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The 17th Century Legacy of Neo-Stoic Ethics

James Mackey, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Hill, Benjamin D., *The University of Western Ontario*
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Abstract

Justus Lipsius was a 16th-century renaissance humanist and literary scholar who, crucially for the history of philosophy, was involved in the publication and reinterpretation of Stoic thought, primarily focusing on the works of Seneca. Despite a fair amount of scholarship on Lipsius's contribution to the history of philosophy, the role of Stoicism in the early to mid-17th century is still not well understood. In this thesis I show, through close examination of Lipsius's work, that Neo-Stoic ethics in the 17th century amounts to a view about the relationship between providence and human actions. After identifying ways that Stoic philosophy was used to explain this connection, I derive two key normative duties that are constitutive of a Neo-Stoic account of ethics: 1) a duty to accept the determinations of providence (whatever they may be) and 2) the duty to develop a large body of rational knowledge about the universe.

In the remainder of this thesis, I map the influence of these Neo-Stoic positions on Rene Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Nicolas Malebranche's moral philosophy. I contend that all these Cartesian-inspired thinkers draw upon the foundational components of Neo-Stoicism in their accounts of ethics. I first consider how the correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth represents a debate about the viability of certain Neo-Stoic theses. And then, I argue that Malebranche's moral philosophy should be read as the natural progression of the Neo-Stoic "seeds" planted throughout this correspondence. In developing a conceptual framework for what constitutes a Neo-Stoic position and mapping the influence of this system on prominent Cartesian thinkers, my thesis tells a conceptual story about the history of Stoicism. My thesis particularly seeks to emphasize the way that Stoicism becomes intertwined with the history of 17th century moral philosophy based on the desire of Early Modern figures to balance voluntarist and intellectualist intuitions.

Keywords

Neo-Stoicism, Lipsius, Descartes, Malebranche, Elisabeth, passions, providence, virtue, early modern philosophy, ethics, moral psychology, free will, history of philosophy

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis represents an attempt to explain what Neo-Stoicism is when we understand Neo-Stoicism as a movement of moral philosophy stemming from the late 16th and early 17th century. During this period there were several people writing about Stoicism because they had rediscovered Stoic texts that had been lost for thousands of years. The idea behind this thesis is that the way that Stoic views were recovered and integrated into the philosophical discussions of the time amounts to its own philosophical movement. And if we can define more precisely than we have so far what views make up this movement, then we can better explain the influence it had on the development of ethics in the 17th century overall.

In the first part of the thesis, I define Neo-Stoicism by looking at both classical Stoicism (the view of the original Ancient Greek Stoics) and "Neo-Stoicism" as we find it in one particularly influential Neo-Stoic commentator: Justus Lipsius. I suggest that a Neo-Stoic ethics make a couple key claims about the sorts of moral duties we have. First, a Neo-Stoic argues that we have a duty to accept whatever happens to us as the outcome of a "fate" or "fortune" which we cannot change. Neo-Stoics think that practicing this acceptance will make us happier. Second, a Neo-Stoic thinks that our ability to practice this acceptance is strongly correlated with the extent of our knowledge. So Neo-Stoics argue that we have a duty to listen to our reason and cultivate as much rational knowledge as we can. In the remainder of the thesis I show how the 17th century philosophers Rene Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Nicolas Malebranche all adopted variations of these Neo-Stoic views. I also show how each of them did some interesting things with these Neo-Stoic concepts that they inherit from Lipsius and other renaissance commentators.

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This thesis would not exist without the intentional (and sometimes unintentional) contributions of some very important people.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

1.1 The Problem of "Neo-Stoicism"

Unfortunately, the complex history of the way Stoicism has been interpreted, of its iterations and evolutions, has yet to be fully comprehended by scholars. For around one thousand years Stoic writings were lost or left untranslated. This was due to the destruction of most of the classical Stoic writings during the collapse of the Roman Empire. As with Aristotle, Stoicism was understood only through second-hand reports during the Medieval period until editions of some of the surviving Stoic texts were recovered. When popular translations and commentaries on Seneca, Epictetus, and others emerged towards the end of the 16th century they rapidly reintroduced the philosophy to the public. The way these translators and commentators understood Stoicism affected how it was conceived in the early modern period. Yet scholars have only recently begun to study the work of these figures.[1] The role of Stoicism in the 17th century, and its impact on the development of philosophy, is still not clearly understood.

One of the main obstacles to understanding the legacy of Stoicism in the 17th century is the lack of a contextually informed characterization of Stoicism in this period. Many scholars have identified "Neo-Stoic" positions in the work of early modern figures through a comparison with the Stoics as we understand them today. They identify something in a 17th century text that looks vaguely Stoic, find an analogue in a classical Stoic text or second-hand report, and argue that philosopher X had a "Neo-Stoic" view of topic Y. This sort of point-and-click methodology has led certain scholars to suggest Descartes has a Neo-Stoic position on the passions, and others to claim that Locke has a

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[1] See: Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*. Papy, "Justus Lipsius as Historian of Philosophy: The Reception of the Manuductio Ad Stoicam Philosophiam (1604) in the History of Philosophy." And Sellars, "Stoic Fate in Justus Lipsius's De Constantia and Physiologia Stoicorum."

Neo-Stoic account of self-ownership.[2] But the understanding of Stoicism that these comparisons are based on was not available to authors in the 17th century. Much like Scholastic philosophy, Stoicism experienced several waves of popularity. First there were the Greek Stoics who followed the school established by Zeno in the 2nd century BCE. This was followed by a second wave of popularity in Rome in the 1st and 2nd centuries due to figures like Seneca and Epictetus. Then the philosophy was (for the most part) lost until the 15th and 16th centuries when accounts of Stoicism in Diogenes and Cicero were recovered along with the writings of Seneca and Epictetus. The main figures involved in recovering these Stoic writings were interpreting Stoic ethics after several hundred years of debate in medieval philosophy between voluntarists and intellectualists about the power of the will. The result was that the accounts of Stoicism early modern figures like Descartes received were far different than our contemporary reconstructions of the ancient school.

In the face of this gulf between classical Stoicism and its recovery in the Renaissance, one might think it best to abandon any attempt to apply the term to 17th century figures. In fact, some scholars have even argued that the complex blend of philosophical influences combined by the humanists of the Neo-Stoic revival makes Neo-Stoicism too much of an amalgam of different philosophical approaches to constitute a meaningful label.[3] My goal in this dissertation is to push back against these intuitions. Despite the misguided methodology, I think that there is a meaningful sense of "Neo-Stoicism" that can be derived from studying the 16th century Stoic revival and its influence on 17th century thought. However, effectively discerning this influence requires that we take several careful steps which have not yet been taken by scholars working on this subject. First, we need to choose a clear "anchor-point" for defining what, exactly, constitutes a Neo-Stoic position. Just as we might use the Coimbrans or the work of

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[2] For Descartes see: Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind* and Pereboom, "Stoic Psychotherapy in Descartes and Spinoza." For Locke see: Hill and Nidumolu, "The Influence of Classical Stoicism on John Locke's Theory of Self-Ownership."

[3] Levi, *French Moralists* and Long, "The Logical Basis of Stoic Ethics."

Francisco Suarez for this purpose with Scholasticism, I contend that we should use the work of Renaissance humanists such as Justus Lipsius and Guillaume Du Vair for Stoicism. These authors produced the editions of Seneca and Epictetus that 17th century figures relied upon. As such, their interpretations of Stoic philosophy are *embedded* in any discussion of Stoic thought that followed.[4] Second, we need to use this anchor-point to develop a clear outline of what a Neo-Stoic system looks like. Rather than focusing on one or two discrete ideas that Lipsius or Du Vair had about Stoicism, we need to examine the overall picture of Stoicism that emerges from their thought. This is because it is this overall picture, not one or two discrete ideas, that influenced the translations and commentaries the Neo-Stoic humanists produced.

Finally, we need to stop looking for 17th century authors to tell us whether they are "Neo-Stoic" thinkers. If we consign ourselves only to the particular moments in which an Early Modern philosopher clearly states that they accept a Stoic position, we will be hard pressed to say anything meaningful about Stoicism in the period. Like Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics were *pagan* thinkers. However, unlike Plato and Aristotle, there was no rich history of commentary that sought to make the Stoics compatible with orthodox theology and philosophy. That tradition began with Lipsius and Du Vair in the late 16th century. In the 17th century it was not popular to refer to oneself as a "Stoic" or to embrace Stoic positions explicitly because it was not always clearly understood that these positions avoided heresy. In addition, much of the influence of authors like Lipsius and Du Vair concerns how they affected the perception of Stoicism by the public, and as an *indirect result* also academic discussions of the philosophy. Individual citations to a particular passage from Lipsius's or Du Vair's work are just not likely to be present. This means we need to take a broader view of Descartes and others to examine systematically whether or not it maps on to the picture of Stoicism that we can derive from the Renaissance commentators. If one insists that good history of philosophy concerns all and only the exact words a philosopher wrote on the page, then my project is not going to

[4] Just as is the case for the Coimbrans account of the Peripatetics, which is now acknowledged to have constituted a contextual feature of the scholastic education of Protestants.

be compelling. Using this methodology, one will be hard pressed to find Stoicism in the early modern period in any meaningful sense and will have to resign to never fully understanding it as its own philosophical movement. What I aim to do here is map out a conceptual story of the role of Stoic thinking in a particular segment of philosophical discussion in the 17th century, and I will do this by thinking abstractly about a legacy of Stoic concepts rather than a chain of footnotes to Seneca.

For the purposes of this project, I have focused on the conceptual legacy of Stoic ethics and moral philosophy. This is because Stoic ethical views are probably the most well-known and distinctive features of Stoic philosophical thinking. The Stoic depiction of life according to virtue as embodied by one of their famous "sages" is so distinctive that it is the one aspect of Stoicism that has made its way into our contemporary popular discourse.[5] As we will see, this was also the case in the Early Modern period. However, the Stoic views on ethics were also picked up during this period for the way in which they could be made to service 17th century moral problems. Stoicism offered thinkers of the time a means of navigating the voluntarist/intellectualist continuum of moral thinking that had developed in the Medieval period. By offering a nuanced account of the relationship between the individual and the universe they inhabit, Stoic concepts could be easily appropriated to explain the power of the human will with respect to the rest of God's creation. In what follows I want to briefly outline some of the context of late 16th and early 17th century ethical discussions to inform the conceptual story I tell about Neo-Stoicism in the rest of this project.

1.2 The Voluntarist/Intellectualist Continuum

In the Medieval period discussions of ethics changed their focus. The dominance of Christianity in both every day and academic life posed new questions for moral philosophers. Perhaps the most significant was the question of where (assuming they

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[5] I cannot remember how many times my father or I have praised one of our sports heroes for their "unflinching" or "Stoic" performance on the field.

exist) do moral rules and prescriptions *come from*? For Christian philosophers this question was also ultimately a question about the nature of God's will. If God is omnipotent and has created the entire world as we know it, then necessarily, all our moral prescriptions must be in some sense determinations of God's will. But there were several options available for explaining how this is the case. First, one might suggest that, because God's will is rational, he determines all of our moral duties based on the judgements of his infinitely wise reason. This approach, dubbed "Intellectualism", is tantamount to saying that moral properties obtain prior to an act of the divine will because God's reason determines what they will be.[6] In contrast, one might argue that – if we are to adequately preserve God's role as the *creator* of moral properties – we need to say that God's will itself, and not his reason, determines what they will be. This approach, dubbed "Voluntarism", maintains that absent God there would be no moral properties because these things only exist as a result of acts of the divine will.[7] Throughout the Medieval period there was a constant clash between thinkers in each of these camps.

Whether one is committed to the intellectualist or voluntarist picture determines much of their subsequent views on moral action. In the intellectualist picture moral properties are instantiated in the divine intellect. This means that, if we understand the human intellect as a reflection of the divine intellect, virtuous actions depend on the judgements of human reason. For an intellectualist, the will pursues something only insofar as it is cognized as "good" or "right" by the intellect.[8] Our will behaves like God's will and follows the best determinations of our reason. Because our reason, albeit finite and limited, shares to some extent in God's reason our rational cognitions are reliable and accurate determinations of what is morally good. Intellectualists supposed that, necessarily, our will has to follow these cognitions otherwise there would be no

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[6] Rossiter, "Hypothetical Necessity and the Laws of Nature" p.1 and 2.

[7] Ibid, p.2.

[8] Penner, "Free and Rational" p.8.

possibility of moral action in the first place. As a result, on this view all moral failures are necessarily explained by failures of our intellect. In the voluntarist picture, however, moral properties are not instantiated anywhere. They are simply the result of various acts of God's will. In this picture our minds do not have any special access to knowledge of moral properties through our rational faculty. As a result, voluntarists rejected the intellectualist claim that moral actions are a product of how we judge. Instead, they saw moral actions as a product of how well an agent can match their will to God's own. This led many of them to posit what Scotus called a "superabundant sufficiency" in the will to shape itself freely from any sort of external determinations.[9] For the voluntarists, reason was considered a servant of the will that could be put to good or bad uses accordingly. People are "good" or "bad" based on the quality of their will alone and not the capacity of their intellect.

By the early modern period the battle between voluntarism and intellectualism had run its course. Nobody in this period can be accurately described as strictly voluntarist or strictly intellectualist. Instead there was a continuum, or as Robert Adams describes a "spectrum" between extreme and moderate views.[10] Elliot Rossiter nicely summarizes the contrast between these positions as follows:

> While both positions hold that some moral properties obtain prior to an act of divine willing, we may say that a moderate voluntarist holds that a certain class of moral properties, namely the obligations present in the duties of the natural law, requires an act of divine willing in order to obtain. The moderate intellectualist, however, holds that these obligations obtain prior to an act of divine willing (even though she may admit that other moral properties depend on the divine will).[11]

This distinction carries with it implications for the accounts of moral action that follow. According to Rossiter, moderate intellectualists and moderate voluntarists disagree only about the moral properties present in the duties of the natural law. Moderate voluntarists hold that moral laws of nature would not exist if God did not exist whereas moderate

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[9] Hoffmann, *Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy* p.121.

[10] Adams, "Voluntarism and the Shape of a History."

[11] Rossiter, "Hypothetical Necessity and the Laws of Nature" p.3.

intellectualists hold that they could exist independently of God. What this means is that, supposing that there are some moral properties baked-in to the structure of the universe, for intellectualists these properties are things that can (in theory) be discerned by a finite human intellect. They constitute moral duties that exist on account of the way that the world is structured. For a moderate voluntarist, even though there are some moral duties present in the duties of natural law these moral duties depend on God's will to obtain. So, whatever it is that we can discern about the moral properties baked-in to the structure of the world, this could (in theory) be changed by an act of the divine will.[12] Which means that even if our intellect has the capacity to discern these moral properties it does not have the capacity to *know* them without God's assistance, because God can always change what they are.

Imagine that a person experiences powerful emotions which are, somehow, an essential part of the structure of the world. They arise from necessity on account of the way the world is designed.[13] Supposing that I have some moral duty to resist the influence these feelings can exert on my actions, then the way this duty is explained will differ for both moderate voluntarists and moderate intellectualists. For a moderate intellectualist, after intellectually discerning the undue influence an experience of emotion has on my actions, I ought to conclude that I have a moral duty to mitigate the influence of this emotion. For a moderate voluntarist, I might intellectually discern the undue influence of an emotion, but I don't *know* that I have a moral duty to mitigate this effect without God's help. So, the moral duty I discern with respect to my emotions becomes simply a duty to ask God for assistance, or more specifically, to pray for

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[12] To be more precise, when I say that God could "in theory" change these properties I do not mean that he could change them in practice, as no author in this period would concede that God actively intervenes in the world (short of miracles). What I intend to pick out here is these sense in which, for moderate voluntarists, there are a class of moral properties that *cannot be known* because they do not correspond to ideas that God has, they correspond to a decision God makes. The upshot of the moderate voluntarist view is simply that God *could have made a different decision* about the moral properties in the world that arise from the natural law, and this would not have any effect on the value of the world. For the moderate voluntarist this is not the case as God's intellect determines that specifically these specific moral properties exist.

[13] We will see some Early Modern explanations of how this is the case later on in this project.

forgiveness.[14] For moderate voluntarists and moderate intellectualists the class of moral duties that we must discern from the natural workings of the world carry vastly different implications for how we should behave with respect to them. Because moderate intellectualists think that the intellect can discern the moral properties present in the duties of natural law, they see moral action depending *more* on the operations of the intellect. For moderate voluntarists, since we are not capable of intellectually determining the moral duties present in the duties of natural law, moral action becomes a function of simply directing our will in the most appropriate manner possible.[15]

Prior to the Early Modern period, there was a rich historical tradition of thinkers attempting to mediate between these two approaches to moral philosophy. The first of note was John Buridan. The essence of Buridan's view was to separate the will from the intellect by a further degree than was commonly supposed. The will and the intellect, he thinks, are separate powers that operate on *discrete occasions*. The intellect always and necessarily makes an initial judgement of the goodness or badness of an object. However, this judgement produces a *feeling* in the will about the goodness or badness of the object which, though not binding, can affect whether the will decides to pursue or avoid said object.[16] Jack Zupko argues that the essence of Buridan's view comes from his recognition that appearances are often contradictory.[17] Experience demonstrates that it is often quite possible to perceive some object as simultaneously good and bad. When I buy a new guitar, I always have conflicting feelings as I pay for it. On the one hand, sitting on the counter of the music store is this new instrument that I have painstakingly picked out

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[14] This is a bit facetious because not all explanations of Christianity require that we ask God for help in this manner. Nevertheless, I think the point is clear. Moderate voluntarists cannot accept moral duties apart from the list given to them by God (usually represented in religious texts like the Bible).

[15] "Moral action" here, and throughout this thesis, refers to a broader sense of action than just doing the right thing. Moral philosophy at this time was still more concerned with how to live a good life than it was with particular actions.

[16] See: Zupko, "Freedom of Choice in Buridan's Moral Psychology" p.81 and 82.

[17] Ibid, p.82.

and am excited to spend hours playing. But on the other hand, the debit machine displays quite clearly the significant impact such a purchase is going to have on my bank account. It is impossible not to also consider in this moment the countless other uses I could have made of my money.[18] Buridan's view takes note of this sort of experience and ascribes to the will the power to choose based on the way that our judgement is suspended in these moments. Since my intellect does not always possess a clear idea of the best course of action, it must be the case that it only provides my will with a feeling which my will can either accept or ignore. This creates the space to be both determined and not determined by the output of our reason.

Buridan's view was quite influential in the Renaissance when more moderate voluntarist and intellectualist accounts emerged. These Renaissance thinkers were themselves particularly interested in applying Buridan's strategy to the influence of the passions on the soul.[19] One of the clearest 16th century examples of this influence comes from John Mair. Mair was a Scottish humanist who spent time in both England and France and was known for an influential commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.*[20] In this text voluntarist and intellectualist themes arise in Mair's discussion of *akrasia*. In explaining how it is possible for someone to act against their best judgement Mair raises the issue of what faculty, ultimately, is responsible for moral action. Mair's goal is to explain how a person can go against their best judgement without being ignorant about what that best judgment amounts to. The first part of Mair's solution appeals to experiences of passion. Our emotions constitute "perturbations" which disturb the ability of our reason to function as it normally would.[21] But this disturbance does not

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[18] Even if, scientifically, this conflicting experience does not in fact happen simultaneously, I think most readers would acknowledge that these discrete moments of assessment are not really discernible from one another in practice.

[19] Why this focus on the passions emerged I am not certain. But I suspect that it would have had something to do with the spirit of the time during the renaissance, as intellectuals suddenly became more interested in emotions and irrationality than they had been in previous centuries.

[20] Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought* p.85.

[21] Ibid, p.87.

amount to obscuring our rational judgment completely, as some more extreme voluntarists argued. Mair argues instead that what happens in instances of *akrasia* is that our will makes a mistake as to the type of command issued by our intellect about the course of action we should pursue. Our intellect judges that X "is to be followed." However, due to the influence of an emotional disturbance, our will understands "is to be followed" as a *performative* command rather than a moral command.[22] That is to say, because we are emotional about the object in question, we mistake the force of the *ought* derived by our reason. As for Buridan, Mair argues that two pieces of contradictory information combine in the soul at the same time to create conditions where the will can dissent from reason's best judgement.

A similar viewpoint was articulated in Italy by Francisco Piccolomini in his textbook on ethics *De Moribus*.[23] In discussing both Plato and Aristotle on moral action Piccolomini finds himself considering what causes a person to go wrong. His answer is twofold. First, as was traditional, Piccolomini asserts that knowing something in a confused or unclear manner, as is the case in experiences of passion, can lead to moral errors. But second, and perhaps more importantly, he thinks that we can possess knowledge of the good "habitually" without this knowledge being used.[24] What would this sort of moral failure look like? Suppose that I become angry with someone and lash out at them. I might "know" that lashing out in anger is morally suspect. Perhaps I have thought a lot about the sorts of negative consequences that ensue when I take such an action. But in the moment when some object issues an emotional disturbance that disrupts my reason, this knowledge fails to have the same effect on my will that it otherwise would have. For all of Buridan, Mair, and Piccolomini, there are circumstances that arise in the course of nature which create space for my will to dissent from the best judgment of my reason. However, in all these cases this dissent is possible because there are

[22] Ibid, p.91.

[23] Saarinen notes that this work was read predominantly in Protestant universities. Ibid, p.95.

[24] Ibid, p.100.

multiple intellectually compelling courses of action available. What happens when I fail to choose the best one is simply that my will misunderstands the "feeling" imparted to it by the judgements of the intellect. My will gives assent to a less than desirable course of action, but it does so for extremely enticing reasons. It was within this murky conceptual space between the initial judgement of the intellect and the final decision of the will that most (if not all) Renaissance thinkers sought to mediate between voluntarism and intellectualism.

The advent of the Reformation added another significant wrinkle to the development of this debate. This was because, ultimately, the voluntarist/intellectualist split in the Middle Ages had backed into a discussion of God's power. This debate centred around the notions of *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. *Potentia absoluta* referred to God's absolute power to will any number of scenarios while *potentia ordinata* referred to God's power as instantiated in one of two contradictory alternatives.[25] If one accepts the intellectualist notion that moral properties are instantiated in God's reason, then moral properties become a function of God's *potentia ordinata* rather than *potentia absoluta*. Some voluntarists worried that this might threaten God's role as the omnipotent judge of our lives and our salvation.[26] They argued as a result that instead we must think of moral properties as a function of God's absolute power. Though this philosophical debate had evolved by the time of the Reformation it is not difficult to see the connection between the reformer's motives and this philosophical question of God's power. The Protestants wanted to re-establish that human salvation was completely and entirely dependent on the efficacy of God's grace.[27] To do this they needed to connect morality with God's *potentia absoluta* rather than *potentia ordinata*, preserving the infinite power of God to judge.

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[25] Courtenay, Capacity and Volition p.156.

[26] See: Hoffman, *Free Will* ch.3

[27] Poppi, "Problems of Knowledge and Action" p.661.

Both Luther and Calvin invoked an understanding of providence which did not impose any limits on God's will.[28] For these figures God has made the ultimate determination of human being's relative worth, judging unfavorably that we are born sinners, and this decision of his will has put salvation out of the reach, in particular, of our finite intellect. The only way to uphold a moral life for Luther is to cultivate one's faith in the hopes of receiving the intervention of God's grace.[29] This Protestant revolution in religious orthodoxy inspired in turn, through Luther's students, a philosophical vision of morality where what most fundamentally determines our praise or blame is the disposition we build within ourselves to believe in God and love what God sends our way. This was explained using the notion of moral conscience. Take for example the view of John Mair. Mair argues that when a person acts against the best judgment of their reason, they do so despite their intellect functioning correctly. This happens because our will confuses the moral obligation to follow reason with a simple performative command which can be ignored. Though this *akrasia* happens naturally, Mair thought that we are culpable in these instances because we act against our own moral conscience.[30] This is to say that, even though we perhaps could not have avoided going wrong, our will violated what we know deep down to be the best course of action. And this conscience, shaped by the direction of our will, is what God judges over and above what we do or fail to do. So, virtue on this account becomes almost entirely a matter of how we direct our will.

Calvin himself also advocated a similar view on the role of moral conscience. However, for Calvin it was important to emphasize that, despite God's infinite *potentia absoluta*, God's providence operates in a rational manner.[31] Lagerlund and Hill suggest that this makes Calvin's understanding of providence quite a bit more intellectualist than

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[28] Cochran, *Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics* p.142.

[29] Ibid, p.94.

[30] Saarinen, *Weakness of Will* p.95.

[31] Cochran, *Protestant Virtue* p.145.

his reformation counterparts.[32] Calvin argued that God predetermines through his *potentia ordinata* who will be saved and who will not be saved. Through an elaborate sequence of causal events God determines the course of the entire universe by his unlimited power. And God has already decided prior to creation whether each individual person will live a life worthy of a Christian, thus predetermining their salvation. This idea of "predestination" made Calvin's account of the reformed faith distinct from Luther and others. It caused much controversy because Calvin's view seems, from a distance, to make God responsible for creating all the sinful people who never find their way back to faith. However, for our purposes it is not necessary to entertain this theological debate. What is important about Calvin's view is the way it demonstrates the pull of moderate intellectualist intuitions. Despite maintaining a view of moral conscience quite like Mair that was intended to make moral behaviour a function of the will alone, Calvin desired to emphasize nonetheless that God's power and act of creation were rational. This led him down the path towards predestination and determinism. There is, for Calvin, a significant sense in which our reason can understand providence in a similar manner to God and help us on our quest towards living a life of good faith. But Calvin still aims to ground God's providence in his infinitely efficacious will and assert the necessity of God's grace for human salvation, and as such he maintains the generally voluntaristic bend to reformation theology.

This survey constitutes a summary of the main contextual developments that informed early modern discussions of ethics.[33] Because of the continuum between voluntarism and intellectualism, ethics morphed into a discussion of what we now call "moral psychology." Stoicism was an appealing source of ideas within this framework for several reasons. First, the increased emphasis on the role of the passions in the

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[32] Lagerlund and Hill, "Ethics" p.532.

