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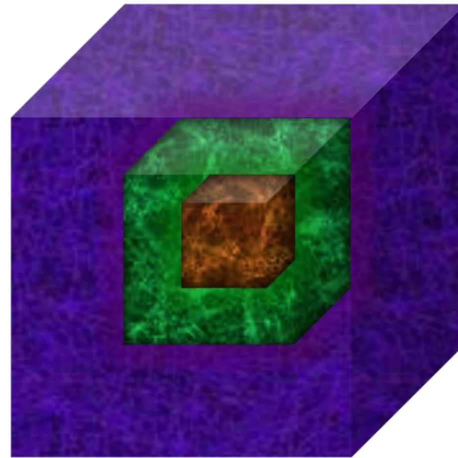

From Theory to Practice: Exploring Stoic Pragmatism for a Life of Resilience and Significance

MASTER'S THESIS IN PHILOSOPHY

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Excluding the words of the references (ch.6), this document contains 24.823 words.

Classification: Internal

With my thanks

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Viability and Value of Stoic Pragmatism

John Lachs (1934-present)[1] in 2005 claimed that "a view we might call 'stoic pragmatism' is not only possible, but also desirable, and that it provides a better attitude toward life than either of the two theories alone."[2] That claim was made in his article in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Seven years later, Lachs published the book *Stoic Pragmatism*, in which the content of the earlier article is identically copy-pasted.[3] The book presents a more comprehensive view of Stoic pragmatism and philosophy in general than the article. It includes not only arguments for the things philosophy can do to make life better, but also more descriptions for a deeper understanding of philosophy and Stoic pragmatism – including an ontology, and numerous evaluations of different works in branches of philosophy taken from Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, J.S. Mill, Durkheim, Derrida, Foucault, Santayana, and many other authors.

I would like to see whether Lachs' claim will hold by investigating the two following questions: (1) Is Stoic pragmatism *really* possible, and (2) Is Stoic pragmatism *really* desirable? My hypothesis with respect to the first question is that Stoic pragmatism is defensible in principle, but that it needs to be adapted. By this, I mean that I assume Stoic pragmatism is theoretically possible, but that it might not be realizable unless it is adapted. My hypothesis with regard to the second question is that Stoic pragmatism performs better than either Stoicism or pragmatism in the range of possible perspectives and actions that emerge for contemporary questions of ethics. By this I mean that I assume that when its stance is actualized in specific ethical cases, it actually makes the agent act better than if a purely Stoic or pragmatist view would be taken.

1.2. The Outline of Our Question

The outline of the structure of this thesis is as follows. After the current introductory section, we will examine the Stoic, pragmatist and Stoic pragmatist attitudes in order to examine a Stoic pragmatist ethics.

The section on the Stoic attitude is divided into five parts. The first part is a preliminary section. The second, third, and fourth parts are examinations of the philosophies of three different Late Stoics: Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 2BC-65AD), Epictetus (c. 50-c. 135), and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus (121-180).[4] The fifth part, finally, is a description of seven core tenets and a brief but concise summary of the Stoic attitude.

The section on the pragmatist attitude is also divided into five parts. After a preliminary section, the second, third, and fourth parts will examine the philosophies of three classical pragmatists: Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1952).[5] The fifth part is a description of seven core tenets and a brief but concise summary of the pragmatist attitude.

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[1] Hereinafter referred to as Lachs; Vanderbilt University, "John Lachs," Philosophy Department, last accessed May 12, 2023, https://as.vanderbilt.edu/philosophy/bio/john-lachs.

[2] John Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (January 2005): 96.

[3] John Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 40-53.

[4] Hereinafter referred to as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus.

[5] Hereinafter referred to as Peirce, James, and Dewey; Peirce became a pragmaticist (pragmaticism) after being a pragmatist (pragmatism), but more on this in the introduction to the section "Exploring Peirce."

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The section on Stoic pragmatism is divided into four parts. After a preliminary section, the second and third parts examine the Stoic pragmatist philosophy through Lachs' article and a contemporary article building on Stoic pragmatism written by Steven A. Miller and Yasuko Taoka (2022). The fourth part is a description of the Stoic pragmatist attitude including my answers to the two thesis questions.

The paper ends with an epilogue that includes a summary, a conclusion, and my personal reflection.

1.3. A Word on the Rationale and Relevance of this Study

I have chosen to study Stoicism and pragmatism, respectively and separately, because the former chronologically predates the latter, and because Stoic pragmatism cannot exist without the combination of these two philosophies. My analysis, however, will be limited primarily to the attitudinal parts of Stoicism and pragmatism. The reason for this is twofold. First, it is primarily the attitudinal parts that are related to Lachs' claim. Secondly, I would not do justice to the philosophies and their proponents if I would claim to describe them fully in the limited span of this thesis.

I have chosen to study the three Late Stoics Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus because, first, extant sources of the Early and Middle Stoa are either non-existent or incomplete, and, secondly, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus focus particularly on ethics,[6] which is essential to the scope of our present investigation.

I have chosen to study the three classical pragmatists Peirce, James, and Dewey, since all three are at the center of the origins of pragmatist philosophy, with Peirce and James comprising the first generation and Dewey pushing pragmatism forward beyond Pierce's and James' original conception.[7] Secondly, I will want to discover the essentials of pragmatism, which I think can only be found by examining its roots. Representing the Stoic attitude by discussing three Stoics and the pragmatist attitude by taking three pragmatists is, of course, also to meet the conditions for an aesthetic frame.

I have chosen to study Stoic pragmatism for two reasons that will recur throughout my analysis. First, life demands great efforts from all human beings, and I believe that if there is a philosophy that might help us live with the demands of life as we know them, I should offer a contribution to the quest for making our lives better. Secondly, before I even ever thought about the possibility of Stoic pragmatism, or discovered Lachs' works, I was fascinated by a personal interest in, as well as an attachment to, both 'Stoic acquiescence' and 'pragmatic amelioration,'[8] which I came to discover in the works of Marcus and Peirce.

There is another reason why I have chosen to study Stoic pragmatism. It will not appear in my analysis, but it is very personal. Marcus gave me back an intrinsic sense of piety and an idea of its beneficial mental effects, which I had lost through my youthful alliance with atheistic imperatives. Peirce gave me back my sense of curiosity and an idea of the fallibility of dogmatic knowledge, that

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[6] See subsection "1.3 Sources" in the following source for the justification of my two reasons: Marion Durand, et al., "Stoicism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), eds. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/stoicism/.

[7] See the introduction in the following source for the justification of the historical claim: Catherine Legg and Christopher Hookway, "Pragmatism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/pragmatism/.

[8] See the "Stoic Pragmatism: An Attitude toward Life" section for what "*Stoic acquiescence*" and "*pragmatic amelioration*" mean.

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I had lost through my subjugated experience of religious paradigms. Both have given me a sense of the relationship between the divine and the natural as interconnected, rather than contradictory aspects of human experience. Studying Stoic pragmatism will, I hope, allow me to delve deeper into these combined worlds and discover their relationships as a gateway to reconcile religiosity, spirituality, and idealism with secularity, worldliness, and realism.

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2. Stoicism: An Attitude toward Life

2.1. Preliminaries

In this section, I will explain the Stoic attitude to life through a reading of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus. For each of these Stoics, I will present their philosophical position based on a book translated into English. These will be outlined in the respective sections on the three Stoics named. In all cases, my footnotes will refer to the Stoic's position as well as to the commentaries made on these by their translators and editors.

The three Stoics I deal with have fundamentally different methods of communicating their philosophies. Seneca writes letters to his companions, Epictetus speaks to people who write down what he says, and Marcus writes in his journal with no intention of publishing it. As a result, the structures of each Stoic section are not aligned. Much of the content will be comparable but must be presented in different ways. Together, the Stoic views will culminate in seven core tenets and a general summary of the Stoic attitude.

2.2. Exploring Seneca

2.2.1. Introduction

The book I shall concentrate on to explore Seneca's Stoic philosophy is called *Letters from a Stoic*, translated and introduced by Robin Campbell.[9] In addition to Seneca's letters, the book also contains commentary on Seneca's views by the editor. In my references, in what follows, I shall make clear whether we are dealing with Seneca's statements or Campbell's commentary.

2.2.2. Seneca on Philosophy

It was about three hundred and thirty years before Seneca's birth that Stoicism was founded by Zeno, "who had thought or lectured in a well-known *stoa* (a colonnade or porch) – hence the name – in Athens."[10] The essential points of this earliest version of Stoicism is described by Campbell in about eight condensed pages, along with his description of later Stoics, the changes they made, and others' critiques and adaptations. Seneca was one of those who used Stoic philosophy to teach himself and his recipients to cultivate wisdom in view of the hardships of life. As far as we can tell, however, in contrast to the earliest Stoics, Seneca taught a more compassionate kind of Stoicism:

> In pursuing the ideal of *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, [the earliest version of Stoicism] seemed to make the perfect man a person detached and aloof from his fellows, superior to the world he lived in. Altogether the impression it conveyed, for all its idealism and sincerity, could be cold, dogmatic and unrealistic. Seneca's contribution to ancient philosophy lay in the humanization of this creed, continuing a process begun long before in Rhodes and Rome by Panaetius and Posidonius.[11]

[9] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans., and intro. Robin Campbell (Bungay: Penguin Classics, 2014); hereafter referred to as 'Campbell.'
[10] Campbell, "Introduction," pp. xvi-xvii.
[11] Ibid., p. xx.

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I go on to explore Seneca's own writings. In the letter in which he writes that we should abandon the desire for attention and instead strive for improvement, he also writes that "[the] first thing philosophy promises us is the feeling of fellowship, of belonging to mankind and being members of a community; being different will mean abandoning of that manifesto."[12] Here, we see Seneca distancing himself from the first Stoics by pulling the Stoics out of the top suite and into the crowded street, where they blend into the community. Nevertheless, the Stoics should still be distinguishable from and by the rest, because they should "admire our way of life but they should at the same time find it understandable."[13] Seneca does not mean that Stoics should have the intention of being admired in order to become famous, since Stoics should "scorn the pleasure that comes from the majority's approval."[14] I suggest that he means rather that people should improve themselves through philosophy, but that they might begin to do so if Stoics, philosophers themselves, show this way to be attractive on philosophical grounds rather than for reasons of fame or agreeability.

In order to freely improve oneself, one should have the ability to realize this improvement. This ability is to be had based on one's philosophy. Seneca takes the following quote from the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341BC-270BC): "To win true freedom you must be a slave to philosophy,"[15] with which Seneca agrees: "A person who surrenders and subjects himself to her doesn't have his application deferred from day to day; he's emancipated on the spot, the very service of philosophy being freedom."[16] Stoicism is thus a philosophy, and a provider of freedom if one submits to its teachings. But to receive this freedom, one should give one's "whole mind to her. Sit at her side and pay her constant court, and an enormous gap will widen between yourself and other men. You'll end up far in advance of all mankind, and not far behind the gods themselves."[17]

Seneca's advice is thus in a way still comparable to the ancient Stoics' pursuit of the ideal of *autarkeia*. The only difference is that the end to be achieved and the means for achieving them are translated into a more realistic framework than that of the first generation of Stoics. Here is an example of their unrealistic ideas:

> Stoicism had a forbidding aspect which went far to explain its failure to influence the masses. There was something unreal or fictional about the *sapiens*, the wise man or philosopher. This ideal figure seemed, from the way the Stoic lecturers talked, to have somehow become perfect [or self-sufficient] in some sudden transformation long ago; gradual self-improvement was hardly discussed. The target it set seemed too high for ordinary men. It stifled and repressed ordinary human emotions in striving after *apatheia*, immunity to feeling.[18]

As I see it, *autarkeia* and *apatheia* are here seen as the unrealistic means and end of the first generations of Stoics. The realization of *autarkeia* in this context would be the result of a sudden transformation of the perspective of the subjective realm of one's life. As a consequence, all one would

[12] Seneca, "Letter V," p. 10.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Seneca, "Letter VII," p. 19.
[15] Seneca, "Letter VIII," p. 22.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Seneca, "Letter LIII," p. 103.
[18] Campbell, "Introduction," pp. xix-xx.

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have been left with, is essentially an apathetic way of life, the absolute continuation of which would yield the perfect human being, according to the earliest Stoics.

Seneca introduces a means and an end that I suggest contests this earlier position and in which *autarkeia* and *apatheia* occur in a reconfigured way.[19] While the first Stoics call for an abrupt and absolute transformation, Seneca calls for improving reflexivity. By this I mean that the former calls for one to be suddenly transformed into a being who is naturally immune to feeling, while the latter calls for a gradual cultivation of one's self-relation by overcoming one's feelings. This, at least, is my interpretation of improving reflexivity when Seneca writes that the apathetic Stoic "wise man feels his troubles but overcomes them [and] is content with himself."[20] Seneca lowers the bar from perfectly not feeling one's troubles to feeling and overcoming one's troubles. I suspect Seneca would argue that overcoming is a more realistic possibility than the perfection that the first Stoics called for, because according to Seneca, ordinary people can acquire Stoic methods by subjecting themselves to Stoic philosophy in order to become 'self-sufficient' enough to be in a state of 'self-contentment'.

The following quote fittingly expresses what Seneca means with 'self-sufficiency' and 'self-contentment': "The only true serenity is the one which represents the free development of a sound mind."[21] To be self-content is to be serene, calm, at peace. And to be able to reach that point individually, that is, to be self-sufficient, is to have a sound mind through free development. Since Seneca roughly claims that one's submission to philosophy is tantamount to the actualization of one's freedom, it will be of interest to focus on the one theme within Seneca's philosophy that creates the largest problems for one's self-contentment, namely death.

Seneca wants people to be aware of death's possible emergence: "You do not know where death awaits you; so be ready for it everywhere."[22] This awareness can make people feel anxious, fearful even, but "why should one complain or regard it as a disadvantage, if powers which ought to come to an end have failed [or are failing anyway]?"[23] Here it seems to me that the negative feelings that arise when one perceives the possibility of death are overcome when one perceives this possibility as a necessity. In this way, the thought of death and the negative feelings associated with it can also be seen as a natural imperative that should not be complained about. Now this does not mean that Stoics should bottle up their emotions, like boys who are told not to cry in order to be men. It means that when the negative feelings come, one may express them. However, one must consciously redirect oneself to overcome them as soon as possible: "Nothing makes itself unpopular quite so quickly as a person's grief. When it is fresh it attracts people to its side, finds someone to offer it consolation; but if it is perpetuated it becomes an object of ridicule – deservedly, too, for it is either feigned or foolish."[24]

Now, overcoming negative feelings is an action that can only be done with a sound mind, that is, if one is wise: "Without wisdom the mind is sick… So this is the sort of healthiness you must make your principal concern."[25] Cultivating wisdom not only helps to overcome the negative feelings about

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[19] Campbell has used the words "self-sufficient" and "self-content" interchangeably, and so I will use those exact words to convey Seneca's *autarkeia* and *apatheia*, respectively.
[20] Seneca, "Letter IX," pp. 24-5.
[21] Seneca, "Letter LVI," p. 114.
[22] Seneca, "Letter XXVI," p. 58; Translation by Wikisource, "Moral letters to Lucilius/Letter 26," accessed May 29, 2023, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Moral_letters_to_Lucilius/Letter_26.
[23] Ibid., p. 57; Ibid.
[24] Seneca, "Letter LXIII," p. 123.
[25] Seneca, "Letter XV," p. 41.

