

1998

Stoic Children

Lawrence C. Becker
Hollins University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/philfac>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Becker, Lawrence C. "Stoic Children," in Susan M. Turner and Gareth B. Matthews (eds.), *The Philosopher's Child: Critical Essays in the Western Tradition*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998. Pp 45-61. Hollins Digital Commons. Web.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy at Hollins Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Hollins Digital Commons. For more information, please contact lvilelle@hollins.edu, millerjc@hollins.edu.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S CHILD

*Critical Perspectives in the
Western Tradition*

Edited by

Susan M. Turner and Gareth B. Matthews



UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER PRESS

STOIC CHILDREN

Lawrence C. Becker

There is no reason to believe that the Stoics paid more attention to children, either in theory or in practice, than other philosophers in antiquity. They expressed interest in and affection for children in general; they mentioned the behavior of infants and children frequently; they wrote books and letters of advice to their own children, and spoke about parental, filial, and familial duties. But so did many other philosophers. There is no evidence that Stoics wrote books specifically about children, or thought that they should write such books. This seems a bit odd, given the fascinating outline of child psychology they provided, and especially given that they regularly wrote whole books specifically about other psychological matters, as well as marriage, love, the equality of women, and many other issues.

There is evidence, however, that the Stoics paid *better* attention than their rivals did to observing, describing, and making theoretical use of the behavior of children, because they gave us a subtle and powerful *developmental* psychology—an account that begins with acute observations of the behavior of infants and very young children. These observations are remarkably well confirmed by modern psychology, and provide a persuasive causal account of moral motivation as well as an intriguing account of the relation between reason and emotion.

In addition, it may be possible to argue that their accounts of moral motivation, reason, and emotion implicitly commit Stoics to a much more robust and nuanced respect for children than seems to have been common in antiquity. This is so because, on the Stoic account of things, the sequence of events that leads from infancy to healthy maturity (and the possibility of virtue) can be defeated at crucial points very early in life, in ways that make recovery difficult if not hopeless. Moreover, the developmental theory they proposed implied that to prevent such damage, one could not simply rely on didactic training, or wait until a youngster was ready for dialectical instruction; nor could one simply rely on the knowledge and habits that would be absorbed in a good polis to prepare the young for moral philosophy. Much more active intervention was necessary. The Stoics thus arguably had more urgent theoretical reasons than their rivals for insisting that adults pay close, patient, and

persistent attention to the early health, security, and education of the young. It seems reasonable to assume that the Stoics recognized those implications of their theory.

It also seems reasonable to assume that they recognized the contribution made by their developmental child psychology both to the form of ethical universalism for which they have been much admired, and to the powerful forms of psychotherapy with which they have been identified in popular consciousness. It is much less clear whether they also recognized the fact that their moral psychology committed them to being vigilant about all forms of what we would now label racism, sexism, and elitism, as well as giving them a challenging standard for assessing child neglect. And of course they could not have anticipated that an outline of early childhood education derived from their work would sound thoroughly contemporary to 20th century ears.

Whatever one may suppose about the justice of depicting the Stoic sage as a grim, dispassionate person capable mostly of enduring pain, it is clear that the Stoics did not expect children to cultivate such characteristics directly. On the Stoic view of things, infants and children up to the age of about fourteen were constituted very differently than adults. It is the developmental story the Stoics told about how children are gradually transformed into adults that gives their views about children special philosophical interest.

Two Quick Preliminaries

Bibliographical Caution

For five hundred years, from roughly 300 BCE to 200 CE, Stoic philosophers were a leading influence in Hellenistic and Roman intellectual life. They were prolific writers, revered teachers, and above all systematic thinkers who made profound, lasting contributions to what we now call metaphysics, logic, philosophy of language, moral psychology, ethics, and political philosophy. They insisted that each of these fields was intimately connected to the others, and that making theoretical mistakes anywhere would compromise their entire enterprise. Some of their contributions, such as their invention of propositional logic, were misrepresented and misunderstood until the mid-twentieth century. Their ethics, however, which was the primary source of their fame and influence in antiquity, was widely and consistently reported, and even though most of the texts are fragmentary, what remains is of significant philosophical interest. There is thus no excuse for the desiccated version of stoic ethics that plagues unreflective modern references to it, despite the persistent efforts of Hellenists to remind us of its riches.