[33] When I say this I am, of course, completely ignoring the political context that informed discussions we find in Machiavelli and Hobbes. One always must pick and choose, when discussing "ethics", what particular topics are identified by that label. Because, in the early modern period, ethics was far broader than it is for us now. But hopefully this introduction makes it clear to my readers that I am primarily concerned with accounts at the individual psychological level which explain how to become virtuous.

voluntarist/intellectualist debate. As discussed, because moderate voluntarists and moderate intellectualists were focused specifically on the duties inherent in the natural law, explaining what to do about the passions was a key issue. The Stoics happened to offer a more advanced discussion of passions (*eupatheia*) than we find in Plato or Aristotle. And additionally, the classical Stoic discussion of passions was heavily influenced by their materialism (as we will see). This made their account of passions fit more coherently with developing early modern science. But second, and more important, was the desire of thinkers in both voluntarist and intellectualist camps to develop a moral psychology that attributed a significant role to both the intellect and the will. Broadly speaking, the reason Stoic concepts constitute a useful means of navigating the voluntarist/intellectualist continuum is because the Stoics were intellectualists who happened to also be quite interested in personal responsibility. The Stoic picture of the world made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to explain human action as something other than the immediate product of external influences on the mind. But nevertheless, despite lacking the conceptual resources to explain human autonomy, the Stoics took great pains to explain the responsibility human beings possess to shape their intellect. This account of controlling not what our intellect *does* but what it is *likely* to do formed, in my view, a very useful point of contact for early moderns grappling with similar problems in their own context.

1.3 Understanding Early Modern Stoicism

The goal of this dissertation is to examine in detail the way that Stoic philosophy was used by several Early Modern thinkers to develop accounts of moral philosophy that balance some of the above intuitions. There are two related questions that I want to answer. First, I want to explain what (if anything) constitutes the basis of a "Neo-Stoic" position when we understand "Neo-Stoic" to refer specifically to early modern Stoicism. If we want to understand the influence that Stoicism had in the period we need to know what "Stoic" positions we can reasonably expect to find in the work of Early Modern figures. Second, I want to explain what influence these Neo-Stoic positions had on the development of 17th century discussions of ethics. It is well and good to come up with a

clear conception of a philosophical movement like "Neo-Platonism" or "Scholasticism." But unless we can also illustrate that this movement had some degree of influence on the thinking of other historical figures, it at best constitutes a nice historical anecdote. A better understanding of 17th century Stoicism requires a conceptual story about how "Neo-Stoic" ideas solved certain problems that the Early Moderns had. In other words, we need to explain why a Neo-Stoic view would have been compelling to someone like Descartes, not simply that he held it.

The first chapter of this thesis will develop an explanation of what constitutes a Neo-Stoic view of ethics in the 17th century. I will do this by comparing our contemporary understanding of classical Stoic ethics with the work of Justus Lipsius, a Renaissance philosopher and humanist who was himself responsible for much of the popularity of Stoicism in the Early Modern period. The big idea in this chapter is that we get a clearer understanding of what Neo-Stoicism amounts to if we determine this systematically in reference to a set of interconnected descriptive theses and normative claims. I will develop these theses by distilling the most essential components of what I understand to be the classical Stoic view of living virtuously. I will then compare these theses with Lipsius's work and consider what he has to say about each of them. This process will reveal the basic contours of a Neo-Stoic approach to the pursuit of virtue. I've chosen Lipsius as the figurehead of this part of the project due to the scope of his influence and his connection to other classical Stoic figures. There were, to be sure, other people heavily involved in the repatriation of Stoic philosophy in the late 16th century.[34] But the accounts of these figures are lacking in some sense or another when compared to Lipsius. Montaigne and Charron, for example, are much less thorough in their treatments of Stoicism and are really only interested in lifting from Stoicism a kind of thought-process which they use to buoy their skepticism. The appeal of Lipsius's work is that he comprehensively discusses Stoic philosophy to outline their views in an intellectually honest fashion. He also was responsible for reproducing a major edition of Seneca's work

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[34] Michel de Montainge, Pierre Charron, and Guillaume Du Vair were probably the most important Neo-Stoics aside from Lipsius.

with some associated manuals of his own. This makes him an apt representative of Neo-Stoicism for the purposes of this thesis because Seneca was the main point of contact for both Descartes and Malebranche's discussions of Stoicism.

The second and third chapters of this thesis seek to develop a partial answer to my second question of how Neo-Stoicism influenced the development of Early Modern ethics. One of the most significant instances of Stoic thinking in the 17th century occurs in René Descartes's correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. Elisabeth asks Descartes about a series of questions concerning how she ought to live. Descartes replies suggesting that they read Seneca, and in the ensuing letters proceeds to borrow a lot of Stoic and Neo-Stoic ideas as he develops a response to Elisabeth's worries. This correspondence sees Descartes and Elisabeth connect ideas of how to live virtuously with Seneca, and more importantly, sees them both take up ideas extremely reminiscent of the picture of Stoic philosophy developed by Justus Lipsius. My second chapter will examine this correspondence in depth and sketch both Descartes's and Elisabeth's respective views on Neo-Stoicism. In the final substantive chapter of this project I turn my attention to Descartes's most famous follower, Nicolas Malebranche and argue that the Neo-Stoic framework developed in my previous chapters offers a compelling explanation of his moral project. This argument involves three steps. First, diffusing the harsh criticisms of Stoicism that Malebranche gives in his *Search After Truth*. Second, illustrating the theoretical similarities between Malebranche's project and the Neo-Stoic picture of the world. And finally, arguing that a Neo-Stoic reading is, in fact, the best interpretation of Malebranche's recommendations for how we can live virtuously.

What will emerge by the end of this thesis is a significant step towards a conceptual story about the history of Stoic ethics. By outlining the theses that constitute a Neo-Stoic approach to virtue I develop a framework for identifying the Stoic themes and positions in 17th century works. And by applying this framework to the ideas of Descartes, Elisabeth, and Malebranche I hope to have demonstrated both how Neo-Stoic ideas were invoked by these authors, as well as how we might discern them in the work of other thinkers who are not considered here. The result of this effort is, I believe, a significant stepping stone in our understanding of the history of Stoic thought. I establish

in no uncertain terms that Stoic themes were an important part of major discussions of ethics in the 17th century. Additionally, I develop throughout this thesis a broader conception of Stoicism than what can currently be found in the secondary literature. In so doing, I believe my thesis also illustrates possible roles that Stoicism might play in other moments of the history of philosophy, where the movement's key ideas and arguments have not been so commonly sought.

Chapter 2

2 Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism

2.1 Reconciling "Stoicisms"

The goal of this chapter is to map out two different pictures of Stoic ethics. First, the one presented by the classical Greek and Roman Stoics, and second, that presented by Lipsius in the late 16th century over a thousand years later. The purpose of outlining these accounts of Stoicism is to try and answer what, if anything, constitutes the basis of a Stoic approach to ethics. My project is particularly concerned to answer this question with respect to the resurgence of Stoic ideas in the 17th century. So this chapter will be focused on understanding Lipsius's account of the philosophy. However, to properly make sense of the relationship between Lipsius's Neo-Stoicism and traditional Stoicism we need to use the Greek and Roman authors as an anchor point. It needs to be demonstrated that there are some legitimate conceptual foundations shared between each iteration of Stoic thinking, otherwise there really is no point identifying one with the other. Additionally, it is important to show some of the ways that Stoicism transforms in the early modern period. Our neglect of this is one of the reasons that we have not been able to do a very good job explaining the role of Stoic ideas in Early Modern thinking. To remedy this, we need to start from a basic understanding of what the classical Stoic school amounted to in the first place.

I will begin this chapter by mapping out what I take to be the key ethical positions of the classical Stoic school. However, this will be done with a significant caveat. I do not intend to exhaust everything that can be said about classical Stoic ethics. Further, I do not even intend to give an overview of the positions that we think of today as being most central to Stoic ethics. There will be very little talk in this chapter, for instance, of "preferred indifferents," which usually makes up a significant portion of modern

introductions to Stoic ethics.[35] I am primarily concerned with the classical Stoic views that would have informed the understanding that Lipsius and other early moderns had of their ethics. This means that Stoic doctrines such as the doctrine of providence, which nowadays usually gets lumped in with Stoic physics, will occupy most of my attention in this chapter. My approach in this chapter will be to formalize the key philosophical principles that constitute a Stoic worldview (in my view there are four), and then to examine how these principles interact to generate what I call "normative duties." This schema allows us to extract everything we need from classical Stoicism while representing their views fairly, allowing the rest of the chapter to focus on Lipsius's early modern variations upon the Stoics' principles.

Regarding Lipsius, the aim of this chapter is to try and discern the account of Stoicism that he developed throughout many years of study and writing. This means extracting a lot of text and reasoning out what philosophical principles inform Lipsius's account. In so doing I aim to compare Lipsius's versions of the classical Stoic principles with their ancient analogues. This will allow the reader to locate specifically the places where Lipsius makes changes to the classical Stoic view. In so doing my chapter will map out classical Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism side by side, bringing into relief those features which are particular to the early modern variant. Once we can clearly see what is unique about Neo-Stoicism, as well as what keeps it firmly connected with classical Stoic cannon, we will have a picture of Stoicism that we can actually use to assess its role in the thought of more popular 17th century philosophers: namely, Descartes, Elisabeth, and Malebranche.

2.2 Classical Stoicism

Stoic ethics is a naturalist view. This means that Stoics conceive of the ethical ideal in terms of living in agreement with nature. Of course, depending on which Stoic

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[35] See: Inwood, *Stoicism* ch.5, for example.

you ask, what it means to live in agreement with nature can widely vary. Lawrence Becker has explained this commitment in perhaps the most widely applicable manner:

> [living well is] the product of following the final, all-things-considered normative propositions of practical reason, and [for a Stoic naturalist] those normative propositions [cannot] be constructed a priori but rather depend crucially on the fullest available knowledge of the natural world.[36]

This is to assert that ethics is fundamentally a matter of moving from descriptive theses about the state of the world to normative claims about how individuals ought to act.[37] Stoic ethics finds the individual situated in a world that is a certain way and asks, in respect of this situation, what behaviours are best. To map this school of ethical thought through its conceptual changes we need to know which descriptive theses and normative claims are an essential part of this project.

The goal of classical Stoic ethics, which they shared with all ancient Greek traditions, was to master the art of flourishing or "living well" [*eudaimonia*].[38] Elucidating Stoic ethics requires that we explain how following a set of normative recommendations derived from the nature of the world can lead to this state of flourishing. I propose to explain this somewhat unconventionally by presenting Stoicism as a theodicy. There are two reasons for doing this. First, materially, every variation of Stoicism contains some kind of psychological account of how to react when bad things happen. This core aspect of Stoic philosophy was received by the early moderns as part of their conceptual toolbox for the project of theodicy, as theodicy is similarly concerned with explain why God allows bad things to occur. So, approaching Stoicism from the perspective of theodicy makes the most sense if we want to understand the way it was received in the 17th century.

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[36] Becker, *A New Stoicism* p.23.

[37] Which means, yes, Stoic ethics requires that we derive an "ought" from an "is", a non-starter for many today. See the rest of Becker, *Stoicism* for an argument that tries to motivate the Stoic view with respect to contemporary concerns.

[38] Stephens, "The Stoics and Their Philosophical System."

But there is a deeper conceptual connection between the Stoic project and the project of theodicy. Daniel Speak explains the project of theodicy as demonstrating "what God's morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil might very well be."[39] This project involves showing that two different claims are plausible. First, that a world containing goods and evils comparable to ours is better than a world containing neither (what Speak calls the "value claim"). And second, that it would be impossible for God to secure a world containing goods comparable to ours without it also containing evils comparable to ours (the "impossibility claim").[40] This is where we get our conceptual similarity. Because the Stoics want to derive their normative recommendations from descriptive facts about the world they also must maintain that there are ways the world could not be, otherwise there would be no descriptive facts sufficient to derive a normative "ought." The Stoic's commitment to naturalism forces them to accept that there is some kind of unchangeable nature of the universe. And it is from this nature that they draw their descriptive theses. The project of theodicy, as we have seen, fundamentally requires that one tries to validate the nature of God's creation. For both groups, the challenges that individual human agents will face are (to some extent) "baked in" to the nature of the universe. As a result of this, Stoic ethics has something to say about the value of our world in comparison to a world with no evil at all.

This project of theodicy has a strong connection with early modern moral thought. Of course, it is in this period that "theodicy" gets its name thanks to Leibniz. But prior to this, philosophers were still deeply concerned with explaining how God created a world in which evil exists. We saw above that the preeminent questions for early modern moral thought concerned the status of the moral duties inherent in the duties of natural law, as well as the way God's will establishes these duties. These questions dovetail with the project of theodicy because they fundamentally depend on explaining the nature of the world and the nature of God's will. A theodicy, per Speak, will establish claims about both the nature of evil things that happen in the world (through the "value claim") and the

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[39] Speak, *The Problem of Evil* p.191.

[40] Ibid, p.193.

nature of God's will (through the "impossibility claim"). This means that a theodicy carries implicit explanations of the duties that might be inherent in the natural laws of the world and the way God's will establishes these duties. So, when we recognize how Stoicism can be interpreted as a form of theodicy, we also start to recognize the value of Stoic philosophy for answering some key questions of early modern moral philosophy.

My reconstruction of the basic principles of classical Stoic ethics will take the following presentation. If we think of theodicy as, most fundamentally, the project of explaining God's reasons for permitting evil, then what a theodicy is really concerned with is God's rational intention. The concept that picks this out best in both the classical and Neo-Stoic lexicon is the notion of *providence*. So, I will begin by explaining what the classical Stoics thought about providence and the closely connected concept of *fate*. Then, once we understand the ways that providence and fate shape the universe for the Stoics, we can examine how these powerful forces affect the psychology of individual human agents. Here the classical Stoics offer us novel concepts of *freedom* and *action*. This is where Stoic explain how ethical challenges are baked into the structure of the world. In classical Stoicism this is also the point where we get a powerful explanation of what exactly human beings ought to do given the sort of universe they inhabit. So, by tracing out the classical Stoics' descriptive claims regarding providence, fate, freedom, and action I will also draw out two of their most important normative principles.

2.2.1 Providence and Fate

Classical Stoic physics regarded the world as a unified network of causally connected bodies with no ontological gaps. The Stoics explained change in this materialist picture by appealing to an active principle (*pneuma*) which was "responsible both for the cohesion, form, and change of the cosmos as a whole, and for the individuation,

cohesion, form, change and duration of the objects in the world."[41] Diogenes summarizes the argument as follows:

> That the cosmos is a living being, rational, endowed with a soul, and intelligent is asserted by Chrysippus in the first book of his work On Providence, by Apollodorus in his Physics, and by Posidonius. It is a living being in that it is a substance endowed with a soul and sensation. For the living being is better than the nonliving; and there is nothing better than the cosmos; therefore the cosmos is a living being. And it is endowed with a soul, as is clear from the fact that each of our souls is a fragment of it (DL 7.142-143).

What the Stoics mean when they say that "the living is better than the nonliving" is that living things are teleological. Having an end, or a purpose towards which one strives, is better than having no end and subsequently no motion or activity.[42] The world must have an end because it is simply a composite of individuals, and we know that individuals themselves have purposes and are ensouled. The world is the highest form of life and, therefore, must have all that other forms of life possess.[43] As Bernard Collette explains, this constituted a cosmobiological approach which saw the universe as a living organism ensouled with a rational mind (which they called "God").[44] The activities of each individual thing were explained in virtue of the motion of this world-soul.

Once they established the existence of a "world-soul" the Stoics argued that this world-soul, like our soul, was an intentional being. This led the Stoics to conclude that the world was governed by what they called "providence", which for them simply amounted to the rational intentionality of the world-soul. This distinguished their ontology from other materialists like the Atomists who thought that the world was inherently chaotic and disordered.[45] Cicero provides a description of this argument in *De Natura Deorum*.

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[41] Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* p.17.

[42] For the Greeks there was simply no notion of activity without an end or goal.

[43] For more on this argument see: Collette, *The Stoic Doctrine of Providence* ch.3.

[44] Ibid, p.23.

[45] Ibid, p.39.

> When we gaze up ward to the sky and contemplate the heavenly bodies, what can be so obvious and so manifest as that there must exist some power possessing transcendent intelligence by whom these things are ruled?… If a man doubts this, I really cannot see why he should not also be capable of doubting the existence of the sun; how is the latter fact more evident than the former? (Cicero ND II.4-5)

Cicero thinks it would be impossible to explain any of the regularity or immensity of the processes we perceive in the natural world were it not for the existence of a rational world-soul governing the world. Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus all offered variations of this same argument that Cicero summarizes.[46] So, after securing that the world is ensouled through an appeal to teleology, the Stoics would argue that this teleological structure of the world was necessarily organized and rational. Attributing this organization to the world-soul, or "God", the Stoics concluded that God structures the world via his own rational and end-directed intentions. These intentions, which amounted to the design of the world itself, were what the classical Stoics understood as "providence." And once we adopt the Stoic materialist picture with a rational, end-directed, world-soul producing the motions and activity of all individual objects, it is quite natural to say that everything is "determined" by this providence.

This notion of providence is to be distinguished from the related Stoic concept of "fate." For the Stoics, fate referred to the sequences of causes through which the designs of providence were carried out. They thought that fate causally determined the events of the world. But the Stoics conceived of the relationship between causes and effects differently than we do today. They thought that causes and effects were part of two separate ontological categories.[47] Causes were conceived as bodies whose activity was responsible for a process or change. In contrast effects were understood to be not bodies but immaterial qualities or changes of state in a body that was acted upon. For modern readers living in a post Newtonian world this is a strange view. Accepting that every action has an equal and opposite reaction we tend to think that a material body exerting some kind of force to "cause" something will necessarily produce an effect which is

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[46] Algra, "Stoic Theology" p.161.

[47] Frede, "Stoic Determinism".

similar in kind. When I throw a ball, my hand exerts force which *causes* the ball to fly through the air. But the Stoics were thinking about the world as a kind of organism. For them, the force of my hand *would* constitute the movement of a body which "causes" some corresponding change of state in the ball. But this change of state is more like a psychological change of mind or change of perspective. This immaterial change then organically shapes the continuing constitution of the ball such that it begins to move. It feels weird for us to say that, in this picture, my hand is what causes the ball to move. Our inclination is to suggest that something like the "immaterial" change of state within the ball is, for the Stoics, what best fits our definition of a "cause" because it is contiguous with the motion of the ball. But this is simply not the way that the classical Stoics viewed the world.

In addition, the Stoics distinguished between external causes which "trigger" an action and internal causes which allow an action to proceed.[48] Here as well modern readers will have trouble conceptualizing what is going on. The suggestion is that, in the above example, something like the motion of my hand is an external cause which "triggers" the action of the ball by applying a force that produces an immaterial change of state. However, the Stoics believed that were the nature of the ball itself resistant to the force my hand applies to it then the ball would not move. So, the nature of the ball *allows* the immaterial change of state to organically produce motion through the ball, and in this sense can be said to be an internal cause which allows the action to proceed. This gets us a little bit closer to the modern intuition that causes need to be contiguous with their effects. But it still represents a different sort of view. The Stoics fundamentally saw motion as something that flowed throughout the universe. Remember, for the Stoics there are no ontological "gaps", so everything is contiguous with everything else. Changes are most fundamentally explained by the principle of *pneuma* flowing through material bodies. This framework allowed the Stoics to think differently about a causal sequence. For the Stoics bodies are active in such a way that they induce the conditions necessary for another body to act. Then the internal nature of the bodies acted upon allows some

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[48] Collette, *Stoic Doctrine* p.56.

actions to proceed and not others. But on top of this, they thought, there are also a host of "immaterial" qualitative changes which result from the actions of some bodies. So, when the Stoics say that fate determines the course of events in the world, they conceive of this occurring through a complex causal network of relationships rather than a linear chain of causes.

Because the Stoic God was immanent in a very strong sense, the way they conceived providence functioning was slightly different than the notion of providence used in the 17th century. If God is inherent in every object and every part of the world his providence will act within each of these objects when they are active. The Stoic picture suggested that God works through the nature of each individual object shaping its actions towards a particular telos. The main criticism of this doctrine of providence and fate was that the existence of evil was inconsistent with the notion that the world was providentially ordered and deterministic.[49] If the world is designed with rational intention, and fate acts through the nature of each thing to carry out this intention, then instances of evil should be logically impossible. This is because "evil" or "bad" things are a kind of opposition. If the same *pneuma* everywhere is responsible for the actions of things, then this *pneuma* would have to act against itself in order for there to be an opposition which we might legitimately call "evil." Chrysippus's answer to this problem was to argue that good and evil are conceptually inseparable from one another, and that this means sometimes in producing a good providence also produces an evil.[50] So evil is a direct product of providence, but this is an acceptable conclusion because it is conceptually impossible that any good ends are reached without there also being some evil.

There are several problems with this argument. First, quite a lot depends on how much our notions of good and evil depend on one another. While there are some good actions that seem like they could not occur without evil (e.g. heroism), there are many

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[49] See: Ibid, p.82.

[50] See: Ibid, p.83 to 91.

types of evil that occur that do not seem to be for the sake of any good whatsoever. It is difficult to imagine how the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which levelled the city of Pompeii, was necessary for the sake of the existence of some good. Perhaps a practicing Stoic might want to argue that Chrysippus's argument is really based on the notion of opposites. If good and evil are opposites, then the presence of one cannot really be understood without the existence of the other. But this idea that good and evil are opposite concepts is not sufficient for solving the classical Stoic problem. Recall that for the early Stoics it is the same *pneuma* which acts in both the universe as a whole and in each individual thing. This means it is the same *pneuma* which produces good events and bad events in the world. But if good and evil are opposites then the *pneuma* seems to itself contain two opposites, which is contradictory. The problem of evil for the classical Stoics is a metaphysical problem and understanding Chrysippus's argument based on the notion of opposites turns it into an epistemic solution.[51] To make sense of what Chrysippus says in a way that deals with the *existence* of evil (not just our understanding of evil) we have to read Chrysippus as maintaining that good and evil are metaphysically inseparable. And at best this sort of argument only seems to explain the existence of those evils which in some way contain necessary connections to good events. The problem of natural disasters like the eruption of Mount Vesuvius are too great for Chrysippus's argument to overcome.

The extent to which these problems were noticed by other members of the Stoic school is unclear. However, they were likely recognized by at least one prominent early Stoic. As Collette recounts, Cleanthes dissented from Zeno and Chrysippus's accounts of providence and fate by maintaining that "some things that come about by fate are not a

[51] A historical aside: In Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, Paulicians, footnote E, this argument is one of several that Bayle ascribes to Lactantius. Whether or not Lactantius got this argument from the Stoics is unknown to me, though it seems entirely possible. However, like me, Bayle is not very fond of this argument and deals with it quite swiftly. The gist of Bayle's argument is the same as what I contend here. An epistemic argument is not going to get God off the hook because we must explain the existence of evil, and it does not seem that evil had to exist for us to know it. What is interesting is that Bayle does not discuss Justus Lipsius in his overview of the problem of evil. As we will see shortly Lipsius made several significant changes to the Stoic argument that make it much more successful at explaining how evil could originate from God. Bayle's omission is quite glaring and, in my view, cuts Stoicism out of the narrative of historical approaches to the problem of evil.

product of providence."[52] This move opens an important conceptual space. Instead of having to explain why different instantiations of the same *pneuma* produce good and evil, the project of theodicy for Cleanthes becomes explaining how a world designed and structured by reason is compatible with evil occurring as an accidental feature of this design. In other words, we only need to explain why the means through which providence is executed (the determinations of fate) sometimes produces evil.[53] Note that Cleanthes and the early Stoics are not yet dealing with the same notion of omniscience that would make this problem so difficult for medieval and early modern authors. So Cleanthes's problem of evil is not quite the same as the problem of evil these theologians face, though it bears a much stronger resemblance than the Chrysippean version. Unfortunately, we do not have enough extant material from Cleanthes to see whether he explicitly recognized the different conceptual space opened by his distinction. But we do seem to find it recognized in later Roman Stoics, like Seneca, who develop a more complete account of evil and misfortune as a result.

Unlike Cleanthes, we have an abundance of texts from Seneca in which he explains his theodicy. The most prominent discussion of this topic occurs in *On Providence* which Seneca conveniently subtitled "why some misfortunes happen to good men, though providence exists." James Ker notes in his introduction that this text contains little that resembles the theodicy of Chrysippus and other early Stoics (HH p.277). This confirms that Seneca is likely thinking about a different variation of the problem posed by the existence of evil.[54] He opens the text by writing to his interlocutor Lucilius that "it would have been more fitting to answer this in the context of a work in

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[52] Collette, *Stoic Doctrine* p.51.

[53] If one worries that fate working as a "cause" takes us back to the strict metaphysical problem of evil, remember that the Stoics recognized causes which were efficacious simply because they allowed events to unfold rather than making them happen directly. As always, we need to be cognizant of the differences in philosophical context between classical Stoicism and modernity.

[54] And we should not be surprised by this. After all, several hundred years of development had occurred between Chrysippus and Seneca. The Stoic school is not, as I will continue to emphasize, a homogeneous movement. So it makes sense that other Stoic authors would arrive at a similar conceptual space as Cleanthes, even if Cleanthes was ignored on these points in his own time.

which we were proving that providence is in charge of absolutely everything and that God is in our midst" (HH p.282). Here we see the two hallmarks of a classical Stoic account of providence: the all-encompassing nature of providence and the immanence of God. So we can infer that, though Seneca does not argue for these conceptions in the text, what he says is informed by the backdrop of a fairly orthodox Stoic view. This means that *On Providence* is a good source for understanding how Seneca develops his own idea of Stoic theodicy.

The argument of the text is based around the central claim that bad things do not, in fact, happen to good people. Seneca contends instead that the gods are the best to the best people. This seems to fly in the face of all experience. So Seneca spends the rest of the text arguing that we should view the "bad" or "evil" things that we think happen to good people differently. He begins by claiming that there is a closer kinship between good people and the gods than most of us realize (HH p.283). This is an appeal to the providential nature that the Stoics thought was inherent and at work within a good person. Seneca and the Stoics maintained that there was something like "seeds" towards virtue in every human being.[55] When this nature advances unhindered it shapes the individual towards their telos, which has them work in accordance with the providence that governs the rest of the universe. When Seneca claims that a good person is "God's pupil, his imitator, and his true offspring" what he is referring to is the way both God and the person are connected through providence (HH p.283). This is important because as we will see Seneca thinks the nature of a good person necessarily comes into conflict with things. However, as I maintained above, it remains logically impossible to say that the nature of the good person who is driven by providence comes into conflict with that same providence instantiated in another thing.