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death, it may also help to achieve self-contentment: "No one can lead a happy life, or even one that is bearable, without the pursuit of wisdom."[26] 'Wisdom' is a broad concept, but for the sake of understanding Seneca's interpretation of things, I propose we understand 'wisdom' as a cultivable quality of the mind through philosophizing in such a way that one finds reasons that bring serene feelings to otherwise negative feelings on the basis of certain thoughts: "Comforting thoughts (provided they are not of a discreditable kind) contribute to a person's cure; anything which raises his spirits benefits him physically as well. It was my Stoic studies that really saved me…"[27]

Seneca's cultivation of wisdom tells us something about our desires and how to control them. In his *Letters*, he strongly criticizes the desire for wealth, luxury, and desiring more than is minimally necessary to live as a person: "You ask what is the proper limit to a person's wealth? First, having what is essential, and second, having what is enough."[28] He recognizes one's strength "if the soul succeeds in avoiding either heading or being carried away in the direction of the temptations that lead people into extravagant living." He then writes that "no surer proof of its strength of purpose can be vouchsafed."[29] In order to cultivate such wisdom, Seneca advises to do "some training before [the crisis] comes."[30] I suppose that abstinence from any object of temptation, such as fasting, can be considered such training. And he finds that all healthy people can do this as long as they contemplate God on their side and in their soul: "No man, indeed, is good without God – is any one capable of rising above fortune unless he has help from God? He it is that prompts us to noble and exalted endeavors. In each and every good man a God (what god we are uncertain) dwells."[31]

Seneca's *Letters* have much more to offer us than what I have written about them so far. This is because I have not gone into all of them, nor into every detail. I have, however, tried to select some essential aspects relevant to the formation of a general Stoic attitude. For the Senecan attitude emphasizes the cultivation of wisdom, compassion, self-improvement, community engagement, self-sufficiency, and philosophical exploration, all while acknowledging the role of a higher power and the innate goodness within. In the next section, I will explore Epictetus' Stoic philosophy.

2.3. Exploring Epictetus

2.3.1. Introduction

The book I will use to explore Epictetus' Stoic philosophy is the collection of *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, translated and presented in a single volume by Robin Hard and introduced and annotated by Christopher Gill.[32] In my references, in what follows, I shall make clear whether we are dealing with Epictetus' statements or Gill's annotations.

2.3.2. Epictetus on Philosophy

Gill writes that we can identify three clustered themes that are prominent in Epictetus:

[26] Seneca, "Letter XVI," p. 46.
[27] Seneca, "Letter LXXVIII," pp. 142-143.
[28] Seneca, "Letter II," p. 5.
[29] Seneca, "Letter XVIII," p. 51.
[30] Ibid., p. 52.
[31] Seneca, "Letter XLI," p. 80.
[32] Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, trans. Robin Hard, intro and annot. Christopher Gill (Oxford: University Press, 2014); Hereafter referred to as Gill.

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> One is our capacity for rational agency, and a second our capacity for ethical (especially social) development; a third is the idea that these capacities form key distinctive features of human nature within the framework of a divinely shaped universe…These three topics correspond broadly with those identified as central for Epictetus in Long, *Epictetus*.[33]

I'll try to describe a limited account of Epictetus' philosophy, touching on the three themes mentioned above.

To understand Epictetus' philosophy as one that we can internalize and use, we need to understand the fundamental distinction he makes between the "things that are within our power [and those that are] not within our power."[34] The things within our power are "whatever is of our own doing," while the things *not* within our power are "whatever is not of our own doing."[35] He says that "opinion, motivation, desire, aversion" are within our power, while "our body, our property, reputation, office" are not within our power.[36]

In my interpretation, all things within our power are those that result from our 'agency,' and all things outside our power are 'circumstances.' The reason for choosing 'agency' is that it denotes our sense of psychological control over psychological actions and their psychological consequences, which, according to my interpretation of Epictetus, should be understood as psychological, since any physical or physiological form of them belongs to the modality of 'circumstances.' The reason for choosing 'circumstances' is that it denotes external conditions that might be associated with our agency, such as choosing to move our right arm and moving it, but that such events are conditioned, determined by the physical modalities of what has not been decided and cannot be decided by our agency. And Epictetus tells us to keep the distinction between agency and circumstance clear for ethical reasons:

> The things that are within our power are by nature free, and immune to hindrance and obstruction, while those that are not within our power are weak, slavish, subject to hindrance, and not our own. Remember, then, that if you regard that which is by nature slavish as being free, and that which is not your own as being your own, you'll have cause to lament, you'll have a troubled mind, and you'll find fault with both gods and human beings; but if you regard only that which is your own as being your own, and that which isn't your own as not being your own (as is indeed the case), no one will ever be able to coerce you, no one will hinder you, you'll find fault with no one, you'll accuse no one, you'll do nothing whatever against your will, you'll have no enemy, and no one will ever harm you because no harm can affect you.[37]

Epictetus' goal is to live in harmony with nature: "Don't seek that all that comes about should come about as you wish, but wish that everything that comes about should come about just as it does, and

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[33] Gill, "Introduction," p. xii; Gill refers to "ch. 8 (on autonomy), chs. 7 and 9 (on ethics and ethical development), and ch. 6 (on human nature and theology)," in Long, A. A., *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford, 2002).

[34] Epictetus, "Handbook," 1.1: p. 287.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Epictetus, "Handbook," 1.2-1.3: p. 287.

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then you'll have a calm and happy life."[38] This quote from Epictetus can be understood through Campbell's terms which I referred to in section 2.2.2: to be self-sufficient is to be able to expect, observe, and reflect on what is natural; to be self-content, on the other hand, is to constantly act on the aforementioned ability.

Epictetus' Stoic method of living harmoniously plays with desires and aversions. For example, suppose I desire to own a luxurious villa. That desire "promises the attaining of what [I] desire…and that [I] who [fall] into desire is unfortunate."[39] In other words, if I desire a circumstance, in this case a luxurious villa, I can experience a negative feeling, unhappiness, by not having that circumstance: "for if you desire any of the things that are not within your power, you're bound to be unfortunate."[40] Instead, my desires should be for "those that are within [my] power,…[and] aren't yet within [my] reach."[41] Now imagine that I want to avert losing my queen while playing chess. This aversion promises me "the avoiding of what [I] want to avoid…while [I] who [fall] into what he wants to avoid [suffer] misfortune."[42] In other words, if I want to avert a circumstance, in this case a lost chess queen, I can experience a negative feeling, misfortune, by falling into that circumstance. After all, I will most likely lose my queen as long as I play enough chess. So, my aversion should be removed "from everything that is not within [my] power, and [transferred to] what is contrary to nature among those things that are within [my] power."[43]

The things we should desire or avert, then, according to Epictetus, are those that are fully within our agency. One of those things is *judgment*, since it "isn't the things themselves that disturb people, but the judgments that they form about them."[44] If I interpret Epictetus' judgment as a psychological action, he tells me that when "you're about to embark on any action, remind yourself what kind of action it is,"[45] i.e., I must *think* about what I am about to *do*. The crucial question is whether I am judging the prospective action as a mode of my agency or as an external circumstance. The correct consequence of choosing to judge the question as a Stoic should be that I ensure:

> that my choice remains in harmony with nature…So if anything gets in [my] way, [I'll] be ready to tell [myself], 'Well, this wasn't the only thing that I wanted to do, but I also wanted to keep my choice in harmony with nature; and I won't keep it so if I get annoyed at what is happening.[46]

Now, as Gill explains, the first two capacities that Epictetus addressed are our rational agency and our ethical development. The former, I suppose, is agency as I have described it, and the latter is living in harmony with nature, including people – who are as natural to me as other circumstances, since they cannot be fully grasped by my agency. They are, however, as Gill implies, naturally distinct from all other circumstances within the framework of a divinely designed universe. That is not just because, as Gill says, the two capacities mentioned are what make us different from other things. It

[38] Epictetus, "Handbook," 8: p. 289.
[39] Epictetus, "Handbook," 2.1: pp. 288-9.
[40] Epictetus, "Handbook," 2.2: p. 288.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Epictetus, "Handbook," 2.1: pp. 288-9.
[43] Epictetus, "Handbook," 2.2: p. 288.
[44] Epictetus, "Handbook," 5: pp. 288-9.
[45] Epictetus, "Handbook," 4: p. 288.
[46] Ibid.

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is also, I would argue, because Epictetus recognizes the connection of our rationality to the divine, something unique to human beings.

Epictetus speaks of a "citizenship of [the] universe," where he proceeds "from the idea that we are akin to God."[47] He begins by opposing the recurrent claim that one is from this or that country, "rather than just a citizen of that corner in which your poor body was thrown down at the time of your birth."[48] There is also the claim to be of this or that particular race, which was supposed to be a natural distinction between peoples. Epictetus questions both claims by seeing "the organization of the universe [as a] society in which human beings and God are associated together."[49] And in the following quote, we can see why our agency binds us to God or the divine:

> From this [linkage] are derived the generative forces to which not only my father and grandfather owe their origin, but also all beings that are born and grow on the earth, and especially rational beings, since they alone are fitted by nature to enter into communion with the divine, being bound to God through reason.[50]

I believe that in Epictetus' view, if we adhere to Stoic principles and thereby live in harmony with nature, i.e., if we use our rational agency properly and recognize the natural/divine origin of everything, then any cause on our part will be threefold. "The first and most necessary [is] the application of principles,"[51] that is, showing Stoic behavior. "The second deals with demonstrations,"[52] that is, explaining why we should hold Stoic principles. "The third confirms and analyses the other two,"[53] that is, uses logics and epistemology to examine whether Stoic principles are logically coherent and truer than others. If, in other words, one lives by taking a Stoic attitude in one's behavior, demonstrates one's understanding of Stoic principles, and affirms them through analysis, then I assume one is going through the ethical development that Gill mentioned about Epictetus' Stoic philosophy.

Epictetus has much more to offer us than what I have written about him so far. I have mainly used his *Handbook*, since it is a compilation of the ethical essentials of Stoicism, which at the same time is a summary of the ethical aspects of Epictetus' *Discourses*. I have left the *Fragments* aside since to study them would exceed the focus of delineating a general Stoic attitude. The Epictetian attitude primarily emphasizes the distinction between what is within our control and what is not, so that by properly assessing our influence we can live in harmony with nature while acknowledging our unique connection to the embodied divine. In the next section I will explore Marcus' Stoic philosophy.

[47] Gill, "Index of main themes," p. 353; Epictetus, "Discourses," 1.9: p. 22.
[48] Epictetus, "Discourses," 1.9.2: p. 22.
[49] Epictetus, "Discourses," 1.9.4: p. 22.
[50] Epictetus, "Discourses," 1.9.4-5: p. 22.
[51] Epictetus, "Handbook," 52.1: pp. 303-4.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

Classification: Internal

2.4. Exploring Marcus

2.4.1. Introduction

The book I will use to explore Marcus' Stoic philosophy is called *Meditations*, in particular its modern, translated and annotated edition by Martin Hammond, which is introduced by Diskin Clay.[54] In my references, in what follows, I shall make clear whether we are dealing with Marcus' statements, Clay's introduction, or Hammond's annotations.

2.4.2. Marcus on Philosophy

The title of this section is misleading, because in describing a Stoic attitude, our interest lies with Marcus' attitude rather than his approach to philosophy. Indeed, his approach to philosophy cannot be primarily attributed to Stoicism:

> Marcus was recognized as a philosopher by his contemporaries and later generations, but his *Meditations* do not read like a work of 'philosophy'…Marcus is unmistakably a Stoic, yet he never proclaims his allegiance to Stoicism, nor does he depend on the authority of the founders of his school to support his convictions. As emperor, Marcus concerned himself with the four philosophical schools in Athens (the Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, and Stoics) and treated and funded them all on an equal footing.[55]

Nevertheless, along with the idea that Marcus was not mainly concerned with Stoic philosophy, Clay also claims that "Marcus Aurelius was both a Stoic and stoic."[56] My interpretation of Clay's conjunction is that on the one hand Marcus was a master of Stoic theory, having been taught it by the Stoic school of philosophy, and on the other hand Marcus behaved apathetically as a Stoic. The former is associated with someone who knows Stoic ideas through scholarship, while the latter is associated with someone who actualizes Stoic ideas through (psychological) behavior. The former, in modern understanding, is somewhat like a transition where someone has passed the theoretical test for a driver's license, while the latter is like someone who drives well enough—whether with or without a driver's license. I am sympathetic to Clay's suggestion of the distinction, since it is possible to have two Stoics, one of whom is less apathetic, just as it is possible to have two people with driver's licenses, one of whom is a worse driver. Nevertheless, I will not use the distinction Stoic/stoic, because I find that to have a Stoic attitude, which I am trying to decipher by reading Marcus, means at the same time to have knowledge of Stoic ideas and to actualize them when possible. I will begin with one such idea, which Marcus called the 'directing mind.'

Marcus describes his "being is made up of flesh, breath and directing mind."[57] By flesh he means the body, which "you should disdain."[58] By breath he means "wind […] being disgorged and sucked in,"[59] i.e., air. By the directing mind, he means something like intentionality, i.e., the power of the mind to be an agent. A frequent theme in the *Meditations* is where Marcus describes the directing

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[54] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond, intro. Diskin Clay (Bungay: Penguin Classics, 2006); Hereafter referred to as Hammond or Clay.
[55] Clay, "Introduction," pp. xxviii-xxix.
[56] Ibid., p. xxv.
[57] Marcus, "Book 2," p. 10.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

mind and implies his desire to control it in order to live in harmony with nature. Marcus gives us a glimpse of comparison, I suppose, after describing an extreme example of the possibility of wild animals tearing off his limbs: "What in all this prevents the mind from preserving itself in tranquillity, in true judgment of circumstance and readiness to use any event submitted to it?"[60]

Did Marcus experience serenity after assessing the possibility of experiencing such an extreme circumstance? If he did, then at least his Stoic attitude proved robust enough to withstand psychological stress. This is, of course, unprovable; we cannot examine Marcus' past thoughts. However, I could argue with Clay's assertion that since "Marcus silently addresses *himself* [and] never seems to have intended for publication the long series of meditations he entered into his journal,"[61] it can be assumed that his self-sufficiency led him to constantly perform actions that translate into reasoned thoughts on the directing mind with the intention of achieving a state of self-contentment.

Marcus often emphasizes the directing mind, referring to the mind, not the body, because "what pulls the strings is that part of us hidden inside: that is the power to act, that is the principle of life, that, one could say, is the man himself."[62] He justifies this metaphysically by identifying us, our individual minds, as sitting in "a bodily vessel [...] One is mind and divinity: the other a clay of dust and blood."[63] The combination of mind and divinity would be a god,[64] as Marcus writes "that every man's mind is god and has flowed from that source." But even "our child, our body, our very soul have come from that source."[65] As such, we and our bodies have all come from god, but only our minds do not seem to have left their divinity behind.