It must be kept in mind, however, that any attempt to describe Stoic doctrines, even ethical doctrines, will be an exercise in reconstructing arguments

from a scanty written record. None of the 700 books reportedly written by Chrysippus, the central figure of the Early Stoa, has survived; nor have any of Zeno of Citium, the founder of the school. Indeed, none of the works from the Early and Middle Stoas has survived intact. The lists of titles of such books, given by Diogenes Laertius, are tantalizing.¹ (As remarked above, there are no works mentioned that seem to be specifically on children, although works on impulses, emotion, love, and marriage are there.) Cicero evidently had access to many of these books, and he knew and studied with major figures of the Middle Stoa. But the books themselves survive only in shards of quotation and description—often from writers hostile to them and to stoicism generally.

The texts we now have to work with are these: (1) roughly half of Arrian's record of Epictetus' teachings, four of the eight books of his *Discourses of Epictetus* having been lost, and the *Enchiridion* having been drawn from the *Discourses*; (2) works by Seneca who, while a committed Stoic, was in his own estimation an unsystematic literary expositor; (3) Marcus Aurelius' unsystematic and unfinished *Meditations*; (4) the very useful summaries of Stoic ethical doctrines given by Cicero, who was not himself a Stoic but who respected them, and who freely helped himself to their views (Book III of *De Finibus* is the best of these texts for our purposes); (5) Diogenes Laertius' somewhat less helpful summaries in Book VII of his *Lives of the Philosophers*; (6) a fragment of a handbook or digest of Stoic ethics from the early second century BCE, written by Hierocles; (7) a scattered array of quotation, paraphrase, summary, announcement, and comment in other ancient (nonstoic) writers. The standard source in English for these fragments is now volume 1 of *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, edited by A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley.²

Beginning in the 1950s, a steadily increasing stream of philosophically important scholarship on Stoic texts has poured forth—a stream that now runs swift, clear, and deep. It includes both important restatements of Stoic doctrine and philosophical assessments of its cogency, though as yet very little of it deals directly with children. A small portion of the current literature is cited in the footnotes here, and readers can find their way into much more of it, with particular ease, through the text and references in several works listed in the bibliography: Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*; Long, *Stoic Studies*; Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*; Schofield and Striker, eds., *The Norms of Nature*; and in the bibliographic commentaries to various chapters of Becker, *A New Stoicism*.

A Reminder about Stoic Naturalism

The Stoics typically divided the philosophical enterprise into three parts. *Physics* was roughly what we would now call a mixture of science, metaphysics, and theology; *logic* was roughly epistemology, philosophy of language, formal and

philosophical logic; *ethics* was defined broadly enough to include metaethics, ethical theory, casuistry, moral counseling, psychotherapy, and social, political, and legal philosophy. It seems fair to say that the Stoics expected to be able to derive their ethical theory from facts about the natural world—from physics, as it were—by way of logic. There is no parallel, in their ethical theorizing, to the modern preoccupation with logical gaps between facts and values, description and prescription, values and norms. This is so because they believed that Nature as a whole (the universe; God) was a purposive, rational being of which humans were a proper part, and that the ultimate or final human good was obviously to be found in perfecting themselves as such a part—which amounted to perfecting their own human nature. Living consistently or “conformably” with human nature would *a fortiori* mean living in accordance with the grand scheme of things. It would mean “following” Nature with a capital N. Thus while in principle Stoic ethical theory depended upon getting all of the physics right (all of facts about the world), as a practical matter Stoics often proceeded by focusing on facts about human nature.³

This commitment to getting the facts about human nature right led the Stoics to pay close attention to human biology and psychology. This sometimes had comical results, as when Chrysippus argued that the heart and not the brain was the seat of consciousness—an argument ridiculed at length by Galen.⁴ But it also produced a subtle and inspiring moral psychology—and more to the point here, a *developmental* psychology that made ethical theory heavily dependent on an account of infancy and childhood. The Stoics insisted that it was only through a proper understanding of the normal course of human development, from the earliest stages of life to the end, that one could construct a sound ethical theory. Their insistence on this point was notorious. Plutarch, for example, says in exasperation,

Why then again for heaven's sake in every book on physics and ethics does he [Chrysippus] weary us to death in writing that we have an appropriate disposition relative to ourselves as soon as we are born and to our parts and our offspring?"⁵

Let us see why.

Child Psychology

The Cradle Argument, *Oikeiosis*, and Moral Development

The Stoic theory of moral development begins with a thesis about the behavior of infants in the cradle—a thesis Stoics advanced in opposition to the Epicurean account of the same matters.⁶ Epicureans insisted that the sovereign motivation of infants was to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and that this

was (yet more) evidence for thinking that pleasure was, by our very nature, the ultimate or final human good. Such an inference is only plausible, of course, if one assumes that human development does not radically transform or eliminate infant behavior but is rather a matter of growth and maturation—growth in the form of increasing size, complexity, capacity, power, knowledge, refinement, and organization; maturation in the form of the preprogrammed emergence from time to time of added powers, such as language or reproductive ability, that are characteristic of adults. (And one gets the impression from the texts that not only the Epicureans but all the philosophers in antiquity *except* the Stoics thought of development in more or less that way.) But the Stoics rejected both the pleasure/pain account of infant motivation and the growth/maturation account of development. This is the key to their moral psychology and to the central role child psychology plays in their ethical theory.

