Introduction

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Interest in Stoicism has been on the rise in recent years. To start, there are the popular and practical applications of the tradition. Blogs, YouTube channels, and popular publications explaining the insights of the school and showing its connection to a variety of other issues (whether to material minimalism, to athletic training, to psychological well-being) abound. Moreover, scholarly interest in the school is as strong as ever. Stoicism's development, its theoretical approach to the emotions, its model for duty and virtue, its anti-skeptical tools, and its model for intellectual aspirationalism are seen as rich sites for philosophical reflection. This is a period of Stoic renaissance.

We, the editors (Aikin and Stephens), believe that the Stoic tradition has much to offer. For that reason, we present the essays in this special issue of *Symposion* as contributions toward continuing the rich lineage of this tradition. The essays we have collected on the topic of *Contemporary Stoicism* offer a broad range of interpretations of what that subject means. It could describe the most up-to-date interpretive scholarly work on the ancients. Or it could refer to bringing contemporary issues to bear on, challenging, and even updating those ancient texts. Or it could involve the contemporary applications and extensions of the tradition's insights. Or it could articulate an interface between the scholarly uptake of the tradition and its popular applications. Stoicism, as a philosophical school, represents a picture of success in terms of its lasting influence and cultural relevance. Few philosophical figures or schools have this kind of purchase. Epicureans, Cynics, and Skeptics also have similar status, but beyond the odd person who might know about Socrates, existentialism, Buddhism, or utilitarianism, few other programs wield as much basic cultural clout. One of the troubles with influential cultural trends is that their impacts ripple well beyond what the originators had in mind. Ancient Cynicism is often confused with cynicism – the amoral worldview of putting one's own interests first. But the latter is precisely what the former would have abhorred. And Epicureans would find practices called 'epicurean' these days exactly the kind of things they avoided – better to have barley cakes and water than wine and fine dining. The contemporary picture of someone who is 'stoic' is not quite so wide of the mark from Stoicism as these others, but it is still inaccurate. The 'stoic' is without emotion, utterly detached and unfeeling. Not so for the Stoic, since the objective is not to eliminate all emotions but only those that undercut one's self-control, namely, disruptive passions. Moreover, Stoicism encourages maximal engagement with, not isolation from, the world.

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To these ends, the Stoics approached philosophy as a system integrating their insights in the three main domains of philosophy – logic, physics, and ethics. In their ancient context, these areas were more expansive than they are in our contemporary usage. Logic extended from formal logic, to argumentation theory and rhetoric, to philosophy of language, to epistemology. Physics spanned the breadth of basic physics, metaphysics, ontology, cosmology, theology, philosophy of mind, and a theory of human nature and development. Ethics included theories of human relations and virtues, ethical principles and meta-ethics, and a theory of human flourishing. We are told that the Stoics thought these three domains were organically connected, like parts of an egg (the shell, the white, the yolk), or a fertile field (the fences, the crop, and the soil), or even an animal (the bones, the muscles and sinews, and the soul) (DL viii.40). This implied that logic, physics, and ethics are interrelated disciplines – one cannot, for example, do ethics without knowing what kind of creature we are finding norms for, and we cannot know those norms without a clear picture of good reasoning. A virtue of systematic philosophical approaches is that they can be robust and useful accounts in which practitioners may live – they are ways of life. A problem for systematic approaches is that they are highly vulnerable to being undermined, since if everything is essential to the system, the whole can be unraveled by a single patch of controversy. The recent interest in Stoic philosophy is exemplary, since the attention has been almost exclusively to Stoicism as an ethics. There is comparatively little uptake in Stoic logic or Stoic physics in its popular instances. In scholarly contexts, as controversial as Stoic ethics is, Stoic physics and logic have even steeper hills to climb with philosophical critique and defense.

This scholarly landscape occasions a question: to what extent *must* Stoic ethics depend on Stoic logic and physics?

Can one do Stoic ethics without the heavy metaphysics of Providentialism or the demanding epistemology of *kataleptic* impressions? (Moreover, one can ask, alternately, whether commitment to Stoic epistemology or physics really implies something in Stoic ethics, e.g. how does belief in *ekpyrosis* entail commitment to Stoic virtues?) To the question of how beholden Stoic ethics is to the other domains of Stoic philosophy, a variety of answers have been given. These are not exhaustive options, but they locate points of conversation in this volume represented in its articles.

> **Strong Stoic Minimalism:** Stoic ethics is free-standing. It does not depend on any particular physics or logic (Stoic or otherwise).
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> **Modest Stoic Minimalism:** Stoic ethics stands free of global theories of Stoic physics and logic but depends on a Stoic theory of human nature.
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> **Stoic Systemic Conservatism:** Stoic ethics depends on Stoic physics and logic, which are defensible with minor modifications.
>
> **Stoic Systemic Revisionism:** Stoic ethics depends on Stoic physics and logic, which must be revised considerably to be defensible.

