I. Introduction

This paper will consider the thesis that there is within Stoic philosophy a distinct and interesting theory of human psychology, which entails not only a normative account of human growth and development but also a corresponding theory of psychopathology based on that account. The theory also encompasses a system of therapeutic techniques formulated to expose and correct these pathologies. In sum, there exists what can only be described as a unique and well-formulated system of Stoic Psychotherapy. In fact, I would assert that Stoicism does not just contain a theory of psychotherapy as part of its larger philosophical theory, but that Stoicism itself is more accurately conceptualised as primarily a psychotherapy, albeit, with an extensive philosophical underpinning. However, as this is not the major topic I wish to address, this position will go largely undefended save for the following material from Martha Nussbaum's book, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (1996).

It is not true that there exists an art called medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul. Nor is it true that the latter is inferior to the former, in its theoretical grasp and therapeutic treatment of individual cases (Galen PHP 5.22, 298D=SVF III.47). (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 14)

They [the Hellenistic philosophical schools and the Stoics in particular] saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering. They practiced philosophy not as a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery. (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 3)

Finding out how human beings are diseased and what they need is a prelude to, and is inseparable from, trying to heal them and to give them what they need. The connection is this close, first of all, because the conception of the philosopher's task as a medical one makes compassion and love of humanity central features of it. Having understood how human lives are diseased, a philosopher worthy of the name—like a doctor worthy of that name—will proceed to try to cure them. The whole point of medical research is cure. So, too, *the whole point of philosophy is human flourishing*. The medical analogy expresses this basic commitment. (Emphasis added) (Nussbaum, 1996, pp. 33-34)

Nussbaum's entire book is an exploration of Hellenistic philosophy as a therapeutic endeavour and an extended defence of that position. She brings out an abundance of additional material in support of this thesis that cannot be included here. Suffice it to say that what has been presented makes clear that the Stoics placed a high priority on their ethical theory and its application to practical living both as an individual, personal endeavour, and in a broader didactic context.

II. Outlining the System

Even if it is granted that within Stoic philosophy there are numerous techniques designed to aid one in the art of living, a collection of therapeutic techniques alone does not constitute a system of psychotherapy, Stoic or otherwise. Aaron Beck, in his book, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (1976), suggests that one of the characteristics of a system of psychotherapy, as distinct from simply a collection of techniques, is that its therapeutic approach be derived from, and related directly to, a comprehensive theory of psychopathology. Although not explicitly stated by Beck, it can be inferred that the theory of pathology also includes a normative account of human development. It is obvious that without the standard

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1 Psychotherapy can be broadly defined as the application of various psychological (as opposed to medical or neurological) techniques directed towards improving or eliminating maladaptive emotions and behaviours. It will become evident, in what follows, that this is not an adequate description of Stoic therapy. Likewise, what constitutes psychopathology (the study of mental and emotional disorders from the psychological perspective) in the Stoic system is considerably more inclusive than in other therapies. I will be using the terms therapy and psychotherapy interchangeably, as well as pathology and psychopathology.
for healthy behaviour, which such a theory would provide, there can be no determination of what constitutes pathological behaviour.

Beck (1976) also suggests that a well-developed system of therapy should possess a detailed description of, and guide to, therapeutic techniques related to this model (i.e., the theory’s model of psychopathology). To this I would add that any comprehensive system of therapy should include a specific therapeutic paradigm or model such as Ellis’ s (1977) ABC Theory of Emotion or Bandura’s (1986) Social Learning Theory in addition to a broad theory of behaviour change. I believe it can be convincingly demonstrated that Stoic philosophy possesses more than ample resources for constructing a uniquely efficacious psychotherapy based on the above criteria. The following material will present, in outline form, one attempt to do so.

A. Normative Psychology

The theory of oikeiosis provides the Stoic account of normative human growth and development. It includes the motivational theory behind goal-directed behaviour and specifies what constitutes appropriate (i.e., normal in a developmental sense) activity for man as a rational creature throughout each stage of the maturation process.

The term itself has no adequate English translation. Sandbach renders it as ‘belonging’ or ‘affinity’ and notes that ‘Oikeion is the opposite of allotrior, what is alien; it is therefore that which ‘belongs to you’, so that you and it go together. Oikeiosis is then the process of making a thing belong, and this is achieved by the recognition that the thing is oikeion, that it does belong to you, that it is yours.’ (Sandbach, 1989, p. 32). Pembroke, who goes so far as to state that ‘if there had been no oikeiosis, there would have been no Stoic’ emphasizes the importance of the concept in the Stoic scheme (Long, 1996, p. 114).