On the Stoic account, infants in the cradle are motivated primarily by their attachment to and “affection” for themselves—attachment and affection that show themselves in behavior aimed at self-preservation and the satisfaction of “impulses” of many sorts. Primal impulses may not even include pleasure seeking at all. Cicero says the Stoics insisted on this point. (See the quotation in note 7 below.) But it was certainly clear to them that infants often subordinated pleasure-seeking to other pursuits such as efforts to move, to explore their environment, to observe, respond, mimic and learn. This complexity, the Stoics thought, was simply an undeniable observation about infant behavior. They believed that the obvious explanation for such behavior was that infants had a primitive consciousness of themselves and their interests, and a built-in affection (appropriate disposition) for preserving themselves and satisfying *all* of their interests.⁷ Thus the Stoics held that the Epicurean version of the cradle argument was unsound if for no other reason than that its premise about primal impulses was false.

The situation was worse than that, however, not only for Epicureans but for any ethical theorist who assumed that human psychological development was primarily a matter of growth and maturation. The Stoics held that psychological development was self-transformative in a predictable way. Indeed, one could read them as stage theorists about cognitive development. In their view, mature human beings were fundamentally different creatures from immature ones. (Recall Seneca’s remark, quoted in note 7, that infants, young adults, and the old each have different “constitutions.”) And they held, against the Aristotelians, that habituation was *not* the fundamental mechanism of character formation. Rather, they thought that the fundamental mechanism was *oikeiosis*.⁸

The term *oikeiosis* is hard to put into English. It has sometimes been translated as familiarization, because it has the same root as house or family. But it is probably better translated as attachment, incorporation, or appropriation. I will follow Long and Sedley in using the English term appropriation for it.⁹

Here is how the developmental process goes, according to the Stoics. Children grow and mature, of course, as other philosophers routinely noted in passing. Newborns have a small array of crude, primal impulses and very limited powers. Infants and children increase in size and physical strength; their powers of locomotion and perception increase; they accumulate memories from a wider and wider range of experience; new powers (notably language) and new impulses (such as an urge for reproduction) are added to their repertoires as they ripen into adolescence and adulthood—and some are subtracted as adults move through middle and old age; children acquire useful habits of inquiry, inference, and conduct, which they refine through trial and error; they generalize, hypothesize, observe outcomes, and acquire a more or less theoretical understanding of things, and eventually they may come to see that practical wisdom requires them to be just, courageous, temperate, benevolent—in a word, virtuous. But that is only what is happening on the surface, as it were. What the Stoics offer in addition to these conventional observations about growth and maturation is an account of the psychodynamics of human development—an account of the causal story, at a psychological level, that leads from infancy through childhood to adulthood.

Oikeiosis is the psychological mechanism that the Stoics put at the center of this causal explanation. It works this way.¹⁰ Early in infancy children's natural affection for themselves is extended to external physical objects and states that are (or appear to them to be) instrumental to satisfying their primal impulses. Infants acquire an affection for the breasts that feed them; comfortable positions in which they are held; interesting or pleasurable motions, sounds, smells, sensations; certain cloths and toys; certain faces, and expressions on those faces; the very cradle itself. These things are "perceived" in a primitive way as extrinsically or instrumentally valuable. Then a fundamentally important transformation occurs. Infants and very young children soon begin to "appropriate" these useful objects psychologically—making the external things "their own," as it were, *in a way that makes the affection for them like the natural affection the infants have for themselves*. This makes the infants disposed to preserve (and act for) the external things in the same way they are disposed to preserve and act for themselves. Thus the initial, conditional affection for the things as means to ends is converted, through *oikeiosis*, into an affection that is quite independent of perceptions of a thing's instrumental worth. It does not matter that the breast is dry, the brightly colored object is dulled, the blanket is no longer warm, the cradle is no longer big enough. Insofar as we have "appropriated" such things, we have affection for them in themselves, for their own sakes. They have intrinsic value for us. (We often develop strong attachments to them also, and the proper management of attachments is a central theme of Stoic ethics.)