To live in harmony with nature, the Stoic ideal, Marcus seeks to live in accordance with reason, which is inherent in both human nature and the nature of 'the Whole'.[66] "The universe," by which Marcus implies 'the Whole', is "one living creature, comprising one substance and one soul, [in which] all is absorbed into this one consciousness."[67] This one consciousness is ruled, Marcus thought, by Providence, i.e., "by a beneficent rational principle" that "created, preserved and governed a coherent, ordered, and purposeful whole."[68] This is God—as opposed to the gods, who must thank God for their existence. Marcus' motivation resulted in an above-average self-determination toward the Stoic ideal, since Marcus' "religious experience and belief went beyond conventional piety."[69] This act of faith led him to connect with "the gods, [i.e., the mythological gods, not human minds]" since "their communications from that world [i.e., Providence], their help and their inspiration" would assist Marcus in "living the life of nature."[70] And if there were any obstacles, they would be "due to [his] own fault and [his] failure to observe the promptings, not to say the instructions, of the gods."[71]

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[60] Marcus, "Book 7:68," p. 69.
[61] Clay, "Introduction," p. xvi.
[62] Marcus, "Book 10:38," p. 104.
[63] Marcus, "Book 3:3," p. 17.
[64] The word "god" is not capitalized because Marcus often wrote about "gods" as a multitude.
[65] Marcus, "Book 12:26," p. 120.
[66] "The Stoic ideal, and a constant underlying theme in the *Meditations*. This ideal is of a life lived in conformity with *reason*, the rationality inherent both in human nature and in the nature of the universe (the Whole), of which human nature is a part." Hammond, "Notes 1.17.6," p. 131.
[67] Marcus, "Book 4:40," p. 31.
[68] Hammond, "Notes 4.3.2," p. 147.
[69] Hammond, "Notes," p. 131.
[70] Marcus, "Book 1:17.6," p. 8.
[71] Ibid.

Classification: Internal

What, then, does Marcus have in mind for us to live in accordance with reason?[72] What we need are two duties, or as Hammond calls them, "two commandments" that "Marcus frequently sums up" as being the conditions for the 'good life'."[73] These are: "Only to worship and praise the gods, and to do good to men – to bear and forbear."[74] I will examine the first duty first, and then the second.

First, to worship and praise the gods. This duty can be interpreted as a pious one, since it concerns a relationship between the person and the divine. But the duty could also be interpreted as a relationship between the person and the natural – if one wants either to take the divinity out of the picture or to mix divinity with nature. In any case, there is a clear distinction in what Marcus presents as the morality resulting from the first duty: the distinction between true good on the one hand and true evil on the other. Marcus describes himself as expecting to meet "meddling, ungrateful, aggressive, treacherous, malicious, unsocial" people, and writes that "this has afflicted them through their ignorance of true good and evil."[75] What good and evil is, is dependent on nature/divinity. Marcus writes that it is up to us to know this distinction and to know what both sides imply. Interestingly, what is good or evil is natural of itself, but the nature of persons is divine. As a person, Marcus "cannot be harmed by any [other person], as none will infect me with their wrong. Nor can I be angry with my kinsman or hate him."[76] He justifies the principle of non-harm "not [by the] kingship of blood or seed, but [by the] sharing in the same mind, the same fragment of divinity."[77] In other words, the first duty can be seen as holding all people equally worthy in the eyes of the Whole, since all people are of equal divinity/mind, whereby we hold people's wrongdoings not as inherently evil, but as viciously ignorant. The difference between people who are evil, of which there are none, and people who are vicious—as opposed to virtuous—would thus be that the former cannot help themselves due to their nature, while the latter unfortunately do not (yet) know why and/or how to be virtuous.

The second duty is to take in the unfortunate ones and help them become virtuous; to do good to men. Marcus, I should note, gives a teleological interpretation to the nature of man, which is both functional and social: "We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. So to work in opposition to one another is against nature: and anger or rejection is opposition."[78] The bodily functions have their own teleology, while we ourselves must remember "that rational creatures are born for each other's sake, [that] tolerance is a part of justice, that wrongdoing is not deliberate."[79] That wrongdoing is unintentional, is a consequence of the idea that people who do wrong are apparently unaware of the right way in which to behave. Hammond describes Marcus' writing as consistent with "the Socratic/Stoic view that virtue is knowledge and vice ignorance. Moral blindness, then, is an involuntary state […] it is incumbent on the morally sighted to […] educate their less fortunate fellows into a clearer vision."[80]

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[72] Before I quote his duties, let me point out that Marcus writes that "whatever it is, either extinction or translation," i.e., an eternity of nothingness from no afterlife, or a transformation/transition to an afterlife, "what do we need [before] the time for that comes?" Marcus, "Book 5:33," p. 44.
[73] Hammond, "Notes 5.33," p. 161.
[74] Marcus, "Book 5:33," p. 44.
[75] Marcus, "Book 2:1," p. 10.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Marcus, "Book 4:3.2," p. 23-4.
[80] Hammond, "Notes 2.13," p. 138.

According to Marcus, one who holds these two duties recognizes the interconnectedness of all individuals and their inherent divinity. One embraces tolerance, forgiveness, and a belief in the potential for moral growth. Rejecting anger, rejection, and opposition, one promotes cooperation and the pursuit of the common good. With a commitment to self-improvement, one seeks to cultivate virtue within oneself and to extend a helping hand to others on their moral journeys. This harmonious alignment with the natural and divine order guides one's quest for wisdom, empathy, and the betterment of humanity.

Marcus' *Meditations* is a wonderfully comprehensive book that I could not even do justice to if I were to write a complete thesis about it. I have tried to include some aspects that frequently appear as major themes in the *Meditations* and that lend themselves to being relevant components in the formation of a general Stoic attitude, which I will try to distill in the next section.

2.5. A General Stoic Attitude

2.5.1. Introduction

From my extensive study of the works of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus, I will outline their common Stoic principles. Although each may differ in nuance and emphasis, they collectively embody seven core tenets of Stoic philosophy. These are outlined in the following subsection.

2.5.2. The Core Tenets

2.5.2.1. The Recognition of Rational Agency

All three philosophers emphasize the importance of recognizing and cultivating the capacity for rational agency as a fundamental aspect of human nature.

Seneca places great emphasis on recognizing and developing one's rational agency through philosophy, emphasizing its central role in personal growth and virtuous living.

Epictetus strongly emphasizes the capacity for rational agency and its crucial role in leading a virtuous life. He provides practical guidance on how to exercise and cultivate this faculty.

Marcus recognizes and honors the power of rational agency, and frequently reminds himself to direct his thoughts and actions by reason.

2.5.2.2. The Harmony with Nature

All three philosophers advocate living in harmony with nature by understanding the order and principles that govern the universe. This involves aligning one's actions and attitude with the inherent rationality and divine essence of oneself, humanity, and the world.

Seneca advocates living in harmony with nature, understanding and accepting the order of the universe. He emphasizes the need to align one's desires and goals with the principles inherent in nature in order to attain a state of self-contentment, while engaging in one's communities to educate others to do the same for philosophical reasons.

Epictetus places great emphasis on living in harmony with nature because we are citizens of the universe from the idea that we are akin to God through our rationality. He sees this as aligning one's judgments and desires with something that is under the full control of the rational agency and not external circumstances.

Marcus often reflects on the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of living in harmony with nature. He dutifully seeks to align his actions and attitudes with the world's inherent rationality, recognizing the inherent divinity of all individuals and embracing tolerance, forgiveness, and a belief in the potential for growth. This harmonious alignment with the natural and divine order guides one's quest for wisdom, empathy, and the betterment of humanity.

2.5.2.3. The Control of the Mind

All three philosophers emphasize the importance of controlling one's mind, thoughts, and judgments. By directing the mind and exercising self-discipline, individuals can achieve serenity, inner peace, and freedom from external influences.

Seneca focuses on the mastery of the mind and emotions, advocating self-sufficiency and self-contentment through rational control of thoughts and desires.

Epictetus places considerable emphasis on the control of the mind, teaching that one's true freedom lies in how one chooses to interpret and respond to external events.

Marcus constantly reminds himself to maintain control over his thoughts and judgments, recognizing that peace comes from directing the mind and focusing on one's actions.

2.5.2.4. The Stoic Virtues

All three philosophers promote the cultivation of virtues such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. These virtues are seen as essential to leading a virtuous and fulfilling life, contributing to personal excellence and the betterment of society.

Seneca discusses at length the importance of the virtues, especially wisdom and temperance, as essential qualities to cultivate in order to lead a virtuous life.

Epictetus emphasizes the cultivation of living in harmony with nature and learning Stoic principles, teaching that this process pursues common sense, inner tranquility, and the moral obligation to treat people fairly, since we are akin to God and deserve to be treated with respect.

Marcus often reflects on the virtues and their importance, reminding himself to act in accordance with virtues such as kindness, humility, and justice.

2.5.2.5. The Acceptance of Circumstances

All three philosophers advocate accepting and adapting to external circumstances, distinguishing between what is within one's control (rational agency) and what is not. They encourage focusing on what can be influenced, while letting go of attachment to outcomes beyond one's control.

Seneca emphasizes the importance of accepting and adapting to external circumstances, especially death, recognizing that many things are beyond our control. He advocates focusing on accepting what is natural, thereby negating negative feelings.

Epictetus places great emphasis on accepting the fundamental distinction, teaching that true freedom lies in recognizing and accepting what is within our control and what is not. He encourages detachment from external outcomes.

Marcus often reminds himself to accept and embrace the present moment,[81] recognizing that events and circumstances are beyond his control. He focuses on his own thoughts and actions.

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[81] Marcus, "Book 12.26," p. 120: "Each of us lives only the present moment, and the present moment is all we lose."

2.5.2.6. *The Divine Connection*

All three philosophers recognize a divine element in human beings and emphasize the importance of aligning one's actions and attitudes with this inherent divinity. They view the individual as a fragment of a pantheistic God or as interconnected with the divine order of the universe.

Seneca acknowledges the divine order of the universe and the presence of a guiding intelligence. He encourages individuals to live according to this divine plan.

Epictetus sees the divine as intimately connected to human rationality. He emphasizes the need to align one's actions and judgments with this divine aspect.

Marcus often reflects on his connection to the divine and the interconnectedness of all beings. He seeks to align himself with the divine order of the universe.

2.5.2.7. *The Duty to Others*

All three philosophers stress the importance of treating others with kindness, love, forgiveness, and cooperation. They promote the idea of universal brotherhood and advocate doing good to one's fellow man.

Seneca stresses the importance of treating others with kindness, compassion, and fairness. He recognizes the interconnectedness of humanity and advocates goodwill toward all.[82]

Epictetus emphasizes the duty to treat others with kindness and forgiveness, promoting cooperation and unity among human beings. This is implied when one improves oneself to live in harmony with nature, since this in itself is ethical development.

Marcus often reflects on the importance of acting with benevolence and compassion toward others, recognizing the common humanity and the need to do good to fellow rational beings.

2.5.3. In Summary

The combined works of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus give rise to a general Stoic attitude that offers valuable insights for living a fulfilled life. At its core, this worldview focuses on rational decision-making and the cultivation of personal virtues. By cultivating a steady mind and regulating our thoughts, we discover a harmonious balance within nature. It becomes essential to gracefully accept external circumstances as they unfold, while using our rational agency to effectively manage those aspects within our control.

There is a divine essence inherent in our being that serves as a guiding force for our ethical behavior when we align ourselves with it. Recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings, we accept the responsibility to extend benevolence, affection, and cooperation to others. Serenity and inner peace become attainable through the practice of self-discipline as we strive to embody virtues such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. These virtues not only contribute to personal excellence, but also play a vital role in the betterment of society as a whole.

Stoicism focuses our attention on the interconnected fabric of existence, urging us to acknowledge our place within the natural order and to detach ourselves from external outcomes. By fostering empathy, kindness, and forgiveness, we create an environment conducive to personal

[82] Seneca, "Letter VI," p. 13: "If wisdom were offered me on the one condition that I should keep it shut away and not divulge it to anyone, I should reject it. There is no enjoying the possession of anything valuable unless one has someone to share it with."

Classification: Internal

growth and transformation. By adopting the Stoic attitude, we embark on a journey of self-improvement and the pursuit of the common good. By adhering to these timeless principles, individuals not only gain wisdom, but also align their lives with the inherent harmony of the universe.

Classification: Internal

3. Pragmatism: An Attitude toward Life

3.1. Preliminaries

In this section I will explain the pragmatist attitude toward life through a reading of essays by Peirce, lectures by James, and a book by Dewey. These will be outlined in the respective sections on each of the pragmatists mentioned. In most cases, my quotations will refer to the pragmatist's writings or speeches, but sometimes I will refer to other philosophers' comments on the pragmatists in online encyclopedias.

The three pragmatists I am dealing with are Americans who lived at the same time and influenced each other's philosophies to the extent that these are essentially defenses of the pragmatic method. As a result, commonalities in their philosophies will be readily apparent, and much of the content will be comparable.

Peirce began as a pragmatist, but later declared himself a pragmaticist, and thus seems to be defending something other than the pragmatist attitude. Nevertheless, I choose to call our general pragmatist attitude what it is, since both pragmatism and pragmaticism have some form of pragmatic method. This difference will be explained shortly in the introduction to Peirce.

Combining common aspects presented by the three philosophers will culminate in seven core tenets and a general summary of the pragmatist attitude.

3.2. Exploring Peirce

3.2.1. Introduction

Peirce ultimately departed from pragmatism into his newly created philosophical denomination: pragmaticism. The editor of the collection of the *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, Justus Buchler, writes in the introduction that "Peircean pragmatism (pragmaticism) […] is a step forward in the history of empiricism, […] whereas Popular pragmatism is an anti-intellectualistic revolt," the latter fatuously demonstrating "an emphasis on mere volition or sensation."[83]

Peirce found that 'Popular pragmatism' was too polygamous in its relationship to the scientific method, something the scientist Peirce disliked. As a consequence, he created pragmaticism to let others know that he had not strayed from science, since, as he writes, "a man's logical method should be loved and reverenced as his bride."[84] Having said that, it needs to be clear that the pragmatic method is used in both philosophies, but that Peirce restricts it to a pure mode of empiricism. Therefore, the pragmatist attitude that I will be describing must be seen as the actualization of such a method in whatever realm is necessary.

3.2.2. Peirce on Philosophy

"To describe the method of scientific investigation is the object of this series of papers,"[85] Peirce wrote. This method will be the focus of my study, since its repeated use would actualize a manifestation of Peirce's pragmatic attitude.

[83] Charles Sanders Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, select., ed., intro. Justus Buchler, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).
[84] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," p. 21.
[85] Ibid., p. 19.

Classification: Internal

Peirce introduces the concepts of doubt, inquiry, and belief. He also introduces the four methods of fixing belief, which are through tenacity, authority, a priori reasoning, and scientific investigation. I will first explain the three concepts and how they relate to each other, and then use these concepts to explain the four methods.

The concept of doubt that Peirce describes is "an uneasy and dissatisfied state [of mind and sensation]."[86] "The irritation of doubt," Peirce writes elsewhere, "most frequently [arises] from some indecision, however momentary, in our action." It is "the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief."[87]

The concept of belief is also a state of mind and sensation, but unlike doubt, it is "a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else, [...] whether the belief be true or false."[88] When held, our beliefs "guide our desires and shape our actions" and are essentially the "establishment of habit."[89] Different beliefs can therefore be "distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise."[90]

It is possible for people to pass "from one [state] to the other [...], the object of thought remaining the same."[91] Peirce writes that this transition is "subject to some rules by which all minds are alike bound."[92] For all minds, the two states have the epistemological difference that "we generally know when we want to ask a question [(doubt)] and when we want to pronounce a judgment [(belief)]."[93] The practical difference is that belief establishes habits, while "doubt never has such an effect."[94]

Both states have "positive effects upon us."[95] Doubt "stimulates us to inquiry until it is destroyed."[96] Belief "puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises."[97] This can be analogized with our nervous system, where doubt and inquiry are like "the irritation of a nerve and the reflect action produced thereby," and where belief is like "nervous associations—for example, to that habit of the nerves in consequence of which the smell of a peach will make the mouth water."[98]

Having already touched on the concept of inquiry, Peirce adds that its consequence of the cause of irritative doubt can be understood as "a struggle to attain a state of belief, […] and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion."[99]

Knowing so far that Peirce emphasized the psychological effects of doubt and the need to move to a state of belief through inquiry, we can now venture to examine his four methods of fixing belief.