Seneca's reconceptualization of evil stems from considering what a person requires to exercise their virtuous nature. Speaking of the good person, he argues

> Without an adversary, their *virtus* wastes away: its size and its power can be seen only

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[55] Collette, *Stoic Doctrine* p.55.

> when it shows what it can stand up to. Clearly good men must do the same. They must not flinch at hardships and difficulties, and must not level complaints against fate; but whatever happens, they must find the good in it – should turn it to good (HH p.284).

Seneca thinks a good person cannot exercise their nature without some kind of adversary or misfortune to come up against. This is our first encounter with the Stoic understanding of virtue as the strength of mind to endure hardships. The Stoics thought that if everything went pleasantly without interruption there would be no way for an individual to know if they were virtuous, or how far their virtue extends. A favourite analogy of the Stoics is that of a wrestler. A wrestler can train her whole life practicing different moves and techniques that might pin her opponent. But if she never comes up against an opponent who is larger, stronger, or outmatches her in some other respect, then she does not really know her true ability to use those techniques to achieve victory. It is the adversity we come up against which tests our strength of mind – and tests our *virtus*. So, for Seneca the existence of evil is compatible with a providential world because bad things need to happen to human beings for them to reach their telos of living virtuously. However, we need to be careful to keep the concepts of providence and fate separate here. It is fate – the complex causal network through which the designs of providence are executed – which tests our virtue. This means that it is fate which sometimes produces misfortune and evil. For Seneca's arguments to work it must be that from the view of providence – the rational design of the world – evil events are not evil because his argument is itself is an appeal to the providential nature of our misfortunes. So, for Seneca's argument to successfully secure the conclusion he intends it follows that, necessarily, he is thinking of a problem of evil more similar to Cleanthes than Chrysippus, distinguishing more sharply between providential events and fated events.

Being mindful of the distinction mapped out above, we should note that there are really two claims here and not one. Let's call our first principle the "providence principle" [PP]. Accepting PP in its classical form amounts to accepting that what happens to us is the outcome of the rational intention of the world-soul. Let's call our second principle the "fate principle" [FP]. Accepting FP in its classical form amounts to accepting that what happens to us is the fixed result of a complex network of causes, and that at least one of these causes would have to change for the results to change. What we

find in texts such as *On Providence* is an argument based on these two principles towards the conclusion that human virtue involves a duty of acceptance, namely acceptance of what cannot be changed in light of providence and fate.

We can push each of these principles further and be more precise about their logical entailments. Let's start with providence. What does it mean in classical Stoicism to assert that whatever happens is a product of the rational intention of the world-soul? We know that when the classical Stoics say this they mean that all activity is the result of an active principle, which is unitary yet spread throughout things, and which acts according to some kind of rational intention. What does "rational intention" refer to for a classical Greek Stoic? The main suggestion given by scholars is that it has to do with the universe being organized. As mentioned, the main contrast here would have been the Epicureans who thought that the order of the universe was chaotic. For the Stoics the universe must be organized,[56] and it is because of this organization that we are in whatever state we happen to be in. For the Stoics this simply amounts to saying that every qualitative state of things in the universe is the product of some common nature.[57] So PP logically entails that there is some nature (N) such that N is inherent in every object (X). One might think that PP logically entails more than this because it appears to assert that everything happens *because of* N. The extent to which this is true depends on how strongly a given Stoic rejects Aristotle's distinction between formal, final, and material causes. For the strictest of classical Stoics, the all-pervading presence of *pneuma* was thought to collapse these distinct senses of "cause" into one, rendering everything a product of one efficient cause.[58] But this gives up the ability to distinguish between different sorts of effects – it's all just *pneuma* – and this would hinder those Stoics who wanted to sharply distinguish between the effects of providence and the effects of fate. Instead, I suggest that PP logically entails that "there is some nature (N) such that N is

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[56] Disagreeing with this point is a non-starter for Stoics because it undermines the effectiveness of our reason.

[57] Bobzein, *Determinism* p.28 to 30.

[58] Ibid, p.20.

inherent in all objects (X), and N *organizes* all X according to some end." However, with the proviso that for a strict Stoic like Chrysippus this amounts to saying that "everything happens because of this N" whereas for Cleanthes and Seneca this amounts only to the notion that the universe is organized in terms of ends.

What about the fate principle? If we accept PP, we accept that the world develops in accordance with some common nature (N). However, we do not accept any one explanation of how the world develops in accordance with N. We know that the Stoics think events are determined according to a complex network of causes which acknowledges a causal role for both forces exerted by other material bodies and the inner nature of the body acted upon. What we want as contemporary philosophers is some kind of clear logical principle that explains when we have which sense of cause. But we don't get this in the Stoic account. In every instance of an action all causal possibilities are live as explananda until our reason can rule them out. Yet, to say only that the universe unfolds according to the determinations of a causal network – one which we cannot begin to explain without analyzing each discrete event that it contains – is not a satisfying answer to give when your philosophy is predicated on a principle as general as Stoic fate. According to Susanne Bobzien, there are two more specific senses in which the Stoics clarify the workings of fate. Material bodies are determined by fate in terms of their individuation, including their position in space and time, while for immaterial entities all their qualities or changes of state are results that fate produces.[59] Things are "determined" by fate but only because their qualities are a function of their relations to other objects. For stricter Stoics like Chrysippus this determination occurs in virtue of the teleological operations of the world-soul. But for other Stoics like Cleanthes and Seneca, who distinguish providence and fate more sharply, accepting FP only amounts to accepting that there are some qualities of things which are determined in virtue of relationships they bear to other parts of the universe. So, we might summarize FP as the claim that: for every (X), there is some relationship (R) to some other (Y) such that RY determines some quality of X.

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[59] Ibid, p.58.

The classical Stoics often connected these two principles with virtue by way of a duty of acceptance. This argument can be reconstructed as follows:

> Providence Principle: There is some nature (N) such that N is inherent in all X, and N organizes all X according to some end.
>
> Fate Principle: For every X, there is some R to some Y such that RY determines (at least) some quality of X.
>
> Definition: To "organize" X is to determine the R between X and some Y.
>
> Conclusion: Everything that happens to X is ultimately determined by N.
>
> [Therefore]
>
> Duty of Acceptance: Everything that happens to X should be accepted in light of its determination by N.

What this amounts to minimally is the conclusion that everything which happens to us can be viewed in some respect as teleologically and providential. And we have a responsibility to accept what happens to us insofar as we can see it as a result of N. Note that this only implies that we have the duty to accept what happens to us when we understand the way that it has, ultimately, been determined by a rationally directed common nature which shapes the world. The Stoic duty of acceptance does not specify or explain what our normative obligations with respect to accepting the determinations of providence are. To understand this, we need to fill in the details of the principle. In the next section I will begin to do this by elucidating the principles of moral psychology that, quite often, filled out a given Stoic's account of the duty of acceptance. However, for the purposes of tracing the development of Stoicism we have two descriptive claims and one normative principle that are sufficient in their general form.

Given that we are aiming at a general conception of Stoicism that can be mapped throughout history, one might wonder what contemporary Stoics have to say about these three principles. Unfortunately, regarding providence and fate modern discussions are quite scant. The most recent treatment of this issue comes from Christopher Gill. Gill attempts to separate Stoic normative duties from their theology and their conception of

nature.[60] His argument is, in short, that the classical Stoic treatments of providence and fate (among other topics) are a non-essential component of their thinking about ethics. The texts, according to Gill, do not force us to interpret the Stoic physics and theology as a foundational component of their normative claims. So contemporary Stoicism has no need for the principles of providence and fate. Gill and I appear to be at cross purposes. Gill's project aims to show how the ethical tools of classical Stoicism can be used in a contemporary context. And this task would be quite difficult if, somehow, it turned out that outdated and unconventional Stoic physics and theology were an essential part of their ethical views. As a result of this desiderata Gill seizes upon the lack of conceptual connection between the various parts of Stoicism that we find in the summaries of Diogenes, Cicero, and Stobaeus and argues that this warrants his move to separate Stoic ethics from Stoic physics and theology. Clearly, this is contrary to my intuition that there is a discernible philosophical core to Stoicism that can help us pick out the philosophy as it was invoked in different contexts throughout history.

However, apart from our opposing methodologies, I think there is a deeper point of contention between Gill's account and my own concerning what exactly a Stoic justification of an ethical principle looks like. Both Gill and I agree that there is some sense in which the Stoics' doctrine of providence relates to their descriptions of ethical duties. Gill describes his preferred interpretation[61] of this connection as follows:

> Human care for oneself and others can be seen as analogous to the providential care of universal nature or god for the whole universe and its parts (as microcosm to macrocosm). Human care can also be conceived in terms of the part-whole relationship, as part of the universal motive of providential care, though a part which has its own distinct integrity and significance, as is brought out in the Stoic accounts of appropriation. Alternatively, care for oneself and others can be seen as that which 'internalizes' the motive of providential care expressed in the (outer) relationship between universal nature (or god) and the component parts of the universe. Taking these patterns into account, we can see that 'harmonizing' oneself with the direction of the universe or Zeus can be understood as developing those qualities (virtue and happiness) which correspond to goodness at the

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[60] Gill, *Learning to Live Naturally* ch.3 "Ethics and Nature."

[61] Gill's text is quite clear that this is one of several potential readings. He does not attempt to wholly discredit the other readings he presents. He only suggests that this one itself warrants the move that he wants to make to separate Stoic theology and ethics.

> cosmic level.[62]

Gill's contention is that the material we find in Stoic accounts of theology is really an addendum to their accounts of virtue. The idea that virtue has something to do with providence is simply that the qualities in ourselves which virtue requires us to develop correspond to what is good at the level of the universe as a whole (the "cosmic level"). So if, for example, Stoicism contains a duty to accept the results of providence, then this duty is itself part of virtue because it resembles something that is good at the cosmic level. Gill suggests that, while this material might deepen one's understanding of virtue, you do not need to know it to be virtuous. But we should note that this reading relocates the normative force of the Stoics claims. In the account of providence and fate that I sketched above, informed by Bobzien, Collette, and other scholars of Ancient philosophy, the reason that we have a duty to accept what happens to us is because what happens to us is a result of the workings of providence and fate. For Gill, understanding providence and fate might provide additional knowledge of why virtue consists in certain things, but the reason to be virtuous has to do with virtue itself. Gill's account implies that Stoics can argue for their program of virtue based on the results that it will bring rather than the basis of their physics and cosmology.

I think that Gill's account is plausible insofar as we see it as a modern variation of Stoicism. I do not think that Gill's account accurately depicts the way that Stoics justified their normative principles. There is certainly a sense, especially in Roman authors like Seneca and Epictetus, that one reason to be virtuous is the good results that being virtuous will bring. However, there are also many texts which see Stoic authors justifying their normative claims based on the way the world is. Seneca's *On Providence* is one such example that I've already discussed. In Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* we find numerous examples of this kind of reason, but here is one that I find particularly clear.

> 40. Cease not to think of the Universe as one living Being, possessed of a single Substance and a single Soul; and how all things trace back to its single sentience; and how it does all things by a single impulse; and how all existing things are joint causes of all things that

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[62] Ibid, p.136

> come into existence; and how intertwined in the fabric is the thread and how closely woven the web…
>
> 42. Nothing is evil to that which is subject to change, even as there is no good for that which exists as the result of change (M IV. 40-42).

We find here Marcus asserting quite clearly all the principles of the classical Stoic account of providence and fate. All things are organized by the common nature of the universe (i.e. providence) and all existing things are joint causes of what comes into existence (i.e. the causal network of fate). Immediately after making this point Marcus draws the conclusion that good and evil cannot be readily applied to things which are subject to change, implying that he, Marcus, as one such thing ought to restrain his estimations of what is good or bad for himself and accept what happens to him. There are further examples of this sort of reasoning in the work of Epictetus. In *Discourses* I.6 Epictetus directly appeals to providence as what informs our ability to take a more comprehensive view of things and emphasizes the "gratitude" that results from taking this view. It seems to me that, at best, the textual evidence is a wash as to whether this manner of justification is essential to Stoicism.

But the relevant difference between Gill's view and my own is not really a question about what the text says, and I think Gill is aware of this. He makes it quite clear that the body of texts cited above exist and that they could be appealed to by someone on my side of the argument. He simply wants to read these texts as non-essential appendages to the Stoic account of why we should be virtuous. For me this move is too conceptually problematic to warrant Gill's conclusions. When we understand Stoicism in the manner Gill suggests we substantially change the force of certain classical Stoic arguments. For example, noted throughout most of the history of discussions of Stoicism is the example of the "man on a rack." A person being tortured on the rack, according to the Stoics, can be happy and free of suffering if their mind is adequately virtuous. The short explanation for why is that the virtuous person has totally embraced their duty of acceptance and uses their power of freedom to view pain as suffering only when it is a pain that could have

been avoided.[63] Given that the circumstances which led to their torture could not have been avoided, the person on the rack does not view the pain they experience as suffering and remains happy. This argument has been considered implausible by every non-Stoic author who mentioned it. But consider how much more implausible it becomes if the reason why I should accept what happens to me has to do only with the utility that comes from doing this, i.e. that I will no longer be in pain on the rack. Do I really possess a powerful enough justification to free myself from instances of such intense suffering? My intuition is almost certainly not. If there is going to be a version of Stoicism that can make any sense of examples such as this one, I think it needs to appeal to the additional force of concepts like providence and fate which we find in Stoic physics and theology.

In summary, the classical Stoics developed a complex physics and theology which played an important role in explaining and justifying their ethical views. The main principles used to do this were providence and fate, each of which can be spelled out in the following form:

> PP: There is some nature (N) such that N is inherent in all X, and N organizes all X according to some end.
>
> FP: For every X, there is some relation (R) to some Y such that R determines (at least) some quality of X.

Together these principles create a picture of a deterministic and teleological universe. This universe was a central component of classical Stoicism and played a significant role in justifying one of their main normative ethical principles: the duty of acceptance. According to this principle, one has a duty to accept what happens to them on the basis that this is (in some manner) determined by the common nature which organizes the universe. Despite variations in how sharply they distinguished between providence and fate, across the board we see most of the classical Stoics accept this principle or some closely related variation thereof. For modern Stoics it has become desirable to explain our

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[63] We have yet to discuss my understanding of this power of freedom. This will come in the following section but follows, for the most part, very traditional lines of interpretation. I do not think that understanding my account of this is important to grasping my argument against Gill. But if readers are bothered by the order of presentation then they should consult section 1.1.2 before returning to this discussion.

duty of acceptance without appealing to the conceptual baggage of providence and fate. Authors such as Christopher Gill subsequently cash out this ethical duty in terms of harmonizing our own nature with a very general conception of the universe, i.e. harmonizing ourselves with reason. In making this move modern Stoics make the philosophy more palatable to a contemporary audience but also cut out some of what makes Stoic ethics a distinct philosophical view. It is this distinct view, providence and fate included, that I aim to examine in the Early Modern period. But first we need to fill in our picture of Stoic ethics in more detail by turning to their account of human freedom and action.

2.2.2 Human Psychology and Evil

We have now a partial picture of the classical Stoics' views on ethics. To fill in the content of this model we need to look more closely at classical Stoic psychology. The Stoics needed to explain how an individual has the power to regard their misfortune differently to not be so negatively affected by it. The Stoics accomplished this by radically intellectualizing freedom and human action. The Stoics, like Aristotle, were part of a rich tradition of virtue ethics that considered what certain actions can tell us about a person's character. However, the Stoics went a step further than Aristotle and made virtuous conduct entirely a matter of intellectual virtue, i.e. what is on an agent's mind when they act.[64] They did this because they held a very restrictive account of human freedom where the only freedom a person can have is the power to think in a certain way.

The Stoic's moral psychology was informed by their account of human knowledge, which we need to understand to get to the heart of their moral claims. Their view is summarized in the following passage from book two of Cicero's *Academia*.

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[64] This is different than the way we typically think about freedom and action in ethics today. We traditionally think of moral actions as actions we perform which are either good in and of themselves (deontological) or have good results (consequentialist). As a result, the sort of freedom moral theorists are interested in involves conditions which allow us to perform these types of moral acts if we so desire. This is not the sort of moral freedom the Stoics were interested in.

> Zeno used to make this point by using a gesture. When he held out his hand with open fingers, he would say, "This is what a presentation is like." Then when he had closed his fingers a bit, he said, "Assent is like this." And when he had compressed it completely and made a fist, he said that this was grasping (and on the basis of this comparison he even gave it the name '*katalepsis*' [grasp], which had not previously existed). But when he put his left hand over it and compressed it tightly and powerfully, he said that knowledge was this sort of thing and that no one except the wise man possessed it (IG, §145).

Stoic epistemology begins in what they called "presentations." As we saw above the Stoics were materialists who thought that everything in the world was part of a complex and continuous causal network of active bodies. "Presentations" were simply imprints left on the soul from encounters with other material objects (see: IG 11-12). Presentations by themselves are not knowledge because they have yet to involve the activity of the soul. I can have a thought of a unicorn but that thought does not have any epistemological implications until some act of my intellect occurs with respect to it. This sort of act the Stoics conceived as "assent." Assent is an act of will that confirms or pronounces what was given in a presentation, and as we see in the above passage, it was thought to be a step closer to knowledge than a presentation. "Grasping" was the next degree of intellectual cognition. According to the Stoics, "grasping" or "apprehension" is a firmer assertion, not just of a presentation, but of what the presentation corresponds to.[65] I can assent to the presentation "a unicorn has one horn" but I do not grasp it until I recognize that it corresponds to a description of a creature in certain children's stories and fairytales. Finally, the last degree is what the Stoics considered "knowledge" represented by a closed fist with another hand covering it.

It is a difficulty to puzzle out what "knowledge" could be beyond simply grasping or apprehending the truth of a presentation. Julia Annas has worked out a sensible interpretation in which the extra hand covering what is "grasped" represents an interconnected body of propositions. The idea is that once we grasp the truth of a single proposition (thus going from "assent" to "apprehension") we can still improve upon our knowledge by situating it properly in the network of propositions it is connected to. Grasping is recognizing the causal connections that explain the truth of one single

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[65] See: Annas, "Stoic Epistemology" p.186 to 7.

proposition. By contrast "knowing" is taking a proposition that we grasp and situating it into a pre-constructed partial view of the universe and its interconnected parts.[66] Here one should again consider Stoic physics. Because of the operations of fate, the actions of every material body are linked in a causal network. This means that once we understand a singular thing we can always understand that thing in relation to its external or 'inciting' causes. Take the proposition "James is walking." When I consider it in reference to myself and realize that James is in fact walking, I "grasp" or "apprehend" the truth of the proposition. But this proposition is not really "knowledge" until I also grasp several other propositions that explain why James is walking and how this activity relates to the rest of the things around me.

In the *Letters on Ethics*, we see Seneca applying this Stoic concept to give Lucilius some recommendations about how to meet his fate. He suggests that we "spend our time on study and on the authorities of wisdom in order to learn what has already been investigated and to investigate what has not yet been discovered" clarifying that "this is the way for the mind to be emancipated from its miserable enslavement" (LE 104.16). Here Seneca is suggesting that the more wisdom Lucilius gains the less he will be enslaved, presumably by the influence of external events outside of his control. Cultivating wisdom in this fashion also allows one to meet with dignity whatever providence and fate have in store for them. Seneca describes this in the following passage from later in the *Letters*.

> There are places where we shall encounter wild beasts and human beings who are more dangerous than any wild beast. We shall suffer damage from water and from fire. We cannot change this state of affairs. What we can do is adopt a resolute character, as befits a good man, in order to endure the chances of life with bravery and be in agreement with nature. Nature controls this visible realm by means of changes. Clear skies follow after cloudy weather, seas become turbulent after a calm; winds blow in turn; day follows night; one part of the sky rises and another sets… We must adapt our minds to this law, following it and obeying it. No matter what happens, we should think that it had to happen and not wish to reproach nature. It is best to endure what you cannot correct, and to go along uncomplainingly with the divinity whom is in charge of the entire course of events (LE 107.7).

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[66] "Pre-constructed" because from birth we begin grasping propositions and adding them into this model. "Partial" because one finite human intellect cannot know the universe in its entirety.

Seneca argues that by “adapting our minds” to the dictates of providence and fate we will be able to endure happily whatever we cannot correct. From the earlier passage we can tell that Seneca thinks of this “adapting” of our mind in terms of the amount of knowledge or wisdom that we acquire. A more complete body of knowledge allows one to meet whatever fortune has in store because it allows us to properly situate these events in the grand designs of providence. Our mind then becomes strong enough to take onboard seemingly “evil” events and meet them with the proper resolve.

The problem with this process, which we need to answer if we want to get to the heart of the Stoic view, is that there are quite regularly things outside of our control which affect the ability of our mind to give or withhold assent. What we would call “emotions”, and what the Stoics called *pathe*, pose a significant challenge. When I am angry I do not think clearly. The way I judge what is true and false becomes affected by the anger I experience. And, at first glance, it appears I can become angry in the Stoic picture due to external causes which are entirely outside of my control. If our ability to meet the requirements of virtue depends on conceiving our power of assent as free, we need to also explain how this power extends to our emotions. Otherwise, the account of virtue the classical Stoics provide is quite easily destroyed by a nearly universal phenomenon. Fortunately the classical Stoics understood this and provided an account of emotions which has come to be seen as one of the hallmarks of their philosophy. We need to give an outline of this account to see how the Stoics met the problem posed by our emotional experiences, and to explain how the Stoics understanding of freedom and action combine to generate further normative claims.

The first question to answer is terminological. What sorts of things do the Stoics call *pathe* and how do these things affect the mind? The Stoics observed that the mind consisted of more than just *phantasia* and the logical “presentations” we derive from them. They also recognized a type of mental state which they called *hormai* or “impulses.” An impulse is, as Margaret Graver describes, an “action tendency.”[67] This is

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[67] Graver, *Stoicism & Emotion* p.26.

meant to capture roughly (though not exactly) what we intend to capture with the concept "desire." Impulses explain the ways that people are directed towards certain things, as well as what behaviours or actions a person is more likely to exhibit. If, in sitting in my bedroom thinking about chocolate cupcakes, I assent to the conclusion that chocolate cupcakes are tasty, then I may generate an impulse to buy a cupcake. Depending on how this impulse interacts with the rest of my psychology I may also decide to go get in my car, drive to the nearest grocery store, and buy a cupcake. It is my "impulse" or "action tendency" – itself generated from thinking about different propositions regarding cupcakes – that produces the subsequent action. The Stoics recognized that external things in the world can affect our psychology by generating these impulses. And they recognized that this can happen in roughly two different ways: one good and one bad. The terms *pathe* and *eupatheiai* were supposed to pick out these two different senses in which the external world affects the action tendencies that develop in our mind. Examples of *pathe* are the fear Agamemnon feels seeing the advances of the Trojan soldiers in *Illiad* 10.9-10, or the lamentation of Trojan war veterans sitting around the dining table in *Odyssey* 4.113.[68] Examples of *eupatheiai* are things such as awe, reverence, and some forms of joy (particularly the intellectual kind).[69] The gist of the distinction is that *eupatheiai* make us more likely to act in ways which are virtuous whereas *pathe* are more likely to interfere with the pursuit of virtue.

Given this picture, the Stoics needed to provide some story of how we control the effects of *pathe* and *eupatheiai*. Absent this an individual's virtue is going to end up depending on how lucky they are. Those exposed to external stimuli which produce *eupatheiai* will be virtuous and those exposed to *pathe* will not, which is obviously not what the Stoics intend. Unfortunately, having defined our freedom in terms of our ability to give or withhold assent to propositions the Stoics severely limited the conceptual resources available to explain this. To overcome this hurdle the Stoics had to be very precise about where our control begins and ends with respect to emotional experiences.

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[68] Ibid, p.3.

[69] Ibid, p.4.

This is described by Epictetus in fragment nine which is commonly attributed to the fifth book of the *Discourses*.

> When some terrifying sound comes from the sky, or from the collapse of a building, or sudden word comes of some peril or other, or something else of the same sort happens, the mind of even the wise man cannot help but be disturbed, and shrink, and grow pale for a moment, not from any anticipation of some evil, but because of certain swift and unconsidered motions which forestall the action of the intellect and the reason. Soon, however, our wise man does not give his assent to these terrifying things seen by his mind, but rejects and repudiates them, and sees in them nothing to cause him fear. And this, they say, is the difference between the mind of the fool and the mind of the wise man, that the fool thinks the cruel and harsh things seen by his mind, when it is first struck by them, actually to be what they appear, and likewise afterwards, just as though they really were formidable, he confirms them by his own approval (*Discourses* 3 to 4, p.451).

Epictetus, representing the general Stoic view, separates the influence of external *phantasia* from the assent we give to them. To understand this distinction we have to recognize that *pathe* are not immediate effects of the *phantasia* our mind receive. The Stoics conceived of emotions as the result of certain judgements we make about these *phantasia*. For the "fool" in Epictetus's example it might seem as though the fear he feels upon hearing a loud and scary noise is inevitable. But the Stoics think that this is only because of how hearing this noise "forestall[s] the action of the intellect and reason." The *pathe* of fear is, for the Stoics, ultimately a result of the judgements we make about the frightening noise we hear, i.e., that it represents some kind of threat to our well-being. It follows that, were we to make more accurate judgements about what the *phantasia* represent, we would also free ourselves from feeling the effects of fear.

Pulling together these threads we can now construct an outline of classical Stoic moral psychology. An individual person, at any particular moment, sits at a nexus of events and external causes which present their mind with a certain view of the world. None of these external factors are within the control of an agent. This set of information prompts our mind to generate certain mental phenomena such as feelings or emotions. These *pathe*, though prompted by the interaction between the outside world and our mind, are really the result of a set of judgements that the agent makes about their situation. The Stoics understand our freedom to consist in our power to give or withhold assent to these judgements. This means that we can control our emotions by giving our assent only to those judgements which we are able to "grasp", and further, those which

we can subsume into a coherent body of "knowledge." Furthermore, it also happens to be the case that, for the Stoics, the way a particular person acts is a function of whatever impulse they possess at a given moment. Because these impulses are also a function of the judgements we make given the information available, we can control these impulses in the same manner through which we can control our emotions. For the Stoics, actions are always a product of what is on an agent's mind when they act.

