought, though historical circumstances complicate any attempt at an analysis of Paul's views on this topic. He was simultaneously a Pharisaical Jew, a Roman citizen, a Philosopher, and a Christian – words for "Law" could have had different meanings when considered under each of these aspects of Paul's personality. To Paul the Pharisee, "Law" meant the covenant between God and Moses. To Paul the Roman citizen, "Law" meant the civil laws of Roman Empire. To Paul the philosopher, law meant the *Logos*. And for Paul the Christian, the Law meant the curse laid upon humankind by God in order to show him his own sinfulness and his need for salvation, to prepare him to receive salvation from the messiah, Jesus Christ.<sup>167</sup> Notwithstanding these complications, there are some unambiguous appearances of Natural Law in Paul's thought. One of most striking passages in all of Paul's writings comes in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans. Paul writes:

When the Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Rom 2:14-16)

Paul here contrasts the Jews who have "have the law," (i.e., the covenant law of Moses) with the non-Jewish gentiles who "have not the law." The law was the pride of the Jewish people, for it showed that God had chosen the Jewish people to be the special recipients of His self-revelation – and to be his *Chosen People*. It distinguished Israel from all other nations. As a Christian Paul is saying the law prepares the way for Christ to "judge the secrets of men," but as a Philosopher, Paul is saying that the law of God is "written on the heart" of all human beings, Jew or not. This internal law "bears witness to their conflicting thoughts," showing them right from wrong and good from evil regardless of their customs and heritage and without the aid of explicit divine

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<sup>167</sup> Brendan Byrne, *Romans and Galatians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 59-173.

revelation. As we have seen in chapter two, Stoic Natural Law was a cosmic moral code that superseded ethnic, political, and religious custom. By connecting the idea of *Natural Law* with moral *conscience*, Paul reinforces the connections between morality and cognition, which in turn helps him explain how even pagans can know right from wrong as a result of their God-given human nature.<sup>168</sup>

But further develops the idea of Natural Law. He attaches to it important Christian concepts of God's Wrath, and condemnation of idolatry,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them... For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator... Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Rom 1:18-27)

While the law is "written on the heart" of all people, that does not automatically mean that all human practices accord with this law, as people are capable of "exchanging the truth for a lie" and turning their back on the Natural Law. For the Stoics, the punishment of transgressing the Natural Law is contained in the vices resulting from the transgression – e.g. ignorance, irrationality, and slavery to the passions. Paul strikes a similar chord<sup>169</sup> when he writes for "they

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<sup>168</sup> The kind of knowledge described here is likely of a different sort than the kind of knowledge gained by Adam and Eve from eating of the Tree in the Garden of Eden. One possible explanation is that, conscience affords a propositional or moral knowledge of good and evil, while the fruit of the tree endowed experiential knowledge of good and evil. The prior explanation not clear.

<sup>169</sup> Niko Huttunen, "Stoic Law in Paul," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 39-58.

became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened ... consumed with passion.” For Paul, God’s wrath against the disobedient consists in God “giving up” the disobedient to “dishonorable passions.” (Rom 1:26). The final and critically Christian theme with which Paul concludes this otherwise largely Stoic passage, is the need for humility and repentance:

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgement upon him, you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgement of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and you do them yourself, you will escape the judgement of God? Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Rom 2:1-4)

Far from being a cause for pride, the Law magnifies how everyone falls short and indicates their need for a Savior.

Lastly, there is Paul’s cosmopolitanism. For Paul, the law of God is written on to the heart of all human beings, undermining any ground for arrogance on the part of the Jewish people and granting opportunity to know and follow God to all people regardless of their birth. But Paul conceives of an even deeper brotherhood of mankind through baptism into Christ, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female;<sup>170</sup> for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:27-29). So while Paul appears to have embraced Stoic cosmopolitanism, he anticipates the even greater bond that will be shared by all people through baptism into Christ.

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<sup>170</sup> Wayne A Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 23.

In sum, Paul embraced a considerable number of Stoic ideas and readily employed them in the service of understanding Christianity, and teaching the first generation of Christian moral behavior. Paul embraces Stoic ideas without firm commitments to them. He uses them, builds upon them, and sometimes contradicts them, showing that ultimately his commitments lie elsewhere. Perhaps Paul's most significant Christian contribution to the largely Stoic foundation of his ethical system is this: for Paul the moral life is exemplified by virtues that transcend the traditional virtues recognized by the Stoics. For Paul the ultimate virtue is Love:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing..." (1 Cor 13:1-3)

For the Stoic, the ideal was Wisdom, and the model was the "Wise Man" or Sage. For the Christian, the ideal is Love, and the model is Christ. This development is mirrored by other early Christian writers including St. Peter,<sup>171</sup> and St. Clement.<sup>172</sup>

While Paul appears to have known and been profoundly influenced by the Stoic doctrines, it seems that Paul was willing to depart from them for something better. If Paul had been trained as a Stoic, this departure from Stoic doctrine would likely have been endorsed by at least one famous Stoic, Marcus Aurelius:

If you discover in the life of man something higher than justice, truth, temperance, fortitude, and generally speaking than your understanding contented with itself, where it presents you behaving by the rule of right, and satisfied with destiny, in what is assigned

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<sup>171</sup>Thorsteinsson, "The First Letter of Peter," in *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 105-116.

<sup>172</sup>Thorsteinsson, "The First Letter of Clement," in *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117-134.



to you and is not yours to choose; if, I say, you see something higher than this, turn to it with all your heart and enjoy the supreme good now that it is found.<sup>173</sup>

In summary, there is significant evidence that St. Paul was influenced by Stoicism. He taught ideas very similar to Stoic cognitive therapy, and likewise held apparently Stoic moral ideas – a doctrine of indifferent things, a doctrine of Natural Law, and cosmopolitan inclinations – which, while not grounding any practices of cognitive therapy explicitly, provided a moral context within which a Christian cognitive therapy could be framed. It would take future thinkers to develop Christian cognitive therapy into an actual organized practice. This is where the great Christian ascetics come into play.