An even bigger change occurs when children acquire language and begin to represent states of affairs and causal connections to themselves, and to generalize, hypothesize, and make rules about how to get what they want. The same two-step process occurs here as well, with dramatic consequences. Children first develop an affection for the beliefs and inferences that are instrumental (the ones that work; the “correct” ones), just because those are the ones that work. A similar affection arises for rule-following behavior that is successful. Then, through *oikeiosis*, children at a surprisingly early age begin to appropriate their useful beliefs, generalizations, rules, and expectations—and thus to convert affection for the instrumental worth of such things into affection for the things in themselves. Children thus come to have an affection for true belief, correct conduct, and rule-following for its own sake, quite independent of its usefulness. This is, moreover, a recursive process. Beliefs are repeatedly modified in the light of new experience. Inconsistencies are repeatedly dealt with in order to make it possible for conduct to conform to all the beliefs one has. Children thus come to value regional coherence or consistency as well as local correctness—first for instrumental reasons, and then through *oikeiosis*, for its own sake.

The penultimate step comes with the realization of the instrumental value of practical intelligence itself, and the attendant affection that children develop for doing things correctly (in the right way, for the right reasons). This is quite distinct from the ever present affection for getting the desired outcome. The novice archer wants to hit the target, certainly, but comes to appreciate that the most reliable way to get that result is by *making the shot correctly*. And this lesson, once learned in a few contexts, is generalized into an affection for procedure, technique, skill, and practical intelligence of all sorts. Affection for the usefulness of these things is then also transformed, through *oikeiosis*, into an affection for them that is quite independent of their utility. Children come to value, for its own sake, doing things in the right way for the right reasons.

The final step (plausibly the step into full maturity, though this characterization of it is not fully explicit in the texts) comes from the cultivation of practical intelligence, once we love it both for its utility and for its own sake. We see that hitting the target (getting many of the things we want) is not ultimately within our control, and not within our control at all except through the (correct) exercise of our practical intelligence. Getting that much right (perfecting our ability to do the right thing in the right way) thus becomes our paramount concern in every context. At first, of course, we want this merely as a means to our other ends. But we quite naturally appropriate it as well, and through *oikeiosis*, come to have a paramount concern for perfecting the exercise of our practical intelligence *for its own sake*.

The connection of all of this to ethical theory is that the Stoics identified this final stage with the pursuit of virtue. Virtue, they held, was for humans the perfection of reason, where what is meant by reason is perhaps better expressed by the notion of the perfection of the exercise of our agency via practical intelligence. Stoics notoriously insisted that virtue was the only good; that it was sufficient for happiness; and that it was an all or nothing thing. Those hard doctrines need not detain us here.

There are, however, several remarkable things about the *oikeiosis*-driven account of childhood moral development that require comment.

First, the account is put forward as the typical, natural sequence of events for children—something that will inevitably occur in favorable circumstances, given the sort of constitution human infants and children have. Virtue, as the culmination of this process, is thus equally possible for males and females, slaves and freemen, nobles and peasants—unless something in the circumstances of a given group systematically defeats the normal course of development for its members. Moreover, since the deliberate imposition of such “defeaters” would be an act in opposition to nature, Stoics were theoretically committed to rejecting any form of sexism, racism, slavery, or elitism that imposed developmental defeaters. There is ample evidence that Stoics regularly saw and acted on some of these implications. They admitted women to the Stoa and gave arguments for their equality.¹¹ They recognized the cosmopolitan implications of their theory. The leaders and pupils of the Stoa were as likely to be drawn from the ranks of ordinary citizens as from an elite. One of their most famous teachers (Epictetus) had been a slave in Rome—indeed had studied with a Stoic teacher while enslaved. And it is certainly clear from Marcus Aurelius’ musings that he did not think his being Roman Emperor gave him special access to virtue.

Second, the Stoic account of moral development is about the way things go for infants and children who are healthy and well-cared for by adults. The Stoics were vividly aware of the ways in which deformities, ill-health, or abuse could interfere with the process. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that they would have been aware that their theory gave them both a way of setting a standard against child neglect and abuse, and of setting up a rather detailed curriculum for the educational system. I will not attempt to trace out these implications for child care and education here, except to point out how congruent they will be with the sort of state-endorsed (as opposed to state-permitted) policies common in developed liberal democracies. Good parenting and good education in both settings are fundamentally directed at enabling children to become healthy, autonomous, broadly capable, and effective agents who not only pursue their own vision of the good life but who are reciprocally tolerant, cooperative, and benevolent towards others who have significantly different conceptions of the good life. Limitations on a child’s freedom, and

affirmative duties to provide for a child's physical and psychological well-being, are in both cases assessed in terms of these developmental goals. And in both cases it is assumed that if children develop in the normal way within such a framework for child care and education, and if subsequently those individuals as adults continue to have reasonably favorable circumstances for exercising their agency, that satisfactory progress toward individual virtue and a just society will follow as a matter of course.