Can we formalize these descriptive claims into a set of logical principles, as we did above with providence and fate? To some extent I think we can. But the Stoics' point about freedom proves difficult to formalize. The claim the Stoics make is that human freedom consists in the power to give or withhold assent. But recall above our logical statement of the fate principle: "for every X, there is some R to some Y such that R determines (at least) some quality of X." What if we substitute "judgements" for X? This gives us, "for every judgement (X), there is some relation (R) to some other judgement (Y) such that R determines (at least) some quality of X." But if this is true, then our capacity to judge is not wholly under our own power because each judgment is, at least in some small respect, determined by its relationship to another preceding judgement. The fate principle, which is in essence a logical statement of Stoic determinism, generates a conflict with the definition of human freedom such that there is no way we can spell out one without weakening the strength of the other.

Most philosophers will be well-acquainted more generally with the problem of the compatibility between freedom and determinism. In the classical context, however, this problem did not much bother the Stoics. There are a litany of responses to this issue, some more successful than others, scattered across the various Greek and Roman Stoic texts. I am not interested in which of these is the most accurate reading of the classical Stoic view. And since I am not arguing for a contemporary brand of Stoicism I am not interested in which of these solutions can address our modern understanding of the conflict between freedom and determinism. Instead, I will briefly list some of the conceptual possibilities.

i) Judgements are not things, and fate only determines things: This is to argue that judgements, in virtue of being mental operations, are not "things" in the sense that they are not material bodies. If one also restricts FP to material bodies, then one can argue that the class judgements fall into are not subject to fate. However, this weakens the argument for our duty of acceptance because it vastly reduces the number of things determined by fate.

ii) The power to judge is determined, but still constitutes our freedom: This is to assert some kind of compatibilism and was probably the most common approach among classical Stoics. It amounts to saying, basically, that yes even our judgements are influenced by the causal network of fate, and as such are subject to some kind of determination. However, this does not matter as they are still "up to us" in the sense that they are *our* judgements. The motion of deciding to give or withhold assent happens within us. It is in our possession. Modern readers will likely feel that this significantly diminishes the sense in which we are "free".

iii) Our rational judgments are determined by providence, but not by fate: This is another way of asserting that we cannot substitute in "judgements" for things in FP. However, here we allow that are judgements are still determined by providence. Specifically, we allow that our rational judgement is a product of our rational nature, which is itself a product of the common nature of the world. So, the "causal" determinism described by the fate principle does not extend to our power to judge. However, our power to judge is still shaped by providence, and therefore, does not weaken our duty of acceptance. This might amount to too much conceptual modification for staunch Classicists. However, it was certainly a possibility given the conceptual tools available (recall Cleanthes). And this line of thinking is indicative of what we will find below in Lipsius's interpretation of Stoicism.

These represent the main approaches that one will find in classical Stoic texts. I do not mean to suggest that these are the arguments verbatim. Merely that these arguments, leaving room for variations upon them, capture most of what readers will find if they look closely and think philosophically about the answers present in the Stoic texts.

For our purposes we can conclude that the descriptive claim most Stoics make about freedom is really an assumption. There is no sure-fire way to make it logically compatible with the fate principle. However, in Stoic philosophy it was ordinary parlance to describe our power in terms of giving or withholding assent. So, this principle amounts simply to assuming that *every human being has the power to give or withhold assent to any proposition*.[70]

We can, however, give some much clearer logical statements of the Stoic claims about emotions and action. Regarding emotions, we have seen the Stoics claim that every emotion is some kind of mental phenomena which is itself the result of our judgements.[71] This amounts to the following logical statement: for every affective state (A) there is some judgement (J) such that if the content of J were different the content of A would be different. Regarding actions, we know that the Stoics think every action is motivated by some impulse. This is not a particularly special or distinctive claim because most theories of motivation posit some kind of motivational state in the mind. However, what is special about the Stoic view is that they think every impulse is itself a function of some intellectual judgement. So, we can put this idea in the following logical terms: for every impulse (I) there is some judgement (J) such that if the content of J were different the *direction* of (I) would be different.[72] What we can see in the above reconstruction is that both of these principles amount to roughly the same sort of logical statements, with only a slight difference in emphasis. I propose that we call this the Stoic "action principle" which I suggest amounts to the following. *For every affective state, there is some*

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[70] And of course, one should keep in mind the above explanations of the compatibility of human freedom with providence and fate for comparing with later iterations of Stoic thinking.

[71] The Stoics do not consider the possibility that emotions might have a connection with the body. This is for the simple reason that the motions of material bodies, in their picture, are not up to us. So if emotions are physical states then they will not be subject to our control. The Stoic position on this gets developed in interesting ways in the early modern period, as we will see later.

[72] I use the term "direction" instead of "content" to capture the sense in which impulses are different from affective states. They have a "direction" because they essentially move the agent towards some course of action.

judgement such that, if the content of this judgement were different, the affective state would be different.

Together, these descriptive theses concerning human freedom and action generated a further set of normative claims which, added together with the duty of acceptance, make up the bulk of what was distinctive about Stoic moral thinking. To extract these claims accurately we need to have in mind the Stoic idea of a "wise man" [sic] or a "sage." Consider the following description from Seneca's letters.

> I do not put the sage in a separate class from the rest of humankind, and neither do I eliminate pain and grief from him as if he were some sort of rock, not susceptible to any feeling. I keep in mind that he is made up of two parts. One is non rational, and it is this that experiences the biting, the burning, the pain. The other part is rational; it is this that holds unshakable opinions and that is fearless and unconquerable. In this latter resides the highest good of humankind. Before that good is filled out, the mind is uncertain and in turmoil; but when it has been perfected, the mind is stable and unmoved (LE 71.27, p.220).

It is this stable and unmoved mind which the Stoics think we ought to aim for. How do we achieve this? There is some hint about it in Seneca's text. Seneca emphasizes that it is through the rational part of our mind, specifically our capacity to "hold unshakable opinions," that is unconquerable by feelings of pain or distressing emotions. Having explicated much of the Stoic conceptual furniture we are able to see why this is so. Ultimately, both our actions and our affective states are the products of rational judgements (action principle). In addition, our capacity for judgement is the only thing that is in our power or "up to us" (freedom assumption). Now pair these principles with what we know about Stoic epistemology. "Knowledge" for the Stoics corresponds to those propositions which we grasp that are integrated into a body of other "grasped" propositions. What I think is assumed here, but left unsaid in many Stoic texts, is that by judging more consistently according to reason we will build up a body of knowledge that is less susceptible to the erroneous judgements which produce troublesome affective states and misguided actions. In positing that we can control our emotions, our actions, and the strength of our mind to accept our misfortune, the Stoics imply that we have a normative duty to develop our knowledge and our capacity for rational judgement as far as we possibly can. Let's call this the "duty of character development", since for the

Stoics "character" is really meant to capture the extent of a particular person's rationality and virtue.

Floating behind all of this, yet again, is the meta-virtue of constancy. As alluded to in the above, the argument for our duty of character development stems from the idea that doing so will make our mind more stable, steadfast, and immovable. This kind of immovability in the face of external fortune also informed the Stoic account of our duty of acceptance. So why have I not said more about this meta-virtue that seems to inform so much of classical Stoic ethics? Unfortunately, the notion of virtue as constancy is something we do not find an argument for in any classical Stoic text. It is assumed and assumed quite uncontroversially. There are certainly arguments that one could make on behalf of this Stoic idea. We will see some of these shortly when we look at Lipsius's account of this same topic. But for the classical Stoics these are only ever implicit in the texts that we have available or suggested by the way they apply their principles to practical examples. It is possible that Chrysippus wrote one of his many lost treatises on this subject. It is also possible that this sense of virtue was just part and parcel of the classical Stoic context. In any case, what matters for our purposes is that we see it as a sort of meta-virtue informing all the rest of our classical Stoic positions. We can represent this as follows:

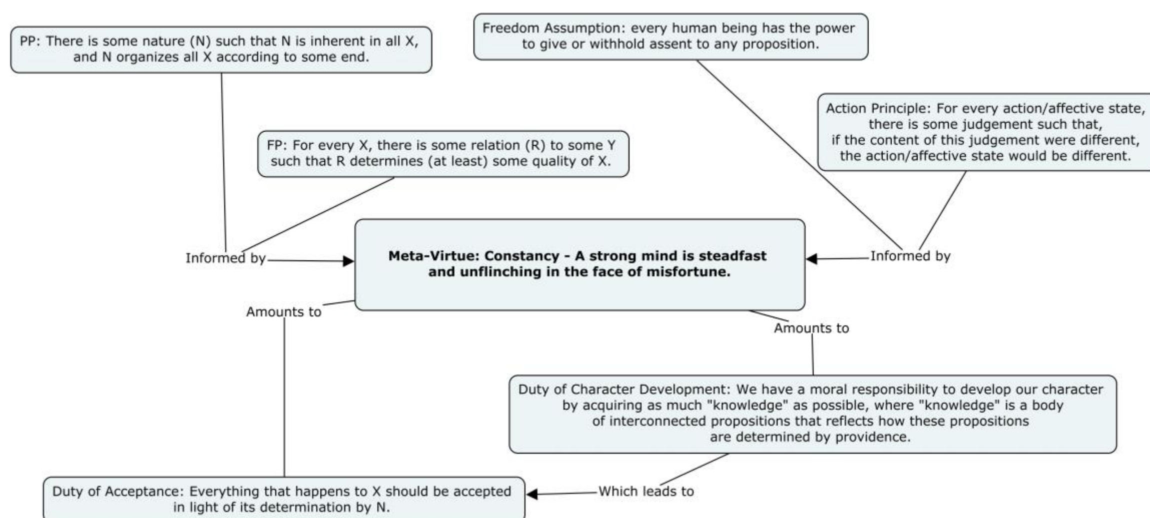

Figure 1

I think we now have a picture of the core themes and positions of classical Stoic ethics. More importantly, by developing this with respect to the problem of evil, we have a basic framework for thinking about how these ideas might be applied in a post-Reformation Early Modern period of philosophical inquiry. The Stoics acknowledge the basic principle that bad things happen in the world. This causes a problem for them because they fundamentally aim to see the world as a rational and organized. Bad things happening, especially to good people, seems to be a hallmark of an irrational and unorganized world. To get around this, the Stoics used their principles of providence and fate to generate an argument for how and why we ought to accept all the bad things that happen to us. But this in turn generated another problem, because when we look inward at our mind, we find that it is quite difficult for us to accept bad things that happen to us. Our emotions and desires muddy the waters and mire us in our misfortune. To deal with this the Stoics mapped out an elaborate picture of our psychology which reduces our control to the judgements we make about i) the truth of propositions and ii) how different propositions are related. Then they argued that all our desires and emotional states can be reduced to these types of judgements. This generates a duty to develop our rational capacities and cultivate as much knowledge as we possibly can. In so doing, the Stoics think we will be better able to accept the results of providence and fate even when they produce bad or unfortunate events in our lives. This picture is certainly not everything that is interesting or distinctive about Stoic ethics. But it represents a more thorough and tightly connected framework for explaining what constitutes a Stoic view than can be found so far in the literature on 17th century Stoicism.

2.3 Lipsius and Neo-Stoicism

2.3.1 Virtue

We saw above that the classical Stoics tended to conceive of virtue in terms of strength of mind and argued that the possession of virtue was itself sufficient to make someone a good person. During the Renaissance, accounts which presumed the self-sufficiency of

virtue (like all the ancient schools) came under some harsh criticism. As Paolo Cassini describes "the pagan sages, ignoring the corruption of the whole of humanity in Adam, also ignored that the only proper means and goals of morals consist in pursuing the glory of God thanks to his special grace."[73] In this context, the revival of Stoicism required defending the Stoic conception of virtue much more arduously than the classical Stoics did in their own time. This is where we must start in mapping out a coherent and consistent set of Neo-Stoic philosophical positions.

Despite the hostility towards ancient schools of ethics, a tradition of positive appeals to the wisdom of Seneca persisted in the 16th century which we can see in the words of Erasmus (who himself strongly influenced Lipsius). Erasmus suggested that "if you read [Seneca] as a pagan, he wrote as a Christian; but if you read him as a Christian, then he wrote like a pagan."[74] This illustrates that, to a 16th century reader, Seneca's wisdom looks quite sympathetic to the core tenets of Christianity when you view it from the perspective of someone unconcerned with the strict dogma of the church. Lipsius also picked up on this idea and the main thrust of his works on Stoicism was illustrating this compatibility. As John Cooper has pointed out, Lipsius saw his main contribution to Stoicism in *De Constantia* as applying the Stoic concept of constancy to the problems posed by public evils, which he argued no one before him had done successfully.[75] This then poses a serious question. How can a Neo-Stoic conception of virtue as constancy make sense in Lipsius's renaissance intellectual context?

We can start to work this out by first looking at Lipsius's own understanding of constancy. Lipsius defines constancy as "*an upright and unmoved vigor of mind that is neither uplifted nor cast down by outward or chance occurrences*" (DC p.27 to 9, original

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[73] Casini, "The Varieties of Neostoic Virtue" p.327.

[74] Ibid, citing Erasmus to Piotr Tomeczki, January 1529, p.325.

[75] Cooper, "Justus Lipsius and the Revival of Stoicism in Late Sixteenth-Century Europe" p.11.

emphasis).[76] In other words, a mind whose state is steady regardless of what is going on outside of it. Lipsius does not think that this steadiness can be achieved through tenacity or stubbornness alone.

> For I wish above all to have tenacity excluded (or it might better be called 'stubbornness'), which is merely the visor of an inflexible mind, but inflated by the wind of pride and boastfulness… Indeed these swollen and stubborn spirits, not easily depressed at all, are quite easily lifted up: they are no different from a leather bladder inflated with air, which can only with difficulty be submerged, but bobs along the surface by itself. Such even is the inflated resiliency of these spirits, of which the source, as I said, is pride and excessive self-esteem. It derives then, from Opinion (DC p.29).[77]

Lipsius clearly distinguishes here that the confidence that we find in extremely tenacious or stubborn individuals does not itself amount to constancy. This sort of confidence does make a person quite resilient to the outcomes of external fortune. But not in the way that Lipsius would like. The main reason for this is that the source of this confidence is pride and excessive self-esteem. A good example of this in our own day is Lt. Gen Chesty Puller of the US marine corps. Puller was known for his stubbornness, often attributed quotes such as "we've been looking for the enemy for some time. We've finally found him. We are surrounded. That simplifies things." We admire the "optimism" of Puller or similar characters in the face of severe disadvantage. But the source of this optimism is Puller's excessive pride in the abilities of his Marine Corps. Lipsius has a problem with this because he argues that this pride is derived only from opinion, which is itself a servant of the body and the senses. "Out of this impure intercourse [between soul and body]" Lipsius contends that "opinion is born in us, which is nothing else than the empty image and shadow of Reason… It is not upright, not uplifted, and it has no regard for

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[76] For each of the Latin passages from Lipsius's texts I will provide, in the corresponding footnotes, the original text. "CONSTANTIAM hic appello, RECTUM ET IMMOTUM ANIMI ROBUR, NON ELATI EXTERNIS AUT FORTUITIS NON DEPRESSI."

[77] "Exclusam enim ante omnia volo Peruicaciam (sive ea melius Pertinacia dicitur) quae et ipsa obstinate animi robur est, sed a superbiae aut gloriae vento: et robur etiam dumtaxat in una parte. Deprimi enim haud facile tumidi isti et peruicaces possunt, facillime attolli: non aliter quam culleus, qui vento in flatus aegre mergitur, supereminet autem et exsilit sua sponte. Talis enim istorum ventosa haec durities est: cui origo a Superbia, ut dixi, et nimio pretio sui. igitur ab Opinione."

anything lofty or of a higher realm" (DC p.33).[78] While Lipsius waxes poetic here I think the explanation is still clear enough. Puller's confidence is not reliable because it is informed, not by the sound judgements of his reason, but by emotions of pride and arrogance which only serve the good of the body. As such it does not amount to "constancy."

Lipsius argues for the value of constancy on two counts. These arguments are quite simple and much more utilitarian than anything we find in classical Stoicism.

> You will be subject to God only, exempt from the yoke of Feeling and Fortune. As certain streams are said to pass through the midst of the sea and preserve their own current, even thus might you pass through surrounding troubles and draw off none of the brine of this sea of sadness. Will you lie dejected? Constancy will lift you up. Do you stagger? It will sustain you. Do you hasten toward a lake or a noose? It will console you and draw you back from the threshold of death (DC p.35).[79]

First, Lipsius thinks that a steady mind is useful because it allows us to act better in the face of fortune. All human beings possess desires and aims. If our mind is unsteady in the face of difficult or unexpected circumstances, then it does seem likely that we will be able to act further towards these aims. Travelling is a great example. Contemporary air travel contains many stressors. Airports are busy, security lineups can induce anxiety, flight delays are common, and in large airports it can take up to 20 minutes to walk from an arrival gate to another gate to catch a connecting flight. What sort of mind is going to function best in this environment? If an individual is prone to the influences of these stressors the chances of them acting calmly and in a way that allows them to successfully reach their destination are lowered. If one possesses a calm, rational, and constant mind, then the presence of all these obstacles will not affect their psychological comportment, and as a result increase their chances of success. But Lipsius also suggests that constancy

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[78] "et ex impuro hoc coetu Opinio in nobis nascitur, quae non aliud quam Rationis vana imago et umbra… non erigitur, non attollitur, nec altum aliquid aut aethereum spectat."

[79] "soli deo subijciere, immunis a iugo Adfectuum et Fortunae. Ut fluuij quidam per media maria transire dicuntur, et seruare suam undam: sic tu per tumultus circumfusos, ut salsedinem nullam trahas ex hoc pelago maerorum. Iacebis? Constantia te attollet. Vacillabis? sustinebit. Ad lacum properabis vel ad iaqueum? solabitur et reducet a limine moritis."

provides a level of consistency to our actions. This has to do with the fact that a constant mind, for Lipsius, is a mind informed by reason. Describing reason Lipsius argues "firm and unmoved in the good, it always judges in the same way; it always seeks or avoids the same things: it is the spring and flowing fountain of good advice and good judgement" (DC p.31).[80] Because a constant mind is informed by reason a constant mind is a mind that always judges and acts in the same way. For Lipsius this consistency is key to living a better life.

There are several pieces of historical context which informed the notion of constancy that Lipsius is arguing for. First, though ethics has not always been recognized by scholars as a focus of the 16th century Scholastics, there was a rich tradition of commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics* in the period.[81] As Risto Saarinen outlines quite nicely, these works had a psychological focus that shaped discussions of ethics towards discussions of the state of mind of moral agents.[82] So Lipsius's focus on constancy as a particular state of mind was perhaps intended to fit nicely into the broad contours of ethical discussion shaped by the Neo-Aristotelians of the time. But as Daniel Schwartz has argued, this psychological focus was turned by the late Scholastics increasingly towards the practical matters of political duties.[83] These discussions covered issues such as bribing, tax evasion, keeping secrets, and the attitude one should take when the country is at war. And this intellectual backdrop set the stage for conceiving of virtue in the hyper-individualistic and practical manner that Lipsius does with his notion of constancy. In addition to this backdrop, there was also a rich tradition of Humanist ethical teaching which characterized ethics in terms of rhetoric and

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[80] "Firma in bono et immota: unum idemque sentiens: unum idemque appetens aut fugiens: recti consilii, recti judicii, fons et scaturigo."

[81] Lines, "Humanistic and Scholastic Ethics" p.304.

[82] Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*. See: ch.2 especially.

[83] Schwartz, *The Political Morality of the Late Scholastics*.

character development.[84] Lipsius can be seen drawing from this approach in his account of constancy as well. It is not difficult to imagine how a certain measured firmness of the mind is necessary for strong rhetoric and argumentation. A steady mind can make better use of its capacity to reason. So Lipsius's account of constancy seems to broadly combine foundational intuitions of both the Scholastic and Humanist schools of ethical teaching.

We can continue to fill in the details of Lipsius's conception of constancy by looking at his *Manuductionis ad Stoicam Philosophiam*. Here Lipsius suggests that virtue can be divided into two parts: contemplation of the truth and proper conduct.

> But from what, and still in what way, is [wisdom] to be taught? But from Philosophy itself, as is clear: and moreover through a twofold path, that of Decree and that of Precepts… This is an appropriate division, for, just as we made it, it divides into two parts itself. Contemplation and Action: we give to both parts a leader, and (in Seneca's words) "education bequeaths contemplation, admonition bequeaths action," by "admonition" that is to say "Decree" (*Manuductio* Bk.II, Diss.XII. p.76).[85]

There is a bit of a terminological mess in this passage. Lipsius seems to think that, where the Stoics divide the pursuit of wisdom in two, we can understand this division in terms of "decrees" and "precepts." But what Lipsius refers to using "precept" seems to fit much better with our contemporary idea of a lesson of experience. Decrees and Precepts are thought to connect with two different species of virtue: contemplation and action. This suggests to me that, as it was for the ancients, Lipsius thinks that there are two different kinds of wisdom that relate to two different kinds of virtue. When we want to engage in virtuous contemplation, we need to pay attention to "decrees" or "laws" of good thinking which we learn through education. However, when it comes to virtuous action, we need to be more concerned with lessons of "admonition." What I think this means is that we learn to act more virtuously from our own moral failures, or by experience, whereas we learn to think more virtuously by paying attention to the rules of reason. This idea fits in

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[84] Lines, "Scholastic Ethics" p.306.

[85] "Ab ipsa Philosophia, ut liquet: atque id via duplici, Decretorum, et Praeceptorum… Apta divisio nam sicut ipsam totam bipertitam fecimus, Contemplatiuam et actiuam: utrique ecce parti ductorem suum damus, et (Senecae verbis) Contemplationem institutio tradit, Actionem Admonitie, Institutio, id est Decreta."

neatly with the thought that Lipsius offers two separate arguments for the value of constancy; one based on the requirements of good thinking and one based on the consistency of good actions. We need a constant mind to be virtuous because a constant mind is involved in both virtuous contemplation and virtuous action in different ways.

The faculty of reason plays a significant role in both of Lipsius's arguments. But we need to be precise about the relationship between soul and body that Lipsius's account of constancy relies on. Cooper points out that Lipsius calls reason the *higher part* of the soul, implying that there is another part of the soul responsive to the "opinions" formed by the body's appetites and desires.[86] So, for Lipsius, mastery of our emotions does not seem to involve reducing them to misguided judgements as it did for the classical Stoics, because our emotions are not subject to reason's domain of intellectual judgements. This same point was also made by another Neo-Stoic figure, Guillaume Du Vair.

> But like someone who shoots at a target, if their aim is impaired by some disease of the eye, or perhaps some disturbance of the air, or if they mistake one target for another, however much desire that they have to reach the target, they cannot help but move away their aim. Furthermore, we do not know well where to locate that which constitutes our good, and often take that which is immediately around us for the same thing, our particular actions strongly departing from our general intention towards the good (MPS p.6 to 7).[87]

Du Vair's remarks focus on an analogy with shooting at a target. No matter how much one *desires* to hit a certain mark, they can still come up short given the multitude of ways that the world might interfere with their aim. Du Vair thinks that virtue is like this. We can aim at the proper target, i.e., what is well and truly "good". But we still often end up carrying out actions that are not in service of this general good. This is because, as Du Vair notes, we mistake what is around us for the good itself. Though he does not say it in this passage, Du Vair clarifies later in the text that we are led astray in our judgement because the passions influence how we judge. And so, Du Vair modifies the Stoic

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[86] Cooper, "Justus Lipsius" p.15.

[87] Mais comme celuy qui tire au but, si sa visee est empeschee, ou par la maladie de l'oeil, ou parle vice de l'air, ou sil prend une chose pour l'autre, quelque desir qu'il ait de le toucher, si ne peut il qu'il ne sen esloigne: aussinous pour ne pas bien cognoistre ou est c'en quoi consiste nostre bien, et prendre souuent ce qui est autour deluy pour lui mesme, nous eslongnons fort nos actions particulieres de nostre generale intention.

conception of virtue here to allow that a virtuous person can aim at the correct mark and still come up short of mastering their emotions, desires, and appetites in the manner the classical Stoics described. We have, then, two separate instances in the Neo-Stoic tradition of thinkers modifying the Stoic conception of virtue to allow that the virtuous person is not capable of perfect control over the different sorts of things that might influence their action. Lipsius and Du Vair instead allow that virtuous people can still fail to be virtuous from time to time due to the influence of their emotions.

Lipsius and Du Vair needed to make this modification because of their desire to make Stoicism more consistent with Christian ethical teachings. The classical Stoics taught that "sages" could attain a state of perfect rational control over their desires and emotions. For a Christian this is not a possible state of being. Because of the original sin of Adam and Eve human beings have become corrupted. Our desires constantly pull at us and tempt us towards sinful actions such that they give us occasion to ask God for his mercy and for his grace. Supposing that someone like a Stoic sage could exist would, according to Christians, negate God's power to give grace because the sages did not need the grace of God to attain perfect control over their affective states. So, for Lipsius and Du Vair to revive the Stoic doctrines of providence, fate, freedom, and wisdom, they needed to clear out the conceptual space to accommodate what Christianity teaches about human nature and the need for God's grace.

Lipsius sought to accomplish this by demonstrating how the Stoic notion of virtue as constancy is, ultimately, linked quite strongly with God. In the first of the above arguments, the clause "you will be subject to God only" is meant to imply some kind of desirability. Our resilience against the influence of external circumstances is supposed to be conceived as a virtue because it amounts to resilience against anything separate from God that might tempt us. In the second argument, again, we are told that constancy brings us closer to God because constancy is informed by reason, which is itself described by Lipsius as "turned toward God in its origin" (DC p.31). Because reason is a capacity God has instilled in us to allow us to come closer to his light, Lipsius thinks that a virtuous mindset is going to consist in making use of this capacity. Even in the argument against the constancy of stubbornness we see an implicit appeal to God when Lipsius argues that

this stubbornness, born of opinion, "has no regard for anything lofty or of a higher realm" (i.e. God's realm). God is brought in as further support for the utility of the Stoic approach to virtue to try and get Lipsius's readers on board with cultivating a constant mind.