Oikeiosis is a verbal noun, and the verb’s immediate neighbour is the adjective oikeios, itself derived from the Greek word for ‘house’ and applied both to persons who were members of the household or had a blood-relationship to its members, and to those connected with it either by marriage or less formally by virtually any kind of favourable association. In the household sphere, oikeios denoted property and so came by simple extension to cover anything belonging to a person in other senses than the strictly economic one (Long, 1996, p.115).

The process of oikeiosis can be viewed from two different but complementary perspectives. In Diogenes Laertius VII 85-89, that which nature has provided for the individual is emphasized, while in De finibus III 20-21, Cicero brings out how the individual is to respond in terms of nature’s provision.

Diogenes Laertius VII

85. They say that an animal’s first [or primary] impulse is to preserve itself, because nature made it congenial [oikeios] to itself from the beginning, as Chrysippus says in book one of On Goals, stating that for every animal its first [sense of] congeniality is to its own constitution and the reflective awareness of this … For in this way [because nature has made the animal congenial to itself] it repels injurious influences and pursues that which is congenial to it.

86. … When in the case of animals, impulse is added (which they use in pursuit of things to which they have an affinity), then for them what is natural is governed by what is according to impulse. When reason has been given to rational animals as a more perfect governor [of life], then for them the life according to reason properly becomes what is natural for them. For reason supervenes on impulse as a craftsman. (Inwood/Gerson, 1997, p. 191)

Rational agents are constituted in such a way that they have an affinity to pursue those things that will promote self-preservation and avoid those things that hinder it. Originally this process of selection/rejection is essentially reflexive or instinctual, but with the introduction of reason, if all goes well, a dramatic change occurs. Instinctual selection/rejection is replaced by rational selection/rejection; reason acting as a ‘craftsman’ to shape the choices made. As Engberg-Pederson puts it, ‘with the arrival of reason there is a shift of allegiance from a subjective concern about particular objects to an objective concern for being right about the value of such objects (Engberg-Pederson, 1990, p. 101).

De finibus III

20. … the first appropriate action (for that is what I call kathekon) is that it [i.e. the agent] should preserve itself in its natural constitution; and then that it should retain what is according to nature and reject what is contrary to nature. After this [pattern of] selection and rejection is discovered, then there follows appropriate selection, and then constant [appropriate] selection, and finally [selection] which is stable and in agreement with nature; and here for the first time we begin to have and to understand something which

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Returning to the passage in Diogenes VII we can see how this process (i.e. selection of that which is in accordance with man’s nature as a rational being), if carried to completion, will issue in a life of harmony, virtue, happiness, and agreement with nature, each of these being simply different specifications of the eudaimon life.2

87. Thus Zeno first, in his book On the Nature of Man, said that the goal was to live in agreement with nature, which is to live according to virtue. For nature leads us to virtue …

88. … Therefore, the goal becomes ‘to live consistently with nature’ … And this itself is the virtue of the happy man and a smooth flow of life … So Diogenes says explicitly that the goal is reasonable behaviour in the selection of things according to nature, and Archedemus [says it is] to live carrying out all appropriate acts.

89. By nature, in consistency with which we must live, Chrysippus understands both the common and, specifically, the human nature … And virtue is a disposition in agreement. And it is worth choosing for its own sake … And happiness lies in virtue, insofar as virtue is the soul [so] made [as to produce] the agreement of one’s whole life. (Inwood/Gerson, 1997, p. 191)

Because the primary focus of this essay is not normative or developmental psychology but rather psychopathology and its treatment, this admittedly foundational topic will go undeveloped. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (1990) provides an extended treatment in his book, The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis.

B. A Proposed Therapeutic Model

Just as in cartography the map is not the territory, so too in psychology the model is not the therapy. A model can, however, serve as a useful tool by providing an overview of the therapeutic process and by illustrating the interrelationships between the different therapeutic constructs. And just as there can be many different maps of the same geographical area, each depicting a specific feature of the landscape (e.g., elevation maps, road maps, etc.) there are a variety of ways to conceptualise what takes place in therapy. What follows is one such conceptualisation; others are certainly possible.

It may prove helpful in understanding the role of models to compare and contrast the proposed Stoic model to that of another similar therapy. The Rational-Emotive Therapy of Albert Ellis, mentioned earlier, will serve nicely in this effort. Very briefly, this theory, the ABC theory of emotion, is as follows:

A is the activating event: what happens to the individual. B is the belief system of the individual: how he or she interprets A. C is the emotional consequence the individual experiences.