Third, on the Stoic account, the infant's natural, initial focus on self-preservation and self-interest for its own sake is very quickly supplemented by an equally natural focus on the needs and interests of others, as ends in themselves. Various fragments, notably one now attributed to Hierocles,¹² suggest that some Stoics might have thought that *oikeiosis* worked along two tracks. One had its roots in the infant's primal affection for itself; the other had its roots in an equally primal, noninstrumental affection for other human beings. The latter, "social" affection then became the source for the workings of "social *oikeiosis*"—the process by which this affection for others as ends in themselves is refined (distinguishing friends from foes, for example), and is extended from local to regional and ultimately universal scope. It is not clear that all Stoics held this two-track view, however. And it is an empirical question as to whether such a primal social affection is part of our repertoire. But it is clear that nothing in Stoic ethical theory will hang on the answer to that empirical question. For even if the social impulse is not primal, it is clear that in the normal course of events it will quickly arise through non-social *oikeiosis*, and then be refined and extended. Moreover, both tracks inevitably lead to forms of impartiality and reciprocity that ground principles of justice.¹³

Impulse, Representation, Belief, Emotion, and Rationality

The transformation of our motivational structure wrought by *oikeiosis* is dramatic, and central to ethics. But the Stoics thought that there was a yet more fundamental sort of transformation produced by the development of our powers of reason. This second sort of transformation also had to do with motivation, and was fundamental to the doctrine that has become synonymous with stoicism in modern popular consciousness—namely, the "extirpation of the passions."¹⁴ Explicating this aspect of Stoic theory is difficult, however. In part, this is due to the fact that the texts are more than usually scanty. But matters are not made any easier by the fact that the texts we have are silent on the causal principle involved in the transformation: we have nothing to work with in this context that is comparable to the notion of *oikeiosis*. Rather, we are simply presented with assertions about the end result, and left to guess what the mechanism of the transformation is. Moreover, Stoics disagreed among themselves about the nature of the transformation. So what follows is necessarily quite speculative.¹⁵

It is clear enough that leaders of the Early Stoa, especially Chrysippus, vigorously opposed the Platonic conception of mind or soul. For one thing, the Stoics were always thoroughgoing materialists, and in their view mental events were physical objects. That alone put them at odds with Plato, not to mention in opposition to what we now call substance dualists of all sorts. But more to the point here, the Stoics rejected the notion that the mind of a mature human being was organized into separate faculties, functioning more or less autonomously, *and each capable by itself of causing a person to act.*

The emphasis in the preceding phrase is needed to avoid confusion. Stoics regularly used the language of mental faculties—speaking, for example, of “the commanding part” of the soul (reason), in opposition to impulses, emotions, or passions. But they held that once reason develops sufficiently, it always plays a decisive role in determining human conduct. In particular, they rejected Plato’s tripartite conception of the soul, at least insofar as it was committed to the view that our appetitive or “spirited” parts could be the immediate causes of action in an adult. Presumably the Stoics would have had the same objection to all the successors to Plato’s conception—including its recent counterparts in various versions of Freudian theory—though of course they would have been ultimately committed to accepting the best science on the matter. Similarly, they probably would have had difficulties with current theories of the modularity of mind.

What the Stoics offered instead was again a developmental account—one in which the gradual development of rationality, from infancy through childhood, ultimately transformed the mind in a fundamental way. The central feature of such development, they thought, was the way belief transformed impulse, affect, emotion, and passion. Here we must begin to interpolate and speculate to a significant extent. But the following seems plausible.

In infants, impulses and affective states are either spontaneous or a matter of reflex. They can be highly differentiated—stimulus and response-specific, as in the case of fear of a particular sound; quite generalized, as in fear of any dark bedroom; or generalized to the extent of a fundamental temperament (basic anxiety). But in the normal course of cognitive development, children begin to represent such experience propositionally, then to believe some and reject other propositions about the experience, and finally to “assent” to certain beliefs in a way that makes those beliefs the immediate causal determinants of action. Once that happens, the causal sequence that generates impulses and affective states can be reversed: such things can then be the *consequences* of beliefs, and be differentiated by the cognitive content of those beliefs. (Ghost stories about dark bedrooms can raise goose bumps.) Moreover, in the normal course of development, the practice of representing experience, and of assenting to beliefs about it, becomes relentless and pervasive for the child. This then has pervasive consequences for the occurrence and nature of our affective states. More

and more of them will be, as it were, supervenient upon our beliefs—and responsive to changes in those beliefs. Thus we find over and over in Stoic manuals that their advice for dealing with troublesome emotions is little more than persistent advice to get the facts right—to focus on correcting errors in one's beliefs.