### **Patristic Era Ascetics: Anthony, Evagrius, Climacus**

Signs of a full-blown theory and practice of Christian cognitive therapy first appear during the patristic era, at a time when Stoicism became even more popular among great Christian thinkers. The greatest theologian of his day, Origen (d. 253), regarded Epictetus as the most influential philosopher in the world, outstripping even Plato.<sup>174</sup> Tertullian (d. 220), another great theologian, claims Seneca as a Christian thinker, referring to him once as “frequently our own,” and another time as simply “our own Seneca.”<sup>175</sup> Christian martyrs relied on the principles of Stoicism to accept their trials, difficulties and persecutions without losing faith, Just as the same principles helped the pagans accept the vicissitudes of Fortune with *apatheia*.<sup>176</sup> Christian ascetics saw Stoicism’s usefulness, and adopted the ideas of cognitive therapy into

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<sup>173</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 3.6 in *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* trans. A.S.L. Farquharson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 19.

<sup>174</sup> Robert Dobbin, ed., *Epictetus: Discourses and selected writings* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006), xvi.

<sup>175</sup> Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 67-68.

<sup>176</sup> Nicola Denzey, “Facing the Beast: Justin, Christian Martyrdom, and Freedom of the Will,” in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, eds. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 176-198.

their worldview, teaching their communities how to control their passions in ways that resemble modern cognitive-behavioral therapies. Fr. Alexis Trader points out many similarities between the two.

Both affirm the centrality of the thought-life or meaning-making structures of cognition in psychological functioning. Both view unhealthy thoughts about the self, the environment, and the future as a source for psychological problems. Both recognize that the correction of the thoughts or the purification of the thoughts is the use of reason as instrumental in better human functioning. Both assert that a human being is able to exert ‘personal control over thoughts and behaviors that promote change in a healthy direction’<sup>177</sup>

The patristic and ascetic literature that deals with topics of cognitive therapy is vast.<sup>178</sup> We shall limit our discussion to three texts: *The Life of St. Anthony*, Evagrius Ponticus’s *The Praktikos*, and John Climacus’s *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. We shall show how the Christian Ascetics had developed a detailed theory and vibrant practice of cognitive therapy. This therapy shared the basic principles and insights of the Stoics and modern CBT discussed in chapters one and two. We shall also discuss what distinguishes the Christian cognitive therapy from CBT and Stoicism. In short what they all have in common is the notion is the basic idea that behaviors and emotions stem from internal mental states and ways of thinking, and that thoughts can be examined and changed using reason to control our emotions and behaviors; what distinguishes the Christian practice from CBT is that it is morally grounded in idealized conceptions of virtue which give it moral norms. What distinguishes it from Stoicism is that classical virtues, such as *apatheia*, are subordinated to distinctly Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love, and its commitment to giving external, supernatural agents a role in the cognitive process.

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<sup>177</sup>Alexis Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck’s Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 4.

<sup>178</sup> Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom*, 49-76. also cf. Bishop Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*, trans. Esther Williams (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994).

We must begin our discussion by noting the role that supernatural agents played in Christian cognitive therapy. In the patristic era, demonology developed parallel to and in tandem with Christian versions of cognitivism. Exorcism and the rebuke of demons was central to the ministry of Jesus and the apostles throughout the New Testament, and the entire milieu of patristic era asceticism is rife with stories and theories about angels and demons. Further examination of patristic ascetic texts will likely be unintelligible to a modern reader who does not first understand this point. As Father Trader writes,

...the fathers classify thoughts as angelic, demonic, and human. Some cognitive psychologists might be prone to reject this classification as a pernicious vestige of medieval superstition. For an Orthodox Christian, however, the presence of angelic and demonic forces is a non-negotiable component of Christian belief according to the testimony of Scripture and Sacred Tradition.<sup>179</sup>

There is perhaps no better way to begin than through examination of the *Life of St. Anthony*. St. Anthony (ca 251 – 356) was the perhaps the earliest and greatest ascetics of the Patristic era. Like many who came after him, Anthony wanted to avoid the dangers that worldly comfort posed to his relationship with Christ. He left his home, family, city, and possessions and fled to the desert in search of a life that would imitate his Lord. Though his life is legendary, he was not a mythical figure. We know much about the man, thanks to his biography, *The Life of St. Anthony*, written by the Egyptian theologian St. Athanasius who personally met and collected stories about Anthony.<sup>180</sup>

Anthony lived in constant prayer, alone in a desert cave in Egypt. Demons, offended by his holiness, tempted and tormented him. According to the stories preserved by Athanasius, the

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<sup>179</sup> Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom*, 66.

<sup>180</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, trans E.A. Wallis Budge (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), 4-5.

battles between Anthony and his demons were waged with cognitive weapons on both sides. The demons would propose distressing or tempting thoughts to Anthony, and Anthony would resist and fight back with cognitive rebukes of his own, as we read “the more the Evil one brought unto him filthy and maddening thoughts, the more Saint Anthony took refuge in prayer and in abundant supplication, and amid them [all] he remained wholly chaste...”<sup>181</sup> They attacked not only his thoughts, but emotions as well,

At the beginning of his tempting of the saint, he approached him with flattery, and cast into him anxiety as to his possessions, and solicitude and love for his sister, and for his family, and for his kinsfolk, and the love of money and lusts of various kinds, and the thought of the rest of the things of the life of this world, and finally of the hard and laborious life which he lived, and of the weakness of body which would come upon him with the lapse of time; and, in short, he stirred up in him the power of the thoughts so that by means of one or other of them he might be flattered, and might be made to possess shortcomings and be caught in the net through his instigation.<sup>182</sup>

Anthony heroically rebuked them with reason and prayer, fighting back with arguments given to him by God.

And again the Enemy multiplied in him the thoughts of lust, until Saint Anthony became as one who was being burned up, not through the Evil One, but through his own lusts; but he girded himself about with the threat of the thought of the Judgement, and of the torture of Gehenna, and of the worm which dieth not. And whilst meditating, on the thoughts which could be directed against the Evil One, he prayed for thoughts which would be hostile to him.<sup>183</sup>

In this milieu, demonology and Cognitivism develop side-by side to the point where they become virtually indistinguishable. This pattern is virtually ubiquitous in the writings of the ascetics, and any examination of the therapy they developed must take this into account. With this topic out of the way, we can turn to the first systematic method of Christian cognitive

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<sup>181</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, 10.

<sup>182</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, 9.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

therapy based on the categorization and ranking of demonic and sinful thoughts and the methods for overcoming them. For this we turn to *The Praktikos* of Evagrius Ponticus.