Although most people believe that it is the activating event itself that leads to their emotional consequence, according to Ellis this is incorrect. In reality it is the individual’s interpretation of the event, that is, his or her beliefs about the event, that actually produce the emotional consequence. Rational beliefs produce rational emotional consequences; irrational beliefs produce the opposite. Irrational beliefs are the pathological agents within this system and its therapeutic techniques are designed to dispute these beliefs and to replace them with new, more rational ones leading ultimately to new emotional consequences.
The ABC Theory of Emotion

The model that I propose for Stoic therapy is similar to that of Ellis though there are some significant distinctions that will emerge as the unique terminology of the Stoics is considered.

Appearances - The ability to make proper use of appearances (or representations) is the cornerstone of Stoic ethical development. Epictetus repeatedly insists that an ethically good life is equivalent to making correct or proper use of representations (for instance, Discourses I.1.7, II.22.29, IV.6.34). The word rendered 'representations' is from the Greek word phantasia. 'There is no agreed translation of phantasia, and no single modern word is entirely apt. 'Appearance', 'impression', 'presentation' and 'representation' are the English renderings most commonly adopted.' (Long, 1996, p. 268, Footnote #10) An appearance is more than raw sensory data. It is sensory experience put into prepositional form. This experience may be external experience perceived by the senses, or internal experience, for example memories or imaginings.

An impression, to be prepositional, must already be an interpretation of some sort. At this stage, we may say that someone has an 'impression of' something (such as an impression of a cat on the mat). The next stage is moving - usually so quickly that this first stage isn’t even recognized by people - to having an ‘impression that’ something, such that there is a cat on the mat. The first sort of impression may be true. The black shape on the mat really does look like a cat. But the second stage may offer a different interpretation, such as having an impression that there is a coat on the mat (it wasn’t a cat at all). The first stage is having an awareness of something or other: the second stage is a commitment to an interpretation that something or other is the case. In moving from an ‘impression of’ to having an ‘impression that’, one automatically applies an evaluation of whether this is something agreeable or disagreeable (and how much so) - or whether it makes no difference either way - and why this is so. (Seddon, personal communication)

Value System - The system of values offered by the Stoics is the essence of their moral philosophy and the very heart of Stoic therapy. It provides the standard against which appearances are to be evaluated. It is open to gross misunderstanding, very counter-intuitive, and even when thoroughly understood difficult for most people to accept. It is, however, the logical outgrowth of the Stoic view of what constitutes a eudaimon or flourishing life.

According to the Stoics, such a life consists of always obtaining those things that we desire and always avoiding those things we wish to avoid. So far, the thesis is unremarkable. It is hard to see how anyone could object to this as a specification of the ‘good’ life. The problem, of course, is that this seems clearly beyond our reach in many instances, for we often do not have control over the things that happen to us. I may desire a healthy life, but as there are numerous conditions that impact on that desire, over which I have little or no influence, my desired outcome cannot be guaranteed. To the extent that my desires are fulfilled and the things I wish to avoid, avoided, to that extent I consider my life to be happy. Of course this places me at the mercy of a host of external factors and virtually insures a life of emotional instability.

The Stoic solution to this dilemma is to confine our desires to only those areas over which we have absolute control.3 In this sense the philosophy is

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3 ‘Remember that desire demands the attainment of that of which you are desirous; and aversion demands the avoidance of that to which you are averse; that he who fails of the object of his desires is disappointed; and he who incurs the object of his aversion is wretched. If, then, you avoid only those undesirable things which you control, you will never incur
reductionistic. We gain control by reducing the sphere over which we attempt to exert control. Clearly, the less I desire to control, the less opportunity there is for my desires to be thwarted. Ultimately, we find that there is only one domain in which we are assured absolute control and that is the domain of our cognitions; how we judge matters, what we think, our beliefs and our attitudes; in a word, the use we make of appearances. But the ability to control our judgements is only one half of the equation; for if our judgements are in error it makes no difference that they are within our control; the eudaimon life still eludes us. Enter the Stoic position on values and the close relationship between Stoic philosophy and the various cognitive therapies. According to the Stoics, the proper use of appearances requires: (1) a correct truth assessment of the appearance and (2) a correct value assessment of the appearance. All appearances are viewed by the Stoics as being incapable of producing happiness (eudaimonía) or of detracting from it; they are ‘indifferent’ in this respect. Thus, to value the illness of a loved one as an evil is an error in judgment. Likewise, to value the recovery of a loved one from illness as a good is an error. Epictetus expresses the appropriate attitude towards appearances in a passage often quoted by cognitively oriented therapists:

'It is not the things themselves that disturb men, but their judgements about these things. For example, death is nothing dreadful, or else Socrates too would have thought so, but the judgement that death is dreadful, this is the dreadful thing. When, therefore, we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never blame anyone but ourselves, that means, our own judgements. (Handbook 6, trans. Oldfather)

To make value judgements accurately and consistently is the second half of the equation in making proper use of appearances.