Firstly, the method of tenacity, which holds that certain answers are to be held as values or truths, regardless of the supposed evidence, opinions, and reasoning that might challenge the belief. Doubt, therefore, rarely arises, but when it does, one inquires with the intention of reinforcing the already

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[86] p. 10
[87] Ibid.; "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," p. 27.
[88] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," p. 10.
[89] Ibid.; "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," p. 29.
[90] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," p. 29.
[91] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," p. 9.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] p. 10.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

Classification: Internal

held answers to the questions that come to mind, so that the subject may again have a firm and unshakable belief in holding these answers.[100]

Secondly, the method of authority, which states that the victims are led by the perpetrators to hold certain beliefs, regardless of whether the victims consider these beliefs to be false or immoral.[101] In addition, the perpetrators try to keep the victims ignorant of any falsity or immorality on their part, so that the victims cannot even think of acquiring such a belief. Examples of this, according to Peirce, are acts of the powerful state and cunning institutions designed to obtain the "complete agreement" of the masses, which is "a very effective means of settling opinion in a country."[102] While doubts may arise in the minds of those subjected to this method, it is important to note that these doubts will not concern the objects and subjects where the authoritarian control firmly maintains the intended beliefs of the victims. Doubts may also arise in the minds of the perpetrators, but they have the choice of whether their domination will be affected by them.[103]

Thirdly, the method of a priori reasoning, which is to let natural preferences guide the formation of beliefs. People engage in conversation, consider different perspectives, and gradually develop beliefs that are consistent with natural causes and universal preferences. This method "makes of inquiry something similar to the development of taste; but taste," Peirce subverts, "is always more or less a matter of fashion."[104] And fashion is seasonal, like the history of metaphysics as a "pendulum [that] has swung backward and forward between a more material and a more spiritual philosophy."[105] The method of a priori reasoning recognizes the importance of questioning and critically examining our beliefs, and through it we can become aware of the influence that social circumstances and personal preferences have on our beliefs. However, metaphysical philosophies that make use of this method are "not usually rested upon any observed facts, at least not in any great degree."[106] Such philosophies were adopted "because their fundamental proposition seemed 'agreeable to reason.' This is an apt expression; it does not mean that which agrees with experience, but that which we find ourselves inclined to believe."[107] There is, accordingly, a need for a more reliable approach that considers evidence, facts, and a broader understanding of the world.[108]

This is brought in by the fourth and final method, the method of scientific investigation, which is a way of establishing beliefs based on evidence and facts. By using this method, any belief that is seen to be "determined by any circumstance extraneous to the facts"[109] will be doubted. The method is designed to determine beliefs "by nothing human, but by some external permanency—by something upon which our thinking has no effect."[110] The intention is to investigate any external influence "which affects, or might affect, every man," so that our investigation may lead to the same "ultimate conclusion of every man," even though "these affections are necessarily as various as are individual conditions."[111] The underlying hypothesis of this method is based on the idea of realism: "There are

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[100] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," pp. 11-3, paragraph is paraphrased.
[101] For not knowing better words, I have used 'victims' and 'perpetrators.' Peirce does not use these words.
[102] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," p. 13.
[103] Ibid., pp. 13-4, paragraph is paraphrased.
[104] pp. 16-7.
[105] p. 17.
[106] p. 15.
[107] Ibid.
[108] pp. 14-8, paragraph is paraphrased.
[109] p. 18.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

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Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them."[112] Although our sensations may differ because we all have our own relationships with objects, we can utilize "the laws of perception [and] ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are."[113] If this method of science is used correctly, with sufficient experience and reasoning about the object under investigation, everyone "will be led to the one True conclusion. The new conception here involved is that of Reality."[114]

After describing the methods, Peirce categorizes them by saying that the methods of tenacity, authority, and a priori reasoning do not present "any distinction of a right and a wrong way,"[115] unlike the method of scientific investigation. With the method of tenacity, I would try to "shut myself out from all influences," which I would keep trying to do, since "whatever I think necessary to doing this, is necessary according to that method."[116] With the method of authority, a group of perpetrators may try to eliminate naysayers "by means which, from a scientific point of view, seem very ill-calculated to accomplish its purposes."[117] Nevertheless, ill-calculated or not, "the only test on that method is what the [group of perpetrators] thinks; so that it cannot pursue the method wrongly."[118] With the method of a priori reasoning, metaphysicians would "think as one is inclined to think, [...] however they may be inclined to judge each other perversely wrong."[119] After briefly touching on the Hegelian system, which "recognizes every natural tendency of thought as logical," Peirce agrees that there is a historical progression of our beliefs in relation to truth, so that "metaphysicians do get the right ideas at last," saying that "opinion will at last go right."[120] However, Peirce is quick to say that "whatever scientific investigation shall have put out of doubt will presently receive a priori demonstration on the part of metaphysicians,"[121] essentially saying that science leads the way and metaphysics follows. The right or wrong use of the method of scientific investigation depends on the fact that "the test of whether I am truly following the method is not an immediate appeal to my feelings and purposes, but, on the contrary, involves the application of the method."[122] And since the proper use of this method depends on its instrumental application and on a resulting belief-claim justified by concrete findings in our practical reality that can be verified or falsified, "it is that bad reasoning as well as good reasoning is possible; and this fact is the foundation of the practical side of logic."[123]

Now, in order to clarify the concept of truth, which Peirce claims can and will ultimately be done through the method of scientific investigation, we must "consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."[124] What Peirce is saying here is "the core of pragmatism as Peirce originally conceived it, [the] Pragmatic Maxim, a rule for clarifying the

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.; paragraph is paraphrased.
[115] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," p. 19.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] p. 20.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," p. 31.

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meaning of hypotheses by tracing their 'practical consequences' – their implications for experience in specific situations."[125]

The *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* is an excellent collection of Peirce's exposition of his scientific philosophy, written in such a way that almost every sentence seems necessary to read in order to understand the whole argument. This is unfortunate for my exposition of his thoughts, as it leaves me with the aftertaste of not having done enough justice to the presentation of his philosophy. Nevertheless, I have glanced at it in such a way as to be able to indicate that the Peircean stance embodies a commitment to rigorous scientific inquiry, evidence-based reasoning, and a pragmatic approach to understanding the world. In the next section, I will explore James' pragmatist philosophy.

3.3. Exploring James

3.3.1. Introduction

The three lectures I will focus on to explore James' pragmatism come from a collection of lectures and essays called *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, edited, introduced, and annotated by Giles Gunn.[126]

3.3.2. James on Philosophy

"The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments," of which James called "pragmatism a mediator and reconciler."[127] I will explain his pragmatic method, which is also known as Jamesian pragmatism, by first explaining its object, which is the temperaments and philosophies possessed by men, and secondly by explaining the intended effect of the application of pragmatist method.

Our philosophies, for James, are fundamentally made and judged by our temperaments, which essentially says two things. Firstly, that a philosophy of the universe, for example, does not come to its conclusion from impersonal reasons, as the philosopher would have it appear, but because of the philosopher's "stronger bias" for his temperament, "wanting a universe that suits it, [believing] in any representation of the universe that does suit it."[128] Secondly, that any published philosophy of the universe, for example, which is not endorsed by every other temperament, will inevitably produce "a certain insincerity in our philosophic discussions [about it]: the potentest of all our premises, [our temperament,] is never mentioned."[129]

To make his point, James gives two antagonistic temperaments that we will "practically recognize" by the titles "tender-minded" and "tough-minded;" that is to say, traits he gives in two columns, as shown here:[130]

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[125] Legg, Catherine and Christopher Hookway, "Pragmatism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*, Summer 2021 Edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/pragmatism/.
[126] William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed., intro., annot. Giles Gunn, (London: Penguin Books, 2000); Hereafter referred to as 'Gunn'.
[127] James, "LECTURE I: *The Present Dilemma in Philosophy*," p. 8; James, "LECTURE II: *What Pragmatism Means*," p. 39.
[128] James, "LECTURE I: *The Present Dilemma in Philosophy*," pp. 8, 9.
[129] Ibid., p. 9.
[130] pp. 10, 11.

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THE TENDER-MINDED	THE TOUGH-MINDED
Rationalistic (going by 'principles')	Empiricist (going by 'facts')
Intellectualistic	Sensationalistic
Idealistic	Materialistic
Optimistic	Pessimistic
Religious	Irreligious
Free-willist	Fatalistic
Monistic	Pluralistic
Dogmatical	Sceptical

"Most of us have a hankering for the good things on both sides of the line, [and] are a mixture of opposite ingredients," James proclaims, but "we cannot preserve a good intellectual conscience so long as we keep mixing incompatibles from opposite sides of the line."[131] Nevertheless, some kind of reconciliation that includes both sides is the true philosophy, as James claims in his particular way of arguing, for instance, that "a sort of free-will determinism is the true philosophy."[132]

Before presenting the possible reconciliation of the pragmatic method, James introduces the idea of a man who "wants science; but he also wants religion,"[133] and argues that the man's desire will not be satisfied by the means of adopting a philosophy of either side, since the man will find "empiricism with inhumanism and irreligion; [and] a rationalistic philosophy that [is] religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with concrete facts."[134] James offers the man pragmatism, "a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand," i.e., "remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, […] preserve the richer intimacy with facts."[135]

Pragmatism is a philosophy concerned with "a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable" by having "*the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts*."[136] In the case of the man who wants science and religion, if he wants to use the pragmatic method, he should "try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences."[137] What would it mean to him practically, in terms of the life he realistically leads? That is, "in what respects would the world be different if this alternative or that were true?"[138] Speculating on these questions is "an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*."[139] I am going to explain what it would mean for existing realities to be changed by explaining what realities are, how to hypothesize about them, and therefore how they might change as we act.

The way James uses 'realities' is to indicate that we perceive things "within the stream of [our] experience," since for pragmatism the only test of probable truth is "what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands,

[131] pp. 9, 11, 12.
[132] p. 11.
[133] p. 12.
[134] p. 14.
[135] p. 20.
[136] James, "LECTURE II: *What Pragmatism Means*," pp. 25, 29.
[137] Ibid., p. 25.
[138] p. 26.
[139] p. 28.

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nothing being omitted."[140] Doing this, we must hypothesize the "practical cash-value" of holding two apparently antonymous ideas as true, i.e., one must consider whether being religious and/or preserving the richer intimacy with facts is profitable to one's life, since "an idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives."[141] James calls something true if it "*proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons*."[142] It would then be better to acknowledge an idea as true, unless, of course, "*belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits*."[143]

To change one's reality, it is then up to the person to inquire into the practical consequences of the hypothetical truths he experiences when he acts as if he believes the notions to be true. The person who philosophizes in this way would be engaging in thought experiments conceptualizing his personal practical life in different ways. In doing so, he tests what-if beliefs in new concepts in order to derive hypotheses about how these concepts would affect his daily behavior. And if there would be no practical difference at all between holding this notion or that, he can drop the dispute between them, because to settle the question would involve a metaphysical dispute with no practical consequences, that is, with no real meaning. If there is a practical difference in the consequences, however, which I think is better verified by conduct than by contemplation, there may be some truth behind either of the concepts. He might then evaluate their utility, their practical cash-value, to see if it is most profitable to live by them. The highest value becomes the truth, so to speak, because one would logically (want to) live by it. One might then manifest the idea one believes in into the concrete fact of behaving accordingly, where the truth is a question of the idea working as a function of living a profitable way of life.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) criticized the Jamesian theory of truth as "only a form of the subjectivistic madness which is characteristic of most modern philosophy,"[144] insisting that Jamesian pragmatists choose what is true if it works for them – thereby denying actual truths because they are unworkable for them. Yet, James says that "*true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not.*"[145] In other words, true ideas for James are those that can be integrated into our knowledge, validated by examination and testing, corroborated by additional evidence, and verified by empirical investigation or practical application. James uses the word 'we' to indicate that the process by which ideas become true for us is through social construction and shared understanding. We learn, communicate, debate, and explore ideas through experience and new information. Pragmatism seeks multiple perspectives so that one's truths do not remain unchallenged in one's private mind. "Truth," James says, "lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs 'pass,' so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank-notes pass so long as nobody refuses them."[146] These checkpoints of verification of our beliefs "are the posts of the whole super-structure,"[147] which is the social regulation of the practical cash-value of our beliefs—whether they are true or not, and how valuable they are. So, for James, truth is not just subjective, it is more socially constructed, but tested on the grounds of practicality and abstractions that it must be able to conform to.

[140] pp. 28, 40.
[141] pp. 28, 37.
[142] p. 38.
[143] p. 38.
[144] Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, (New York: Simon And Schuster, INC., 1945), p. 818.
[145] James, "LECTURE VI: *Pragmatism's Conception of Truth*," p. 88.
[146] Ibid., p. 91.
[147] Ibid.

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Hitherto, with the pragmatic method, we have looked at practical consequences, at their good use, and their relation to our other beliefs, to determine whether an idea is to be considered true or not. If people, then, have a desire for religion, they should look at how they could change their behavior to the extent that it is possible to do so with respect to their experience and accumulation of beliefs. James gives the example of believers in the idea of "the Absolute, of transcendental idealism,"[148] and rhetorically asks them how their belief matters in practical ways. For James, it matters to them because it affords "religious comfort to a class of minds."[149] James himself condemns the idea for its "remoteness and sterility,"[150] but still argues that, "so far as it affords such comfort, it surely is not sterile; it has that amount of value; it performs a concrete function."[151] Thus, being a pragmatist, James calls the Absolute "true 'in so far forth,'" and says that if what the believers do by means of holding the idea of the Absolute is good, they will "allow the idea itself to be good in so far forth, for [they] are the better for possessing it."[152] A person with a desire for religion can accordingly justify his belief in the Sabbath, for example, based on "the legitimacy of taking moral holidays," and not based on "other supernumerary features" that his empirical attitude would probably despise.[153] The idea of reconciling this belief with an empirical attitude is already provided by the pragmatic method, since pragmatism is "devoted […] to facts, [and] has no objection whatever to the realizing of abstractions, so long as you get about among particulars with their aid and they actually carry you somewhere."[154]

I find *Pragmatism and Other Writings* of James an interesting collection of illustrations of his philosophy. I have also found that they invite an interactive exchange of ideas since reading this book made my mind play with my own recurring ideas about the practical influence and relevance of philosophical positions in my life. Of course, I have not done enough justice to James' pragmatism, but at the same time I feel that I have described his pragmatic method sufficiently for someone to see how it might be used in one's own life. The Jamesian stance in fact encourages an openness to a practical and pluralistic approach to both philosophy and life, emphasizing the importance of practical consequences, direct experience, multiple perspectives, and individual choice in shaping beliefs and understanding the world. In the next section, I will explore Dewey's pragmatist philosophy.