### *Evagrius Ponticus – The Logoismoi*

Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399 A.D.) was another Christian who, like Anthony, fled to the desert to save his soul and become holy. He was Greek, a bishop's son, and a friend of the Cappadocian fathers St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen. He experienced dream visions that told him he must flee from city life to the Egyptian desert to avoid damnation.<sup>184</sup> He fled to Egypt and joined a monastic community, practicing strict asceticism and studying the writings of Origen, the great Alexandrian theologian. Evagrius wrote many texts on theology, prayer, and Christian spirituality. One of his most influential works, *The Praktikos*, introduces a full-blown Christian nosology of psycho-spiritual problems: the Eight *Logoismoi*. The eight *Logoismoi*, or passionate thoughts, was a list of thoughts that were believed to be the ultimate cause of all sins. It was later revised to become the more familiar Seven Deadly Sins.<sup>185</sup> It was the contemporary equivalent of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM, currently in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition) used by mental health professionals today.<sup>186</sup> Just as the passions represented errors in judgement, emotion, and behavior for the Stoics, the *logoismoi* represented specific kinds of thoughts that led to sin: gluttony, impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. Each of the *logoismoi* represents not only the passion *per se* but also the kind of demon which provokes that passion. Unlike the earlier Christian accounts of demonic activity which were merely descriptive, such as those in *The Life of St. Anthony*, Evagrius attempts to classify these attacks

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<sup>184</sup> John Bamberger, "Introduction" in *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981) xxxv-xlii.

<sup>185</sup> Kalistos Ware, "Introduction" in John Climacus *The ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Russell Norman (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 62-63.

<sup>186</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

into a coherent nosological/etiological system: some *logoismoi* are more dangerous than others or are dangerous in unique ways, for example, “The most fierce passion is anger... It constantly irritates the soul and above all at the time of prayer it seizes the mind and flashes the picture of the offensive person before one’s eyes.”<sup>187</sup> Some tend to co-occur or reinforce each other. For example,

The spirit of vainglory is most subtle and it readily grows up in the souls of those who practice virtue. It leads them to desire to make their struggles known publicly, to hunt after the praise of men. This in turn leads to their illusory healings of women, or to their hearing fancied sounds as the cries of demons – crows of people who touch their clothes... When in this way he is carried aloft by vain hope, the demon vanishes and the monk is left to be tempted by the demon of pride or of sadness who brings upon him thoughts opposed to his hopes... It also happens at times that a man who a short while before was a holy priest, is led off bound and is handed over to the demon of impurity to be sifted by him.<sup>188</sup>

Some tend to preclude or rule-out others. For example,

The demon of *acedia*... causes the most serious trouble of all... First of all he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long... Then too he instills in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labor... No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one (when he is defeated) but only a state of deep peace and inexpressible joy arise out of this struggle.<sup>189</sup>

Like any good nosology, the *Eight Logoismoi* function as a guide for “treatment.” The treatments Evagrius proposes for overcoming the *logoismoi* bear much in common with the

The Eight <i>Logoismoi</i>	The Seven Deadly Sins
Gluttony	Gluttony
Impurity	Lust
Avarice	Greed
Sadness	Wrath

<sup>187</sup>EvagriusPonticus, *The Praktikos*, 11, in *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1981), 18.

<sup>188</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 13, trans. Bamberger, 19-20.

<sup>189</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 12, trans. Bamberger, 19.

techniques proposed by Seneca,  
Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius, but  
with a distinctly Christian flavor.

Anger	Sloth
Acedia (i.e. weariness/laziness)	Vanity
Vainglory	Pride
Pride	

For example he suggests cognitive techniques for overcoming *acedia*,

When we meet with the demon of *acedia* then is the time ... to divide our soul in two. One part is to encourage; the other is to be encouraged. Thus we are to sow the seeds of a firm hope in ourselves while we sing with the holy David” Why are you filled with sadness, my soul? Why are you distraught? Trust in God, for I shall give praise to him. He it is who saves me, the light of my eyes and my God.<sup>190</sup>

And like CBT, he integrates behavioral techniques alongside the cognitive,<sup>191</sup> such as in regard to anger, (“A gift snuffs out the fire of resentment”)<sup>192</sup> and gluttony (“When the soul desires to seek after a variety of foods then it is time to afflict it with bread and water that is may learn to be grateful for a mere morsel of bread. For satiety desires a variety of dishes but hunger thinks itself happy to get its fill of nothing more than bread.”)<sup>193</sup> But Christian cognitive therapy did

<sup>190</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 27, trans. Bamberger, 23.

<sup>191</sup>Evagrius appears to rank cognitive techniques as more advanced than behavioral ones. He writes, “The demons strive against men of the world chiefly through their deeds, but in the case of monks for the most part by means of thoughts, since the desert deprives them of such affairs. Just as it is easier to sin by thought than by deed, so also is the war fought on the field of thought more severe than that which is conducted in the area of things and events. For the mind is easily moved indeed and hard to control in the presence of sinful fantasies.”(EvagriusPontikus, *The Praktikos*, 48, trans. Bamberger, 29.) This is echoed by John Climacus, “It is one thing to pray for rescue from bad thoughts, another to stand up against them, and another still to despise and ignore them.... the man who stands in the middle position will often make us of the first of these, since he is insufficiently prepared, whereas the man who is still at the first stage cannot use the second method as a way of overcoming his enemies. However, the man who has come as far as the third step will completely ignore demons... Our own determination and intention together with the help of God come into play in every spiritual act of ours, visible or not, and the latter is unlikely to operate without the former.” (Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 26, trans. Luibheid and Russell, 240-241.)

<sup>192</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 26, trans. Bamberger, 23.