Consequences
The consequences of misjudging an appearance need not be immediately apparent nor are they confined solely to the realm of emotions; the impact on the agent is more extensive. In Ellis’s theory, to engage in irrational thinking is to experience unwanted or maladaptive emotions and it is these emotions that signal the need for therapy. On the other hand, an individual may believe that his or her new vacation house is a ‘good’, although according to the Stoic system of values the house would actually be an indifferent. As long as the house remains undamaged there are no negative consequences resulting from this misjudgement, and thus therapeutic intervention would not be appropriate within many systems of therapy including, presumably, RET. Not so the Stoics, who would view the misjudgement itself as indicative of pathology regardless of the presence or absence of ‘emotional symptoms’.

This somewhat counter-intuitive stance on what constitutes pathology is directly related to the Stoic theory of normative development (the process of oikeiosis). Ideally the agent will move through life selecting only those things that are truly in accordance with the nature of a rational being and rejecting those which are not. However, because selection is based on what ‘appears’ good to each individual rather than what is actually good according to the Stoic value system, inappropriate selections are made. Such inappropriate selection stems from two sources: 1) inaccurate valuations of externals and 2) failure to carry through with choices rightly judged to be appropriate and conversely failure to avoid choosing that which is rightly judged to be inappropriate.

This latter category, which corresponds (approximately) to ‘emotions’ in other systems, concerns the topic of the Stoic pathē or passions, a subject over which there has been and continues to be much misunderstanding. In spite of the fact that the subject of the passions (including their cause, cure and prevention) must ultimately comprise a major portion of any Stoic therapy, such a treatment is well beyond the scope of the present project. At this point, it must

anything which you avoid; but if you [wish to] avoid sickness or death or poverty, you will run the risk of wretchedness. Withdraw aversion, then, from all things that are not within our power, and apply it to things undesirable, which are within our power.’ (Black, 1944, p. 332, #2)

4 I will use the term RET (Rational Emotive Therapy) in this paper, although Ellis’s theory is now often referred to as REBT (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy).

5 The importance of a proper understanding of the passions within Stoic philosophy in general is seen in both Posidonius and Epictetus. ‘At PHP V 6. 2, p.326, 14-16, Galen quotes Posidonius from near the beginning of his On Emotions as saying that a correct investigation of the nature of the emotions is the necessary foundation on which to develop a correct account of what is good and bad for human beings, the ends of life, and the virtues.’ (Cooper 1999, p.477). Epictetus maintained that of the three major fields of Stoic study (desires/aversions, pursuits/avoidances, and whatever belongs to judgment) the ‘principle and most urgent’ was that which reached the passions. (Discourses 3.2, trans. Higginson)
suffice to say that for the Stoics (at least, for those that held to a Chrysippean as opposed to a Posidonian analysis) the passions are to be understood as a set of beliefs, specifically, a set of beliefs that are inconsistent and contradictory but which are to be distinguished from simple errors in judgment in that they also entail an ‘excessive’ motive force.

Although negative emotions (or in Stoic therapy, ‘pathē’) may be one consequence resulting from the misuse of appearances, this does not define pathology in the model as envisioned; it is simply one of the by-products or symptoms of that pathology. It is the development of maladaptive cognitive and behavioural habits, which are the long-term effects of judgements that are the targets of therapeutic intervention. Appropriate judgements result in positive cognitive and behavioural habits, inappropriate judgements in the opposite.