Versions of these four positions are identifiable in the ancients, and they all find contemporary expression with authors in this volume. Aristo of Chios held that one should be interested only in ethics and left physics and logic to the side (DL vii. 162). Marcus Aurelius held that his (quasi-Stoic) ethics bound him under conditions of either Providence or atoms in the void (*M*. ix.28). Aristo and Aurelius were strong minimalists, and Chuck Chakrapani's "Stoic Minimalism" carries on this tradition. Representatives of the modest minimalists can be found in Stobaeus's and Cicero's reports that the key thesis is that humans are rational and social and are thereby capable of enduring astonishing hardship (Stobaeus, *Anth*. 5b1; Cicero *De Fin.* 3.42). A case for this form of moderated minimalism is made in Christopher Gill's "Stoic Ethical Theory: How Much is Enough?" The systemic conservative approach is exemplified by Chrysippus's view that all of philosophy's programs are designed to, in concert, help us harmonize with nature (DL vii.88). Kai Whiting, Aldo Dinucci, Edward Simpson, and Leonidas Konstantakos's essay, "The Environmental Battle Hymn of the Stoic God," makes the case that Stoic theology is plausible by contemporary standards and has significant relevance to how we ought to view the crisis of the environment. Then there are the systemic revisionists, with which Seneca famously identified when he said the founders of the tradition are our guides, not our masters (*Ep.* 33.11). Scott Aikin's "The Stoic Sage Does not Err: An Error?" is a case for the revised program in Stoic epistemology and ethics, based on the thought that the requirements of never making mistakes are equivocal and need clarification, and these new interpretations yield significant differences in how the system works.

The cases for Stoic ethical minimalism (and some instances of systemic revisionism) generally come in three forms, with arguments that proceed according to the following lines:

> **Defensibility:** Ancient Stoic physics/logic/theology is not defensible by contemporary standards, so Stoic ethics should not be derived from it.
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> **Controversy:** Ancient Stoic physics/logic/theology were sites of controversy among the Stoics, so Stoic ethics cannot depend on any one particular view.
>
> **Actuality:** Contemporary (and some ancient) practitioners of Stoic ethics successfully practice the ethics without commitment to (or even knowledge of) Stoic physics/logic/theology. This shows it is a free-standing program.

If any of these argumentative lines have any plausibility, the revisionist and minimalist take the lead carrying on the Stoic tradition. The ancients may have had insights about some things, but it's possible for a philosopher to be right about those things, but wrong about how it all hangs together. Every systematic philosopher thinks it all has to come as a complete package, but they are not always right. Some parts of systematic programs are detachable without significant loss. (Consider, simply, the fact that arguments from poverty of the stimulus can establish epistemic nativism without a metaphysics of abstract objects, contrary to Plato's views on the matter; or consider the fact that one can

be moved by Hegel's 'sense certainty' argument against empiricism without also being committed to Absolute Idealism, contrary to Hegel's announcement of the implication.)

A further topic of scholarly reflection is the relevance of the Stoic program to contemporary questions – how can a philosophical system from the ancient world inform us in the 21st century? In this regard, we've seen the case that Stoicism offers philosophical resources for accounts of autonomy that are consistent with the feminist insight that relations are central to our identity. Emily McGill's essay, "*Prohairesis* and a Stoic-Inspired Feminist Autonomy" argues that Stoicism has the tools for such a cutting-edge case, using this ancient program as a resource for developments in feminist theory. William O. Stephens's essay "Stoicism and Food Ethics" draws a line of connection between the ancient material minimalist viewpoints on consumption and our contemporary challenges of managing not only our personal health but the manifold harms of the vast 'meat industrial complex.' Tristan Rogers, in "Stoic Conservatism," argues that Roman Stoicism offers a model for conservative politics that, while being neither thinly cosmopolitan nor passively communitarian, encourages virtue to emerge from within societies. Finally, Alyssa Lowery contends in "Problems and Promises of Two Stoic Big Tents" that though popular Stoicism has problems of misplaced emphasis and even moments of moral failing, it should be seen as an extension of an expansive conception of the philosophical tradition.

With this collection of essays our hope is to spur discussion of its range of topics, demonstrate the value of studying ancient Stoic philosophers alongside contemporary philosophers in the Stoic tradition, and enthuse readers about lively, competing visions of what contemporary Stoicism is and ought to be. However its specifics are conceived, it is clear that contemporary Stoicism is thriving.

Ancient Sources

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