3.4. Exploring Dewey

3.4.1. Introduction

Besides relevant secondary materials, the primary literature I will focus on to explore Dewey's pragmatism is his book *Experience & Education*.[155]

3.4.2. Dewey on Philosophy

The editorial preface to *Experience & Education* frames Dewey's work as:

[148] James, "LECTURE II: *What Pragmatism Means*," pp. 36-7
[149] Ibid., p. 37.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] p. 39
[154] p. 36.
[155] John Dewey, *Experience & Education* (New York: Free Press, 2015).

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> …a lucid analysis of both "traditional" and "progressive" education…Where the traditional school relied upon subjects or the cultural heritage for its content, the "new" school has exalted the learner's impulse and interest and the current problems of a changing society. Neither of these sets of values is sufficient unto itself. *Both* are essential. Sound educational experience involves, above all, continuity and interaction between the learner and what is learned…Dr. Dewey insists that neither the old nor the new education is adequate. Each is mis-educative because neither of them applies the principles of a carefully developed philosophy of experience.

I will try to illustrate Dewey's meaning of experience and its relation to education, thereby showing an implication of his instrumentalism which, if one follows such a philosophy, is sufficient defining the Deweyan attitude. I will begin with his instrumentalism.

In *Britannica's* online encyclopedia of philosophers, the section on John Dewey's instrumentalism, written by James Gouinlock, describes instrumentalism as "Dewey's particular version of pragmatism, […] the view that knowledge results from the discernment of correlations between events, or processes of change." Inquiry, then, is to introduce "specific variations in [such processes] to determine what differences thereby occur in related processes, and measures how a given event changes in relation to variations in associated events." But predictions about various changes in such processes "must be tested experimentally to see whether their predictions are borne out." Some predictions can be verified, but even "experimentation itself is fallible." Nevertheless, "the chance for error is mitigated by further, more rigorous inquiry." The moral of experimental inquiry is that "ideas empower people to direct natural events, including social processes and institutions, toward human benefit."[156] We will return to Dewey's instrumentalism later. For the moment, let us turn to Dewey's own view of experience and its relation to education.

As noted above, Dewey was critical of both traditional and progressive education and advocated an educational experience consisting of continuity and interaction. He finds both "traditional" and "progressive" approaches in education inadequate for actualizing such experience, leaving them with "the problem of ascertaining how acquaintance with the past may be translated into a potent instrumentality for dealing effectively with the future."[157] Dewey seeks to solve this problem by providing "a coherent *theory* of experience" that emphasizes the importance of selecting quality experiences that promote future learning.[158]

Dewey's first principle of experience is "the category of continuity, or the experiential continuum," which is involved in "every attempt to discriminate between experiences that are worth-while educationally and those that are not,"[159] such as Dewey's tendency to believe that democratic, free, and dialogical social arrangements "promote a better quality of human experience" than others.[160] The principle of continuity "rests upon the fact of habit," which includes our attitudes, "our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in

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[156] Gouinlock, James S., "Instrumentalism of John Dewey," *Britannica*, last accessed June 11, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Dewey/Instrumentalism.
[157] Dewey, *Experience*, p. 23.
[158] Ibid., p. 30.
[159] p. 33.
[160] p. 35.

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living."[161] Here we can model development, but "*only* when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth."[162] Continuity of experience can develop in two separate ways, one of which will leave a person "arrested on a low plane of development, in a way which limits later capacity for growth."[163] The other can carry a person "over dead places in the future."[164] For the process to go either way, it is important to explore and explicate one's "preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end."[165] I will illustrate this with an example.

Imagine a person at the crossroads of continuity of experience. He has to choose between two divergent paths. Each has different consequences. He risks stagnation and being trapped at a low level of development if he succumbs to fear of the unknown and clings to the familiar. However, he has the potential to transcend dead ends in his future if he accepts challenges, faces his fears, and actively seeks growth. This requires a deep exploration of his likes and dislikes and an understanding of the motivations behind the choices he makes. Armed with self-awareness and a willingness to step out of his comfort zone, he can set himself on a path of continuous progress that transcends limitations and cultivates resilience. The choice lies within him and determines whether his journey will lead to arrested development or unfold as a transformative journey of self-discovery and fulfillment. Through this continuous process of shaping his world, he has "rendered himself more sensitive and responsive to certain conditions, and relatively immune to those things about himself that would have been stimuli if he had made another choice."[166]

Dewey's second principle of experience is interaction, which "assigns equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions…Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation*."[167] Every experience changes when the situation changes, for not only does every experience have "an active side which changes in some degree the objective condition under which experiences are had,"[168] but the objective conditions of a situation also condition our experiences. Dewey illustrates both sides by saying the following. "Destroy the external conditions of present civilized experience, and for a time our experience would relapse into that of barbaric people."[169]

The two principles of continuity and interaction are united because they are "the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience," meaning that "something is carried over from the earlier to the later ones" and "what [the person] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow."[170] The lifelong learning process that a person undergoes involves an acquisition of experiences that are valuable. Adherence to both principles of experience will "provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience."[171] Dewey points out that the educator has a duty here, since

[161] Ibid.
[162] p. 36.
[163] p. 37-8.
[164] p. 38.
[165] p. 37.
[166] Ibid.
[167] p. 42.
[168] p. 39.
[169] Ibid.
[170] p. 44.
[171] p. 44-5.

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it is this person who must determine "that environment which will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a worth-while experience."[172] I will illustrate this with an example.

In education, the principles of continuity and interaction combine to shape a student's lifelong learning process. Educators can do this by recognizing "every experience [as] a moving force" and then judging its value "only on the ground of what it moves toward and into."[173] Continuity ensures that knowledge and skills acquired in one situation serve as building blocks for effectively dealing with subsequent situations. For example, math concepts learned in elementary school provide the foundation for solving complex problems later. At the same time, interaction plays a crucial role because we can hypothesize its value based on understanding our "own past experience" and engaging in social "contact and communication."[174] Educators who recognize this create environments that foster meaningful engagement. They must organize the environment so that it becomes "a social enterprise in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility."[175] By designing experiences to meet students' strengths and needs, teachers ensure that the learning process is valuable and promotes growth. Adherence to both principles becomes the measure of educational significance. Educators are responsible for fostering continuous growth, promoting the transfer of knowledge and skills, and meeting the evolving needs of students.

We may understand Dewey's pragmatism in more general terms once we see how the integration of experience and instrumentalism results in a distinctive perspective on life. Both the development of experience in education and the instrumentalism of learning-by-events encourage individuals to view life as a continuous journey of learning, driven by interactions and the identification of meaningful connections between events. A notable aspect of this perspective is that it emphasizes the influential role of ideas in shaping the world for the betterment of humanity. It emphasizes the importance of developing one's ideas by consciously choosing experiences that facilitate future learning and contribute to personal and societal progress. Therefore, in order to cultivate a purposeful and progressive existence, it becomes crucial to assess desired outcomes by matching past experiences with the present situation, allowing logical inferences to determine the most favorable course of action for personal growth and flourishing. In this regard, a Deweyan pragmatist actively seeks out diverse experiences, leveraging past knowledge for future growth. Such a person embraces interaction, collaborates with others to find practical solutions, and applies her ideas to benefit society. She exemplifies the integrated perspective of experience and instrumentalism, making a meaningful impact on her life and the world.

Reading Dewey's *Experience & Education* made me think that all worthwhile experiences are those that provide a true learning situation that is both social and historical, both dynamic and ordered. However, Dewey's instrumentalism is not made explicit in his book on *Experience and Education*, nor does his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* offer a view on Dewey's own conceptualization of instrumentalism. Nevertheless, what we have covered thus far is sufficient to distinguish a Deweyan attitude: it involves viewing life as a continuous learning process driven by interactions, recognizing connections between events, and actively selecting valuable experiences that promote personal and

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[172] p. 45.
[173] p. 38.
[174] Ibid.
[175] p. 56.

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societal growth. In the next section, I will attempt to distill a general pragmatist attitude form the works of all three pragmatists studied.

3.5. A General Pragmatist Attitude

3.5.1. Introduction

On the basis of my extensive study of particular works by Peirce, James, and Dewey, we are now equipped to give an outline of their common principles. Although each may differ in nuance and emphasis, they collectively embody what we may think of as the core tenets of pragmatism. They emphasize practicality, experiential learning, scientific inquiry, open-mindedness, adaptability, and the transformative power of knowledge. The tenets presented reflect the core attributes found in the general pragmatist attitude.

3.5.2. The Core Tenets

3.5.2.1. The Value of Practicality and Experience

All three philosophers advocate embracing the value of practicality and experience, since beliefs (should) conform to habits, where our experience of life resides.

Peirce emphasizes the fixing of beliefs to empirical facts resulting from scientific experimentation, which practically guide us to conform our habits to objective reality.

James recognizes that true philosophy consists in reconciling opposing temperaments by testing their implications through practice, thereby experiencing their difference in value—if they have one—in order to resolve their dispute.

Dewey emphasizes the importance of continuous and interactive experiences in education and the development of ideas, which are used practically to expand our experience.

3.5.2.2. The Scientific and Empirical Approach

All three philosophers advocate a scientific and empirical approach, indicating how the focus on practical matters presupposes a reality accessible to all in which we use our conditions effectively.

Peirce promotes the use of the method of scientific investigation to clarify the meaning of hypotheses by tracing their practical consequences—their implications for experience in specific situations.

James emphasizes conducting experimental investigations of abstract concepts to discover whether they have any experiential impact in habit when held.

Dewey emphasizes empirical investigation and verification of ideas through rigorous testing and social communication to educate ourselves.

3.5.2.3. The Open Mind and Flexibility

All three philosophers believe that knowledge is fallible and constantly changing through evolutionary conceptualizations that result from experimentation and changing methods.

Peirce recognizes that the different methods for fixing beliefs are individually held by people, possibly leading them to believe in inconsistent or dishonest ideas, and says that these methods still

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have some advantages over the method Peirce himself uses.[176] Moreover, Peirce admits that he himself can be wrong about anything, since he can use his method wrongly. He is therefore open to different points of view, accepting the fallibility of his own beliefs, and flexible enough to change these when reality contradicts them.

James acknowledges the clash of temperaments and the need for mediation by pragmatism, which means that James is open to the idea that there are different truths that people hold, even if he himself does not hold them, and that these can have real meaning in the lives of those who do hold them. These truths, however, can change as our ideas about their practical consequences change, which makes them flexible.

Dewey encourages continuous development, the flexible adaptation of traditional ideas to changing circumstances and social needs. Dewey is open-minded enough to insist that we have social communication to exchange ideas so that we can find specific uses for them and gain worthwhile experiences.

3.5.2.4. The Priority of Practical Consequences and Human Benefit

All three philosophers prioritize practical consequences in their philosophy and urge us to use them in accordance with the benefits to ourselves.

In contrast to beliefs that result from non-empirical attitudes, such as beliefs in Martians, angels, or Pegasus, Peirce values beliefs that result from scientific investigation because their practical consequences are most consistent with shared reality. These benefit us by leaving us with a clear logical conscience, because they are justified by external permanence with almost no corrupting opinion on our part.

James emphasizes the importance of ideas that guide us effectively and are consistent with human benefit. Thus, people should not reject ideas solely on metaphysical grounds if such ideas have the potential to transform people's practical lives into something experientially worthwhile—as James illustrated with the example of the man who wanted religious comfort but could hardly accept it because of his metaphysical adherence to empiricism.

Dewey emphasizes the consideration of practical consequences and positive effects on society in terms of its educational value, including on personal experience, which will be positive if certain desires and aversions are discriminated against to produce experiences that are worthwhile.

3.5.2.5. The Social Dimension of Truth and Knowledge

All three philosophers hold truth to be common; we can all venture into the enterprise of recovering it and share our experience through the universal mediator of practical matters. Ultimately, this allows us to develop an idea of truth that encompasses different aspects of the effects a certain notion brings with it, as seen from various perspectives.

Peirce, through his Pragmatic Maxim, recognizes that we, as a collective, must consider what practical effects we conceive the object of our conception to have, so that our inquiry may lead each person to arrive at the same ultimate conclusion.

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[176] "Such are the advantages which the other methods of settling opinions have over scientific investigation," Peirce writes after explaining them in "The Fixation of Belief," p. 21.

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James recognizes truths as socially constructed and tested on the basis of practicality and social validation, which he emphasizes by speaking of the whole superstructure that socially regulates the practical cash-value of our beliefs.

Dewey emphasizes the development of ideas within social communication and environments that foster continuous learning, conditioned by past history, present experience, and purposes for the future. Truths are therefore inherently dynamic in the sense that we discover new facts about them, use these truths differently, and thereby have new ideas about how they work.

3.5.2.6. The Integration of Theory and Practice for Growth

All three philosophers integrate theory and practice for growth, in the sense that theory cannot be valuable without practical consequences, and that the value of a practice cannot be measured without our understanding of it.

Peirce emphasizes the integration of theory and practice through the method of scientific investigation, and specifically denounces theoretical (dis)agreeableness when it is justified on anything other than experience or is the mere result of fashion or taste. To arrive at the one true conclusion, Peirce says, that is, to grow toward the truth, we must hold the theory that works within our conception of reality. In short, Peirce advocates practicing a theoretical method of science to grow toward truth.

James encourages truth-seekers to consider which theories are practically realizable, what their practical consequences are, and what their practical cash-value is in relation to those who actualize them by living their habitual lives, so that truth-seekers can adopt the good ones if they wish. This inquiry into what is good thus becomes a means toward experiencing the good, which itself helps a person to resolve all the metaphysical disputes that may plague his mind.

Dewey emphasizes the development of educational theories by integrating a sophisticated view of experience so that experience becomes instrumental to our practical lives now and in the future. Past knowledge and experience, in and of themselves, are instrumentally used to create something in turn adapted to worthwhile future experience—which is pragmatism in action.

3.5.2.7. The Aim for Continuous Personal and Societal Development

All three philosophers strive for continuous personal and social development by guiding us to grasp the effect of our ideas in such a way that we can use them for the good of us all.

Peirce emphasizes continuous scientific investigation and inquiry in order to arrive unanimously at the same explanation of what needs to be explained, leaving us with the clear conscience of knowing that we are not fooling ourselves, and leaving society in a better state because of the mutual understanding its people bring to their experience of common reality.

James focuses his attention on ideas that individuals willingly embrace for the betterment of humanity, as individuals explore the practical significance of these ideas and their value, enabling them to ascertain the benefits of the ideas through interpersonal exchange and the dissemination of experiential ideas that promote societal progress.

Dewey emphasizes the importance of creating environments and experiences that promote continuous learning and social progress, leaving individuals free to develop themselves while being responsible for contributing their valuable output as new input that is given back to society.

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3.5.3. In Summary

A general pragmatist attitude emerges from the combined readings of Peirce, James, and Dewey. It values practicality and experience as the basis for forming beliefs, aligning them with empirical facts and objective reality. Scientific inquiry and empirical approaches are advocated, fostering an open, flexible, and ever-evolving mindset. The philosophers prioritize practical consequences and human benefit, emphasizing the integration of theory and practice for growth.

Truth is understood as a social construct, shared through practice and validated through social interaction. They urge the pursuit of continuous personal and societal development, using ideas for the betterment of humanity. Environments and experiences conducive to continuous learning are encouraged, along with the responsibility to contribute valuable output to society.