<sup>193</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 16, trans. Bamberger, 21.

not proceed through a simplistic correspondence of problem with technique.<sup>194</sup> Careful discernment and wisdom were always necessary,

Reading, vigils and prayer – these are the things that lend stability to the wandering mind. Hunger toil and solitude are the means of extinguishing the flames of desire. Turbid anger is calmed by the singing of Psalms, by patience and almsgiving. But all these practices are to be engaged in according to due measure and at the appropriate times. What is untimely done, or done without measure, endures but a short time. And what is short-lived is more harmful than profitable.<sup>195</sup>

One such discernment is to distinguish between demonic and non-demonic thoughts,

The passions of the soul are occasioned by men. Those of the body come from the body. How the passions of the body are cut off by continence and those of the soul by spiritual love... The demons that rule over the passions of the soul persevere until death. Those which rule over the bodily passions depart more quickly. The other demons are like the rising or setting sun in that they are found in only a part of the soul. [*Acedia*] however, is accustomed to embrace the entire soul and oppress the spirit. It is therefore after the extinction of the passions that the solitary life is sweet, for then the memories are only simple...<sup>196</sup>

Now that we have discussed supernatural agents, we may move on to the second distinctive characteristic of Christian cognitive therapy: the integration of virtue ethics. While

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<sup>194</sup> Father Alexis Trader concludes that one patristic text endorses such a view. He writes, “The patristic tradition singles out eight principal bad thoughts that encompass and engender all the other sins that the mind can commit. The eight bad thoughts include gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, vainglory, and pride. They are the conceptual analogues to specific behaviors, for “what the body acts out in the world of things, the *nous* acts out in the world of terms as the gluttonous behavior of someone overeating, the unchaste conduct of someone having illicit sexual relations, the avaricious actions of someone gambling, and so forth. This patristic connections between thought and behavior links the subjective reality of eight bad thoughts to the objective reality of concrete actions that can be observed and measured by an external observer. Furthermore, if bad thoughts can be formulated in behavioral terms, their antidotes can also be framed in like manner. For example in a text attributed to Saint John of Damascus, the author notes that “gluttony can be corrected by self-control, unchastity by desire for God and longing to future blessings; avarice by compassion for the poor; anger by goodwill and love for all men; worldly dejection by spiritual joy; listlessness by patience, perseverance, and offering thanks to God; vain-glory by doing good in secret and by praying in the manner of the boastful pharisee, and by considering oneself the least of all men:” For each bad thought, the believer is provided with an incompatible set of thoughts to be cultivated, so that a given bad thought can be cut off by that incompatibility” (Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck’s Cognitive Therapy*, 79.

<sup>195</sup>Evagrius Pontikus, *The Praktikos*, 15, trans Bamberger, 20.

<sup>196</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 36-37, trans. Bamberger, 25-26.



Evagrius does not present a list of virtues equal and opposite to the eight *logoismoi*, he clearly sees virtues as playing a necessary role in one's spiritual progress, as he writes, "A man who has established the virtues in himself and is entirely permeated with them no longer remembers the law or commandments or punishment. Rather, he says and does what excellent habit suggests."<sup>197</sup> Virtues such as temperance, humility and *apatheia* are given roles: "Beyond any doubt, the ability to drive away the thought of vainglory through humility, or the power to repel the demon of impurity through temperance is a most profound proof of *apatheia*." Evagrius sometimes appears to rank *apatheia* as the primary virtue, at other times, he appears to give this place to more distinctively Christian virtues, for example he writes in one place that "the kingdom of Heaven is *apatheia* of the soul along with true knowledge of existing things."<sup>198</sup> While in another he states that "the goal of the ascetic life is charity; the goal of contemplative knowledge is theology. The beginnings of each are faith and contemplation of nature respectively..."<sup>199</sup>

But while Evagrius is not entirely clear on the relative merits of *apatheia vis a vis* charity, other ascetics are. To demonstrate this we turn to John Climacus, and his work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Climacus (d. 649) was a monk of the Arabian desert near Mount Sinai. He was familiar with Evagrius's writings and incorporated the *logoismoi* into his spiritual manual *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, written to help train other monks of his monastery.<sup>200</sup> *The Ladder* is among the greatest works of Christian Spirituality and a part of the massive Eastern mystical

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<sup>197</sup>Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 70, trans. Bamberger, 70.

<sup>198</sup>EvagriusPontikus, *The Praktikos*, 2, trans. Bamberger, 15.

<sup>199</sup>EvagriusPontikus, *The Praktikos*, 84, trans. Bamberger, 37.

<sup>200</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 14 in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. ColmLuibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 166.

corpus known as the *Philokalia*.<sup>201</sup> The work evokes the image of a ladder reaching to heaven from earth. Each of its thirty chapters represents a step, or rung of a ladder, with each rung constituting a virtue to master, vice to overcome, temptation to renounce, or grace to receive.

- Step 1 – Renunciation
- Step 2 – Detachment
- Step 3 – Exile
- Step 4 – Obedience
- Step 5 – Penitence
- Step 6 – Remembrance of Death
- Step 7 – Sorrow
- Step 8 – Anger
- Step 9 – Malice
- Step 10 – Slander
- Step 11 – Talkativeness
- Step 12 – Falsehood
- Step 13 – Despondency
- Step 14 – Gluttony
- Step 15 – Lust
- Step 16-17 – Avarice
- Step 18-20 – Insensitivity
- Step 21 – Fear
- Step 22 – Vainglory
- Step 23 – Pride
- Step 24 – Simplicity
- Step 25 – Humility
- Step 26 – Discernment
- Step 27 – Stillness
- Step 28 – Prayer
- Step 29 – Dispassion
- Step 30 – Love.<sup>202</sup>

As one progresses from chapter to chapter, he or she grows in virtue, ascends the ladder, separates themselves from the Earth, and comes closer to God. Evidence of Stoic and Evagrian

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<sup>201</sup> Cf. Anthony M. Coniaris, *A Beginner's Introduction to the Philokalia* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 2004).

<sup>202</sup> Unknown Author, "Introduction" in John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. ColmLuibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 13.

influence is clear. There are chapters dedicated to *apatheia* (here translated “dispassion”)<sup>203</sup> as well as to each of the Eight *Logoismoi*.<sup>204</sup> In this instance, while *apatheia* or dispassion and Charity or love are ranked very closely, the Christian virtues Faith, Hope, And Love, “the ultimate trinity of virtues,” hold primacy.<sup>205</sup>

This leads us to a final distinctive characteristic of Christian cognitive therapy: the necessity of divine grace. As we have noted, Christian cognitive therapy deals in categories of Nature and Reason, as with the Stoics and CBT. But unlike Stoicism and CBT, Evagrius and Climacus are careful to avoid making Reason into an idol.<sup>206</sup> They do this in a number of ways. Firstly, because for Christians the mental life is impacted by supernatural agents, one can make objective cognitive progress in absolute terms and yet fail to show humanly observable evidence of such progress. Likewise, one may show the appearance of moral or cognitive progress which may be nothing more than demonic trickery. Climacus warns that demons can collude with one another to create this effect.