In the *Manuductio* we get a fuller presentation of the way that Lipsius understands the relationship between virtue and God. Lipsius invokes the Christian notion of God's omnipotence to secure the Stoic conclusion that virtue alone is good.

> We settle upon the *root* of this doctrine: behold the *tree* rising up from it, *in virtue by itself is the supreme good: indeed virtue alone is good*. This saying is what separates this strong and manly School [Stoicism] from others who are milder or softer: it leads from the earth, from the body, and from external things, towards the soul, and towards what is innate and eternal (*Manuductio* bk.II, diss.XX. p.92).[88]

To understand this we need to also note that Lipsius makes this point after arguing in bk.II diss.XIX, by appeal to numerous ancient texts, that God constitutes a common nature within each particular person (p.89).[89] This is supposed as the "root" of the doctrine that he lays out in the above. Here the argument seems to be that, since God is the common nature within each person, if we think of God as himself constitutive of virtue, then Lipsius thinks we arrive easily at the Stoic claim that "virtue alone is good." This is because virtue, understood in terms of a constant mind informed by reason, is a state cultivated by the connection one has with God through their rational capacities. And in this passage Lipsius reinforces that he sees value in this doctrine because it can lead us away from what is good for the body and towards what is good for the soul.

Lipsius then proceeds to draw a threefold distinction regarding the goods that constitute virtue:

> They [the Stoics] say there are "good" things in three ways: 1. That from which results "benefits" as virtue is expressed in Greek: [Greek text] and moreover this as it is from the

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[88] "Radicem Decretorum panximus: ecce Truncum ab ea adsurgentem, In sola virtute Summum bonum esse: imo Solam illam, Bonum esse. Haec dictio est quae fortem et virilem hanc Sectam ab aliis mitioribus aut mollioribus abiungit: que a terra, corpore, externis omnibus, ad animum, ad interna et aeterna ducit."

[89] "Tu magnus ille, Natura Communis es: paruus hic in nobis, Propria."

> primary cause. 2. That through which there are benefits: [Greek text] Virtue makes use of [this kind of good], and furthermore, her subordinate actions. 3. That because of which what is useful, or rather, in one word, beneficial things, can exist. [Greek text]: as said before by two, and similar; Friends, Good Men, God, and Spirits [Angels?]. You see what things are good, and in what sense and order they are distinguished: from which Virtue pervades all things: pervades? Indeed, and it makes all things good by its contact (*Manuductio* bk.II, diss.xxii. p.98).[90]

It is especially frustrating that such an important philosophical passage is so unclear. What the passage does tell us, however, is that Lipsius thinks something can be good in three ways. A thing can be good because it produces virtue, and a thing can also be good because it is a means by which some virtuous action is accomplished. Think here about the difference between a book and a sword. Reading a book produces knowledge which, for Lipsius, quite literally is itself a good. A sword by itself does not necessarily constitute any kind of good. But it can be used in a virtuous manner to defend one's country from tyrants and barbarians (or so Lipsius might say). Standing above these two sorts of good is a third kind, namely, that in respect of which all good things exist. We know that for Lipsius this is God. And the argumentative thrust of the above passage seems to be that, once we understand this distinction, we see how God is virtue is the most perfect sense. It is *through* God, specifically that rational nature imparted to all human creatures, that we can become virtuous.

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[90] "Bonum trifariam dicunt:

1. A quo Utilitas ut est Virtus Gre ce efferut: [Greek text] at que hoc, ut a prima caussa.

2. Per quod Utilitas: [Greek text] utiteru Virtus, et amplius, secundam eam Actiones.

3. Quod potest Utile esse sive, uno verbo, Utibile: [Greek text] ut dicta ia duo iteq; Amici, Vir bonus, Dij et Damones.

Vides quae *Bona*, et quo sensu graduque dicantur: ex quibus *Virtus* omnia permeat: permeat? Imo et contactu suo omnia facit."

This section of Latin is extremely unclear in the first edition of the text. It is possible that the Greek terms Lipsius cites are material to the translation of the passage, in which case my understanding might be slightly askew. There are also several words which don't come up in any dictionary and probably constitute misspellings. Unfortunately, this passage is also doing a lot of philosophical heavy lifting. In making sense of it I have primarily referred to Saunders, *Justus Lipsius; the Philosophy of Renaissance Stoicism* p.105-6, though I have not followed his reading of the distinctions exactly. A fair bit is, unfortunately, left to speculation about what Lipsius was intending to do with these distinctions.

Now we can see more clearly how Lipsius conceived of Stoic virtue being made compatible with Christianity. Neo-Stoic virtue is self-sufficient, but not in the same sense as it was for the classical Stoics. Only God can be properly considered as the *source* of benefits. This is why God must ground the human capacity for virtue. But the sort of virtue that can be attained by the mind of a finite human agent is different. It would be better, I think, to understand human rationality as either the cause or the tool by which human beings attain benefits. It is sufficient by itself to liberate the mind from all sorts of evils and impediments to acting in the best possible way. But it is not sufficient to produce benefit without God who is necessarily the source of all benefits, and who himself grounds this rational capacity. We do not get an explicit reconfiguration of any of our Stoic descriptive theses or normative claims here. However, what this conceptual adaptation does is motivate why we should, in Lipsius's context, pursue a Stoic theory of living well. Stoicism recognizes the fundamental connection between our rational capacities and the good of the universe. As such, it is a candidate for a thoroughgoing sort of intellectualism that explains how we might use the tools God has given us to live a better and happier life. We can now turn to the way Lipsius tries to develop this Neo-Stoic intellectualism.

2.3.2 Providence and Fate

Jan Papy has aptly described Lipsius's core project in his Stoic writings as emphasizing, based on the philosophical solutions found in the classics, how Christians can live a moral life through the exercise of reason and will.[91] Perhaps two of Lipsius's most useful tools to this effect are the classical Stoic notions of fate and providence. However, just as in the case of virtue, Lipsius needed to adapt these "pagan" concepts to fit a proper theological understanding of God and his attributes. This initiated a conceptual evolution that opened new ways in which Lipsius could argue for quintessentially Stoic

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[91] Papy, "Lipsius' (Neo-)Stoicism" p.52.

conclusions. We can begin our examination by considering Lipsius's arguments for the existence of providence and fate.

The first step in Lipsius's adaptation of the classical Stoic argument is to secure that there is such a thing as providence. In *De Constantia* his spokesperson Langius argues:

> the fact has not escaped you that there is some eternal intelligence, which we call 'God', which regulates, harmonizes, and governs the permanent spheres of the heavens, the capricious courses of the stars, the shifting vicissitudes of the elements, and, finally, all things both above and below (DC p.59).[92]

Like the classical Stoics before him Lipsius appeals to the regularity and order of the natural world to claim that it must have a providential design. God is defined as "eternal intelligence", and his existence is secured only insofar as this sort of being is necessary to explain the movements of the cosmos. This is essentially the exact same argument that we saw earlier in the classical Stoics. Lipsius also thinks that some kind of necessity follows from this understanding of providence. Lipsius contends that "if there is a God, there is Providence; if the latter, then there is a principle of order in things; if this, then there is a firm and determined necessity of events" (DC p.75).[93] The idea here is simply that, if the universe is governed in a regular and orderly fashion, then this order must extend to all individual things and by consequence determine necessarily what will happen. Lipsius invokes here the classic rationalist argument that if there is a reason for everything these reasons themselves imply some degree of determination at the level of individual objects. If I chose to eat Vector cereal this morning and there was, in principle, some reason for this choice (regardless of whether I know it or only God knows it), then this reason itself seems to have determined my decision in some sense.

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[92] "Quod enim te non fugit, aeterna quaedam mens est, quam Deum apellamus: quae caelorum perennes orbes, quae siderum inaequales cursus, quae elementorum alternas vices, quae denique omnes res superas, inferas temperat, moderatur, gubernat."

[93] "Si enim deus est, Providentia est: si haec, Decretum et ordo rerum; si istud, firma et rata necessitas eventorum."

This argument invokes, in no uncertain terms, the principle of sufficient reason. For every thing that exists it seems Lipsius is committed to also maintaining that there is a reason why it exists. Recently there has been a lot of work done on this topic, in particular by Michael Della Rocca, arguing quite forcefully about the consequences of adopting this principle. In his book *The Parmenidean Ascent*, Della Rocca maintains that if one adopts the principle of sufficient reason, as he thinks we ought to, then they also end up backing into a sort of radical monism which recognizes no distinctions among the constituents of the universe.[94] Lipsius invokes the notion of providence, as we will see, to support a practical Neo-Stoic intellectualism which explains the sort of control we might have over the dispositions of our mind. This move is not going to fit with the sort of radical monism that Della Rocca proposes. If the principle of sufficient reason forces us to conclude that there are no distinctions to be made in reality then, as Della Rocca himself ascertains, reason cannot really generate any meaningful conclusions. At the very least, reason is not going to be capable of determining the sort of practical conclusions required to be involved in shaping our psychology and our actions. This would fundamentally undermine what Lipsius and the Stoics are trying to do.[95]

Let's unpack Della Rocca's account of the principle of sufficient reason (the "PSR") in more detail. Della Rocca's basic contention is that, if one accepts the PSR, then for any explanation *why* something is you can ask further *why that explanation is true*. Della Rocca thinks that some kind of radical monism necessarily follows from this claim. This is because, in short, if you can always ask a further question about a given explanation ad infinitum then the only "sufficient reason" which truly and properly

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[94] Della Rocca, *The Parmenidean Ascent* ch.10.

[95] I want to emphasize what kind of response to Della Rocca's problem I think is necessary for the project I am currently undertaking. I do not think my thesis needs, or wants, to aim at showing that Della Rocca's account of the PSR is incorrect. Nor do I need to show that Della Rocca's account does not present a potential objection to Neo-Stoic thinking. If Neo-Stoicism were no longer viable due to developments in contemporary philosophy, this would not concern my project because it is a historical project. However, I do think that I have some obligation to show interested readers how I think Lipsius and the Neo-Stoics would have responded to someone like Della Rocca if presented with this view. What I aim to provide below is a (tentative) alternate defense of the PSR that, while it may not convince Della Rocca or his readers, can convince my audience that there is not some sort of fundamental conceptual or logical barrier to Lipsius's project.

grounds any explanation is going to be the total set of all reasons taken together as one. Put in our own Neo-Stoic terms, if God's providence rationally explains why I chose to eat Vector cereal, and why my sister chose *not* to eat Vector cereal, and why my father was running late for work today, etc… then none of these actions are *really* distinguishable from one another because ultimately God's providence is the explanation for all of them. But why not just limit the PSR and say that we cannot reasonably ask for explanations ad infinitum? Della Rocca argues against this move based on the nature of relations. According to him, we have two options regarding relations. We can either say that relations are "free-floating" and are not grounded by any further explanation, in which case we violate the PSR because we admit that there is something which does not have a sufficient reason for its existence. Or we can concede, as he thinks we must, that every relation is grounded by its *relata* and as a result we can always ask about the relata that grounds a particular relation, and about the relata that ground those relata, and so on ad infinitum. For Della Rocca, there is no viable PSR except an unlimited PSR, and an unlimited PSR leads to rejecting all philosophical distinctions whatsoever.

What would Lipsius have to say about this argument? Given that he thinks God's providence must necessarily explain all actions it seems, at first blush, that Lipsius is also committed to a full extension of the PSR and (by Della Rocca's lights) some kind of radical monism. However, Lipsius takes pains to deviate from the classical Stoics on this point and distinguishes more strongly the notions of providence and fate.

> Now Providence I conceive or consider not otherwise than as a force and power in God of seeing, knowing, and governing everything. I mean a force universal, undivided, compacted, and, as I may say with Lucretius, joined together. But Fate seems rather to descend into things themselves, and to be observed in them individually, so that I may say it is an arrangement and unfolding of that common Providence in discrete particulars. So providence is in God, and is ascribed to Him alone; Fate is in things and is ascribed to them (DC p.85).[96]

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[96] "Nam Providentia non aliter capio aut considero, quam ut in Deo vis sit et potestas omnia videndi, sciendi, gubernandi. Et vis dico universa, indivisa, stipata et, ut cum Lucretio loquar, vinter iuncta. At Fatum ad res ipsas magis descendere videtur, in ijsque singulis spectari, ut inquam sit digestio et explicatio communis illius Providentiae distincte et per partes. Itaque illa in deo est, et ei soli tribuntur: hoc in rebus, et ijs adscribitur."

Just as for the classical Stoics, for Lipsius providence corresponds to God's intention and design while fate corresponds to the way this design plays out in the world. Where things begin to separate is in the way Lipsius describes fate. Lipsius says that fate "seems rather to descend into things themselves, *and be observed in them individually*." But how does Fate descend into particular things? Lipsius clarifies that it "works moderately and without violence, as the characteristic features impressed by God upon each thing require" (DC p.87).[97] So God impresses a nature, referred to by Lipsius as "characteristic features", but unlike in classical Stoicism that nature itself is not what acts within a particular thing. More specifically, that nature produces requirements for whatever individual it constitutes and these requirements themselves are what Lipsius thinks determine the individual's activity.

> And so with respect to things, [Fate] brings to bear no force or coercion, but as each thing of its nature acts or is acted upon, it thus directs [*dirigit*] or influences [*flectit*] each of them individually. But if you trace it back to its origin, that is Providence and God, then it must be unhesitatingly affirmed that everything that Fate does is done necessarily (DC p.87).[98]

So, for Lipsius, Fate *emanates* from Providence into particular things. In my view this represents a departure from the classical Stoic view that fate corresponds to God's activity understood discretely as it emanates through each individual thing. For the classical Stoics the unfolding of *pneuma* in particular things remained quite closely connected to the way they thought *pneuma* was dispersed throughout the universe. They conceived of "God" acting directly within individual material bodies. Lipsius's revision of the distinction allows that fate be understood as simply the way the activity of individuals unfolds *by their own nature* in accordance with God's providential plan. While this difference seems slight it allows that God need not act directly within things

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[97] "sed leniter et sine vi agere, ut cuique rei impressa a deo signa postulant et notae."

[98] "Itaque rerum quidem respectu, vim nullam adfert aut coactionem: sed ut quidque natum est facere aut pati, ita dirigit singula et flectit. At si id ad originem suam tamen retrahis, id est Providentiam et Deum: constanter nec timide adfirmandum, necessario omnia fieri quae Fato fiunt."

themselves, so "fate" can be more properly ascribed to the activity of individuals than the activity of God.

Lipsius himself tries ardently in *De Constantia* to separate his notion of fate ("true" fate) from the Stoic notion of fate which he calls "violent fate". He argues that the Stoic notion of fate subjects all things to necessity, including God's will and our own human will, both of which are supposed to be "free" (DC p.79). There is some controversy in the secondary literature about Lipsius's intentions with respect to this distinction. In his later *Manuductio* and *Physiologiae Stoicorum* Lipsius appears much more friendly to the classical Stoic understanding of fate. The traditional understanding is that, after twenty years of further study, Lipsius had a change of heart about the compatibility of Stoic fate with Christian orthodoxy and embraced the Stoic view wholeheartedly. Against this traditional reading, John Sellars has argued that, in fact, Lipsius's position remains consistent throughout all of his Neo-Stoic writings.[99] However, Sellars maintains that Lipsius is consistent in his *agreement* with the classical Stoics on fate throughout these texts, which is contrary to my interpretation. In what follows I will argue that Sellars is correct about the evidence he cites in favour of no change of position. However, I will argue against his view that we see Lipsius adopt the classical Stoic understanding of fate.

Sellars contends that the depiction of fate in *De Constantia* differs only minimally from the classical Stoic view. Sellars's argument is based on several passages in which Lipsius concedes that, when understood "moderately," the Stoics "violent fate" is not that different form his own "true fate."[100] We do not need to examine any of these passages because I agree with Sellars regarding their interpretation. Lipsius does appear to concede in several places that Stoic fate can be read in a more reasonable way that does not subject God to necessity. Where I disagree with Sellars is that Lipsius makes these concessions because he secretly agrees with the classical Stoic position on fate. In

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[99] Sellars, "Stoic Fate in Justus Lipsius's De Constantia and Physiologia Stoicorum."

[100] Ibid, p.659 to 662.

support of this view Sellars puts forward several arguments aimed at undermining Lipsius's criticisms of the classical Stoic view.[101] For the sake of clarity I will follow Sellars's division of these lines of criticism into four, exposit Sellars's response to each, and then present my own understanding of what is going on in these complicated interactions between Lipsius's view and the Stoic view.

i.) *The Stoics subordinate God to necessity*. Lipsius makes it very clear in the text that the main problem with the Stoic understanding of fate is that it subjects God's will to necessity. Lipsius's solution is to see fate as a species of providence, not something synonymous with it, and as result conclude that his view makes better sense of the way fate is both universally binding, yet subject to God's will (via his providential determinations). But Sellars argues that Lipsius himself acknowledges that the Stoics never actually expressed that God's will is subject to fate.[102] Sellars chalks up instances where Stoic texts imply this view to just be instances of clumsy expression by the Stoics. While it is certainly possible that Sellars is right about Lipsius's personal understanding of the Stoics, I do not agree that their view so easily skirts the objection. We saw above that the classical Stoic view conceived of the universe as a cosmobiological whole animated by *pneuma*. Insofar as we accept the traditional line of Chrysippus that providence and fate are different in name only, it seems that providence is subject to fate just as much as fate is subject to providence. Because it is the *pneuma* in every instance that acts and the way this *pneuma* acts is determined by the way it is spread, causally, throughout the rest of the universe. This is why, in Lipsius's own time, it would have been impossible to ignore that the classical Stoic conception of providence and fate does not fit the description of God given by Christianity.

ii.) *The Stoics decree from eternity a flowing succession of natural causes*. Sellars does not spend much time explaining Lipsius's problem with this view. He argues, correctly in my view, that Lipsius himself in his own conception of fate has already

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[101] See: ibid, p.661 to 662 for these reconstructions.

[102] Ibid, p.661.

understood it as a causal order that proceeds from God for eternity. So, this does not look like a point of difference between Lipsius and the Stoics. However, the problem Lipsius finds with this aspect of Stoic fate seems to me to be in the notion of "natural causes", which Sellars neglects to point out. While fate does consist in a series of causes that proceeds from God for eternity, Lipsius does not think all these causes are "natural" so to speak. Specifically, it looks as though Lipsius wants to leave room for the human will as a sort of cause which contributes to the order of fate while remaining a step removed from the physical influences of nature.[103] The traditional Stoic view naturalizes the human will and makes it just like any other cause. The human will becomes simply the motion of *pneuma* as instantiated in a particular human agent. So Lipsius is right to take issue with this aspect of Stoic fate given his purposes.

iii.) *The Stoics remove "the possible" from things and make everything necessary*. Lipsius takes issue with this view because he thinks it does not allow for what he calls "secondary causes." These include things like the human will which are not directly determined by the influence of other preceding causes. Instead, these kinds of causes work together with fate to produce, by their nature, certain outcomes which result when other forces act upon them. Sellars maintains that this Lipsian "innovation" is already a conceptual possibility within classical Stoicism that we can see articulated by Alexander of Aphrodisias, among others. Here I think Sellars is right on the mark. We already saw earlier how the unorthodox understanding of causes and effects in classical Stoicism complicated exactly how their determinism was spelled out. Sellars is right to maintain that Lipsius's view does not add anything that is not already a conceptual possibility within Stoicism. And he also correctly notes that both views ultimately are not able to avoid making everything that happens a "necessary" determination of fate, even if secondary causes remove this necessitation by one degree. Here I am happy to concede that Lipsius and the classical Stoics agree, and that the apparent disagreement is the result of contextual pressure upon Lipsius to avoid a controversial position commonly associated with Stoicism.

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[103] More on this view will come in 2.3.4.

iv) *The Stoics inflict violent force upon the will, removing its freedom*. Sellars argues that this objection is already undermined by his response to the third. The Stoics did not intend to inflict violent force upon the will and asserting so is simply a misrepresentation. Let's recall precisely why one would think that the classical Stoic view is subject to this criticism. For the classical Stoics the way one's will behaves is a function of the way that *pneuma* flows through each person. The important point here is that one's nature is determined by *pneuma* which also determines the nature of every other thing in virtue of the way it is instantiated. This does seem to inflict a violent force upon the will. I act the way that I do because of how *pneuma* is instantiated in my material body. Remember, the part of me that is ultimately responsible for acting (the "active part") is, for the classical Stoics, the *same pneuma* that explains the activity of any other person, just instantiated differently. This is not the same as maintaining that my will functions as a secondary cause based on the nature that God determined me to have when creating me. The reason these views differ is, importantly, because the latter is based on a sharper distinction between God's activity as providence and as fate. God is able to create, by a determination his providence, a particular nature in me that is *not synonymous* with the events that result from fate. This distinction is not a possibility in the traditional Stoic of Chrysippus view because providence and fate are synonymous. Though it is a conceptual possibility for *some* Stoics, it seems to have been something that was argued about within the school. So, contra Sellars, Lipsius does seem to have a good reason to differentiate his own view from the Chrysippean line of thinking.

Let's try to pinpoint more carefully what is going on with the passages of text Sellars observes in which Lipsius appears to suggest that, understood carefully, the Stoics never made any of the above point. We saw earlier that Cleanthes and Chrysippus, two of Greek Stoicism's earliest authors, disagreed on the distinction between providence and fate. I also demonstrated earlier in this chapter how Seneca's approach to the problem of theodicy makes more sense if we see him following the same line as Cleanthes, distinguishing more sharply between providence and fate. What I have suggested is that, perhaps, there is not as much homogeneity throughout classical Stoicism as we would like there to be. This is important because, we should note, Lipsius's project was primarily concerned with expositing the wisdom of *Seneca* specifically. In addition, Papy

has suggested that Lipsius may have been inspired in part by the phrasing of Cleanthes *Hymn to Zeus*.[104] What Lipsius is doing in the later texts, which are intended as appendages to his edition of Seneca, is adopting the more nuanced approach to the distinction between providence and fate. As Sellars correctly observes, this more nuanced approach *was* part of some classical Stoic treatments. But Lipsius is also keenly aware of the orthodox reconstructions of Stoicism of his time, as well as the common objections people had to the Stoic view. In *De Constantia*, which was written as a popular text, Lipsius puts more emphasis upon rejecting the orthodox Stoic views that he disagrees with. His work is an attempt to carefully distinguish his own position while arguing against the flaws commonly perceived in the philosophers he is drawing upon. So, there is both legitimate agreement and legitimate disagreement with the Stoics across Lipsius's texts despite the fact that his views remain consistent.

Sellars then proceeds to discuss Lipsius's position on fate in the *Physiologiae Stoicorum*. Diss.XII of this text is titled "To derive fate from providence. What does that mean? How does it avoid taking away freedom from God?"[105] Here Sellars sees Lipsius mediating his own proposed objection to the Stoic doctrine of fate from *De Constantia*. The following is perhaps the most important passage from this section.

> And so, these [two principles] are often conflated by the Stoics: if however, it seems right to distinguish, in such a manner what results from Providence with the knowledge, or thought, that exists in God of all things, this will make more distinct his own law and the decree given to each individual. And so what is from God is to a greater extent in God. I add that the former [providence] is like a Proconsul who decrees and establishes, the latter is like an attendant upon a magistrate who proclaims to all this judgement and who executes it with action (Phys Bk.I, Diss.XII, p.25).[106]

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[104] Papy, "Justus Lipsius and Neo-Stoicism" p.216.

[105] "E Providentia Fatum consequi. quid illud? et quomodo libertatem Deo non tollat."

[106] "Itaque ab ipsis Stoicis confunduntur haec saepe: si tamen discerni placet, sic fiet ut Providentia in ipso Deo sit scientia, vel sententia, omnium, haec distinctius lex ipsa et decretum singulis datum. Itaque a Deo est istud, magis quam in ipso. Addo quod illa velut Proconsul est, qui decernit et statuit, istud, velut lictor, qui sententiam illam facto promit, et omnibus propalat."

Lipsius takes this distinction to rescue the Stoics from the objection that they make God subject to necessity. When we think of providence like a governor who legislates and fate like a loyal servant who carries out this legislation, we recognize that, though it may look in some cases as though God's will is subject to fate, God's providential ordering of the universe stands above whatever fate brings about by necessity. Sellars notes that, in principle, the two roles described here are two sides of the same coin. Lipsius works to distinguish them to demonstrate how the Stoic conception of fate can be saved from potential objections. So there is, according to Sellars, no change of position here and Lipsius ultimately agrees with the classical Stoic depiction of providence and fate. I agree with Sellars that the above argument does not represent a change of position from *De Cosntantia*. In fact, I find it quite interesting that even the specific language Lipsius uses, referring to God's providence as a "governor" and fate as an "executor", maps quite neatly onto the passages from the earlier text. However, I disagree with Sellars that we should understand this as a defence of the classical Stoic position. While Lipsius acknowledges how easy it is to collapse fate and providence, *he still takes great care to distinguish them*. And as we have already seen distinguishing providence and fate in this manner signals that Lipsius is drawing from a less orthodox and non-traditional understanding of Stoicism.

Sellars further contends that we see Lipsius's discussion in the *Physiologiae* as a defence of the Stoic position because of the tenor of his argumentation. Lipsius here is, certainly, defending the Stoic view and he does so via a very colourful array of citations to numerous Stoics (including Seneca), as well as other Neoplatonic and Scholastic thinkers. Regarding this, Sellars says the following:

> This line of argument, identifying God's will as both free and necessary at the same time, is prominent in the Platonic tradition as well, is discussed at length by Plotinus, and taken up much later by Ficino. However, as we can see, Lipsius's source for this line of argument comes directly from Seneca, and so remains exclusively Stoic.[107]

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[107] Sellars, "Stoic Fate" p.665.

It is true that Lipsius cites Seneca directly for this view and for many others in this section of the text. But this is because these are views that he wants his readers to identify with Seneca. The *Manuductio* and *Physiologiae* were published in 1604 as a precursor to Lipsius's new 1605 edition of Seneca and are commonly thought to be manuals intended to guide the reader through their study of Seneca's work.[108] In addition, these texts were written in quintessential humanist fashion. Lipsius wants to show the reader that, not only can certain views be found in Seneca, but that they represent an agreement between Seneca and numerous other important philosophers throughout history. This is why, in almost every chapter, Lipsius proceeds by outlining a view, attributing it to Seneca, and then attributing the same view to Plutarch, Apuleius, Cicero, Plato, Plotinus, Ficino or other non-Stoic thinkers. It does not seem to me that we say that his view remains "exclusively Stoic" because he attributes it to Seneca. More importantly, we saw earlier that even Seneca himself did not necessarily have the most orthodox Stoic position on fate. I think there is room to see Lipsius as both meaningfully drawing upon the Stoic school as well as innovating using more modern conceptual tools.