This pragmatist attitude takes a dynamic and experiential approach to the search for truth, grounded in practicality, open-mindedness, and the pursuit of positive outcomes. It embraces the evolving nature of knowledge, acknowledges fallibility, and encourages a collective journey toward a better understanding of truth. Through this mindset, individuals engage in the active exploration and application of ideas, contributing to personal growth and societal progress.

Classification: Internal

4. Stoic Pragmatism: An Attitude toward Life

4.1. Preliminaries

In this section I will explain the Stoic pragmatist approach to life through a reading of an article by Lachs, two of whose arguments I will criticize, and an article by Miller and Taoka.[177] The articles will be outlined in the respective sections on each of the authors mentioned.

Unlike the Stoic and Pragmatist sections, this section will not include a description of any core tenets of the philosophy described that are common to the writings of the authors. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Lachs and M&T describe the same type of Stoic pragmatism and repeating commonalities seems redundant. Secondly, Lachs and M&T offer examples of practices in possible situations for Stoic pragmatists to follow that sufficiently describe the supposed attitude. This section will nonetheless end with a summary of the attitude.

4.2. Exploring Lachs

4.2.1. Introduction

The article that I will focus on to explore Lachs' Stoic pragmatism is called "Stoic Pragmatism." I have chosen not to take excerpts from the book *Stoic Pragmatism* because I find the article sufficient for my study.

4.2.2. Lachs on Philosophy

According to Lachs, pragmatists generally agree that "a central part of the business of life is to make life better," that "human intelligence can make a vast difference to how well we live," and that pragmatists "extol the possibility of improving our circumstances" because they tend to be "dissatisfied with the status quo and see indefinitely sustained amelioration as the solution to our problems."[178]

In sharp contrast, according to Lachs, Stoics are "quick to call attention to the limits of our powers and recommend accepting them without complaint," that Stoics tend to think that "only our beliefs and attitudes fall securely in our control," that the key to living well is "control over self, not over circumstance," to achieve "inner calm in the face of whatever misfortune befalls us."[179]

The "pragmatic ambition and stoic equanimity appear to be incompatible values," Lachs writes, because pragmatists and Stoics seem to occupy "opposite ends of the spectrum, with the former busy trying to improve the conditions of life and the latter adjusting their desires to the course of nature."[180] But Lachs takes issue with the supposed incompatibility, writing that the "radical distinction between the stoic and the pragmatist is misleading and inaccurate."[181] He will argue this by "[bringing] the two views closer together than it has been supposed possible."[182]

Lachs' argument is divided into three stages. The first stage, which I call the stage of Compatibility and Justification, is to show situations in which "the pragmatic attitude is inappropriate," where "good

[177] Miller & Taoka: hereinafter referred to as M&T.
[178] Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," p. 95.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] p. 96.
[182] Ibid.

Classification: Internal

sense requires that pragmatists believe and act like stoics," and Lachs justifies this stage by saying that "if intelligent pragmatists have to be stoics from time to time, then pragmatism and stoicism are not incompatible, after all."[183] The second stage, which I call the stage of going Beyond Active and Passive, aims to show that "the usual distinction between them as active and passive is ill-conceived" because Stoics are "disposed to undertake action and improvement no less than do pragmatists," thus showing that "the difference between them is not primarily in what they do, but in their motivation for doing it."[184] In the third and final stage, which I call the stage of Acceptance and Improvement, Lachs shows that "in every case in which we wish to improve something, we have to accept the conditions that make amelioration possible,"[185] thus linking Stoic acceptance and pragmatic improvement even more closely. With these three stages combined, the argument is intended to make Stoic pragmatism as sufficient as possible, and more desirable than either theory alone, as "a better attitude toward life."[186]

Lachs begins with the stage of Compatibility and Justification, writing that pragmatists tend to assert that "the ultimate value is growth," emphasizing the progressive enrichment of experience and improved control over circumstances by proposing to replace narrow or final-state values with a unitary value that depends on individual circumstances: "what counts as growth depends on where we are in life, what we need, and what is possible."[187] Growth is valued at different stages of life, from children to adults facing challenges. Even as individuals age, there are still opportunities for growth, although the modalities become more limited. However, there comes a point when "all opportunities for growth disappear"[188] and the pursuit of growth becomes unintelligent. Instead, it is advisable to "accept what cannot be changed and thereby reduce frustration and pain."[189]

The search for acceptance is not limited to those with extreme old age but is relevant in various contexts where circumstances limit our range of action, as Lachs gives the example of quadriplegics who have mastered "the meager repertoire of actions possible for them"[190] but must accept the limits of what they cannot do, even if they try to do more. It is necessary to know that "growth in acceptance is possible only by adding to the things to which we accede," i.e., activities that are all-or-nothing, "and not by increasing the degree of our acquiescence."[191] Exploration of our conditions typically leads to "acceptance of their limits as a totality," which means that by inductive logic "we must accept the operational constraints imposed on us by who we are" and what we cannot change.[192] While we can try alternative means to achieve our goals, this requires that we "recognize and bow to what we cannot do."[193]

Before moving on to the next stage, Lachs adds the following information, which I think is relevant to strengthening the argument of the first stage and that of the second stage, namely that Dewey and James emphasize the importance of accepting limitations and the choices we must make in light of

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.
[188] p. 97.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] p. 98.
[193] Ibid.

Classification: Internal

them. Here, I think, these pragmatists seem to be advocating a practice that the Stoics would also do. Lachs writes that James recognizes that desires are "tragically disorderly and miscellaneous" and that satisfying some desires means sacrificing others, which must be accepted, while Dewey recognizes the need for acceptance "in the aftermath of tragic events and in circumstances near the end of life."[194]

With the second stage, Beyond Active and Passive, Lachs begins by demonstrating the different approaches to life and control between Stoics and pragmatists, where the former focus on self-transformation to "want [events] to happen as they do" so that "[their lives] will go well," while the latter commit to bringing life under "intelligent and effective human control" to actively change the world through the development of technologies.[195]

Lachs further sharpens the distinction between these approaches, adding a critical view of Stoicism through the pragmatic attitude. But although there appears to be a sharp contrast between pragmatists and Stoics, a closer examination of Stoic texts and practices reveals a more nuanced perspective, Lachs argues. The Stoics seem to recognize the importance of fulfilling obligations based on natural relations, as Lachs quotes Epictetus that "appropriate actions are in general measured by relationships."[196] Lachs justifies this by recalling Marcus, who recognized that certain responsibilities cannot be ignored because of one's station in life, thereby emphasizing the unity of the self and the integrity of the person in carrying out the right course of action.

Lachs adds that "the active political lives of Seneca, Cicero, and countless other Roman stoics" embrace "action as a necessary part of the full life," believe it is important to be "engaged members of their communities."[197] Moreover, Stoics also "criticize irrational habits" and strive "to educate both the public and its leaders about what is of permanent value."[198] Lachs goes on to quote a few sentences from Seneca's essay "On Clemency":

> Your first task is to judge a thing's value, your second to assume a controlled and tempered impulse with reference to it, and your third to harmonize your action with your impulse…Apply good sense to your problems; the hard can be softened, the narrow widened, and the heavy made lighter…The man who laughs at the human race deserves more gratitude than the man who mourns over it, for he allows the hope of amelioration, whereas the foolish weeper despairs of the possibility of improvement.[199]

After reviewing a number of considerations, including those written here, Lachs concludes that "the contrast between active pragmatists and passive stoics is simplistic and will not stand scrutiny," since "pragmatists are just as vitally interested in habits of self-control as stoics are committed to appropriate social ameliorative action," which Lachs justifies on the basis of their very similar

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[194] Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," p. 98; James, William. 1977. "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life." In *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott. Chicago: U of Chicago P, p. 622; Dewey, John. 1966. *Democracy and Education*. New York: The Free Press.
[195] Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," p. 99.
[196] Ibid.; Epictetus. 1983. *The Handbook*. Trans. Nicholas White. Cambridge: Hackett, p. 20.
[197] Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," p. 100.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.; Seneca. 1958. *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca*. Ed. And trans. Moses Hadas. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, pp. 222-3, 93-4, 102.

Classification: Internal

"nonlinguistic behavior."[200] Their motivations, however, are quite different, since Stoics "seek nobility of mind and tranquility of soul, and view actions as either indifferent or merely means to internal self-transformation," while a pragmatist, on the other hand, "values the consequences of our acts both as means and as ends, never shying away from satisfying desires and enriching the material aspects of life," with the difference being that pragmatists "stress the significance of external achievement" and Stoics emphasize "the internal life."[201] For Lachs, Stoicism and pragmatism are comprehensive views of "how to live well and both extol the value of intelligence and control."[202]

Lachs begins with the stage of Acceptance and Improvement, where he further reconciles the two philosophies. The structure in which he does this involves two main arguments, the first of which is that each philosophy "captures only about half of the truth about the human condition."[203] Secondly, Lachs argues that the combination of both, Stoic pragmatism, is an appropriate view to have. The first argument is made by criticizing both philosophies for their inaccuracies, and the second by combining their correct points and saying that this synthesis is more desirable than either of them.

Beginning with the first argument, Lachs claims that pragmatists are "so taken with all we can do to make life better that they tend to say little about our circumambient impotence," while some Stoics are "so impressed with the uncontrollability of external events that they declare all attempts at amelioration futile."[204]

Lachs first takes on the Stoics by criticizing Epictetus' fundamental distinction between agency and circumstance, arguing that the claim that circumstances are beyond our ability to influence is "an extraordinarily bold claim that flies in the face of everyday experience."[205] Lachs argues that "for most of us, attitudes and desires are much more difficult to control than the movements of our hands,"[206] emphasizing the unrealistic aspect of this. Lachs further disputes Epictetus' claim by saying that it is false that "defrauding people does not harm one's reputation even as it helps one's finances, that smoking does not tend to impair one's health, and that generally we are unable to walk, drive cars, or chatter endlessly about all the things we cannot do"[207] – thereby arguing against the Stoic view that circumstances can actually be influenced by choice and affect our agency. Lachs finds Epictetus' distinction a "foolish suggestion" because it lacks a distinction between "what is essentially and what is only accidentally in our power."[208] This latter distinction in fact suggests a more realistic framework, implying that we can or could have power over circumstances. But even this framework Lachs does not find defensible for two separate reason: first, in reality "our power to think and feel as we wish is more tenuous than our ability to move about and see, and is sometimes largely dependent on it"; Secondly: "the sharp contrast between what we can and what we cannot control is a fiction designed to bolster stoic resolve to be high-minded and steely-willed."[209]

Having further criticized the Stoic distinctions of power and value, Lachs next criticizes pragmatists for their mistaken view of the human condition, saying that they are sometimes "without

[200] Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," p. 100.
[201] Ibid., p. 101.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] pp. 101-2.
[209] p. 102.

Classification: Internal

a sober assessment of what is possible." Indeed, they tend to forget "how situated, local, limited, and perhaps even passing our accomplishments remain."[210] In advising such pragmatists also to take Stoic values into account, Lachs wants them to "consider what we cannot change, no matter what we do," such as "the inexorable passage of time […], youth comes but once, loss is irreversible, every action excludes a hundred alternatives and each inaction exacts a toll."[211] Lachs brings in a host of further considerations as well, such as "the unforgiving properties of space […] the physical features of things, [and] where we were born and in what century."[212] The general point of Lachs' criticism focusses on the fact that any type of betterment always also has limiting implications: "amelioration has definite conditions whose existence must be presupposed unchanged; each time we improve something, something else closely connected with it must remain unimproved," so that "the ambition to make the world better in some particular requires that we accept it in many others."[213]

Having criticized both philosophies in this way, by comparing their intellectual framework to potential benefits of the opposite framework, Lachs asserts that "this shows the intimate connection between the need for acquiescence and the possibility of amelioration."[214] In reality, then, we need both Stoic and pragmatist views, since we need to be aware of the fact that we are part of this world and can influence parts of it in terms of where we are, the time we live in, and what we can do in terms of the parts that are changeable. If we want to make things better, we must first accept what is unchangeable. This means that we should be aware of such diverse things as the laws of physics or historical events. If we want to mine diamond rocks from celestial bodies, we have to accept the fundamental principles and equations that govern the behavior of matter and energy in the universe, and if we want to advise the Dutch government on its policies, we have to accept the historically determined outlines of today's constitutional monarchy.[215] In other words, it is important to accept certain things as they are in order to make improvements. And this is why Lachs notes that "stoics and pragmatists call attention to different sides of the same coin: the former stress all we must take for granted, the latter the useful changes we can make."[216]

At this point, in order to flip this particular coin, Lachs puts forward his second, the view that Stoic pragmatism is the appropriate view to develop:

> The theory reflects the attitude of human beings who seek a better life but feel ready to face reality when all else fails. It reduces the boundless ambition encouraged by the success of science and offers a sensible account of our prospects as individuals and as a species. It neglects neither sound counsels of finitude nor the vigorous assault on life essential to

[210] p. 103.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Examination of the two examples reveals a striking contrast in context and nature, even though both involve necessity. The introduction of the concept of contingency strengthens the argument that both examples involve an awareness of the fallibility of our limited understanding. This acknowledgment recognizes the potential for our scientific and historical knowledge to evolve and be revised. By accepting the universal necessities involved in mining diamond rocks from celestial bodies and advising the Dutch government on its policies, while also acknowledging the potential for change and revision, we equip ourselves to navigate the complexities of our world with clarity, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to continuous growth.
[216] p. 104.

Classification: Internal

> making it better, supplementing guarded optimism about the future with a realistic sense of the limits of achievement and the possibilities of failure.[217]

In a discussion in which Lachs participated, he has said that Jose Medina rightly argued that "[pragmatism] insists on gauging the efficacy of actions, [Stoicism] on assessing their futility,"[218] adding that his own Stoic pragmatism incorporated both critical principles. Lachs endorses the progress of social cooperation, scientific implementations, and the growing inclination toward the good, of which he cites numerous historical and contemporary examples. The "values of the Enlightenment," for instance, "are alive and well in pragmatism and in our daily practices."[219] Lachs finds the continuity of growth in these areas important, but says that "it is even more vital to guard against crushing disappointment," since "the probability of frustration and consequent disenchantment is directly proportional to the immensity of our expectations; the more we want to accomplish, the greater the chance that we will fail."[220] The Stoic pragmatist therefore increases his efforts to improve life while reducing his hopes, because "Stoic detachment is a powerful antidote to the hype that elevates science to the level of savior and social effort above natural limits," and because "pragmatism teaches drive […] for living well […] so that we may develop what is latent in us."[221] The wisdom of the Stoic pragmatists is essentially "knowing how far to push and when to hang up,"[222] and that, as Richard Shusterman reminds Lachs, "sometimes only acceptance can improve one's situation,"[223] such as accepting that the job market you're pursuing is limited so that you can explore alternative career paths instead. Lachs ends his article with a situation that exemplifies Stoic pragmatism, one in which he himself was involved, having recently had to let go of his wife, who died of cancer (may she rest in peace):[224]

> This is perhaps the most valuable contribution of the stoic. Consider decisions about the end of life. Sooner or later, almost everyone must join the battle with old age or disease. The pragmatist advises all-out war: let the fur fly if the prize is more or better life. Initially, or so long as there is something of substance to gain, this surely is the right attitude. But at some point, combat becomes futile: another operation and yet another round of untested chemotherapy amount to torture and gain no result. Nature checkmates us in the end, and when that becomes plain, it is unbecoming to knock over the board in anger and pointless to play out every move. At that stage, the stoic teaches us to smile, to say it was a good game and now goodnight.[225]

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[217] Ibid.
[218] p. 106.
[219] p. 104.
[220] p. 104-5.
[221] p. 105.
[222] Ibid.
[223] p. 106.
[224] Philosophy Bakes Bread, "Ep 5 – John Lachs on Stoic Pragmatism," Radio Show & Podcast, January 19, 2017, https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2017/02/09/009-ep5-john-lachs-on-stoic-pragmatism/.
[225] Lachs, "Stoic Pragmatism," p. 105.