The demon of vainglory and the demon of praise came to sit on either side of me. One poked me with the finger of vainglory and encouraged me to talk publicly about some vision or labor of mine in the desert. I shook him off with the words: ‘Let those who wish me harm be driven back and let them blush’ (Ps. 39:15). Then the demon on my left at once said in my ear: ‘Well done! Well done! You have become great by conquering my shameless mother.’ Turning to him I answered appropriately, making use of the rest of the verse: ‘Defeat and shame on all who say, “Well done! Well done!” ... Dread vainglory urges us to pretend that we have some virtue which does not belong to us. It encourages us with the text: “Let your light shine before men that they will see your good deeds: (Matt 5:16). The Lord often humbles the vainglorious by causing some dishonor to befall them. And indeed the first step in overcoming vainglory is to remain silent and to accept dishonor gladly. The middle stage is to check every act of vainglory while it is

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<sup>203</sup> Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 29, trans. Luibheid and Russell, 282.

<sup>204</sup> Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 13, trans. Luibheid and Russell, 163.

<sup>205</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 30, Kindle Edition, trans. Patristic Publishing (Ontario: Patristic Publishing, 2017), 155.

<sup>206</sup> Trader, *Ancient Christian Wisdom*, 60.

still in thought. The end – insofar as one may talk of an end to an abyss – is to be able to accept humiliation before others without actually feeling it.<sup>207</sup>

Evagrius warns that the same effect can be caused by competition among the demons: “I have observed the demon of vainglory being chased by nearly all the other demons, and when his pursuers fell, shamelessly he drew near and unfolded a long list of his virtues.”<sup>208</sup> For this reason he advises, “Both the virtues and the vices make the mind blind. The one so that it may not see the vices; the other, in turn, so that it might not see the virtues.”<sup>209</sup>

The main point in all this is that, for a Christian, our emotions are not merely natural processes controlled by inanimate antecedents such as neurotransmitters and hormones, or stimuli and responses to them. The passions, in so far as they are influenced by demonic or angelic forces, have a mind of their own and will creatively seek new ways gain influence over our lives. As Evagrius says, “When the demons achieve nothing in their struggles against a monk they withdraw a bit and observe to see which of the virtues he neglects in the meantime. Then all of a sudden they attack him from this point and ravage the poor fellow.”<sup>210</sup> While some demons can be bested, others are simply too strong or crafty for us to overcome them on our own. Evagrius advises that only Christ can provide what is needed to overcome such demons.

If there is any monk who wishes to take the measure of some of the more fierce demons so as to gain experience in his monastic art, then let him keep careful watch over his thoughts. Let him observe their intensity, their periods of decline and follow them as they rise and fall. Let him note well the complexity of his thoughts, their periodicity, the demons which cause them, with the order of their succession and the nature of their associations. Then let him ask from Christ the explanations of these data he has observed.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 23, trans. Luibheid and Russell, 205

<sup>208</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos*, 31, trans. Bamberger, 24.

<sup>209</sup> Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 62, trans. Bamberger, 33.

<sup>210</sup> Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 44, trans. Bamberger, 28.

<sup>211</sup> Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 50, trans. Bamberger, 29-30.

Unlike the Stoic “Wise Man” who is beyond emotional perturbation, the Christian, as he or she becomes more holy, is attacked all the more aggressively by demonic thoughts, “For the demons become thoroughly infuriated with those who practice active virtue in a manner that is increasingly contemplative. They are even of a mind to ‘pierce the upright of heart though, under cover of darkness’ (Ps 10:3).”<sup>212</sup> Climacus agrees that as one progresses, the battle gets not easier, but harder,

Violence (Matt. 11:12) and unending pain are the lot of those who aim to ascend to heaven with the body and this is especially at the early stages of the enterprise, when our pleasure-loving disposition and our unfeeling hearts must travel through overwhelming grief toward the love of God and holiness. It is hard. Truly hard. There has to be an abundance of invisible bitterness, especially for the careless, until our mind, that cur sniffing around the meat market and reveling in the uproar, is brought through simplicity, deep freedom from anger and diligence to a love of holiness and guidance. Yet full of passions and weaknesses as we are, let us take heart and let us in total confidence carry to Christ in our right hand and confess to Him our helplessness and our frailty. We will carry away more help than we deserve, if only we constantly push ourselves down into the depths of humility.<sup>213</sup>

Humans need constant supernatural grace to understand the full extent of our thoughts and emotions and to contend with the demonic creatures that manipulate them. This fact entail a need for the virtue of humility in ways not discussed by either the Stoics or CBT. For as one ascends the *Ladder* he or she contends with craftier and mightier foes who are more able to turn their successes into defeat. The way to *apatheia* and to God requires an enormous bounty of divine aid which we could never deserve or earn from our own merits alone; we are pulled up from above far more than we pull ourselves up from below. Without humility, the demons use this principle to their advantage. As Climacus writes,

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 1, trans. Luibheid and Russel, 75-76.

Some passions enter the body by way of the soul, and some work in the opposite way, the latter affecting people living in the world, the former assailing those living the monastic life and, hence, lacking stimulus from the outside... After we have fought long and hard against this demon [fornication], this ally of the flesh, after we have driven it out of our heart, torturing it with the stone of fasting and the sword of humility, this scourge goes into hiding in our bodies, like some kind of worm, and it tries to pollute us, stimulating us to irrational and untimely movements. This particularly happens to that who have fallen to the demon of vainglory, for since dirty thoughts no longer preoccupy their hearts they fall victim to pride...Poor wretches! They forgot the saying: 'What have you got that you did not receive as a gift either from God or as a result of the help of prayers of others?' (1 Cor 4:7).<sup>214</sup>

St. Anthony, quoting St. Paul, anticipated this concept, "For when one repeated too often those triumphs which were wrought for him Saint Anthony answered and said, "It was not I who worked, but His grace which was with me' (1 Corinthians XV, 10)."<sup>215</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the history of Stoic influence on Christianity from the Old Testament through the Patristic era. The Stoic idea of controlling the passions by subjecting them to reason was appreciated in the early Christian community, especially by the Christian Ascetics, such as Evagrius, and John Climacus, who developed their own techniques and programs for helping people to control their emotions and behaviors in the pursuit of holiness. Christians tended to ground theirs in a virtue-based form of moral reasoning which provided norms and purpose for their therapeutic techniques. The virtue ethics used by the Christians bears similarities to Stoicism, as seen, for example in the invocation of classic virtues like temperance and *apatheia*. However, they clearly subordinated the Greek virtues to more distinctly Christian ones, most notably faith, hope, and love. In addition, Christians synthesized cognitive therapy with demonology which elevated the importance of humility in ways not seen

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<sup>214</sup> Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 15, trans. Luibheid and Russell, 183-184.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

in Stoicism. Finally, though Christian ascetics (as represented by Anthony, Evagrius, and Climacus) believed, as the Stoics did, in the importance of reason for overcoming the passions, they are far less certain than the Stoics of the extent to which this can be achieved through human reason alone. For them, whatever progress one makes in conquering the passions depends on divine grace at least as much if not more than it does on our own efforts.