We also need to be sensitive to the intellectual context in which Lipsius was writing. For about two hundred years prior to Lipsius voluntarists and intellectualists had engaged in academic battles over whether God's will be free or necessary. The conclusion of these debates, as we saw, was that God's will must be both free and necessary. However, among the various accounts that sought to stride along this voluntarist/intellectualist continuum there were some that placed a greater emphasis on God's will being free and some that placed a greater emphasis on it being necessary. The advent of the reformation did not help matters. Luther and his followers possessed a noticeably voluntaristic streak, strongly emphasizing the free power of God to grant or withhold grace at any time after his initial act of creation.[109] It is easier to support this view if one makes a strong distinction between providence and fate. If the course of fate

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[108] Adamson and Sellars, "John Sellars on Lipsius and Early Modern Stoicism." Given that Sellars makes this point himself on Adamson's podcast I find it odd that he does not notice its implications.

[109] See: Saarinen, *Weakness of Will* ch.4 for an overview of the Reformer's voluntarism.

can bring certain things about which are not explicitly part of God's providence, then it becomes more reasonable to suppose that fate might bring events about where there is no clear moral prescription and where we need God's help to determine what to do. In 1585 when Lipsius published *De Constantia* he was a Professor of History at the University of Leiden. To accept this position, he had been forced to make an outward profession of Calvinist faith.[110] By the 1604 publication of the *Physiologiae* Lipsius had long since returned home to Mainz and simultaneously returned to the Jesuit faith of his youth. This is to say that when writing *De Constantia* Lipsius, who had several devoted Calvinist students, had more reason to emphasize the separation between providence and fate. In 1604 this was not the case, and he could more easily acknowledge how the determinations of God's will are, in theory, collapsible into the operations of his intellect. But this difference in emphasis does not change the view that developed across both texts.

In the end I think we ought to represent more carefully what it is that Lipsius aims to do in his discussions of Stoic providence and fate. Inheriting a set of concepts that, admittedly, are not very clear in the classical Stoic texts Lipsius aims to mold these concepts to uses important to him given his intellectual backdrop. Faced with the legacy of the voluntarist/intellectualist split and the influence of the reformation Lipsius saw a conceptual apparatus within Stoicism that could make sense of ways in which God's will is both free and necessary. In both *De Constantia* and the later texts what Lipsius seems to be doing is *co-opting* the Stoic concept of fate. But the reasons why he does this are not, as A.A. Long suggests, to superficially make Stoicism out to be compatible with his Christian faith.[111] It is because he legitimately wants to guide his readers towards the wisdom he finds in the Stoic's conclusions. However, to do so he needed to adopt a modified understanding of the distinction between fate and providence which distinguishes them more sharply. If we now recall our formulations of the classical Stoic principles:

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[110] Saunders, *Justus Lipsius* p.19.

[111] Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition."

> PP: There is some nature (N) such that N is inherent in all X, and N organizes all X according to some end.
>
> FP: For every X, there is some relation (R) to some Y such that R determines (at least) some quality of X.

Consider Lipsius's versions:

> PP: There is some agent (A) such that A has determined intellectually each individual nature (N) for every X, organizing all X according to some end.
>
> FP: For every X, there is some relation (R) to some Y such that R determines (at least) some quality of X.

Notice that, though in the text Lipsius works hard to argue for an alternate conception of fate, logically speaking it is his understanding of providence that changes. This is because he still ultimately takes the principle of fate to imply the same sort of determinism as the classical Stoics accepted. So the claim about necessity that I extracted from the classical Stoic treatment of fate still applies to Lipsius's view. However, Lipsius diverges by maintaining that fate *emanates* from providence. The way providence has determined the causal relations that influence different activities is not by acting within the nature of each thing, but by intellectually determining the nature of each thing and then allowing this nature to unfold.

We have in the above the beginnings of a response to Della Rocca's contention. For Lipsius Della Rocca is ultimately correct that, through reason, we can trace every event back to one single explanatory source (specifically to God). But just because we can perform this sort of rationalization does not mean that we must, nor that we necessarily see all distinctions evaporate into thin air. God has established, so Lipsius thinks, individual *natures* for each thing which explain the different ways that things behave. We can at least minimally meaningfully distinguish between these different individual natures in the rational explanations of different events that we give. And when we observe the roles that these particular natures play in the outcome of events, we can see how certain things are more or less properly ascribed to the activity of God. But, Della Rocca will ask, is it not still true that the explanation of each individual's nature is *grounded* by the relation it has to God via God's act of creation? Can we not just use reason to push Lipsius back to this starting point that sees all meaningful distinctions fall

away? While we certainly *can* do this, I am not convinced that Lipsius thinks we always should. But to explain this, and to fully answer Della Rocca's fundamental question, we need to say more about the sort of intellectualism Lipsius seeks to derive from providence.

In the *Physiologiae* Lipsius can be found frequently contrasting his Stoic view with that of the middle Platonists. Sellars notes that he does this in his discussion of Stoic fate, arguing that the Platonists divide providence into too many layers.[112] He also makes a similar move again later in the text when he takes up the question of *ideas*. In Bk.II Diss.III, having discussed the Stoics principles of God and matter, Lipsius turns to the question of whether we need a third distinct category of ideas (as he suggests the Platonists held). Lipsius cites Seneca's understanding of "idea" from the *Letters on Ethics*, which I reproduce below from a more modern translation.

> As for what an Idea is — or rather, what Plato thinks an Idea is — listen: "An Idea is the eternal model of those things which come naturally into being." To this definition I will add some interpretation so as to make the subject plainer to you. Suppose I want to make a portrait of you. I have you as a model for the picture: from that model, my mind receives a certain configuration to impart to its work. Hence that which instructs and informs me — your appearance, from which the imitation is derived — is an idea. The world's nature includes countless models of this sort: models of human beings, of the various fishes and trees. All things that must come into being by nature's agency are formed according to these models (LE.58, §19, Graver and Long p.168). [113]

In citing this definition Lipsius seems to unquestionably accept the existence of ideas or forms. His divergence from the Platonists, then, must come from what he thinks about the status of these ideas. In Seneca's definition we are told that ideas are not things, per se, but models of things which can be used in our thinking of them. Lipsius clarifies his understanding of this view by criticizing Aristotle who understood Ideas "just as though

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[112] Sellars, "Stoic Fate" p.663.

[113] For those who want to compare with Lipsius's citation, it is reproduced below:

"Quid sit Idea, id est quid Platoni esse videatur, audi. Idea est eorum, que natura fiunt, exemplar aeternum. Adijciam definitioni interpretationem, quo tibi res apertior fiat. Volo imaginem tuam facere, exemplar picturae te habeo, ex quo capit aliquem habitum mens, quem operi suo imponat. Ita illa quae me docet et instituit facies. A qua imitation petitur, Idea est. Talia ergo exemplaria infinita habet Natura rerum (id est Deus) hominum, piscium, arborem: ad quae, quodcum que fieri ab illa debet, exprimitur." (Physiologiae Bk.II, Diss.III, 60).

they stand outside the Intellect itself, moving around in matter, and being impressed like a seal into wax" (*Physiologiae* Bk.II, Diss.III, p.60).[114] Lipsius thinks that ideas are best understood as existing in, and consisting of, Gods mind. Here he again cites Seneca as a source, but the crucial argumentation comes immediately after: "But you will say, are these various and diverse things in God, who is wholly one, and of the most simple nature? Our senses vary: but in God there is one idea and one exemplar, nevertheless separating into individual things" (*Physiologiae* Bk.II, Diss.III, p.60). [115] It seems as though Lipsius is taking issue with those Platonists who thought that, because God is wholly one, the intellectual ideas of particular things which he grounds must stand apart from his perfect unity.[116]

So, for Lipsius there are ideas, but they are not material entities that impress themselves upon the senses, nor are they independent intellectual constructs which our mind accesses. They are, ultimately, different aspects of God's mind which are crystallized through our senses and our interactions with material things.[117] Importantly what Lipsius wants to stress in this section of text is that we do not need to think of ideas as separate ontological entities. They are all, in theory, collapsible into the divine intellect. What this means is that we do not have to posit ideas as archetypes of perceptible objects. If I see a book I receive the idea of the book. But for me to perform intellectual operations with this idea I do not need some further archetype of "bookness" standing over and above the idea of the book I perceived. The idea is, for Lipsius, itself a particular aspect of the divine intellect that is imparted to my mind in light of my sense experiences. My body interacts with the world in a particular way and as a result I get to

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[114] "Ille enim Ideas sic accepit et proddit, quasi extra Intellectum per se substitentes, et agentes in Materiam, ut sigillum in ceram solet."

[115] "Sed dices. Ergo varia ista in Deo et diversa, qui totus unitas est, et simplicissima natura? Nostro sensu varia: sed in Deo una est Idea et exemplar, in rebus singulis tame disparanda."

[116] Plotinus is one such Platonist. However, it is quite difficult to identify who Lipsius is arguing against in this passage because he only explicitly cites people that he thinks, ultimately, agree with this view when they are properly understood.

[117] "Audis? In Corporibus Idea variat, in Deo est una." (Phys Bk.II, Diss.III, 60).

see certain ideas which represent, in abstract, the parts of the world I experience. But Lipsius thinks that we do not need anything further to ground these ideas other than the fact that they are possessed in totality by God's intellect. So those Neoplatonic intellectualists who posit an additional layer of intellectual "forms" floating above the basic ideas we possess make God's providential power more complex than it needs to be.

In theory, this means that Lipsius accepts Della Rocca's contention that the PSR demands our explanations lead back to one undifferentiated explanatory principle. However, in practice Lipsius understands our own reasoning to differ from God's intellect on account of our possession of a material body equipped with numerous sensory faculties. We should not aspire to reach the accounting of the universe that God possesses because we are, in practice, limited beings with limited intellects and we could never meaningfully grasp this perspective. Even if the perspective God's mind has on the entire universe is in fact the most accurate picture of what there really is. In response to Della Rocca's contention Lipsius would likely argue that, though Della Rocca is correct about what the PSR demands in theory, in practice we just do not need to, nor can we, follow reason to such an extent. Astute readers will note that we now seem to be at a crossroads. At the beginning of this section, I explained how Lipsius's commitment to the Stoic doctrine of providence amounts to some kind of rationalism. And now, after examining the texts in more detail I am arguing that he suggests, in anti-rationalist fashion, that considerations regarding the functioning of our senses demand that in practice we not try to follow reason so far. What gives? Exactly how far, and to what uses, should we aspire to put the Neo-Stoic principles of providence and fate that Lipsius has outlined? To answer this, we need to turn to the normative component of Lipsius's project and explain his version of the classical Stoic's first normative duty: the duty of acceptance.

2.3.3 Accepting Providence and Fate

After introducing his understanding of God's providence Lipsius swiftly connects it with to the occurrence of bad things in the world.

> There is a kind of golden chain let down from on high (as Homer veils it by a fable) to which all these lower things are linked. The fact that an earthquake in one place has swallowed up a number of cities comes from Providence, that in another place the plague has mown down many thousands of persons comes from the same source, and that slaughter and war are in the Low Countries from the very same. From God, Lipsius, from God are all these disasters sent, and therefore it was well and wisely said by Euripides, 'Ruin is divinely ordained' (DC p.63).[118]

This passage unequivocally and firmly links God's will with the occurrence of disasters and misfortune. We should take careful note of exactly what this argument is suggesting before proceeding to the passages in which Lipsius tries to soften the blow of connecting God and evil. Lipsius's argument for providence inferred that the world is providential based on the orderly functioning and design of nature. This notion of providence is linked with design, structure, and (if one is bold enough to assert the classical Stoic terminology) telos. To say that, on account of the entire world being providential, evil and misfortune are providential is to say that there is some rational end, purpose, or design to the occurrence of these disasters. It is not to claim that God himself enacts every single part of these disasters. He certainly foresees them (which was standard doctrine for the time), and for Lipsius he also probably intends for them to occur, but he can still be a degree removed from the enactment of the evil because he is a degree removed from the activities of created things.

Consider the traditional trifecta of attributes typically ascribed to God in monotheistic traditions. The account sketched thus far easily makes sense of both God's omniscience and his omnipotence. If disasters are all a part of the divine plan, then one can insist that God knows they will happen without threatening his power because he would not want to prevent things which are a part of his own plan. However, Lipsius's proposal that God himself wills evil into existence does seem to threaten God's omnibenevolence. In book II of *De Constantia*, Lipsius proceeds to try and deal with this worry by making several arguments for how evil could be part of a providential design

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[118] "et aurea quaedam veluti cathena demissa superne est (ut per fabulam Homerus velat) ad quam omnia haec inferna alligata. Quod ibi labes terrae opida aliquot absorpsit, a Providentia est: quod alibi pestis multa milia hominum demessuit, ab ista: quod caedes et bellum apud Belgas, ab eadem ista. Divinitus, Lipsi, divinitus immissae omnes istae clades: ideoque bene et sapienter Euripidi [*clades a deo invecte*] dictae."

which seeks to bring about certain ends. In so doing, he deploys some powerful Stoic arguments about how individuals ought to think about the things that happen to them in their life. This is to highlight that, for Lipsius, answering how the existence of evil is rationally ordered relates to explaining how individuals can be psychologically happy. In trying to rescue God's omnibenevolence by way of Stoic principles Lipsius ends up arguing for the Stoic normative duty of acceptance. To get a clear sense of what is distinct about Lipsius's version of this claim we need to pay attention to the way his arguments in *De Constantia* hinge upon his modified distinction between providence and fate.

Lipsius general argument is to contend that evil and misfortune are compatible with omnibenevolence because "they are always directed toward the good and our well-being" (DC p.127).[119] If it is true that the things we suffer and which cause us pain are necessary for us to reach the good ends God intended for us, then they can be said to be compatible with a providential design. Lipsius proceeds to provide four more specific explanations for how misfortune might direct us towards something good.[120] First, Lipsius argues that the hardships we endure on account of misfortune and evil "strengthen, test, and provide examples" of virtue (DC p.133).[121] We have already seen Lipsius argue generally for the idea of virtue as constancy. Here he invokes this notion to claim, much like Seneca in *On Providence*, that without the advent of disaster we could not cultivate or test our own virtue. In this sense, Lipsius argues, evil "is like a gymnasium where God trains His own to endurance and virtue" (DC p.133).[122] To reap

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[119] "quia ad bonum directae semper et salutem."

[120] This is all done with the caveat that we probably cannot speculate very well or with certainty about God's reasons for using evil (see: DC 129). However, I am not sure how seriously we should take this caveat. It is something Lipsius would have had to say at the time. However, it undermines the force of the arguments that follow. If we do not know with certainty that God actually has these reasons for using evil then discussing them is not a useful means to achieve constancy. I would suspect that, if pressed, Lipsius would want to suggest quite firmly that these are in fact (some of) God's reason for using evil.

[121] "Iuuat enim Excercitium illud non uno modo: sed firmat, probat, praeit."

[122] "Firmat, quia hoc velut gymnasium est, in quo deus suos ad robur instituit et virtutem."

the benefits of exercise at the gym one must endure some pain and discomfort. Just so, if we did not endure the discomfort and suffering brought on by evil, we would not be able to attain a virtuous disposition. The strength of this argument is that, rather than posit evil as some sort of causal antecedent to good, it ties evil in with the design of virtue and goodness. Once God decided one of the goals of human life would be the cultivation of a constant mind he necessarily had to design a world with evil.

Lipsius's next two explanations are linked appealing to what he calls "correction" and "punishment". Lipsius argues that evil and misfortune can correct us. This occurs in two ways; as a "lash" when we ourselves have failed to act virtuously and as a "bridle" when we are on the precipice of failing in virtue (DC p.135). Lipsius notes that often when we allow our mind to succumb to the pleasure and opulence of good external fortune, failing in constancy, God will "take good things away from us, because we have turned them to extravagant uses" (DC p.135).[123] Think about a successful gambler. Often someone who gambles and repeatedly runs into good fortune will push their luck further and further, losing touch with the initial principles that governed their play, until finally they experience losses that make them destitute. The "bad fortune" the gambler endures in this instance is a sort of punishment for failing to remain detached from their own success. Lipsius also claims that God uses evil as a "bridle" by "drain [ing] out of us by means of certain tribulations matter that otherwise would be the kindling of vice" (DC p.137).[124] This is to suggest that, for example, one who experiences a sudden loss of wealth does so because this wealth would have attached them too closely to the outcomes of fate and fortune, destabilizing their constant mind and corrupting their virtue. For Lipsius, this sort of misfortune ought to serve as a reminder of why we ought not get attached to our material possessions.

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[123] "Bona nobis eripit: quia ad luxum ijs usi."

[124] "sic deus per has clades quaedam nobis adimit, materiam alias et focolore de aegritudine iudicat, sed e pectore et fibris."

The final explanation Lipsius provides for God's use of evil pivots back to the design of the world. Here Lipsius is especially clear that this last explanation is speculative. He contends that evil might be necessary for the preservation of the arrangement of the universe. Lipsius appears to be talking about an arrangement in the sense of physical principles, as he states that God "arranged each [thing] according to a particular number, size, and weight" (DC p.141).[125] The argument, then, appeals to the order of the physical principles which God used to structure the universe. Lipsius clarifies that he "conceive[s] no excellence in this vast mechanism without variety and definite change. I admit the sun is most beautiful, but the dewey night, when the black mother's mantle is drawn, makes him more gratifying" (DC p.143).[126] The universe would not be beautiful, in fact it would not be good, if there was no variety and motion. On account of this motion, it seems to be necessary that there is change. And change is something that Lipsius thinks naturally produces things labelled "disastrous" or "bad" from the perspective of human beings. Consider the way that disastrous earthquakes are the result of tectonic plates slowly shifting over time. These earthquakes harm and displace thousands of people, but they are also a necessary result of a natural world that tends towards motion and change. Lipsius also thinks his arguments from variety and change apply equally to human affairs. The world is more beautiful the more diverse arts and intellects it possesses (DC p.143). This naturally produces some conflict between different groups of human beings on account of their diverse views. But Lipsius thinks this arrangement is, in the end, always to some benefit because we can learn from what history teaches us and avoid perpetrating the same evils against groups of human beings in the future (DC p.145).[127] Both variations of this argument appeal to variety and change to suggest that a beautifully designed world must also be a world with evil and suffering.

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[125] "Ac de Conservatione quidem eo suspicor, quod deus ille qui sapienter haec omnia condidit et disposuit; ita condidit, ut singula certo numero, augmento, pondere definiret"

[126] "Primum, quia ornatum nullum in hac vasta machina concipio, sine verietate et distincta vicissitudine rerum. Solem illum pulcherrimum fateor, sed gratiorem tamen eum roriflua nox facit, et pallium obductum nigrae matris."

[127] Lipsius would, no doubt, be aghast at the way some of the same systemic evils from his time perpetuate today.

Lipsius's Neo-Stoic versions of these classical Stoic arguments are informed by his modified distinction between providence and fate. The classical Stoic understanding of fate posits that God is directly active in the material world. Because of this the classical Stoics could also explain evil as something which might lead to good results, but they had to insist that the events we perceive to be "evil" are in fact *conceptually necessary* for the existence of these good results. This is essentially to say that God, in his providential determination of events, decides to value something about the evil results that he knows will follow. Without these evils no good could result and this is why a providential universe can still contain them. The consequence of this position is that human reason leads us to deny the legitimacy of our own suffering. "Pain" is not really pain if one conceives of it in the right light and recognizes the species of good that it can produce. Though Lipsius's arguments are built from a similar sort of reconceptualization of the evil that happens to us, they do not involve this final radical step. By separating God's activity from the material world by a degree, Lipsius's modified account of fate allows that evil is not conceptually necessary for the good results that might follow from it. God does not, in Lipsius's picture, directly produce any of the evil things that occur in the course of the universe. But he does allow them to happen and Lipsius thinks there is a strong set of reasons that inform this decision. In creating a world where evils come about through the course of nature God makes a world with the *potential* for more harmony, more piety, and more virtue. The evil things that happen to us cause real pain and are legitimately *bad* things.[128] But God does not intend to produce them. He merely foresees that they will happen and allows them to happen on account of the potential for good they create. He leaves it up to us to actualize this potential by cultivating a properly virtuous and resilient state of mind. In this manner Lipsius utilizes the philosophical tools of Christian thinking to *improve* the classical Stoic account of theodicy.

This brings us, finally, to Lipsius's formulation of the duty of acceptance. Lipsius argues,

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[128] Which seems to be contra the wisdom of the classical Stoics who would often repeat "who knows what is good or bad."

> if we are wise, let us follow the power drawing [*attrahentem*] us from on high, and regard it as just that men should be pleased with whatever has pleased God. A soldier in a camp gathers up his gear when he has heard the signal for marching; when he hears the signal for battle, he lays it down, his mind, eyes, and ears ready and attentive to every order. May it be the same with us, and in this military service of ours, let us follow eagerly and with a brisk pace wherever our Commander calls us (DC p.65).[129]

We are supposed to follow God, Lipsius thinks, in the way that he is "drawing us from on high." From Lipsius's treatments of providence and fate we can understand what this means. God draws us towards certain ends which he has determined by his providence, and he does this using a sequence of events (fate) that affect our lives and our inner nature which he created according to a particular form. In the *Manuductio* and *Physiologiae* this inner nature is explained through our power to reason. Lipsius thinks that it is through reason we can determine the potential benefit of the bad things that happens to us. It is particularly telling that Lipsius uses the example of military service. Soldiers often must obey and endure commands that do not make sense to them in the moment. However, if their commanding officer is rational and possesses a "higher" point of view, they are often able to anticipate things that the ordinary soldier could not see. Lipsius thinks we ought to try and obey God's commands for our life and the way he leads us even when it involves enduring intense misfortune. Our sorrow in these moments can be alleviated by recognizing how evil functions as part of God's providential plan. Compare this understanding of our normative duty with the classical Stoic formulation.

> Stoics: Everything that happens to X should be accepted in light of its determination by N, *where N is some common nature within every X that influences/directs X's activity.*
>
> Lipsius: Everything that happens to X should be accepted in light of its determination by G, *where G is the providential determination of God's intellect that has ordered and structured the rest of the universe.*

Hopefully readers can see that, while the differences are slight with regards to the philosophical content, the historical context significantly affects the way that this

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[129] "Mittamus aliquando haec vana: et, si sapimus, sequamur ab alto attrahentem illam vim, et aequum censeamus ut homini placeat, quidquid placuit Deo. Miles in castris audito viae signo, vasa colligit; audito pugnae, deponit; animo, oculis, auribus, paratus ad omne imperium et intentus. Idem nobis sit, et in hac militia sequamur alacres et pleno gradu quocumque vocantem Imperatorem."

normative duty is presented in each iteration of Stoicism. And as I have argued above, this seems to have a legitimate affect on how we understand what a Stoic duty of acceptance requires of us. Because, in the end, it is different to accept what happens to me because it is some instantiation of the universe inside of myself than it is to accept what happens to me because it is the best determination of a divine intellect.

It should now be clear from this discussion how Lipsius would respond to the Della Rocca inspired critic who asks: "just how far are we to follow our faculty of reason if not all the way?" For Lipsius the entire Neo-Stoic project, from *De Constantia* to the later Stoic manuals, is aimed at consolation. His goal in the texts is to show his audience how to consult reason to alleviate whatever ails them. And in each of his Neo-Stoic arguments for accepting our fate he tries to model how we should do this. In the end, my guess is that Lipsius would not be interested in using reason to answer more abstract questions about what relations ground the relata of other relata, etc. He would be interested in using reason only so far as we need to situate the events in our life into the grand scheme of God's providential plan, such that this assessment provides some kind of consolation or peace of mind. This is to say that Stoicism as it is repurposed in the early modern period is primarily a kind of rationalist *ethics*. Not a physics or a logic as many ancient scholars would argue it was intended. The parallels with Stoic cosmology and Stoic epistemology are certainly there, but these tools are only drawn upon for the sake of demonstrating how we might take advantage of Stoic wisdom regarding events which are outside of our control. So, for Lipsius, reason is a very important tool which allows for human beings to live better lives, but our need to consult it does not seem to extend beyond practical matters which affect our anxiety and psychological distress.

2.3.4 Free Will

One might wonder how we have any power to cultivate a character that agrees with the dictates of providence and the results of fate in Lipsius's picture. After all, if God is the necessary cause of every effect [FP], it seems as though everything that I choose to do or not do, I choose necessarily. This brings us to the final feature of Lipsius's Neo-Stoicism

worth unpacking: his treatment of free will. Elucidating how Lipsius deals with traditional questions of the compatibility of freedom and determinism will in turn explain how we can attribute to him the second Stoic normative duty of character development.

Lipsius is clear from the outset of his argument from necessity that he intends to leave room for contingency among the actions of created things.