Rational Restructuring
Rational restructuring is the term chosen to describe the dynamics of Stoic therapy. In Stoic philosophy reason is the defining characteristic of the mature individual and is the standard by which appearances are to be judged and behaviour and thought guided. Epictetus makes this point vividly:

For what is a man? The answer is: ‘A rational and mortal being.’ Then, by the rational faculty, from whom are we separated? From wild beasts. And from what others? From sheep and like animals. Take care then to do nothing like a wild beast; but if you do, you have lost the character of a man; you have not fulfilled your promise. See that you do nothing like a sheep; but if you do, in this case the man is lost. What then do we do as sheep? When we act glutonously, when we act lewdly, when we act rashly, filthily, inconsiderately, to what have we declined? To sheep. What have we lost? The rational faculty. When we act contentiously and harmfully and passionately, and violently, to what have we declined? To wild beasts. (Discourses 2.9.2 - 5, trans. Hard)

The therapeutic process of Stoic Rational Restructuring is based on a two-step approach to treatment, which corresponds to the two areas in which problems arise: (1) improper selection/rejection due to a faulty value system and (2) improper selection/rejection due to the passions. Rational Restructuring is comprised of an educational phase and an application phase, which can be outlined as follows:

i) Educational Phase: Value Restructuring - The Proper Use of Appearances
Instruction in the proper locus of control (internal versus external)
Instruction in the Stoic system of values

ii) Application Phase: Cognitive/Behavioural Restructuring
Restructuring behavioural habits
Restructuring cognitive habits

Restructuring occurs in three areas: the maladaptive value system itself, and the habits, both behavioural and cognitive, which are based on this system. The emphasis on habit formation, maintenance, and change is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Stoic therapy and that which serves to distance it from the purely cognitive schools of therapy with which it is so often associated.

Successful outcomes are not produced simply as the result of changes in the client’s cognitions. Though adoption of the Stoic system of values is a prerequisite for change, the Stoics clearly recognized that this, by itself, was insufficient to immediately overturn years of faulty habituation. The process of value restructuring is a lifelong endeavour. (This fact emphasizes the need for continued ‘self-

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6 Generally speaking, Chrysippus maintained that the pathe were false judgements while Posidonius asserted that in addition to these false judgements something more was needed to account for the excessive nature of emotional experience: a non-rational ‘affective movement’ (pathetike kinesis).

7 ‘The central and guiding attitude of Stoic therapy is its respect for the dignity of reason in all human beings... Reason is not just the most important thing about humans: it is something that is fully their own, in their power to cultivate and control.’ (Nussbaum, 1996, p.15). What I intend by the label ‘Stoic Rational Restructuring’ should not be confused with the specific technique of ‘systematic rational restructuring’ developed by Goldfried, Decentece, and Wienberg (1974), which is essentially a stress reduction strategy.

8 ‘All their [the Stoics] therapy is cognitive, and cognitive therapy is taken to be sufficient for the removal of human diseases.’ (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 335). I must respectfully disagree with Nussbaum on this very important point. While it is true that Stoic philosophy has a large cognitive component in its therapy, Epictetus is at pains to emphasize that this alone is inadequate to overcome the influence of years of maladaptive cognitive and behavioural habits. It is possible to know the Stoic theory of values and to know the areas over which we have and do not have control and still fail in living a virtuous life. As Epictetus said, habit has a powerful influence.
therapy beyond the initial formal therapeutic session(s); a point that finds ample support in the Stoic writings.) It is one thing to know the Stoic position on values, another to accept its validity, and yet another to habitually apply it to all of one’s judgements. The Stoic therapeutic techniques are designed to assist the individual to do just this in a number of different contexts and under varying conditions.

*Eudaimonia*

The goal of Stoic therapy is not the elimination of the presenting problem (the issue or issues that prompted the agent to seek counselling initially), it is much broader, much more extensive. It is the *eudaimon* life.\(^9\) This is described as a smooth flowing life, a flourishing life, a life free from emotional disturbance. The Stoic model of therapy, while similar in some respects to the RET of Ellis and to other cognitively oriented schools, is distinguished from these by at least three factors: its emphasis on a specific and well-defined theory of values, its more inclusive view of what constitutes pathology and subsequently, its more restrictive view of what constitutes cure.

\(^9\) ‘The patient must not simply remain a patient, dependent and receptive; she must become her own doctor. Philosophy’s medical function is understood as, above all, that of toning up the soul - developing its muscles, assisting it to use its own capabilities more effectively (Sen. Ep.15).’ (Nussbaum, 1996, pp. 317-318).

\(^{10}\) *Eudaimonia*, as its etymology indicates, is the name for a ‘blessed’ or ‘god-favoured’ condition, a condition in which a person’s lot or *daimon* is good. The term is normally and correctly translated ‘happiness’...’ (Long, 1996, p. 181).
C. A Stoic Theory of Pathology and the Process of Change

Beck (1976) lists five standards for evaluating different theories of psychopathology. Since the tenets of Stoicism are being presented in this essay in terms of a normative psychological theory along with an accompanying theory of psychopathology it seems reasonable that the theory should be expected to meet these criteria.