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4.2.3. Examining Lachs' Arguments

There are two arguments in Lachs' defense that I find questionable. These are the stage of Compatibility and Justification, and the criticism of Epictetus' fundamental distinction in the stage of Acceptance and Improvement.

If the first argument were taken as a sufficient means of justifying the possibility of a Stoic pragmatism, it would indeed suffice merely to associate those who are already Stoics or pragmatists. As we have seen in subsection 4.2.2, Lachs' article theoretically leads to a person with a Stoic pragmatist attitude who holds the good parts of both philosophies, the parts of both that Lachs praised whilst decimating their bad and unrealistic parts. As a result, the Stoic pragmatist believes in and acts on certain ideas that are simultaneously based on Stoic acquiescence and pragmatic amelioration. At the same time, Lachs argued that, although Stoic and pragmatist ideas are not identical, those who hold them act similarly, since in their nonlinguistic behavior, Stoics and pragmatists generally act in the same manner, according to Lachs. Following this logic, if the Stoics and pragmatists behave similarly in practice, the Stoic pragmatists would not act any differently. On the theoretical side, moreover, they would adhere to both sides of the same coin.

It may be suggested that the Stoic pragmatist only takes the good parts of Stoicism and pragmatism, leaving room to say that such a person would not actually have similar ideas as the followers of either of the original traditions. If this is the case, however, Lachs' argument that Stoics and pragmatists have always been unperturbed by following maxims classically attributed to the representatives of the opposite philosophy, as shown in the Beyond Active and Passive stage, would be problematic. If the point is to enlighten those who were unaware of the similarity of their views to those of their counterparts, then the argument works. But if the argument is used to justify the possibility, or even the existence, of a person who is a Stoic pragmatist, then the category of Stoic pragmatism comes a bit too late, since we are actually dealing with improved neo-Stoic neo-pragmatists who are in fact neither Stoics nor pragmatists. Nevertheless, as this is ultimately only a question of categorization and of naming, it is not enough to detract from the attraction of combining elements in Stoicism and pragmatism in such a way that this contributes to a philosophy that has a lot of potential, inspiring us to the acceptance of a balanced and valuable attitude toward life.

Now to my second criticism, which concerns Lachs' critique of Epictetus' fundamental distinction in the context of developing the ideas of Acceptance and Improvement. Lachs' interpretation of Epictetus is extraordinary, probably because he misread what Epictetus actually taught. Lachs claims that Epictetus was of the opinion that external events are uncontrollable and beyond our ability to influence. Lachs' interpretation of Epictetus' fundamental distinction is thus that it involves an ontological distinction between things that humans can and cannot do in this world. On the basis of our study of *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, however, I would argue that this is not what Epictetus was trying to convey. Epictetus was fully aware that there is a world outside of us that we can influence with our wishes. What Epictetus added to the separation between us and the outside world, however, is that having any expectations, hopes, desires and aversions in relation to what is not fully in our power, even if it is circumstantial to only a small degree, is bound to bring us misfortune. Likewise, Epictetus tells the anecdote of what disappointment awaits us if we try to control circumstances before death: "if I can change external circumstances according to my wish, I change them; if not, I want to rip out the eyes of whoever is standing in my way. For such is human nature, we cannot bear to be deprived of the good, and cannot bear to fall into what is bad."[226] According to

[226] Epictetus, "Discourses," 1.27.11-2: p. 58.

Classification: Internal

Epictetus, it is apparently human nature to change external circumstances when we want to and are able to do so. This directly contradicts Lachs' claim about Epictetus. Another passage from Epictetus goes against the Pyrrhonians and skeptical academics of his time, which certainly shows the commonsense Epictetus had when it came to external circumstances and his ability to influence them according to his power:

> Why, when I want to swallow a piece of food, I never carry it to your mouth but to my own. When I want to get some bread, I never pick up a broom, but go straight to the bread as though to a target. And do you yourselves, who deny the evidence of the senses, do anything different? Which of you, when he wants to go to a bath house, goes to a mill instead? Well then, shouldn't we devote every effort to defending this position or safeguarding common sense, while shoring ourselves up against the arguments that would seek to oppose it?[227]

Epictetus is not saying that we have no power over circumstances, that our actions have no consequences, or that circumstances have absolutely no power over us. On the contrary, we have power over a contingent set of circumstances, as Epictetus claimed and exemplified, and our actions affect both ourselves and the circumstances around us. Indeed, Lachs himself rightly concluded that Epictetus valued ethical actions toward those in natural relations with us (who are circumstantial), and that our behavior may have obvious consequences, such as when Epictetus says that "if your companion is polluted, anyone who rubs up against him is bound to become polluted too, even if he himself happens to be clean."[228]

When Stoics welcome the attitude in which the fundamental distinction of Epictetus is present, they aim to bring peace to themselves by forgiving the world and themselves for circumstantial situations from which they would get negative feelings, as these are not fully in their power anyway, without hiding themselves in an ivory tower never to try again. This, however, is also exactly what Stoic pragmatism is about, which thereby also brings us back to our former point: accepting limits and transcending laziness, without, however, being opposed to the fundamental distinction of Epictetus, is not only a Stoic pragmatist, but indeed a Stoic standpoint.

4.3. Exploring Miller & Taoka

4.3.1. Introduction

M&T wrote the article "Toward a Practice of Stoic Pragmatism,"[229] which is a contemporary application of Stoic pragmatism based on Lachs' philosophical theory. In this section, I will focus only on the five practices that, according to M&T's account, a Stoic pragmatist might follow.

4.3.2. Miller & Taoka on Philosophy

"In the panoply of Stoic pragmatism, Stoicism provides the shield and suit of armor to pragmatism's lance and sword," M&T write, and "when one feels besieged or overwhelmed, a self-preservational mode of practice is warranted; on the other hand, if one is feeling confident in one's moral and

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[227] Epictetus, "Discourses," 1.27.18-20: p. 59.
[228] Epictetus, "Handbook," 33.6: p. 297.
[229] Steven A. Miller and Yasuko Taoka, "Toward a Practice of Stoic Pragmatism," *The Pluralist* 10, no.2 (Summer 2015): pp. 150-71.

Classification: Internal

physical stability, one can perform these practices in a more active mode."[230] There are five practices in particular, and they are named chronologically: Awareness, Moral Holidays, Good Enough, Leaving Others Alone, and Courage. I will briefly go through them, aware of the fact that my discussion is necessarily incomplete, since these practices are quite complex and are discussed more extensively in M&T's article.

Stoic Awareness is built through the "analysis of impressions and oikeiosis."[231] A person engaged in the analysis of impressions goes through a series of three questions about impressions and objects in order to: "(1) define the object for what it is, devoid of emotional attachments; (2) determine what ethical response is appropriate for it; and (3) recognize its role in the cosmos."[232] With oikeiosis, one "targets the development of the ability to understand and sympathize with other human beings [by imagining] ourselves at the center of a series of concentric rings comprised of all humanity."[233] It is then a matter of bringing "these circles closer to the center [by extending] more intimate terms of address to those in outer circles, calling them cousins and brothers."[234] Pragmatism adds to this Stoic aspect of the practice of awareness "by insisting that we recognize that these groups of circles, including our own limited position, intersect and interact," saying that "we are not the center of other people's circles, and in fact it may well be a conceptual and narrative fiction to think of ourselves at the center of any circle whatsoever."[235] A Stoic pragmatist should then, through synthesis, "attempt to make expeditions to other circles, visiting and experimenting with other modes of life," suggesting that "the atheist go to church, that the heterosexual spend a night at a PFLAG meeting, that the vegetarian try meat on Monday and veganism on Thursday, that the pagan celebrate solstice with her Christ-loving uncle," and so on.[236] The two purposes of pursuing the Awareness of a Stoic pragmatist are to "destabilize our Stoic-privileged central location" and to acquire "experiential bases to understand more fully the lives of those who appear to be in other, seemingly disparate, circles."[237] And the point of all this is that by making ourselves "uncomfortable now, we make possible less discomfort and more situational integration in the future."[238]

The Moral Holidays-practice is based on "the idea that self-reflective meditation allows the practitioner to review the events of today and prepare for tomorrow."[239] Accordingly, Stoics meditate by reflecting on bad circumstances and death, which is "directed at self-betterment," since the practice tells the practitioner that "he or she is not, and will not be, in these worst circumstances, and that, should they come to pass, it is not an unbearable experience."[240] M&T discuss various types of meditation proposed by various Stoics, which they categorize as either retrospective or prospective. Pragmatists also meditate, but with them "there is more to forward-looking consideration than only tragedy," telling us that "we must also attempt to plan ahead for all actions, including those we expect to see succeed."[241] Combining both types of meditations, a Stoic pragmatist should then

[230] Ibid., p. 159.
[231] p. 160.
[232] Ibid.
[233] p. 161.
[234] Ibid.
[235] p. 162.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.
[240] pp. 162-3.
[241] p. 163.

Classification: Internal

"imaginatively rehearse not only death and the worst that could happen, but as many other activities and possibilities for action as he or she is able."[242] M&T conclude that "these reflective moments are 'holidays' from striving toward our moral ends, but they always function in service of the same."[243]

Stoics and pragmatists both engage in the practice of Good Enough, but they differ in where they draw the line between what is up to them and what is not, and in the extent to which they believe they can influence what is not up to them. M&T explain the Stoic practice of this in terms of Epictetus' fundamental distinction "that we apply this criterion of 'up to us' to all things we encounter—we will, in this way, be able to sort out the things worth working on from the things we could, but need not, work on: it is a method for sorting out what is 'good enough.'"[244] A pragmatist objection, M&T write, is that in doing so "we forsake amelioration and control of the body, possessions, reputation, for the security of our own happiness."[245] A pragmatist, therefore, would "seek to circumscribe a larger area for what constitutes 'good enough.'"[246] He would still seek to influence elements that Stoics would think are not within our control and to bring about consequences through his interaction with them, "and so we may think of them as 'partially up to us.'"[247] It is up to the Stoic pragmatist, then, to "push at the borders of the 'up to us.'"[248] However, as he explores and experiments with circumstances, the boundary between what is up to him and what is not up to him fades. Thus, the Stoic pragmatist is:

> slow to judge some feature of experience as "not up to us," completely beyond his or her potential influence, and so he or she rejects the strict binary between "up to us" and "not," instead looking for those ways in which situations are or can be made at least "partially up to us." This encourages a habit of hopeful, experimental engagement that does accept limitations—but not before trying to overcome them.[249]

I now come to the practice of Leaving Others Alone. After M&T refer to some passages from Marcus' *Meditations*, which are repetitions of Marcus exhorting himself "not to be vexed by the behavior of others; he can control only himself,"[250] they write that Marcus prescribes that "we practice leaving others alone by refraining from anger and judgment, trying to convince others calmly and logically, and—failing that—recognizing the rights of others to create their own happiness."[251] M&T contrast this with a regular pragmatist who says that "it may unfortunately preclude possibilities for development," since "recognizing that other people may have divergent beliefs and reasons affirms what Peirce called 'the social impulse,' which led him to encourage an attitude of fallibilism," that is, that "disagreement is not wholly negative."[252] Combining both philosophies, M&T encourage Stoic pragmatists to "seek out disagreement not only in order to change minds, as Marcus might suggest, but also to grow and learn possibilities for their own desire and belief."[253] Ultimately, "such

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[242] p. 164.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] p. 165.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] p. 166.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.

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explorations educate and provide opportunity for development of one's positions as well as those of other people."[254]

The final practice, Courage, can be done in two ways, M&T note, which are found in Marcus and throughout Roman Stoicism. For Marcus, it does not matter if you are tired, have opposition, or are about to die, these are not valid excuses for not doing the right thing: "He must do right regardless,"[255] i.e., as M&T call it, he must be self-berating. As for the other Stoic way of practicing Courage, we should "seek inspiration in the examples set by others around us" that will help us come out of depression.[256] These two ways of practicing Courage together act like "the proverbial carrot and stick: the survey of admirable qualities as a carrot to inspire us to emulate exemplary virtues, the self-baratement as a stick to goad us out of easy excuses for our cowardice."[257] As with all other Stoic practices, M&T criticize this practice from a pragmatist standpoint because it becomes problematic to know "when we need to apply these techniques to ourselves—if we have deluded ourselves about our lack of courage, we will not be able to diagnose when we need to berate ourselves."[258] For pragmatists, it is the case that "we are constituted with and through one another, and this goes as much for our aims and our efforts as for our 'selves.'"[259] Pragmatists would want us to be accountable not only to ourselves but also "to other practitioners."[260] A Stoic pragmatist would then "encourage oneself or others to strive toward shared, mutually developed ideals," since "the courage necessary to do good in this world comes more easily when it is encouraged by another."[261]

M&T conclude that when we regularly perform the five practices, we develop "both a defensive (Stoic) trunk, and proactive (pragmatic) sprouts," and that these two elements "work to form a unified and stable but still growing organism, responding to the stresses and possibilities of its broader environment."[262]

4.4. A General Stoic Pragmatist Attitude

4.4.1. In Summary

Stoic pragmatists embrace the principles of both pragmatism and Stoicism. They actively pursue personal growth while acknowledging the limitations beyond their control. They cultivate self-control and discipline to foster these qualities. In addition, they are committed to taking meaningful action to bring about positive change in society, recognizing their interconnectedness with the world and their ability to influence it based on their circumstances and available opportunities.

To facilitate growth, a Stoic pragmatist understands the importance of accepting certain aspects of life as they are. They maintain a realistic and cautiously optimistic outlook, recognizing both the limits of achievement and the possibility of setbacks. They strive to increase their efforts to improve while managing their expectations.

[254] Ibid.
[255] p. 167.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.
[261] pp. 167-8.
[262] p. 168.

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Exploration and experimentation are fundamental to the Stoic pragmatist's mindset. They actively seek out diverse experiences and perspectives, stepping outside their comfort zone to gain a deeper understanding of different ways of life. They willingly endure temporary discomfort in pursuit of long-term integration and personal growth.

Self-reflection through meditation is an essential practice for the Stoic pragmatist. They engage in introspection, reviewing daily experiences, preparing for the future, and mentally rehearsing various scenarios. This practice builds their resilience and adaptability.

Stoic pragmatists push the boundaries of what is possible, exploring new circumstances and experimenting with different approaches. They embrace disagreement as an opportunity for growth and value diverse perspectives that challenge their own. They actively seek education and encourage the development of shared ideas, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment.

In summary, a Stoic pragmatist seeks a harmonious balance between Stoic restraint and pragmatic action. They strive for personal growth, accept unchangeable aspects of life, engage in meaningful social action, explore diverse experiences, reflect on their journey, and strive for improvement while remaining grounded in reality.