> But let me return to clarifying my definition [of fate]. I have said that it is 'an inherent decree' that I might show that fate ought to be observed in those things to which it comes, and not from where it comes. In addition, I said 'in changeable things', which indicates that although Fate itself is inexorable, it does not take away from things their innate contingency and nature, but works moderately and without violence, as the characteristic features impressed by God upon each thing require. That is, of course, in necessary causes (by which I mean secondary causes) necessarily, in natural causes naturally, in voluntary causes voluntarily, and in contingent causes contingently. And so with respect to things it brings to bear no force or coercion, but as each thing of its nature acts or is acted upon, it thus directs or influences each of them individually (DC p.87).[130]

This passage clarifies that Lipsius thinks fate works in tandem with the nature of each created thing. If it is my nature to act according to the determinations of my will, which is free, the way that my will operates will be influenced by the sequence of fate in such a way that it remains "free". Though everything I do is certainly necessary and foreseen by God it is not, strictly speaking, coerced. We typically think about problems of free will in a linear fashion. If there was a reason for my decision to use my big coffee cup this morning instead of the small one, this reason precedes my action. Subsequently, if I conclude that this reason itself *determined* my action, and that there was yet another preceding factor that determined my reason, we tend to think my choice of coffee cup was not free. But Lipsius does not think about the issue this way. He argues that fate is a first cause of everything that happens. However, this first cause "is so far from taking away second and medial causes, that (regularly and for the most part) it only functions

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[130] "Sed ut ad clarandam finitionem meam redeam, dixi Inhaerens decretum. ut ostenderem spectari Fatum debere in ijs ad quae peruenit, non a quo venit. Addidi, Rebus mobilibus: illud adsignificans, Fatum ipsum etsi immobile, motum tamen insitum et naturam non tollere a rebus: sed leniter et sine vi agere, ut cuique rei impressa a deo signa postulant et notae. In caussis quidem (secundas intellego) necessarijs, necessario: in naturalibus, naturaliter: voluntarijs, voluntarie: contingentibus contingenter. Itaque rerum quidem respectu, vim nullam adfert aut coactionem: sed ut quid que natum est facere aut pati, it a dirigit singula et flectit."

through them" (DC p.91).[131] So while it may be true that my choice to drink from the big coffee cup was providentially determined by God's will, it does not follow that this deliberation by God determines my own subsequent deliberation. I have my own reasons, determined through my own free and rational nature, and I come to the same conclusion that God himself foresaw and willed. Fate works with my will rather than through coercing its agreement.

Lipsius tells us that "God draws all human things by impact of Fate, but does not abolish the particular *force or motion of each individual*" (DC p.91, my emphasis).[132] Our will is part of the force or motion that constitutes our nature or natural power. This position is by itself quite reminiscent of some moderate voluntarist accounts of free will. But if God is working in tandem with our will does this not make him complicit in the sins that result from poor use of the will? Here Lipsius argues by analogy "I am astride a weak, lame horse and spur him on: the spurring is mine, the weakness his. I pluck an out-of-tune, badly strung lute: still, you will admit, the discords are the fault of the instrument, not mine" (DC p.93).[133] God merely spurs us on through external causes that activate our will in particular ways. Though he knows for certain what the results of this spurring will be, he is not responsible for what follows because what results is a product of the quality of our own character and our own acts of willing. In Lipsius's picture it seems that culpability and responsibility lie in the makeup of an agent's nature, which itself informs why we will the way we do. It remains up to the virtuous person to develop a character that will be truly resilient when they meet with bad fortune. And this aspect of his view is more closely correlated to the strategies of moderate intellectualists.

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[131] "Fatum est? sed prima nempe caussa. quae adeo secundas mediasque non tollit, ut non nisi (ordinatim quidem et [greek text]) per eas egat."

[132] "sic Deus fati impetu humana omnia trahit, sed peculiarem cuiusque vim aut motionem non tollit."

[133] "Equum insideo et impello debilem et claudum: quod impello, a me est; quod debilem, ab ipso. Citharam pulso disonam et nervis male vinctam: quod tamen discordat, instrumenti vitium esse fatebere, non meum."

However, it is unclear from what Lipsius has said so far what work the will is really doing in this picture. If providence and fate govern the course of events throughout the entire universe then, even if we allow that human beings contribute to this course through their own power, there remains much that is outside of the control of individual human agents. In fact, much of Lipsius's Neo-Stoic project is predicated on the idea that there is so much beyond the control of human beings which we ought to condition ourselves to deal with. If we accept this then we must allow that these events which are beyond our control can influence our will and shape our character to some degree. Unfortunately, Lipsius does not explicitly address this worry. But he does give some very important clues about his position in the following passage:

> Fate is, so to speak, the dancing master, and he leads the train in this world's jig; but in this fashion, that we always dance some of our parts willingly, some unwillingly. And our will extends no further: we do not decide whether we dance — because it would please God that sufficient will at least is left to man to resist and struggle, and not the power also by which he might succeed. It is as if I were in a ship where I am allowed to walk about and pass along the gangways or among the benches, but this petty movement is not at all significant enough to hinder the ship's course. So it is in this bark that bears us all along: our wills are permitted to run one way or another, not to turn the ship from its course or stop it (DC p.93).[134]

First, Lipsius argues (contra Voluntarism) that God did not have to give us the power to always and infallibly succeed in the way we exercise our will. It is enough, he thinks, that we have the power to struggle against unfavourable currents of fortune even if we are doomed to succumb to them.[135] Lipsius then describes the actual power that our will possesses. Like a passenger on a ship who is free to walk about we can direct our will one way or another. However, we cannot on our own alter the course of the ship itself. Lipsius claims that we do not "make a decision" [*efficiendi*] as to whether we dance

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[134] "Denique ut concludam de hac Libertate: Fatum veluti praesultor est, et funem ducit in mundi ista chorea: sed ita ut partes aliquae nostrae sint volendi semper sut nolendi. Nec ultra: non enim efficiendi: quia arbitrium saltem relictum homini, quo reluctari et obniti deo libeat: non vis etiam, qua possit. Ut in naui ambulare mihi fas, et per foros discurrere aut transtra, sed nihil minutus hic motus valet ut impediat eius cursum: sic in fatali hac naui, qua omnes vehimur, currant licet voluntates nostrae et transcurrant, non via eam eiiciant aut sistent."

[135] Note that this is quite a different position from Descartes who would later argue that, in some sense, God must have given us the power to succeed infallibly if we use our will correctly otherwise he would not meet the requirements of omnibenevolence.

along with fate or not. The verb *efficere* is a rather strong choice by Lipsius because it can also mean “to cause”, “to produce”, “to accomplish”, or “to effect”. To me this signals a departure from the classical Stoic language of assent and dissent. Rather than locating our freedom in moments of discrete assessment of propositions Lipsius seems more concerned with the power of the will to *incline* one way or another. God finds it sufficient that we should have the power to “resist and struggle”. And so our wills have the capacity to “run [*currant*] one way or another” but not necessarily to give or withhold assent full stop, as the classical Stoics posit.

But now there seems to be yet another knot in Lipsius’s theory. If our freedom is understood as our power to incline our will towards or away from certain things, and this power is the means by which we may “struggle” against the difficult situations we are presented with, how should we understand the normative claim that we ought to agree with God’s providence? Lipsius asks, “Why don’t we leave everything to that great, indomitable ruler, and we ourselves sit, as they say, with our hands folded? For even by your own admission, all help and advice are useless with the fates in opposition” (DC p.97).[136] This is essentially a version of the “lazy argument” that Stoics such as Chrysippus faced since the inception of their school.[137] Lipsius responds by arguing that this sort of apathetic approach is more akin to struggling against fate than it is to accepting it. “Who ever told you” he argues “that mere Fate works on its own without an intermediate and auxiliary cause” (DC p.97).[138] Since the human will works as a secondary cause in conjunction with fate, to suspend it indefinitely and never do anything

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[136] “cur non omnia rectori illi magno et indomito permittimus, et sedemus ipsi, quod dicitur, manibus compressis? nam tuo quoque concessu, vanum auxilium omne et consilium adversantibus fatis.”

[137] See: Bobzein, *Determinism* ch.5 for a full discussion of this problem in classical Greek and Roman Stoicism.

[138] “Quis enim umquam tibi dixit, Fatum merum solumque agere sine media et auxiliante caussa?”

would be acting against what fate prescribes.[139] Lipsius argues that it is quite difficult to determine for certain the signs that something is fated to occur. "Bring help" he says "and so long as there is life in the patient… there is hope. But if the fatal alteration will appear by clear and definite signs, in my judgment that phrase will prevail, 'not to struggle with God'" (DC p.99).[140] This puts the burden on each individual person to try and determine by *clear and definite signs* what God's providence has decreed. In other words, as Lipsius argues later on, "turn to wisdom, which may correct your morals, which may calm and enlighten your troubled, shabby mind. That is what can imprint virtue and supply Constancy; that alone can open up to you the temple of good understanding" (DC p.121).[141] It is through our reason that we are best able to act in accordance with fate. And so long as we have the freedom to incline ourselves towards or away from certain ideas, we have the freedom necessary to think and to reason for ourselves.

It should now be apparent that, like the Stoics, Lipsius subscribes to an intellectualist picture of virtue. We are free to reason, and the products of our reasoning themselves are supposed to work in conjunction with fate and determine how we act. The success with which we can bear what fate sends our way will depend on the degree to which we are able to understand, through reason, the dictates of God's providence.[142] However, when it comes to our freedom and the way in which we dispose our will, Lipsius continues to modify the classical Stoic view. Rather than maintain with the Stoics that freedom consists in our power to give or withhold assent, Lipsius restricts the domain of the will further (likely due to the influence of voluntarist/intellectualist

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[139] And this signals yet again that Lipsius is not using exactly the classical Stoic conception of free will, where indefinite suspensions of judgement are encouraged when one lacks the necessary information.

[140] "Fer opem igitur. et quamdiu, iuxta vetus verbum, anima huic agero est, spera. Quod si iam certis clarisque indiciis fatalis mutatio apparebit: me quidem iudice valebit illud."

[141] "Ad Sapientiam convertere, quae mores tibi corrigat, quae animum turbidum sordidumque tranquillet et illustret. Illa est quae virtutem imprimere, quae Constantiam suggerere potest: illa sola, quae templum tibi aperire Bonae mentis."

[142] At least, as far as is possible for a finite human mind. Remember, Lipsius does not think we can be infallibly virtuous (contra the classical Stoics).

debates) and claims that our freedom consists only in our power to incline our will towards or away from certain things. Like the Stoics Lipsius wants to endorse the idea that our good or praiseworthy actions are the result of our capacity for rational judgment. However, on account of his modified understanding of our freedom, Lipsius modifies this "duty of character development" to consist merely in attending to the best, most rational, sets of ideas that are available to our mind at any given time. This severely weakens our ability to achieve what is, in principle, the best course of action. However, it also lowers the burden of what is required to cultivate a virtuous disposition and live morally. And this is representative of the sort of conceptual changes we saw Lipsius make earlier to the Stoic doctrines of virtue and providence. If we were to summarize Lipsius's approach to Stoicism as a whole, it is to make Stoicism less arduous and more palatable by importing a particular understanding of God and the way that God structures events in the world. For the rest of this dissertation I will turn my attention towards the legacy of this Neo-Stoic project as it permeated through the 17th century.

Chapter 3

3 Descartes and Elisabeth on Neo-Stoicism

3.1 Neo-Stoicism in Descartes and Elisabeth's Correspondence

Rene Descartes's *Discourse on Method* and his *Meditations on First Philosophy* left readers with a fairly austere account of his moral philosophy. In part three of the *Discourse*, Descartes sets out a list of basic moral duties that he adopts as a *morale par provision* for the sake of living well until such time as he is more able to meditate on the best ethical system.[143] In the fourth of his *Meditations*, Descartes then provides an explanation of error that also carries some normative implications. Descartes concludes that "if, whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong" (CSM II, p.43). Descartes specifies in the fourth set of objections and replies to the *Meditations* that this account only explains intellectual error and does not extend to moral matters (see: CSM II, p.172). But Descartes's normative criterion naturally suggests an approach to morality. If our intellectual errors are simply a matter of giving assent to ideas that are not clear and distinct, why can we not say the same about our moral errors? After all, as we saw above, there does seem to be some basic relationship between the capacity of the mind to search for knowledge and its capacity to know, and follow, the best course of action.

Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, one of Descartes's most trusted correspondents, writes him asking about this topic in May of 1645. She poses the following problem.

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[143] See Collette, "Stoicism in Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza" ch.1 for a compelling argument that Descartes's provisional morality is, in fact, just provisional and should not be considered strong evidence against a Stoic interpretation of his ethics.

> Although I do not rest my felicity on things which depend on fortune or on the will of men at all, and although I do not judge myself to be absolutely wretched knowing I will never see my house in order or those near to me away from misery, I still do not know how to consider the injurious accidents that befall them under any other notion than that of evil, nor how to consider the useless efforts I make in their service without some sort of anxiety (LS p.89).

Elisabeth is very clear that her problem here has to do with anxiety. She has, essentially, taken Descartes account of the will in the *Meditations* and applied it to her life, trying not to allow her happiness to be affected by anything other than the best judgement of her reason. But Elisabeth notes that, despite doing this, there are still events in the world (such as misfortune in the lives of her loved ones) which seem to be genuinely bad things, and which manage to produce discomfort in her mind. Descartes's account of the will does not tell us what to do when we cannot help but make judgements that produce anxiety in our minds. This question can be asked of Descartes because he has not, as of this point in his life, given any explanation of how his account of intellectual error relates to moral errors and to the pursuit of a good life. Elisabeth pushes Descartes to discuss this topic and their correspondence transforms into a discussion of moral philosophy which, eventually, prompts Descartes to write his *Passions of the Soul* in which he spells out more detailed answers to some of Elisabeth's questions.

The course of Descartes and Elisabeth's discussion leads Descartes to explicitly mention Seneca and Stoicism. In his letter of July 21, 1645, Descartes suggests that "one of the ways that seems most useful to me to acquire this felicity is to examine what the ancients wrote about it and to try to go beyond what they said by adding something to their precepts" (LS p.96). He then recommends that he and Elisabeth read Seneca's *De vita beata* so that he may draw considerations "from the reading of this particular book." In his subsequent letter of August 4, Descartes says the following about Seneca's work on happiness:

> When I chose Seneca's *De vita beata* as the book to propose to your Highness as an agreeable topic of discussion, I did so only on the basis of the *reputation of the author* and the dignity of the subject matter, without thinking of the manner in which he treats it. Having since considered this manner, I do not find it sufficiently exact to merit following it through. But in order that your Highness can judge of it more easily, I will here try to explain in what way it seems to me that this subject ought to have been treated *by a philosopher like him* who, not having been enlightened by faith, had only natural reason as a guide (LS p.97, my emphasis).

There are a couple of important points to make about this appeal to Seneca. First, Descartes's intention from the start seems to be to use the ancients as a jumping off point for his own philosophizing about virtue, allowing him to "add something to their precepts." This is important because it tells us that Descartes is not really aiming to wholly endorse or criticize Stoicism. He simply wants to use it as a conceptual toolbox to draw from in answering Elisabeth's questions. However, there is enough evidence here that suggests to me that Descartes makes a concerted effort to pick out Stoicism in particular. First of all, he claims that he recommended reading *On the Happy Life* based on the reputation of its author. We saw in the last chapter exactly the sort of reputation that Seneca would have had in Descartes's day, thanks to Lipsius, as a pagan carrying deep sympathies with Christian morality. In Descartes's time, Seneca also would have been seen as one of the most advanced Stoic authors, thanks in large part (again) to the efforts of Lipsius and Erasmus. Finally, though Descartes takes issue with what Seneca spends time discussing in the text, he suggests to Elisabeth that his goal is to explain how the subject of happiness ought to have been treated "by a philosopher like him." Descartes's clarifies that he means a pagan who only has natural reason as their guide to the good life. But then why not mention Plato, or Aristotle, or better yet Epicurus?[144] Descartes appears to be intentionally picking out the Stoic school to answer some of Elisabeth's questions.

We do get an explanation later in the correspondence of why Descartes chooses to appeal to Stoicism to answer Elisabeth's questions. Descartes argues that the wisdom of the ancients, specifically Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicurus, can be made compatible. He suggests that

> Aristotle considered the sovereign good of the whole of human nature in general, that is, that which the most accomplished of all men can have, and so he was right to have it consist of all the perfections of which human nature is capable. But that meaning is not useful to us. Zeno, on the contrary, considered that which each man could possess on his own. This is why he too was quite right to say that the sovereign good consists only in virtue, for it is only virtue, among the goods we can have, which depends entirely on our

[144] As there have been many attempts to connect Descartes's ethics (primarily from his earlier works) with Epicureanism and its revival in the 17th century.

> free will… Finally, Epicurus was not wrong, in considering what true happiness consists in and the motive or the end to which our actions tend, to say that it is pleasure in general. For even though the mere knowledge of our duty could oblige us to do good actions, this would not, all the same, make us enjoy any true happiness if we did not receive pleasure from it (LS p.104).

Descartes assigns to each of these ancient views a domain of ethical inquiry. Aristotle, he thinks, was right about the theoretical picture of the highest good that any one human can possibly attain. As such he provides a useful model for perfecting human nature, however, one that does not help with the imperfect nature of practical matters. Zeno and the Stoics were right about the good that one can pursue on their own using their free will. This is to say that the Stoics were right about how we ought to act practically from day to day. When we think of an individual agent by themselves trying to make the best choice with respect to the given options available, Descartes thinks that the Stoics were closest to the mark. Finally, Descartes suggests that the Epicureans were right that the *motive* that makes us act the way that we do is pleasure. This is to say that the Epicureans were right about the psychological picture of virtuous action. When someone acts for the sake of some good it is ultimately, Descartes thinks, pleasure which explains their action. Note that the segment of ethics where Descartes follows the Stoics is the area of ethical inquiry most directly related to Elisabeth's questions, which explains why Descartes suggests reading Seneca earlier in the correspondence. Descartes thinks the Stoics have answers about the best way for an individual agent to use their own free will, and as such can help answer Elisabeth's questions about anxiety and misfortune.

And so, Elisabeth and Descartes's discussion of virtue and happiness becomes an important discussion of Stoic ideas that sets the stage for the integration of Neo-Stoic themes and positions into Cartesian thought.[145] By suggesting that they start from principles of thinkers like Seneca and try to go beyond them by adding to them, Descartes implicitly signals that he is (intentionally or unintentionally) interested in a similar project as Lipsius, Du Vair, and other Neo-Stoics. The goal of this chapter is to use the

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[145] Remember, Descartes's side of this correspondence was published with the rest of his corpus. So the themes and ideas that he sketches can be considered part of the Cartesian cannon that influenced the authors inspired by him.

Stoic and Neo-Stoic interpretive frameworks developed in the preceding chapter to evaluate Descartes and Elisabeth's discussion of how to be happy. This will be done in three steps. First, I will frame Descartes's position on the will with reference to the developments of the voluntarist/intellectualist debate, and the resulting continuum, that preceded him. To understand contextually what Descartes and Elisabeth are concerned with we need to understand how the issues they discuss sit in reference to the continuum between voluntarism and intellectualism on which early modern accounts of moral psychology were situated. Then, I will turn to Descartes and attempt to lay out systematically the program of ethics that seems to emerge from his correspondence with Elisabeth and later writings on the passions, taking care to note where he adopts Neo-Stoic positions similar to Lipsius. Finally, I will turn to Elisabeth's criticisms of Descartes to explain how she develops a novel view of her own. Here I will take care to emphasize how Elisabeth manages to identify the problems with Descartes's Neo-Stoic positions while simultaneously adapting his Neo-Stoic package of views to her own intellectual concerns.

What will emerge by the end of this chapter is an account of two different ways that Neo-Stoic positions are integrated into two different "Cartesian" accounts of ethics.[146] I will explain why Descartes and Elisabeth were motivated to adopt ideas reminiscent of the Stoic school by explaining the concerns that drove them to do so. In addition, the account provided in this chapter will set the stage for a further examination of Nicolas Malebranche's complex and interesting relationship with Neo-Stoic thinking in the following chapter. Once we see the reasons that inspired Descartes to adopt Neo-Stoic lines of thinking, and the gaps in this thinking pointed out by Elisabeth, we will have a better idea of why it makes sense to look for these same Neo-Stoic positions in Malebranche's thought. The following, then, is an account of how Neo-Stoic ethical positions entered the Cartesian lexicon of conceptual possibilities.

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[146] Elisabeth, though not strictly a Cartesian, is deeply sympathetic to Descartes's account of ethics and tries to incorporate many of his key insights into her own view.

3.2 Between Voluntarism and Intellectualism

Given that Descartes appeals to Stoicism to explain the good use that we might make of our free will, we need to know a little more about the Cartesian picture of the will. In the fourth meditation, Descartes famously concludes that "if, whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong" (CSM II p.43). Descartes intends this declaration serve as a normative criterion for the rest of his philosophical enterprise. As Lianghua Zhou has explained nicely, when our ideas are clear and distinct they command the assent of the will.[147] But when the intellect possesses ideas which are not clear and distinct it runs into a problem. This is because our faculty of will, the faculty that Descartes thinks bears likeness to God himself, is unlimited and can give or withhold assent to ideas even if they are unclear (CSM II p.40). This leads us to make errors because, unfortunately, our intellect is quite inferior to God's and we often possess ideas that are not clear and distinct. The scholarship on Descartes's account of free will has mainly focused on the tension between the thought that clear and distinct ideas command our assent ("clear and distinct determinism" or "CDD") and the thought that the faculty of the will is unlimited and always could have done otherwise (the "principle of alternative possibilities" or "PAP").

The main scholarly approach to this question has been what Brian Embry calls the "restriction reading" of PAP.[148] This reading restricts the idea that our will always could have done otherwise to cases where we lack clear and distinct ideas.[149] This move resolves the tension between CDD and PAP completely by maintaining that each principle applies only in absence of the other. However, these readings tend to underplay Descartes's unrestricted endorsements of PAP, such as when he suggests the will is an

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[147] See: Zhou, "Descartes on the Source of Error."

[148] Embry, "Descartes on Free Will and Moral Possibility" p.384.

[149] See: Kenny, "Descartes on the Will", Lennon, "No, Descartes Is Not a Libertarian", Ragland, *The Will to Reason* ch.4, and Newman, "Attention, Voluntarism, and Liberty in Descartes's Account of Judgment" for some examples of this approach.

"unlimited" faculty and the part of us that is most like God himself. Another approach is the deontological reading favoured by Lilly Alanen and Noa Naaman-Zauderer.[150] These scholars argue that Descartes thinks whether clear and distinct ideas command our assent depends on whether the content of these ideas is something morally necessary or just morally permissible. If my clear and distinct ideas are of something only morally permissible, then Descartes thinks my will can dissent from these ideas. However, when my clear and distinct ideas are of something morally necessary then it is not possible for the will to dissent. The main problem with this reading is that Descartes uses "moral possibility" and "moral necessity" in a much wider sense in other contexts, making it difficult to fit this reading to all the relevant texts.[151]

Inspired by both approaches, Embry proposes a new alternative by appealing to several instances in which Descartes appears to adopt the scholastic distinction between absolute possibility and moral possibility. According to the Scholastics something was considered absolutely possible if it was possible in theory absent of any considerations about the likelihood that it would happen, whereas by contrast, something was considered morally possible if it was in fact probable that it would occur.[152] If we understand Descartes's remarks distinguishing absolute possibility from moral possibility along the same lines as the Scholastics, Embry argues that we read Descartes as suggesting that, in the presence of clear and distinct ideas, it is extremely probable (i.e. morally possible) that the will gives its assent. However, it remains "absolutely possible" that our will might dissent from these clear and distinct ideas and, in this sense, bears some similarity to God's unlimited will. I like the intuition behind Embry's approach that we try to find a middle ground interpretation by appealing to Descartes's Scholastic background. However, I do not think that Embry properly appreciates how severely Descartes's view is undermined by allowing that, even if it is only an "absolute possibility," the will might

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[150] See: Alanen, "Descartes and the Power to Do Otherwise" and Naaman-Zauderer, *Descartes' Deontological Turn* ch.3.

[151] See: Embry, "Moral Possibility" p.386.

[152] Ibid, p.388-91.

dissent from clear and distinct ideas. Clear and distinct ideas are supposed to be how God is cleared of responsibility for our errors. If possessing clear and distinct ideas is at *any* time insufficient to command the assent of the will, then God has created a world where reason can fail to determine the best judgement of human agents. This would mean that I can do my best to think clearly and distinctly as Descartes suggests and still fail to judge correctly. And so, God becomes responsible for error. The view that we are responsible for our own errors is undermined by conceiving of the Cartesian will in this way.

Fortunately, there has been new work that seeks to develop further an alternative reading of the sort that Embry suggests. Zhou argues that, if we look exclusively at the meditations, we only get a partial account of the will. The account in the meditations "leaves out an explanation why we judge at the time we do, when we could (and should) continue to inquire insofar as we have not yet gathered sufficient evidence."[153] In other words we do not get an explanation of those practical cases, which we all know occur, where we fail to reach clear and distinct ideas. Zhou argues that this explanation can be found in the correspondence with Elisabeth. Here Descartes begins providing an internal explanation of how we fail to reason properly on account of the passions. But Zhou's focus is on the way that this explanation fills in Descartes's account of more practical cases of moral and intellectual failure. Ariane Schneck adopts a similar strategy and extends it to the theoretical account of the Cartesian will.[154] Schneck distinguishes between intellectual determination and determination by the external body to argue, similarly to Zhou, that the freedom limiting cases of determination for Descartes are cases where the body determines the will. Clear and distinct ideas can determine our will's assent without any threat to its ability to do otherwise. But, Schneck argues, we do not see this until we recognize the way in which Descartes is drawing upon both the voluntarist and intellectualist traditions in his various remarks on the will.

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[153] Zhou, "Source of Error" p.1009.

[154] See: Schneck, "Descartes's Conception of Freedom."

It is worth saying a bit more about Schneck's reading. Schneck's view relies on three important distinctions. First is the distinction mentioned above between internal and external determination. Descartes thinks that only external determination is freedom threatening. However, Schneck argues that, for Descartes, the sense of "external" determination that he is concerned with is determination *external to the soul* rather than determination *external to the will*. This is because there are several passages in which Descartes describes intellectual determination, determination external to the will but not to the soul, and suggests that it is not freedom threatening.[155] Schneck's second point is to distinguish the Cartesian soul from its powers.

> According to Descartes's theory of judgement, the intellect is the soul's passive power, the faculty by which the soul has ideas, about which the will, the soul's active power, can then judge. Without the intellect providing ideas, the will would not have any material about which to judge; and without the will, the soul could not take an affirmative or negative stance towards the material provided by the intellect. The activities of the intellect and the will, intelligere and velle respectively, are both forms or modes of thinking (cogitare), understood broadly. Hence, the agent in question is not the will, but the soul as a whole, or the thinking thing with its two powers.[156]

Schneck takes great pains to explain, correctly in my view, that the Cartesian soul – though it has different parts, or *powers* – fundamentally cannot be in conflict with itself. The intellect and the will are two equally integral components of the soul's thinking and judgment. So if we conceive of them as being in conflict with one another we misrepresent how the Cartesian soul actually operates. It follows that conceiving of "external determination" as determination external to the will simply cannot be correct. It is determination external to the soul as a whole that Descartes is concerned with. Finally, Schneck distinguishes between having a power and exercising that power. It is possible for the will to have the power to give assent without *always* exercising this power. This means that the intellect can (effectively) block the exercise of the will's power by determining it towards a particular judgement without removing our theoretical power to judge differently in every case.