The theory should satisfy the requirements of any good scientific theory, namely, that it explain the phenomena within its domain with minimal complexity. (p. 307)

Because the model of Stoic therapy suggested is structured along cognitive and cognitive behavioural models rather than the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Jung, or other so-called ‘depth’ therapies; it avoids the complexities inherent in such systems (e.g., unconscious conflicts, dream analysis, the collective unconscious, etc.) It is essentially a common sense theory in which someone who is having difficulty quitting smoking, for example, is viewed as having a problem with their cognitive and behavioural habit patterns and is not fixated in the oral stage of their psychosexual development. As Freud himself said, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

The theory should be elastic enough to allow for the development of new techniques without being so loose or complex that it obligingly dispenses a justification for any procedure a therapist might feel inspired to improvise (Beck, 1976, pp. 307-308).

Stoic therapy has the advantage of being grounded in an extensive philosophical system that acts to limit the type of techniques deemed suitable for use. Therapies such as Arthur Janov’s Primal Scream can be dismissed a priori as incompatible with the Stoic view on emotions. On the other hand, Stoic philosophy was historically viewed as an evolving body of thought which was continually being refined and developed. Any techniques which do not mitigate the fundamental tenets of the theory and which enjoy a measure of empirical support should be considered for inclusion in the cognitive-behavioural therapeutic repertoire.

An important challenge to a scientific model is the degree to which it is based on verified evidence. A related attribute is the degree to which its assumptions, axioms, and hypotheses can be tested through systematic investigations and experiments. (Beck, 1976, p. 308)

As there is, at this time, no existing body of research on Stoic therapy, per se, (due in no small part to the fact that there is no formally recognized body of Stoic therapy) meeting these criteria will depend on future efforts. However, to the extent that the techniques employed in Stoic therapy correlate to those of other therapies (e.g., RET, Cognitive-Behaviour Modification, etc.) whose techniques have produced strong empirical support, to that extent the criteria has at least, in part, already been met.

The theory of psychopathology should be closely related to its allied psychotherapy so that it is obvious how the psychotherapeutic principles are logically derived from the theory. (Beck, 1976, p. 307)
The theory should provide the basis for understanding why its derived psychotherapeutic techniques are effective. The rationale and mode of operation of the therapy should be implicit in the theory (Beck, 1976, p. 307).

Throughout the Discourses, Epictetus repeatedly makes reference to 'the proper use of appearances'. As noted, it is this ability that is the hallmark of Stoic moral growth and the lack of this ability that results in the manifestation of problems and their subsequent negative consequences. In light of this emphasis, Stoic psychopathology can be defined very simply as the habitual failure to make proper use of appearances, which issues in inappropriate and self-defeating selections/rejections.11

Accordingly, the goal of Stoic therapy is two-fold: (1) to counter the maladaptive thinking and thought patterns that have resulted from the improper use of appearances and (2) to provide training in the proper use of appearances and towards the development of adaptive habits of thought and thought processes. The therapeutic techniques of Stoicism are designed to facilitate this change from maladaptive to adaptive behaviour. And it is change, in one form or another, which is at the heart of all therapies.

Donald Meichenbaum (1977) in his book, Cognitive-Behavior Modification: An Integrative Approach, views the change process as occurring in three phases:

Phase 1: Self-observation. ‘Through heightened awareness and deliberate attention, the client monitors with increased sensitivity, his thoughts feelings and physiological reactions, and/or interpersonal behaviors.’ (Meichenbaum, 1976, p. 219)

Phase 2: Incompatible Thoughts and Behaviours. ‘As the client’s self-observations become attuned to incipient low-intensity aspects of his maladaptive behavior, the client learns to initiate cognitions and behaviors that interfere with the maladaptive ones. The self-observation signals the opportunity for producing the adaptive thoughts and behaviors.’ (Meichenbaum, 1976, p. 223)

Phase 3: Cognitions Concerning Change. ‘The third phase of the cognitive theory of behaviour change is concerned with the process of the client’s producing new behaviors in his everyday world and how he assesses (or what he says to himself about) the behavioral outcomes.’ (Meichenbaum, 1976, p. 225)

That is, are the techniques employed working or not? If so, why? If not, why not?

It is interesting to note that some 2000 years ago the Stoics were already utilizing the three phases of change presented by Meichenbaum. In the Discourses, Epictetus writes,

I am inclined to pleasure. I will bend myself, even unduly, toward the other extreme, as a matter of training. I am averse to pain. I will strive and wrestle with these appearances, that I may cease to shrink from any such object (Discourses 3.12.7, trans. Higginson).