4.4.2. Possible & Desirable?

In the introduction to this paper, I proposed to answer two questions about the possibility and desirability of Stoic pragmatism. I begin with a concern about its possibility.

I hypothesized that Stoic pragmatism was theoretically defensible in principle, but that it might require some adjustments before a person could realize the philosophy in actual practice. I mentioned one of Lachs' arguments as questionable because I was concerned with the uncertainty about the category and name of Stoic pragmatism itself. It highlights the problem of whether or not Stoic pragmatism is a combination of Stoicism and pragmatism. To address the problem, I will compare Lachs' Stoic pragmatism with my own findings on Stoicism and pragmatism and in doing so, test my hypothesis. Finally, I will bring my findings to bear on what M&T presented in their article.

There are three Stoic tenets that Lachs either omitted or perverted. These are harmony with nature, acceptance of circumstances, and divine connection. What these tenets have in common is that they are predetermined by our rational agency. Thus, we can understand that in order to become Stoics, we must align our actions with what we can influence. We must accept circumstances and our own limitations and powers, and then adapt to the nature of the universe and live in harmony with it. Our studied Stoics say that this works if we recognize our rationality as a divine element connected to the order of the universe, which is a pantheistic God.

Lachs misdescribed Epictetus' teaching of what can or should be influenced and what cannot or should not be influenced, perverting the Stoic tenet of acceptance of circumstances. At the same time, he left the sharp difference between Stoic and pragmatist motivations as it is. Because of this difference in motivations, however, Lachs was not able to incorporate Stoic motivations as universally as the Stoics did themselves. It seems that for Lachs' Stoic pragmatism, Stoic equanimity either remains in the background or comes to the fore only when all hope is lost. That is, whilst the Stoic pragmatist acts pragmatically to effectively influence the external world, he remembers to relax only when his expedition is impeded, or when his goals are completely impeded in terms of their physical realization. Only then does he subtract his pragmatic side to become a full-fledged Stoic. Stoics, on the other hand, are not motivated to experience equanimity only when a particular situation calls for

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this; they are motivated to experience equanimity unconditionally because they want to live exclusively in harmony with nature.

The pantheistic divinity of God in classical Stoicism is not an unnecessary add-on within Stoicism. It is important to adhere to the idea of a divine order in order for Stoics to successfully achieve their goals and to be able to fully understand the relevance of metaphysics for ethics. In classical Stoicism, we are divinely connected to God through our minds, and we should therefore align ourselves to what is demanded of us. Lachs did not use the words "God" or "divinity" in his article or imply anything of the sort. However, in his book *Stoic Pragmatism*, Chapter 4: "An Ontology for Stoic Pragmatism,"[263] there are two sections entitled: "The Difference God Makes"[264] and "Materialist and Idealist Counterchanges."[265] In these sections, Lachs essentially analyzes a variety of arguments and standpoints brought forward by different philosophers who challenge each other by having contrasting views on the topics presented in the section titles. Ultimately, for Lachs, the question boils down to where philosophers cast their glance:

> Should they attend to the world as it exists in their neighborhood, displaying treacherous forces with which they must negotiate their survival, or should they look for the patterns of another world, barely adumbrated in the gritty details of individual life?[266]

Lachs notes that the philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) "[raised this] question of honesty in philosophy […] more vividly, more urgently, and more eloquently," than anyone else in the history of philosophy.[267] Unfortunately, studying Lachs' take on God was not part of this paper, but neither does it make much of a difference, since Lachs seems to leave the God question open, thereby also leaving open the question whether or not he perverted the Stoic tenet of divine connectivity, even if he did not entirely leave it out of the debate.

In conclusion: Lachs' Stoic pragmatism definitely does not include two of the three Stoic tenets in question, and possibly neither includes the third of the three, let alone that he would include all of the tenets of classical Stoicism.

I would have to agree with the idea that the seven tenets of pragmatism are inherent in Lachs' Stoic pragmatism when it comes to the supposed pragmatism in his article. Additionally, studying Lachs' book, one will find that for Lachs, philosophy in itself should be valuable in the sense that we can use its teachings to make life better.[268] Therefore, I believe that not only does Lachs seem to have a pragmatist attitude, but also that his philosophy is particularly focused on the tenets of classical pragmatism.

In conclusion: Lachs' Stoic pragmatism definitely includes the seven pragmatist tenets, and therefore includes classical pragmatism.

So far, the problem of not including all Stoic tenets is the main conclusion we might draw about Lachs' Stoic pragmatism. I will address a few relevant points from M&T's article that will prove to be

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[263] Lachs, *Stoic* Pragmatism, pp. 143-81.
[264] Ibid., pp. 144-58.
[265] pp. 170-81.
[266] p. 174.
[267] Ibid.
[268] He expands on this in Chapter 1: "What Can Philosophy Do to Make Life Better?", pp. 3-27, and in the Epilogue: "The Personal Value and Social Usefulness of Philosophy," pp. 182-93.

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relevant to the problem of determining the possibility of Stoic pragmatism as a productive philosophical stance.

M&T avoid Lachs' precariousness in understanding Epictetus' fundamental distinction by describing the practice of Good Enough. Here they find the Stoic distinction to be between what is within our control and what is not, but also that we can influence what is not within our control, although we do not have to do so because we can also accept things as being good enough. This is a normalization of the fundamental distinction which, if applied in Stoic pragmatism, would reconcile the problem of the omission of the tenet of acceptance of circumstances.

When it comes to the tenet of living in harmony with nature, M&T's practices also culminate in a much lesser perversion of this tenet than Lachs' propositions imply. M&T said that Stoicism provides the shield and armor when one feels besieged or overwhelmed; as with Lachs, the Stoic side seems to emerge when the situation calls for it. From a pragmatist perspective, however, the practices of M&T begin with engagement with a diverse and pluralistic world in which the individual gradually undergoes a personal transformation and gains wisdom. This transformation includes learning to approach differences with a sense of peace and equanimity, which allows the Stoic pragmatist to adapt and navigate the world pragmatically. The practices of Awareness, Moral Holidays, and Courage particularly emphasize this emphasis on experiential learning and the ability to face and overcome challenges.

By incorporating M&T's practical Stoic pragmatism into Lachs' Stoic pragmatism, the only remaining point of contention is whether or not to include the notion of the divine order. This raises the question whether the absence of this tenet undermines the classical Stoic aspect of Stoic pragmatism, or whether Stoic pragmatism introduces something else. In my opinion, if it is indeed possible for an atheist to embody Stoic pragmatism in practice, which seems feasible given the secular nature of the philosophy when described in general terms, it would nevertheless be appropriate to label it differently, such as secular Stoic pragmatism or neo-Stoic pragmatism. This is because an atheist cannot fully agree with classical Stoicism's emphasis on recognizing the divinity of God/nature. To avoid confusion, it would thus be advisable to separate Stoic pragmatism from classical Stoicism by changing its name.

The deeper question of whether an atheistic version of Stoicism can still be considered Stoicism might, if this is answered in the negative, lead us to rename Stoic pragmatism as 'moderate pragmatism' or 'conservative pragmatism' – names are not so far-fetched, since the proposed Stoic pragmatist seems to be a pragmatist who is more conservative than regular pragmatists when it comes to trying to change parts of the world and is also less extreme, and thus relatively moderate.

In conclusion: Stoic pragmatism, in the combined works of Lachs and M&T, definitely includes six tenets of classical Stoicism and seven tenets of classical pragmatism, and perhaps one more tenet of classical Stoicism. Since Stoic pragmatism may actually affirm this tenet, while classical Stoicism definitely does, I cannot affirm that Stoic pragmatism is possible in any straightforward way as a combination of Stoicism and pragmatism. Regarding this tenet, namely the question of God in classical Stoicism and Stoic pragmatism, and whether any differences and similarities should or could determine their (in)distinctiveness, would in any case be important preconditions to be decided before one could speak of a genuinely 'Stoic' pragmatism.

The only significant difference between Stoicism and pragmatism, on the one hand, and Stoic pragmatism, on the other, is in fact the question whether or not to preserve the notion of God, understood through the tenet of the connection to the divine. Lachs already argued that the non-

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linguistic behavior of Stoics and pragmatists is similar, which implies that the behavior of Stoic pragmatists may by and large be similar, so that we may not expect significant differences in ethical behavior when it comes to act in practical situations, unless, of course, they are situations that involve personal motivations that crucially depend on maintaining a connection with divinity. I will describe one such scenario.

4.4.2.1. Ethical Dilemma Involving Religion and Spirituality

In this scenario, an ethical dilemma arises that involves religious or spiritual considerations. The Stoic perspective, rooted in classical Stoicism, places a strong emphasis on acknowledging God's divinity, recognizing one's kinship with God, and fulfilling one's duty to God. The pragmatist perspective, on the other hand, is less prone to emphasize religious beliefs and may approach spirituality from a more secular or non-theistic standpoint. The conflict between the Stoic and pragmatist perspectives arises from their different beliefs about the role of God, religion, and spirituality in ethical decision-making. The Stoics' commitment to recognizing and fulfilling one's duty to God may clash with the pragmatists' focus on practical outcomes and considerations that do not involve religious or spiritual beliefs.

Stoic pragmatists might then act as a bridge between the Stoic and pragmatist perspectives, offering a reconciliatory approach. They can emphasize the practical consequences and benefits of incorporating religious or spiritual values into ethical decision-making, while recognizing the diverse perspectives of individuals who may hold different beliefs or none at all. They can promote a broader understanding of spirituality that goes beyond traditional religious beliefs to include universal moral principles and a sense of interconnectedness with others and the world. They can promote ethical practices that foster compassion, empathy, and moral integrity, regardless of an individual's belief or lack of belief in a higher power.

By adopting a pragmatic and adaptable mindset, Stoic pragmatists can find common ground between the Stoic emphasis on acknowledging God and fulfilling one's duty and the pragmatist focus on practical results and inclusive ethical considerations. They can encourage open dialogue, respect for a diversity of perspectives, and the integration of moral principles into decision-making processes that transcend religious or non-religious boundaries. Ultimately, Stoic pragmatists aim to promote an ethical framework that embraces both the possibility of belief and non-belief, prioritizing ethical behavior and the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

In conclusion: When it comes to ethical dilemmas involving religious or spiritual aspects, Stoic pragmatism emerges as the most desirable approach among Stoicism, pragmatism, and Stoic pragmatism itself. Stoic pragmatism serves as a bridge, motivating individuals to reconcile the dilemma by accommodating different beliefs on the metaphysical level. It accomplishes this by emphasizing the practical benefits of incorporating religious or spiritual values into ethical decision-making. In contrast, the Stoics prioritize the pursuit of nobility of mind and tranquility of soul through a connection to the divine order through prayer and reason. Pragmatists, on the other hand, prioritize the consequences of actions, valuing the material aspects of life and fulfilling desires for the sake of external achievements. Stoic pragmatists respect and incorporate both Stoic and pragmatic motivations. They use the pragmatic method but never depart from universal, social, and individual morality. They use the scientific approach ethically while adhering to spiritual guidance that is reasonable.

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5. Epilogue

5.1. In Summary

This paper, entitled "From Theory to Practice: Exploring Stoic Pragmatism for a Life of Resilience and Significance," explored the viability and value of Stoic pragmatism as an attitude toward life. The introduction set the stage for the study, outlined the research question, and discussed the rationale and relevance of the topic.

The first section dealt with Stoicism, examining the perspectives of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus. It studied their views on philosophy and highlighted the core tenets of Stoic philosophy. The section concluded by presenting a general Stoic attitude that encompasses these principles.

The second section focused on pragmatism, exploring the philosophies of Peirce, James, and Dewey. It discussed their ideas about philosophy and presented the core tenets of pragmatism. It then summarized a general pragmatist attitude that encapsulates these principles.

The third section merged Stoicism and pragmatism into Stoic pragmatism. It examined the works of Lachs and M&T, which provided insights into the integration of these two philosophies. The paper presented a general Stoic pragmatist attitude that combines the strengths of both Stoicism and pragmatism.

The paper then raised the question of whether Stoic pragmatism is both theoretically possible and ethically desirable. It explored the coherence and exceptionality of Stoic pragmatism in light of what had been discussed.

5.2. In Conclusion

Is Stoic pragmatism *really* possible, and is Stoic pragmatism *really* desirable? My answer to these questions is as follows:

Stoic pragmatism may not fully encompass all the tenets of classical Stoicism, since it is acknowledged that the question of God in classical Stoicism and Stoic pragmatism requires further investigation, in order to determine the distinctiveness of these philosophies. Without a conclusive understanding of this aspect, it becomes difficult to assert the definite possibility of Stoic pragmatism. As a consequence, it would be hard definitively to state that the possibility for a consistent philosophy of Stoic pragmatism is without any problems.

When it comes to its desirability, Stoic pragmatism serves as a bridge, harmonizing rational virtues and integrating practical experience. It blends the Stoic and pragmatist attitudes and promotes a desirable approach to life. This bridge connects and balances the harmonious interplay of rational virtues such as acceptance, interrelated ethics, discipline, and wisdom. At the same time, it incorporates practical experience, seamlessly integrating empirical inquiry, flexible growth, and the search for truth. By bridging these aspects, Stoic pragmatism offers a comprehensive and engaging framework that combines philosophical principles with practical application. It allows individuals to navigate life with intention, using the wisdom of Stoicism and the practicality of pragmatism to shape their beliefs, actions, and personal growth. Thus, Stoic pragmatism becomes a bridge that unifies and harmonizes these essential elements, allowing for a holistic and desirable approach to life.

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5.3. Personal Reflection

I embarked on a personal journey to rediscover what I had lost – my sense of piety and curiosity. I longed for a new perspective on the relationship between the divine and the natural. This quest led me down many paths as I explored different belief systems and ways of life. I immersed myself in militant atheism, LaVeyan Satanism, Protestant Christianity, Western Buddhism, liberal Islam, classical Stoicism, functionalism, and pragmatism.

Each step of this journey opened my mind and allowed me to understand the contrasting perspectives that come with different belief systems. I became more accepting and respectful of others, recognizing the value in their chosen paths. However, it was through my study of Stoic pragmatism that a profound transformation took place.

Stoic pragmatism illuminated the essential need for the coexistence of idealism and realism, inner harmony and external challenges, moral principles and individual agency, wisdom and experience, mindfulness and action, self-contentment and personal growth. It showed me that we are a blend of mind and body, abstract and concrete, thought and matter. The unity of these seemingly opposing aspects is essential to our natural flourishing.

While Jamesian pragmatism acknowledges the influence of individual temperaments, Stoic pragmatism recognizes the importance of acquiring the themes of each temperament through personal experience. Stoic pragmatism proposes to embrace all seeming contradictions as a unified philosophy encompassing all temperaments. I have come to believe that true harmony lies in understanding the interdependence of the various facets of human existence.

While Deweyan pragmatism encourages us to explore, discover, and learn ideas from new experiences in order to accommodate our lives as a finite journey of experiential education, and at the same time use traditional ideas (like classical Stoicism), I find that Stoic pragmatism might itself in the end provide an argument in favor of Deweyan pragmatism.

Through my personal journey and study of Stoic pragmatism, I learned the value of embracing different perspectives and finding unity in apparent contradictions. I discovered the beauty of integrating different aspects of myself and recognizing the harmony that results from such integration. This story is a testament to the transformative power of exploration, open-mindedness, and the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of our complex human nature.

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