The nature of the final step in the process is not very clear in the texts. At least it is not clear to me. Stoics evidently thought that children who developed normally would eventually cross a threshold and be transformed in a fundamental way—from animals whose conscious behavior was frequently determined directly by impulse, emotion, reflex, and routine, into animals whose conscious behavior was always directly caused by the beliefs to which they assented. (The Stoics apparently thought that this transformation usually occurred at about age fourteen.¹⁶) What was in dispute among Stoics themselves was the precise nature of this transformation, and perhaps the mechanism behind it.

We have very little evidence about what they thought the mechanism might be. One can suppose that something like a critical mass phenomenon might occur, so that once a large enough number and range of a child's emotional states were supervenient upon beliefs, the frequency and range of such experience would somehow feed on itself and increase of its own accord. Then if, as the Stoics imagined, the child's belief structure naturally tended toward global coherence, affective states supervenient on beliefs in a coherent set might be in some analogous way coherent (psychologically "consonant" rather than dissonant) and perhaps even mutually reinforcing. In that case one might often expect to find seamless modulation from one emotional state to the next, at least when the child is moving through a sequence of closely related beliefs. And even in cases of sharp discontinuity (induced, perhaps, by a sudden leap from one belief to another that is nowhere in the logical or psychological vicinity of the first), one might still expect to find the consequent, disjointed emotional states in harmony with one another. Moreover, one might suppose that this ever enlarging process might eventually crowd out primal impulses, affective reflexes, and spontaneous affect altogether. Perhaps Chrysippus held a view something like that. But perhaps not. Perhaps he had a mechanism in mind that was as original in its way as *oikeiosis* is in its. This seems unlikely if only because there does not seem to have been subsequent discussion of the matter. So one is reduced to speculation on this point. But by all accounts Chrysippus certainly did hold that the end result of the process was a mature, rational agent in whom "non-propositional" emotional states and impulses were absent.

Posidonius, an important member of the Middle Stoa, disagreed. He held that primal impulses and spontaneous emotions were never rooted out. Some commentators have thought that he was therefore returning to a Platonic account of mental faculties. But it now seems more reasonable to suppose that Posidonius remained firmly opposed to Plato on this point, and merely held

the quite reasonable view that primal impulses, affective reflexes, and spontaneous emotion operated throughout our adult lives in much the same way external stimuli do—as inputs with which we cope. The difference between children and mature adults on this score would then be in the swiftness and completeness with which their rationality captured such experience and either (a) interposed itself as the immediate causal source of our behavior, or (b) did that and in addition actually made emotion supervenient upon beliefs. This difference would count as a fundamental transformation if, for example, primal impulses, affective reflexes, and spontaneous emotion simply could not persist and blossom directly into action in healthy, mature adults—if instead, as quickly as such things emerged they would be nipped in the bud and replaced by propositional attitudes whose power to determine our conduct came wholly from our assent to the propositions involved. The mechanism for that sort of transformation might be simply that the child's practice of representing experience propositionally, once it gets going, quickly becomes imperialistic, and eventually operates always, everywhere in the child's experience. And then one can suppose that habituation could increase the speed, accuracy and completeness with which children propositionalize their experience.¹⁷ That would eventually lead to a situation in which there is little or no opportunity for spontaneous emotion ever to persist, let alone blossom into action.

Being transformed in that way would not, of course, entail the absence of wildly inappropriate emotions. Such emotions in an adult, however, would be generated by false or inconsistent beliefs—for example, beliefs that, when assented to, simply replicated or reinforced the motive power of inappropriate primal emotion. (Attorney: "You've got to get control of your anger. Think of the consequences." Client: "I'm *thinking* about *revenge*.") The therapy for them would be very different, then, than the therapy for violent and inappropriate emotion in a child. In the case of an adult, one would expect standard Stoic practice (much like its contemporary descendant, Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy) to work quite well across the board, because it is the adult's assent to inappropriate beliefs that is ultimately doing the causal work. In the case of children, one could have no such across-the-board expectation, and might often find that causing the child to "focus on the facts" would have no useful effect at all. For adults who are resistant to Stoic therapy, the proper course would be to find ways to get them to attend to the facts. For young children, the proper course would be to accelerate the imperialistic development of their efforts to capture their experience in propositional terms.