## **Chapter 4: Summary and Future Directions**

In this chapter I tie together the themes of the previous chapters by pointing out what modern CBT and Christian asceticism, both heavily influenced if not inspired by Stoicism, have to learn from one another. Specifically I will argue that modern CBT can gain moral insights from examining how the Christian tradition adopted and adapted the practices of cognitive therapy while retaining their foundation in a morally normative vision of human nature, and that Christian asceticism and spiritual disciplines can learn from CBT's empirical and scientific rigor.

### **Morally Grounding CBT**

Unlike its Stoic sources, CBT lacks a theory human flourishing and offers no answers to questions about what constitutes healthy or ideal mental functioning. It is focused only on relieving negative symptoms as opposed to fostering positive virtues. As one therapist-scholar points out, “Ironically, what perhaps is missing from the REBT and CBT appropriations of this Stoic precept [of cognitive therapy] is some recognition of the corresponding *positive value* which it implies should be attached to the development and exercise of one’s psychological strengths, the role of *love* in Stoicism, the love of wisdom [philo-sophia].”<sup>216</sup> Rather than a way of life, like Stoicism or Christianity, CBT is more a kind of rhetorical technology for behavioral and emotional control.<sup>217</sup> This problem is by no means limited only to CBT, but is endemic to most other modern forms of psychotherapy. Without a robust idea of people *ought* to think and behave, CBT (any psychotherapy in general) cannot rightly claim to be mentally or behaviorally medicinal, remedial, or therapeutic. It can only claim to be *pleasant*.

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<sup>216</sup>Donald Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy* (London: Karnac Books, 2010), 119.

<sup>217</sup> Marsha Linehan (1993) *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality disorder* (New York, NY: Guilford, 1993), 20.



The pioneers of CBT, such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, were likely limited in their thinking by modern prejudices against teleological views of Human Nature, prejudices which have come to dominate modern social thought on morality in general.<sup>218</sup> Modern psychotherapists, not unlike their Stoic predecessors, have tended to present themselves as gurus of human flourishing, often positioning themselves in quasi-religious roles, without having any defensible theory of what human flourishing entails. As Thomas Szasz points out,

All this betokens still another aspect of the implacable resolve of psychotherapy to rob religion of as much as it can, and to destroy what it cannot: contrition, confession, prayer, faith, inner resolution, and countless other elements are expropriated and renamed as psychotherapy; whereas certain observances, rituals, taboos, and other elements of religion are demeaned and destroyed as the symptoms of neurotic or psychotic illnesses.<sup>219</sup>

This tendency is widespread in modern times, dominated as they are by human fact/value distinctions<sup>220</sup> and presumptions that teleology and the idea of a Cosmic Providence has been discredited by an evolutionary model of biology that emphasizes chaos and randomness;<sup>221</sup> or by the denial that there are basic principles of human flourishing which are consistent and universal across all cultures that bind humans together as a species, and that Human Nature a merely social construct.<sup>222</sup> Where therapeutic techniques and healing wisdom were once expressions of something transcendent, harmoniously integrating human behavior within the order of Nature, today they are mere expressions of technological power to make people *feel* good instead of *be* good, merely another tool for power, control, and manipulation of one human being over

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<sup>218</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 119.

<sup>219</sup> Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy*, 188.

<sup>220</sup> Howard P. Kainz, *Natural Law: An introduction and Re-examination* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004), 69.

<sup>221</sup> Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 2.

<sup>222</sup> Steven Lukes, "The Social Construction of Morality?" in *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality*, ed. Steven Hitlin and Stephen Vaisey, (New York: Springer, 2010), 549-560.

another, however much that manipulation may be desired.<sup>223</sup> The criticisms which Noam Chomsky leveled against B.F. Skinner and the behaviorists apply in full force to the cognitivist therapies that followed. But there is hope.

The Stoics have shown us that it is possible to ground cognitive therapy in a cosmopolitan moral vision of humanity and the world. And Christian ascetics have shown us that cognitive therapy may be imported with great success into new traditions and contexts with such a guiding moral vision fully intact. The Stoics' cognitive therapy was guided in practice by their Virtue Ethics, principally by the virtue of *apatheia*, and by their theory of Natural Law. The role of Natural Law in ancient Christian cognitive therapy remains unclear,<sup>224</sup> but role of idealized virtues remains intact, if not amplified in the ascetic practices. Such a feat could be replicated for CBT.

In fact, as the cognitive sciences have progressed, the idea of a morally-grounded CBT has become more plausible. The Cognitive Revolution which paved the way for CBT has since generated research that has increased our understanding of human morality. The idea of an innate human nature was frowned upon during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the cognitive sciences have resurrected it.<sup>225</sup> Cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists have begun to show how some moral principles have a universal, evolutionary basis.<sup>226</sup> And developments in primatology are disconfirming the modern prejudices against ideas of a universal Human Nature. As primatologist Franz De Waal has argued, primate social interactions both in the wild and in

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<sup>223</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 30-35.

<sup>224</sup> See appendix one.

<sup>225</sup>Cf. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

<sup>226</sup>Cf. Patricia Churchland, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells us about Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

captivity are clearly governed by moral norms such as fairness, empathy, and altruism,<sup>227</sup> adding support to the thesis that just as our primate relatives do not socially construct morality, neither do we. If these studies continue to be vindicated by further research, CBT may be in an ever-better position to integrate some form of Natural Law theory simply on the basis of empirical observations.