Phase One: He recognizes areas requiring change - ‘I am inclined to pleasure ... I am averse to pain.’ Phase Two: He sets about to establish incompatible behaviours; ‘I will bend myself to the other extreme.’ Phase Three: He establishes the criteria by which success in the change process can be measured, - ‘I will strive and wrestle with these appearances, that I may cease to shrink from any such object [as causes pain].’ (Emphasis added) If Epictetus finds that he continues to shrink from those necessary situations that cause him pain (as opposed to enduring pain needlessly12), he knows that he has more striving to do. Note that the

11 On the one hand, Epictetus says that a good life consists in using one’s representations correctly, and that this is a faculty that human beings possess. This thesis suggests that we are able to take stock of our representations, interpret their content, and accept or reject courses of action that they propose. It implies that responsibility, praise and blame, rest not with our representations but with the use we make of them. On the other hand, Epictetus also says that people cannot fail to act in accordance with their representations of what is dominantly in their interests.’ (Long, 1996, p. 278)

12 Epictetus makes it abundantly clear in the opening lines of this chapter that there is no need for physical training that does not contribute to the proper understanding of those things that are within our power and those that are not. ‘We are not to carry our training beyond nature and reason; for in that case we, who call ourselves philosophers, shall not differ from jugglers. For it is no doubt difficult to walk upon a rope, and not only difficult but dangerous. Ought we too for that reason make it our study to walk upon a rope, or balance a pole, or grasp a statue? By no means. It is not everything that is difficult or dangerous but such things as are conducive to what lies before us to do. ‘And what is it that lies before us to do?’ To have our desires and aversions free from restraint.’ Diogenes was known to train himself for hardship by grasping snow-covered statues.
striving referred to is not physical striving (i.e., to endure the pain), but with the appearances concerning the pain. His desire is that he judge the pain appropriately, as an indifferent and not as an evil.

This three-fold analysis of change (assessment, cognitive/behavioural restructuring, evaluation) is a recurring theme in the Stoic writings and provides the framework for understanding and implementing their therapeutic techniques.

**D. Therapeutic Techniques**

Epictetus is well aware of the fact that representations often overwhelm people and constrain them to act without proper reflection. His discourses are packed with analysis—psychoanalysis one is tempted to call it—of the conditions under which this may happen, and of what may be done to resist such representations (cf. II.22.5, III.12.11, II.22.6). (Long, 1996, pp. 276-277)

Rather than provide a laundry list of Stoic therapeutic procedures, I will confine my examination to only one section of the Discourses. However, I believe this section will be adequate to illustrate the extensive use Epictetus makes of these techniques and to demonstrate the possibility of a future ‘handbook of Stoic therapy’.

In Book III, Chapter 12 of the Discourses, Epictetus responds to a question concerning the appropriate sphere of moral training:

> Not to be disappointed in our desire, nor fall into anything, which we would avoid. To this ought training to be directed. For without vigorous and steady training, it is not possible to preserve our desire undisappointed and our aversions unincurred; and therefore, if we allow it to be externally employed on things uncontrollable by will, be assured that your desire will neither gain its object, nor your aversion avoid it. And because habit has a powerful influence, and we are accustomed to applying our desire and aversion to externals only, we must oppose one habit to another: and where the semblances [i.e., appearances] are most treacherous, there oppose the force of training. (Discourses 3.12.4-6, trans. Higginson)

In this passage the important point is made that there are two types of training involved in effective moral development: behavioural habits and cognitive habits. I take the reference to ‘habit as a powerful influence’ and our being accustomed to applying it (i.e. habit) to ‘externals only’ to be speaking of habits of behaviour which must be countered by new incompatible patterns. However, in the next phrase, where Epictetus speaks of ‘the appearance’, the emphasis shifts to an internal, specifically cognitive perspective.

The practice of developing behavioural habits is well known but not often recognized (or, at least, not emphasized) as a significant component within Stoic training by contemporary commentators who tend to overemphasize the cognitive elements in moral development. This may be due, in part, to the fact that some writers see behaviour that is the result of habit as somehow less than moral behaviour. In discussing the problem of *akratic* action (i.e., weakness of the will) David Carr (1996) makes the following statement:

> … if an agent who would otherwise have succumbed to weakness holds out under the influence of training, he acts from habit rather than reason, and is not therefore, on rationalist assumptions, acting as a genuine moral agent.