Concluding Remark

It may well be that the Stoics overstated the extent to which these two transformations—one in moral motivation and one in the relation between reason

and emotion—occurred in the normal course of development from infancy to what we would now call early adolescence (that is, age fourteen). The Stoics were, of course, vividly aware of the difficulties adults of all ages have in governing their emotions, and in acting appropriately. So they cannot have meant that cognitive and moral development was *complete* by the age of fourteen, and it seems peculiar to insist that even all the fundamental changes would be complete by that age. What is evidently missing is a developmental account of adolescence, and perhaps a stage theory of young, middle, and old age as well. And given the power and originality of the Stoic account of childhood development, it is tantalizing to try to imagine what they might have done if they had addressed themselves to later stages. But even though wishing is a Stoic-approved emotion,¹⁸ perhaps we should simply be grateful for what we already have from the Stoic tradition.

Notes

1. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Edited by T. E. Page and translated by R. D. Hicks. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd, 1931 [2nd century CE]. Book VII.

2. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Vol. I.

3. There is a lively debate among Hellenists about whether Stoic theology and cosmic teleology plays a logically necessary role in their ethics. Tony Long thinks it does. See, for example Long, "Stoic Eudaimonism," *Proceedings of the Boston Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1988): 77–101, reprinted along with other important papers in Long, *Stoic Studies*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. For opposition, see Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Ch 5, and Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis* Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1990.

4. Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, Translated by Phillip De Lacey. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984, I–II. In the course of his lengthy and scathing attack on Chrysippus throughout the work, Galen preserves some important fragments, not only of his target's arguments, but also (especially in Books IV–V) those of Posidonius, from the Middle Stoa.

5. From Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, at 1038 b. Quoted in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 348.

6. These theses are now often known as "cradle arguments," a term that by extension can apply to the entire account of moral development, beginning at the cradle. For a summary of such controversies and evidence of their prevalence in antiquity, see Brunschwig, "The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism," in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 113–44. He opens his essay this way:

"All the ancient philosophers, in particular those of our school, turn to cradles [*ad incunabula accedunt*] because it is in childhood [*in pueritia*] that they think we can most easily recognize the will of nature. . . ." Piso, disciple and mouthpiece of Antiochus of Ascalon in Cicero's *De Finibus*, is perfectly correct in his assertion (V 55): the moralists of the Hellenistic period, of whatever school, made frequent use of what may be called the *cradle argument*, that is, a procedure which consists first in describing (or in claiming to describe) the behavior and psychology of the child in the cradle (usually in conjunction with young animals) and then in drawing (or claiming to draw), more or less directly, certain conclusions which, in one way or another, lead to the formulation and justification of a moral doctrine. (113)

It should be noted that Brunschwig finds little evidence in the ancient texts to support the view that the philosophers involved did any systematic empirical, or even observational, work on the behavior of children. I do not dispute that as a statement about what is explicit in the texts, but I suggest that the nature of the Stoic account of psychological development gives us reason enough to believe that they were careful observers.

7. This passage from Cicero's *De Finibus* III.v is typical. Cato is speaking to Cicero on behalf of stoicism.

It is the view of those whose system I adopt, that immediately upon birth (for that is the proper point to start from) a living creature feels an attachment for itself, and an impulse to preserve itself and to feel affection for its own constitution and for those things which tend to preserve that constitution; while on the other hand it conceives an antipathy to destruction and to those things which appear to threaten destruction. In proof of this opinion [stoics] urge that infants desire things conducive to their health and reject things that are the opposite before they have ever felt pleasure or pain; this would not be the case, unless they felt an affection for their own constitution and were afraid of destruction. But it would be impossible that they should feel desire at all unless they possessed self-consciousness, and consequently felt affection for themselves. This leads to the conclusion that it is love of self which supplies the primary impulse to action. Pleasure on the contrary, according to most Stoics, is not to be reckoned among the primary objects of natural impulse; and I very strongly agree with them, for fear lest many immoral consequences would follow if we held that nature has placed pleasure among the earliest objects of desire. But the fact of our affection for the objects first adopted at nature's prompting seems to require no further proof than this, that there is no one who, given the choice, would not prefer to have all the parts of his body sound and whole, rather than maimed or distorted although equally serviceable.

And from Seneca, *Letters*, 121.15 Quoted in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 347:

A baby who is set on standing up and is getting used to supporting himself, as soon as he begins to try his strength, falls down and with tears keeps getting up

again until he has trained himself through pain to do what nature demands . . . A tortoise on its back feels no pain, but desire for its natural state makes it restless, and it does not stop struggling and shaking itself until it stands on its feet. So all animals are conscious of their own constitution, and this explains such easy handling of their limbs. . . . (3) Each period of life has its own constitution, one for the baby, and another for the boy, <another for the youth,> and another for the old man. They are all related appropriately to that constitution in which they exist.