Finally, there is the growing movement known as “Positive Psychology,” led by former president of the American Psychological Association. Seligman has argued for a greater integration the concept of virtue as a guiding principal in psychotherapy. He has proposed that exercise of the virtues build character, which is a key factor not only in navigating and overcoming psychological distress, but in positively flourishing. This movement has provided much empirical research into various virtues, and shown how their practice can lead to positive outcomes in psychotherapy.<sup>228</sup> This movement is still young, and it’s conceptualization of virtue is far less robust than the conceptualizations offered by the Stoics or the monastics,<sup>229</sup> yet it shows that cognitive psychology continues to provide promise for a possible armistice between Christianity and psychotherapy in the near future.

### **Empirically Grounding Christian Counseling**

As a whole, Christian pastoral counseling and spiritual direction lacks standards. Its theories and practices are either largely idiosyncratic<sup>230</sup> or fragmented along sectarian lines.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Frans De Waal, “Morality Evolved: Primate Social Instincts, Human Morality, and the Rise and Fall of “Veneer Theory” in *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1-58.

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<sup>229</sup> Craig Steven Titus, “Aquinas, Seligman, and positive psychology: A Christian approach to the use of the virtues in psychology,” *Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 12 no. 5, (2017), 447-458.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Bernard J. Tyrell, *Christotherapy II: A New Horizon for Counselors, Spiritual Directors and Seekers of Healing and Growth in Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982)

Yet committed Christians are often leery of turning to secular psychology as an alternative. Many turn to their pastors who they expect to be able to help, but who often have little training in modern empirically-validated techniques and practices such as CBT and often have to improvise their methods.<sup>232</sup> But such a predicament is unnecessary. Christian history has produced multiple cognitive therapies whose foundational theories and techniques are grounded by the same empirical science that grounds mainstream CBT. Thanks to their common ancestor in Stoicism, there need not be any vast chasm separating the basic theories, methodologies, and terminology of Christian counselors from more mainstream CBT therapists. There may always be fundamental conflicts of worldview between Christian and mainstream counselors, but to a large degree Stoicism provides an intersection at which Christian counseling and mainstream CBT can meet and speak a common language, should they choose to do so. Furthermore, its pedigree within Christianity – from the Old Testament, through the teachings of Christ, and the letters of St. Paul – suggest that the utilization of Stoicism as a *lingua franca* could help foster increased unity among Christians who practice pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, for it may provide a cosmopolitan space in which to build consensus among Christian counselors of different denominational traditions, foster ecumenical dialogue, and possibly even help resolve theological disputes.

## **Conclusion**

This study has argued that Stoic philosophy inspired the development of modern CBT and Christian asceticism. In Stoicism, cognitive therapy functions against the backdrop of teleological views of Human Nature in the form of Natural Law and virtue-based morality, the

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<sup>231</sup>Cf. Eric L. Johnson ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010)

<sup>232</sup>Tim Clinton and George Ohlschlager, "Christian Counseling and Compassionate Soul Care: The Case for Twenty-First-Century Practice" in Timothy Clinton and George Ohlschlager (eds.), *Competent Christian Counseling Volume One: Foundations and Practice of Compassionate Soul Care* (Colorado Springs, Waterbrook Press 2002), 11-35.

latter of which was also adopted and adapted by the Christian ascetics. However, the forms which cognitive therapy took on under the auspices of modern psychotherapy (i.e. CBT) lack any significant moral component, which represents a moral hazard for CBT. The first chapter presented the history and theory behind CBT and showed how it lacks moral grounding. The second chapter summarized Stoic teachings on Nature and the passions and how these ideas provided moral grounding for their use of Stoic cognitive-therapeutic techniques. The third chapter showed how Stoic philosophy influenced early Christianity, and how Christian ascetics adapted Stoic techniques of cognitive therapy into unique systems which took account of their theological and soteriological worldview. In this final chapter we argued that the integration of natural law and virtue ethics in the Stoic and ancient Christian versions of cognitive therapy may serve as a model for possible future developments in CBT, and that many CBT practices can be integrated into Christian pastoral counseling and spiritual direction without posing any threat to religious integrity.

## Appendix 1: Natural Law and Virtue Ethics

There does not appear to be any explicit theory of Natural Law involved in the therapies of Evagrius or Climacus. However, it would not be baseless to say that Natural Law played an implicit role. There are some possible hints of Natural Law reasoning scattered through the writings of Evagrius and Climacus. For example Climacus writes, “He is a lover of God that is in communion with all that is sinless and natural...”<sup>233</sup> and Evagrius writes “...But these [demons], for their part, draw our anger to worldly desires and constrain us – contrary to our nature – to fight against our fellow men to the end that, blinded in mind and falling away from knowledge, our spirit should become a traitor to virtue.”<sup>234</sup>

There are historical factors favoring an inference that Natural Law played an implicit role. Firstly, as we have seen, there is evidence of Natural Law reasoning in the writings of St. Paul, of which Evagrius and Climacus undoubtedly aware. Secondly, historically the city of Alexandria in Egypt, the cultural epicenter most geographically proximal to most of the desert fathers and one of the foremost centers of learning in the Roman Empire, had a heritage Jewish and Christian Natural Law thinkers by the time of the ascetics. By the time of Evagrius, it already had a long history of producing thinkers ready and willing to synthesize Judeo-Christian ideas with Greek ones.

The important center in Hellenistic times for the meeting of Philosophy and religion was Alexandria. It was here that the search for moral and spiritual certainty produced a spirit of syncretism in which men became accustomed to entertain what was offered in all doctrines and ceased to be great extent to respect close distinctions in theory. In syncretism one finds at last the truth in many systems, or, in another sense, the truth as it rests in one system is viewed as reasonably approximated in other systems...”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Kindle Edition, 1.

<sup>234</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos*, 24, in *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 23.

<sup>235</sup> William A. Banner, “Origen and the Tradition of Natural Law Concepts,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8, (1954): 62.

Certainly, by the time of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BC-50AD), there was a strong tradition of synthesizing the Jewish and Christian Theology of Divine Commandment with Hellenistic Natural Law Philosophy, and “Greek Natural Law ideas supported an ideal of virtue and justice which was in general agreement with the ancient Hebrew moral law.”<sup>236</sup> These ideas were also important in the thought of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, the theological mentor to Evagrius and many other of the great Egyptian ascetics. Although there is no explicit reference to Natural Law, it is likely that Natural Law reasoning played an implicit role in their moral reasoning, parallel to their idea of divine command.