Contrary to this, the Stoics share the view of R.S. Peters (1996) that the palace of reason is entered through the courtyard of habit. The importance of habit is constantly stressed in the Discourses. However, even with the pre-eminence afforded cognitive factors within Stoic philosophy by most, the role of habit as applied to thought processes seems to strike many as something quite out of the ordinary. This is unfortunate, as this is the hallmark of the Stoic sage who has so trained his or her mind that the proper use of appearances is automatic (i.e., habitual).

Epictetus continues his instruction by providing a detailed and individually tailored training regimen geared to address the specific needs of his students who are then encouraged to test their progress.

> Afterwards [i.e., training] you will venture into the lists at some proper season, by way of trial, to see whether these semblances get the better of you as much as they used to do.

There are several interesting points in the above passage and what is to follow. Most notably, progress is viewed as incremental. The Stoic teachings are set forth and after an appropriate time for assimilation by the student, the application of those teachings are tested in the real world. Progress, or the lack thereof, is then noted and presumably additional teaching is provided depending on the outcome of the test. Prior to this testing, however, Epictetus offers this caveat: ‘But at first flee from what is stronger than you.’ This raises the question, what could be stronger than the
power to make proper use of appearances, and why should it ever become necessary for the Stoic to flee anything? The answer is both surprising and instructive.

The contest between a fascinating woman and a young man just initiated into philosophy is unequal. The brass pot and the earthen pitcher, as the fable says are an unfair match.

It is instructive to note that in this analogy philosophy is likened to an earthen pitcher, clearly of less value than that of brass. But is this really the point that Epictetus is making? The answer is both yes and no. To the neophyte Stoic the answer is yes. The allure of a fascinating woman may indeed have more motivating force than his limited ‘cognitive’ training can overcome. And what is the solution to this shortcoming offered by Epictetus? Not more instruction. Not an exposition on the Stoic theory of values to the effect that the woman is simply an indifferent and in this specific instance apparently a dispreferred indifferent. No, Epictetus has a very simple, very straightforward and very behaviourally oriented recommendation: flee. This emphasizes once again, not only the common sense approach to therapy that the Stoics advocated, but also their recurring acknowledgement of the pervasive strength of habit.

This brief passage captures some of the essential features of Stoic Rational Restructuring. The chapter opens with a discussion of what is and is not in our control, moves to a consideration of specific individual problems areas, and provides suitable training and testing guidelines for those areas. And it concludes with behavioural strategies for contending with particularly difficult situations.

III. Conclusion

I began this paper by acknowledging that there are broad philosophical underpinnings upon which any development of Stoic therapy must inevitably rest. If parts of the Stoic physics and metaphysics are left out of the therapeutic process, it is, for me, an open question at which point the process is no longer fundamentally Stoic. It is difficult to see how, in the face of apparent tragedy, one can maintain the level of equanimity espoused by the Stoics without also possessing their corresponding belief in a rational, providentially ordered, and benevolent universe. Yet, by drawing on the work of Seligman (1990) and his theory of learned optimism along with other insights from the positive psychology movement, it could perhaps be argued that such a belief, whether true or not, is demonstrably the most effective strategy for dealing with life’s vicissitudes and therefore, on Stoic grounds, the most rational attitude to adopt. In any event, Chrysippus was clear that Stoic therapy was beneficial even to those who did not adhere to all other aspects of his philosophy.

The idea of Stoic philosophy as therapy is not new, it is as old as the philosophy itself; a point emphasized by Nussbaum in the earlier citations and illustrated in Pierre Hadot’s book The Inner Citadel (2001), in which the Meditations of the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius are presented as personal spiritual exercises undertaken according to a definite plan and program. How viable is Stoic philosophy as psychotherapy? The answer will depend in part on how the therapeutic teachings of the Stoics harmonize with the current empirical findings in the fields of cognitive science and neuropsychology including, especially, the recent work on emotion by Antonio Damasio (1994), Joseph LeDoux (1998) and others (Eckman and Davidson, 1994). I believe it will be found that the rapprochement between the ancients and moderns is considerably more extensive than many might have guessed. Although it is clear that much work remains to be done, I hope that I have at least, demonstrated the feasibility of such a project.13

My apologies to the reader for not adhering to the guidelines of Epictetus.

A book will always be read with more pleasure and ease, if it be written in fair characters; and so everyone will more easily attend to discourses likewise, if ornamented with proper and beautiful expressions. (Discourses 2.23.1, trans. Higginson)

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References


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