Note the suggestion of a stage theory of development.

8. It was sometimes thought that the term and concept originated with Aristotle, but that has now been definitively rejected. See Pembroke, "Oikeiosis," in *Problems in Stoicism*, edited by A. A. Long, London: The Athelone Press, University of London, 1971, 112–49, for an analysis. *Oikeiosis* is to Stoic ethics what habituation is to Aristotle. And it is, in my view, their most original and important contribution to ethics.

9. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 351.

10. See Cicero, *De Finibus*, III.v–vi. Compare Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, VII, 85–88. There is a careful and illuminating analysis of the latter version in Long, "The Logical Basis of Stoic Ethics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1970–71): 85–104, which is reprinted in Long, *Stoic Studies*.

11. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, 322ff.

12. Long, and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 347–8, 349–50.

13. Either way then, Julia Annas is wholly convincing on the point that eudaimonistic ethics is not necessarily egocentric, and that the Stoics show us this in an especially clear way. See Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Part III.

14. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, Chap. 10.

15. For its outlines, and the identification of its few secure points, we are indebted to Kidd, "Posidonius on emotions," in *Problems in Stoicism*, edited by A. A. Long, 200–15; Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, and many other scholars. In particular, my account here owes a great deal to John Cooper's lucid recent paper Cooper, "Posidonius on Emotions," in *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Juha Sihvola, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, forthcoming.

16. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 7, 55–56, says "An animal's utterance is air that has been struck by an impulse, but that of a man is articulated and issues from thought, as Diogenes [of Babylon] says, and is perfected at the age of fourteen." Quoted in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 197. But notice that reason itself has completely emerged by age seven. See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 238, quoting from Aetius:

When a man is born, the Stoics say, he has the commanding-part of his soul like a sheet of paper ready for writing upon. On this he inscribes each one of his conceptions. (2) The first method of inscription is through the senses. For by perceiving something . . . they have a memory of it when it has departed. And when many memories of a similar kind have occurred, we then say we have

experience. For the plurality of similar impressions is experience. (3) Some impressions arise naturally . . . and undesignedly, others through our own instruction and attention. The latter are called 'conceptions' only, the former are called 'preconceptions' as well. (4) Reason, for which we are called rational, is said to be completed from our preconceptions during our first seven years.

17. Posidonius did make an important place for habituation in his psychology. See Cooper, "Posidonius on Emotions."

18. In a famous passage Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, VII.116, quoted here from Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 412, says:

(1) They [the Stoics] say that there are three good feelings: joy, watchfulness, wishing. (2) Joy, they say, is the opposite of pleasure, consisting in well-reasoned swelling [elation]; and watchfulness is the opposite of fear, consisting in well-reasoned shrinking. For the wise man will not be afraid at all, but he will be watchful. (3) They say that wishing is the opposite of appetite, consisting in well-reasoned stretching [desire]. (4) Just as certain passions fall under the primary ones, so too with the primary good feelings. Under wishing: kindness, generosity, warmth, affection. Under watchfulness: respect, cleanliness. Under joy: delight, sociability, cheerfulness.

References

- Annas, Julia. *The Morality of Happiness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Becker, Lawrence C. *A New Stoicism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Brunschwig, Jacques. "The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism." In *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker, 113–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *De Finibus*. [c. 45 B.C.] Edited by T.E. Page and translated by H. Rackham. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd, 1951.
- Cooper, John. "Posidonius on Emotions." In *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Juha Sihvola. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, forthcoming.
- Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. [2nd century CE] Edited by T.E. Page and translated by R.D. Hicks. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd, 1931.
- Engberg-Pedersen, Troels. *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis*. Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1990.
- Galen. *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*. [2nd century CE] Translated by Phillip De Lacey. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984.
- Inwood, Brad. *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Kidd, I.G. "Posidonius on Emotions." In *Problems in Stoicism*, edited by A. A. Long, 200–15. London: The Athelone Press, University of London, 1971.

- Long, A. A. "The Logical Basis of Stoic Ethics." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1970-71): 85-104.
- . "Stoic Eudaimonism." *Proceedings of the Boston Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1988): 77-101.
- . *Stoic Studies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- , and D.N. Sedley, eds. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Therapy of Desire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Pembroke, S. G. "Oikeiosis." In *Problems in Stoicism*, edited by A. A. Long, 112-49. London: The Athelone Press, University of London, 1971.