Whatever the role of Natural Law reasoning may or may not have played, the role of Virtue Ethics is clear; the cognitive techniques of both Evagrius and John Climacus are clearly guided by the shunning of vices (i.e. the eight *logoismoi*) and by idealized virtues (e.g. Chastity, Humility, Wisdom, Faith, Hope, Love), providing vital moral guidance to their cognitive techniques.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa* included treatises on both Natural Law, the passions, and the virtues weaving together nearly all of the strands of thought on cognitive therapy in an attempt to synthesize the learning of the Greeks with the faith of the Christians, though his theory did not propose any specific therapeutic techniques for change as did the Stoics, CBT, Evagrius or Climacus. Aquinas lays out his cognitive theory in his Treatise on Human Acts in the *Summa Theologiae*. For him, human actions are the result of an interplay between different parts of a person’s soul: the will, the intellect, and the passions: the passions

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<sup>236</sup> Banner, “Origen,” 63.

are the “appetite” of the will,<sup>237</sup> and the will is moved by the intellect.<sup>238</sup> And Aquinas connects his theory of human actions with his theory of Natural Law through the concept of *telos*, or the “last ends” of man: that human beings naturally strive towards goodness and happiness as the fulfillment of their nature.<sup>239</sup> Unfortunately, Aquinas never developed his cognitive theory into operationalizable therapeutic techniques. How Aquinas might have explained specific techniques used in cognitive therapy today (e.g. Dialectical Behavior Therapy, or Schema Therapy) would be a good topic for further research.

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<sup>237</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III q. 22, a. 3 in *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, second and revised edition, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920) online edition by Kevin Knight (2017), <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2022.htm#article3>

<sup>238</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 9, a. 1, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2009.htm>.

<sup>239</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II, q. 1-5, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm>.



## Appendix 2: Angels and Demons

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, talk of demons in any work of scholarship is likely to be met with scorn, so it seems necessary to give some defense. Angelology and Demonology are deeply rooted in the historical and theological foundations of Christianity. Besides familiar angel stories, such as the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, the angels at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the angels at Christ's empty tomb, there are many appearances in the Bible of demons. The conquest of demons is a central component of Christ's life and ministry. He is driven out into the desert where he is tempted by Satan,<sup>240</sup> and many of His healings are attributed to His authority over demons, so much so that He is even accused of being in league with demons himself.<sup>241</sup> He gives His disciples power over demons; though some demons prove to be too powerful for them.<sup>242</sup> St. Paul reaffirms the reality of demons when he explains the dangers of idolatry, "No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (1 Cor 10:20).

Very little about this was original to Christianity. In fact, Christian Angelology and Demonology is just another of the artifacts attesting to its Hellenistic roots. The demons (or *daimona* as are known in Greek) played an important role in Greek culture, philosophy, and theology. *Daimona* were intermediaries between the world of humans and the world of the Divine. Today the word "demon" has connotations of evil, but this was not necessarily the view of the ancient Greeks, this was a development which came over time.

Since lesser gods and intermediary powers were identified with demons, there was a *demonizing of religion*... The word *demons* did not have the negative connotations it does today, but as unlucky happenings were attributed to intermediary beings or forces it

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<sup>240</sup> Luke 4:1-13

<sup>241</sup> Matthew 9:32-34

<sup>242</sup> Matt 17:14-21

began to acquire even in pagan thought something of a pejorative sense. The demons filled the gap between the gods and human beings and between the superlunary world and the earth. Demons had their starting point in abstract powers, ghosts, and the unexplained in human nature. They came to be identified with beings under the one God. Peoples of the Roman empire, if not “demon possessed” or rather demon influenced (as the Christian apologists suggest), were certainly demon conscious.<sup>243</sup>

The idea of good and evil *daimona* vying with each other for influence over a person’s moral choices was a popular trope even for the Greeks. Everett Fergusson presents a collection of notable examples:

Socrates referred to a demon that warned him against certain actions (Plato, *Apology* 31D, 40A), thus giving to the demon a function almost like the conscience... Plato’s varied use of the term influenced its future development. One work says that the demons are the sons of gods by nymphs or other mothers, serving as interpreters between gods and people ([?] *Epinomis* 984E); in this sense *demon* is a generic term for divine intermediaries. Plato’s writings also regard the demon as a destiny spirit somewhat like a guardian angel as a companion of persons (*Phaedo* 107D; *Republic* 617D; *Statesman* 271D, 272E) or of cities as well as of individuals (*Laws* 713C, 738D). He also refers “demon” to the highest and divine element in a person. From the idea of a demon accompanying each person came the use of the word as virtually equal to “fate” (but as referring to the personal destiny of a individual without the capriciousness of Tyche). Xenocrates, Plato’s student, systematized demonology. He and later philosophers listed three classes of demons: permanently disincarnate beings, souls of the deceased, and the soul “in” or intelligence accompanying us. He ascribed human passions to them and made the distinction that some demons were good and some bad. From this came the idea that each person has two demons, one good and one bad. By the fourth century B.C. the word was deteriorating into use only for unlucky happenings. Since once avoided putting the blame for evil happenings on the gods, they were attributed to the demons. Thus the way was prepared for regarding demons as evil beings...<sup>244</sup>

The purpose of these stories is not to revel in superstition, but neither should they be considered as mere metaphors for human suffering.<sup>245</sup> In the minds of the Christian ascetics,

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<sup>243</sup> Everett Fergusson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 176.

<sup>244</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds to Early Christianity*, 236-237.

<sup>245</sup> Matthew 8:30-34

Angelology and Demonology function in tandem with cognitive therapy: the demons propose irrational or tempting thoughts, while the angels assist in overcoming them.

The stories are clear that these demons were not hallucinations. On some occasions, the demons manifested their supernatural powers on him physically, at one point beating him so badly that a friend had to intervene to rescue Anthony.

Then they began to smite him with blows, and they smote him so severely that at length he fell on the ground, and nothing but his breath was left in him; and Saint Anthony used to relate that the blows with which the devils smote him were more severe than those of the children of men. But God brought help unto him, and would not deliver him over to death, for He put it into the mind of him that used to visit him to come quickly, and to open the door of the tomb according to his wont, and he saw the blessed Anthony, who was like unto a dead man by reason of the blows; and straight-way he lifted him up and brought him to the church in the village.<sup>246</sup>

To make it even more clear that these are not hallucinations, Athanasius records stories of people who witnessed some of these supernatural phenomena.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, 13.

<sup>247</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of St. Anthony*, 17-18.

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