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[155] Ibid, p.148 to 9.

[156] Ibid, p.150.

Schneck combines these elements to illustrate how Descartes's view draws upon both the voluntarist and intellectualist approaches to the will. Schneck's big idea is that, since the free agent we are concerned with is the whole soul, a person's judgements will be free the more they are determined by their intellect because the intellect is *internal* to the soul. Anything else that might determine the will is *external* to the soul and stands to take away freedom. So Descartes accepts that clear and distinct ideas *determine* our will towards a particular judgement, and that this capacity of our intellect is itself constitutive of our freedom. Schneck describes this as the "intellectualist" element of Descartes's view. However, Descartes can maintain all of this consistently with PAP. This is because, for PAP to be true, our will only needs to possess the power in theory to affirm or deny. And more importantly, the "alternative possibilities" that our will must be able to affirm have nothing to do with the clear and distinct ideas of reason. To see this, we need to look at the practical case of the passions. Descartes understands the passions as perturbations which fundamentally alter our attention and distract us from our clear and distinct ideas. These passions are connected with the body and the manner in which the body communicates information to the soul. They create "situations of uncertainty" in which there is no clear rational judgement to make.[157] As a result it is crucial for Descartes's view that the will also possess the absolute power to do otherwise (the upshot of "PAP") because otherwise it would be determined by the influence of the passions just as much as the influence of the intellect. So, the will possesses an absolute power to do otherwise *per se* (as the voluntarists maintained) but this power is not needed except in situations where something outside of the soul exerts influence upon it.

Both Zhou and Schneck succeed in advancing our understanding of the Cartesian will by appealing to Descartes's writings on the passions. This is because, as Schneck demonstrates, Descartes uses the passions to mediate between the voluntarist and intellectualist aspects of his view. Descartes's maintains both CDD and PAP because he is attempting to maintain the key insights of both the intellectualist and voluntarist positions. But to see how these principles fit together we need to attend to the relationship

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[157] Ibid, p.156.

between the whole soul and the body it inhabits. It is the influence of the body, specifically through the passions, that explains our power of free will because these are the sorts of things our will needs to have freedom from. As we saw in the introduction, this approach of mediating the voluntarist and intellectualist accounts of the will by way of the passions was not unique to Descartes. This move was in fact a common development that I made note of in several important “moderate intellectualists” who sought to accommodate some of the voluntarist’s insights. What is unique to Descartes is the “real distinction” between mind and body which separates the soul and body into two different ontological categories. As we have seen from Schneck’s exposition, this clear separation allows Descartes to navigate the voluntarist/intellectualist continuum more easily. This is because, in Descartes’s thought, the passions no longer represent an instance of the soul in conflict with itself. The passions become linked with states of the body and, as such, constitute an *external* influence on our will which is a legitimate threat to our freedom. For Descartes the problem of how to use our free will becomes a problem of how to use the best judgments of the intellect to combat the influence of our passions. And this conceptual backdrop sets the stage for an application of Stoic principles.

3.3 Descartes's Neo-Stoic Ethical Vision

3.3.1 Passions

Descartes defines the passions of the soul as “those perceptions, sensations or emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the [animal] spirits” (CSM I, p.338 to 9). Passions are “perceptions” by elimination because they are not volitions, and they are not actions. This point emphasizes that passions happen, as we might except, *passively* – they happen *to us* rather than because of us. Descartes also clarifies that passions are sensations in the sense that they are received in the soul in the same way as our sensations of material objects. The key distinguishing feature of passions for Descartes is their connection to what he calls “animal spirits,” which are essentially physiological responses in the

body.[158] When I feel fear, it is common for my palms to get sweaty. The activation of my sweat glands constitutes a movement of these “animal spirits.” By insisting that passions are always connected with animal spirits Descartes connects the passions with our physiological reactions to external stimuli.

This move is no accident. For Descartes subsequently claims that the purpose of the passions is to “dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body” (CSM I, p.343). There is some scholarly debate about how to understand the function of the passions. The classic treatment of this issue can be found in Susan James’s *Passion and Action*. James notes that Descartes understands passions as things which can influence the will. However, explaining how they influence the will is tricky. James makes this point by comparing the Cartesian person to the Cartesian conception of animals.

> The causal connections between the bodily motions that initiate passions, the passions themselves, and the bodily motions to which they give rise, are ordained by nature. In animals, after all, the connection between input and output is purely mechanical, so that when a sheep sees a wolf the motions in its sense-organs cause it to run away without the intervention of any thought at all. In the human case a passion is inserted into this process, but it need not always make a tremendous difference to the outcome. A soldier exposed to gunfire, for example, may feel terror as he turns to run away; but he runs away none the less (101).[159]

The key idea here is that it appears as though the objects of our passions could exert some influence upon our will even if there was no corresponding passion. The soldier exposed to gunfire need not feel terror to run away. This connection is, as James puts it, “ordained by nature.” James concludes that, for Descartes, passions must be part of the informative process about the harm or good presented by a given object. She argues that passions are more successful at motivating our actions the more determinate their corresponding objects are.[160] If I feel fear on account of seeing a snake on the hiking trail, this emotion is much more likely to prompt an action response than feeling a vague sense of fear while

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[158] Shapiro, “Descartes’s Passions of the Soul.”

[159] James, *Passion and Action* p.101.

[160] Ibid, p.102.

hiking that I cannot attribute to any particular object. James concludes that "for Descartes, the evaluative perceptions that constitute our basic passions are just as basic and natural as our sensory perceptions and sensations."[161] Passions are just like our perceptions of colours except that they tell us a different kind of information. They tell us about whether the object they correspond with something we should fear, love, covet, disdain, etc. And on account of providing this information they motivate our will towards certain things and away from others.

Several authors have since argued that Descartes does not conceive of the passions as representational devices that provide information, but rather, as motivational states that act upon the will more directly. Sean Greenberg has suggested that the standard reading of passions as representational doesn't pay close enough attention to Descartes's text. While Descartes does think that passions are similar to sensations, ultimately, he contrasts the two connecting sensations more firmly with the objects they represent and passions with movements of the will.[162] The main piece of text we need to consider to see what Greenberg is getting at is Descartes's description of soul and body interaction in PA§.34.

> Let us recall what we said previously about the mechanism of our body. The nerve-fibres are so distributed in all the parts of the body that when the objects of the senses produce various different movements in these parts, the fibres are occasioned to open the pores of the brain in various different ways. This, in turn, causes the animal spirits contained in these cavities to enter the muscles in various different ways. In this manner the spirits can move the limbs in all the different ways they are capable of being moved (CSM I, p.341).

Remember that Descartes defined passions as "caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the animal spirits." In light of the above passage, we can understand Greenberg's point as a point about the order of operations in the soul. Passions cannot be representational states because they are caused by movements of the animal spirits, which Descartes describes in the above passage as occurring *after* and *as a result* of our perceptions of various objects. The information about the objects we perceive that excites

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[161] Ibid, p.105.

[162] Greenberg, "Descartes on the Passions" p.722 to 723.

certain movements of these "animal spirits" must be already baked-in to our sensations. Greenberg argues instead that the way passions influence our will is by fixing our attention on certain objects after we have received sensory information about them. Passions fix our attention on a particular object because of the way Descartes thinks they "strengthen" and "preserve" the impression we already have of this object.[163] So, for Greenberg, passions influence the will more directly than they do for James by fixing our attention on objects our senses have already perceived as "good" or "bad."

Shoshana Brassfield has also made a similar argument to Greenberg that appeals to much of the same textual evidence. However, Brassfield also argues that the representational reading of the passions does not work because Descartes does not think we should follow the inclinations of our passions.[164] If the passions were, as James suggests, fundamental sources of evaluative information about what is good and bad, Brassfield contends that they should have a positive influence on our will. But Descartes's does not think this. In one of his earliest responses to Elisabeth's concerns about the passions, he concedes the following point.

> I know well that it is nearly impossible to resist the first troubles that new misfortunes excite in us, and even that it is ordinarily the best minds in whom the passions are the most violent and act more strongly on their bodies. But it seems to me that the following day, when sleep has calmed emotions in the blood that occur in such circumstances, one can begin to get one's mind in order and make it tranquil (LS p.94).

From the outset Descartes describes passions as an obstacle to good reasoning and a calm mind. In addition, we already saw above that Descartes's understanding of the will depends on conceiving of passions as something that can interfere with the clear and distinct ideas of our reason. I am inclined to agree with Brassfield and Greenberg that Descartes does not conceive of passions as a source of information concerning good and evil. Our *senses* inform us about the objects we perceive and, as Greenberg suggests, passions merely fix our attention on these things according to the assessment of them provided by our senses. The utility of this strategy is that it explains why different people

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[163] Ibid, p.724.

[164] See: Brassfield, "Never Let the Passions Be Your Guide" for the details of her argument.

have different passions regarding the same objects. If the passion of love represented some object as good based on its utility to us then we should all love the same things and the same people. But we do not. This is because, though love is a consistent emotion for all those who feel it, what our love is directed at is determined by the information received by our senses. Our senses represent different things as good or bad because our senses themselves can vary quite widely from person to person. A colour-blind person is less likely to be struck by the appearance of someone wearing bright red lipstick. So, when Descartes says that passions "dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body" he means that they *motivate* our will to judge in favour of pursuing bodily goods by focusing our attention on these things.

This motivational feature of the passions is what makes them a subject of ethical inquiry. If passions incline us towards certain actions, then they are inherently connected with the way we behave. As a result, the good use of our free will becomes a matter of controlling the influence of the passions. If a certain passion exhibits such an influence on my will that my will uses its absolute power to give assent before it has meditated on what is clear and distinct about the proposed action, then I have made poor use of my free will. If instead I am able to control the influence of this passion such that it does not pre-empt my best rational judgement then I have made a good use of my free will. To understand how we can control our passions we need to consider where, in the experience of a passion, I have some degree of control. Based on the way Descartes talks about passions in the text, we can identify the following six moments which are common to all experiences of passion.

1. Agent (A) perceives object (X)
2. A makes an initial judgement (implicit and automatic) about X*
3. The judgment corresponds with a passion (P) in the soul
4. P motivates A towards some end (Y)
5. The intellect supplies a second (rational) judgement about Y*
6. A wills or does not will the action pursuant with Y

Instances 1 through 4 are taken directly from the passage of PA§.34 cited above. My senses perceive an object (1) and that sensory perception then provides me with some information that allows me to automatically assess the potential benefit or harm that object poses me (2).[165] This judgement excites the animal spirits in my blood in a certain way, and these movements are communicated to the soul with a corresponding passion (3). This passion in turn "fixes" my attention, as Greenberg and Brassfield suggest, motivating me towards a particular end (4). However, we know that to complete Descartes's picture we also need to add steps 5 and 6. The end result of an experience of passion is a movement of the will (6), as Descartes makes quite clear. But we also need to interpose a step somewhere for the intellect to make an assessment based on the best available judgments of our reason (5). If the intellect could not do this, then our passions would always *automatically* determine the will towards this or that end, and exerting rational control would be a fantasy. We know that this step must occur *after* the passion has begun to affect our attention because Descartes and Elisabeth agree that this is what makes it difficult to think rationally during an experience of passion.

The question of control of the passions, then, becomes a question of how our intellect can supply secondary judgements that moderate the influence of a passion on our will. In PA§.45 Descartes argues that our passions "cannot be directly aroused or suppressed by the action of our will, but only indirectly through the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we wish to have" (CSM I, p.345). So Descartes's strategy for controlling the passions involves mediating them with representations that are connected with other passions. We can, he thinks, habitually represent objects which arouse the passions we wish to have to re-align the relationship between certain objects and certain passions in our mind. What this looks like is, rather

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[165] I want to be careful to specify here that this initial implicit "judgement" about the relative benefit or harm posed by the object of my sensation is *not* Descartes's own sense of judgement. I use the term "judgement" here because it is a moment where the intellect supplies some kind of information about the object of sensation. If I've never seen a snake in my life before, seeing one slither across the hiking trail is not likely to illicit a fear response. For this to happen, I must have some information (not necessarily rational) stored in my memory that allows the sensation to be informative. This first instance of "judgement" is worth noting because it is a place where one could push Descartes that control ought to take place, although in his picture this answer is not possible.

than to simply succumb to fear every time I see a snake on a hike, I habitually represent to myself things that I love in the presence of snakes. Over time, Descartes thinks I would build the capacity to experience love at the sight of a snake rather than fear. Lex Newman has explained this account of control through what he describes as the will's "attentional function."[166] The details of Newman's account are not useful to us because, unfortunately, his paper is engaged with scholarly discussion that conceives of the will and intellect as powers in conflict with one another within the soul. We've already seen why this framework is likely not an accurate reading of Descartes's position. But Newman still manages to uncover some of the nuance of Descartes's account. He argues, through appeal to PA§.20 and PA§.76, that Descartes gives the will the power to "attend to" different objects.[167] The will *imposes* attention to certain states upon the understanding. Newman concludes that, broadly speaking, the power our will has in this sort of framework to effect control is not a *direct* voluntarism – where we decide upon an action and it immediately follows – but an *indirect* voluntarism wherein our will effects control over the state of our soul gradually based on the objects it attends to. This is why, in the *Passions*, Descartes argues that we can only control our passions by, during an experience of passion, representing to ourselves a different passion. By attending to something different than what immediately agitates our body we can "unlock" the intellect and increase the likelihood that our clear and distinct ideas determine our final judgement.

This explains how Descartes conceives of the will's role in our struggle against the passions. But Descartes remains insistent in the correspondence with Elisabeth that the *intellect*, not the will, is the means by which we can be happy and live virtuously.

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[166] Newman, "Attention" p.65 to 6.

[167] The textual evidence for those interested:

"When our soul applies itself to imagine something non existent . . . and also when it applies itself to consider something that is purely intelligible . . . the perceptions it has of these things depend chiefly on the volition which makes it aware of them" (PA§.20, CSM I, p.336).

"For we may easily make good its absence [i.e., an inclination for inquiry] through that special state of reflection and attention which our will can always impose upon our understanding" (PA§.76, CSM I, p.355).

What exactly does the intellect contribute to our struggle against the passions if we understand it in the above terms? Fundamental to answering this question is recognizing that the struggle against the passions is not a struggle *within* the soul, but a struggle between the soul and the body. James picks out this aspect of Descartes's view quite nicely when she describes how Descartes thinks about action.

> The key to recovery is therefore to alter one's bodily state by using the understanding and volition to counter the movements that constitute our passions wherever they are most exposed. To understand how philosophers such as Descartes think about action, we perhaps need to try to imagine what it would be like to understand one's body as an unstable river system, prone to violent floods and tides, and one's deliberations as a more-or-less uneasy succession of ebbs and flows.[168]

Thinking of action as the result of this "unstable river system", we can see how the different powers of the soul and the body interact to produce individual acts. A passion motivates us towards some object or end, in particular, some object or end associated with the good of our body. As James argues, the body is "already disposed to act… possess[ing] its own emotional patterns and moods."[169] But prior to willing the action that is pursuant with this end our intellect gets an opportunity to make a judgement about it. It cannot be the case that our intellect itself is completely free in the sort of judgement it makes. For Descartes it is not this type of faculty. Our will is free, and if our will attends to whatever is agitating the body, the associated passion will obstruct our ability to think clearly. However, if there is information available in the intellect that can reframe the desire our passion is producing, Descartes seems to think that our will can attend or not attend to this information. As James puts it our soul "can sit back and endorse [the desires of the body] uncritically, or it can actively refashion them… through the understanding and will."[170] So our intellect contributes to our ability to control the passions based on the resources it presents for reframing and critically examining our emotional experiences.

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[168] James, *Passion and Action* p.263.

[169] Ibid, p.264.

[170] Ibid, p.264.

Now we must turn to habituation and consider why it is such an important part of Descartes's strategy. Descartes argues in a 15 September 1645 letter to Elisabeth:

> since we cannot always be attentive to the same thing – even though we have been convinced of some truth by reason of some clear and evident perceptions – we will be able to be turned, afterward, to believing false appearances, if we do not, through a long and frequent meditation, imprint it sufficiently in our mind so that it turns into a habit. In this sense, the Schools are right to say that the virtues are habits (LS p.113).

Descartes suggests here that it is not enough to merely struggle against the influence of our passions in the moment. We need to take additional steps. If we do not also habitually meditate on the truths of reason that will allow us to reframe the desires produced by our passions, then this information will not be available to us when we need it. Consider the following example. John and Chris both get in a traffic accident with one another. Neither is hurt. John, convinced that the accident was Chris's fault, feels an intense anger towards Chris. Chris, conceived that the accident was John's fault, feels an intense anger towards John. However, John has not spent any time meditating on the function of his anger and the best manner to direct his will in response. As a result, John gets out of his car and angrily berates Chris before smashing the passenger window of Chris's vehicle. Chris, as it happens, has spent a lot of time trying to understand his own emotions. So, when John's anger leads him to violently attack Chris's vehicle he does not retaliate. Though Chris is presented, on account of his intense anger, with an object that he should hate and retaliate against (John), he does not act on these feelings. For Descartes, this is explained by the fact that Chris has more readily available in his intellect the rational ideas of how to behave in a traffic accident. Perhaps he has meditated on what further violent responses could do to escalate his current conflict. Or perhaps he keeps clear in mind that it will be up to the authorities to determine responsibility for the accident, not himself and John. Regardless, it is this sort of meditation that Descartes thinks can create the conditions which will allow us to keep our passions at bay. Because of habituation, then, our intellect occupies an important role in the struggle against the passions. But it is a role that requires our constant efforts to maintain. Not just our effort in instances where emotions interfere with our process of judgement.

Commentators have not missed that the strategy Descartes outlines for controlling our passions is extremely reminiscent of the classical Stoics. And indeed, given that

Descartes appeals to Seneca's *De Vita Beata* as a potential account of the good use of our free will, this should not surprise us. Derk Pereboom has summarized the similarity.

> "Like the Stoics, [Descartes] maintains a distinction between representations that precede and incline one towards a passion and the passions themselves. Furthermore, in his correspondence with Elisabeth he seems to favor the Stoic view that in the typical case, a passion results only when an appropriate judgment is made, where a component essential to any judgment is the will's assent upon entertaining a preliminary representation. And, although in *The Passions of the Soul* Descartes suggests that passions can occur without judgment, still he does claim that a passion can always be avoided by an act of will" (605).[171]

For Pereboom, Descartes's view is Stoic because he conceives of emotions as a species of evaluative judgements and argues that we control them by controlling the representations we give our assent to. Deborah Brown also notes this similarity, acknowledging that the Stoics were the only ancient school to conceive of emotions as a type of judgement, however she is more tentative about how close Descartes's view is to the Stoics.[172] Pereboom's argument in particular is somewhat problematic. As we saw above, Descartes does not really think of the passions as evaluative perceptions like the Stoics. Instead, he conceives of them as motivational states. Though passions do result in judgments they are not judgements themselves. If they were, then Descartes's entire schema for controlling them would be nonsense because much of his account is about what happens *in between* an experience of passion and a subsequent judgement. However, Pereboom does seem right about the similarity between Descartes's account of control and that of the Stoics. Ultimately, control of our passions *is* a matter of the representations we give our assent to, just as it is for the classical Stoics. Brown suggests that, like the Stoics, "the principal task of Cartesian moral philosophy is to use our reason to discriminate what is and what is not within our control, and to regulate desires accordingly, so that our contentment of mind does not depend on what is beyond our power to control."[173] But, again, she also notes that the classical Stoics thought we could

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[171] Pereboom, "Stoic Psychotherapy" p.605.

[172] See: Brown, *Passionate Mind* p.31 to 4.

[173] Ibid, p.34.

do this unfailingly and attain an emotionless state of *apatheia*, whereas Descartes certainly does not give human beings the power to override their emotions.

The reason scholars have struggled to identify the relationship between Descartes's view on the passions and Stoicism is because of a lack of understanding of Lipsius and Neo-Stoicism. The broad similarities between Descartes's view and the classical Stoics exist because he is, as denoted by his own words in the letter of 4 August 1645, trying to draw from the Stoic account. However, because Descartes's moral project is *Neo*-Stoic he does not accept the Stoic theory of passions wholesale. He modifies the Stoic account to accommodate it better to the contemporary developments of his own philosophy. To bring these modifications into relief consider Lipsius's account of the Stoic "duty of character development." Due to the influence of voluntarism and intellectualism Lipsius restricted the domain of the will to a narrower space than the classical Stoics conceived. This caused Lipsius to modify our duty of character development to consist only in following the best and most rational set of ideas available to our mind at any given time. Descartes adopts this same modified Stoic view. The passions pose a problem for human freedom because they possess the ability to "externally" determine the will and incline it towards the concerns of the body. To control our passions, we need to habitually meditate and practice representing to ourselves the clear and distinct ideas that we want to override our passions when they occur. Note that, for both Lipsius and Descartes, this lowers the degree of success we can have moderating the influences of our body. But this modification was necessary in the intellectual context in which they were writing. We can, therefore, best explain the parallels between Descartes's account of the passions and the Stoics by suggesting that, like Lipsius, he is adopting a modified Neo-Stoic view.

3.3.2 Providence

Descartes's strategy for controlling the influence of our passions consists in directing our attention toward, and meditating upon, our clear and distinct ideas of reason. But which clear and distinct ideas specifically? For his strategy to be plausible, and to address more directly Elisabeth's *practical* concerns, Descartes needs to give us some more particular "truths of reason" and explain how they are anxiety mediating. In his letter of September

15, 1645, Descartes outlines the “truths” which he thinks are relevant to mediating anxiety in the soul and living a happy life. I have summarized these in the following list which is taken directly from the text of LS p.111-13.

1. Knowledge of God’s omnipotence and the extent of his providence.
2. The nature of the mind insofar as it subsists without the body.
3. The extent of the universe that God has created.
4. The connection one has with the universe through their family, city, state, country, and worldly position.
5. The nature of the passions to direct us towards bodily goods.
6. The cultural *mores* of the particular place we live.

Descartes specifies that in addition to knowing these truths one also needs to cultivate a habit of acquiescing to them every time they are remembered. We need to cultivate both clear and distinct ideas *and* the habit of allowing only these ideas to influence the direction of our will. Concerning the truths Descartes provides Elisabeth, there is some brief explanation of the anxiety mediating effect that each can have. But notice that, for all except perhaps #6, there are some common characteristics. The nature of one’s mind is, after all, connected with the nature of the body it inhabits as expressed through the passions. One’s particular place in the grand scheme of the universe is made clearer when one also considers the size and extent of the universe as a whole. And all these things are in some sense collapsible into God’s providence. God had to create the universe with a particular size, he had to position every person within this universe, and as well he had to establish the nature of both the mind and the body including their means of interaction. One could even argue that the cultural *mores* of one’s society is a product of the way that society developed according to the principles and laws God established for it. So, Descartes is essentially appealing to the notion of divine providence as the key idea of reason which serves to mediate our anxiety. And he even says as much, arguing that “when we elevate our mind to considering God as he is, we will find ourselves naturally so inclined to love him that we will draw joy *even from our afflictions*, in thinking that His will is carried out as we receive them” (LS p.111, my emphasis).

The key question we need to answer about Descartes's view is how contemplation of divine providence can mediate problematic external influences on the will. In part two of the *Passions*, Descartes argues that since the passions motivate us towards goods that do not depend on us they generate what he calls "vain desires" – desires for things which we may never attain through our own power (CSM I p.379). Descartes argues that there are two remedies for these sorts of desires: generosity (which we will come to in the next section), and frequent reflection upon divine providence. Here Descartes provides another expression of his commitment to divine providence as a kind of therapeutic device, but he gives more detail than in his exchange with Elisabeth.

> For we can desire only what we consider in some way to be possible; and things which do not depend on us can be considered possible only in so far as they are thought to depend on Fortune – that is to say, in so far as we judge that they may happen and that similar things have happened at other times. But this opinion is based solely on our not knowing all the causes which contribute to each effect. For when a thing we considered to depend on Fortune does not happen, this indicates that one of the causes necessary for its production was absent, and consequently that it was absolutely impossible and that no similar thing has ever happened, i.e. nothing for the production of which a similar cause was also absent. (PS II.§145, CSM I p.380).

Descartes's basic contention is that divine providence is therapeutic because it exposes fortune as a chimera. We cannot desire something unless we think it is possible. Things that are outside of our power seem possible only because they seem as though good fortune might bring them about. Consider a love for someone who lives far away. Often, the possession of this desire to be with someone who is far off can generate a lot of anxiety because we think that, if only fortune was to turn our way, circumstances might change and bring us closer to the person we love. When this does not happen, we might want to complain about our "bad fortune" and the distance between us and our loved one. But Descartes thinks that the notion of divine providence can dispel our misery. Once we see that everything that happens is subject to the order of providence we no longer have any space for the concept of fortune. God's providence determines everything that happens in a sequence of causes stretching to eternity. The results of God's divine will are immutable and, though it may sometimes appear that certain things are subject to fortune, really these are just events where we cannot see all of the concurrent causes that bring them about. Recognition of divine providence helps remind us of the immutable

order of events and to ignore what "seems" possible even though it is, in fact, not possible.

Brown points out a significant issue with Descartes's account in this passage. She argues that human agents are not in a position to know whether, in light of divine providence, something is metaphysically possible. Since we cannot know this, she argues that we might as well strive for whatever x we desire to attain since this striving itself might be causally efficacious enough to bring it about.[174] According to Brown this points to a deeper problem. Our desires for things which do not depend on us are effective motivators towards action. And even if Descartes conceives of reason as the tool to overcome these desires, presumably, we only turn our attention towards reason due to some other end that we want to pursue. Take my earlier example of John and Chris's car accident. If, as we imagined, Chris is able to resist his anger on account of frequent meditations upon the truths of reason, there still must be some explanation for why he undertook such behaviour. If Descartes is to be believed our reason for practicing meditation upon the truths of reason is our desire to live a happy life. But this desire looks like a desire for something that does not depend on us because we do not have full control over events that might make us unhappy (like getting in a car accident). Brown argues that "it is impossible in this life to avoid desiring outcomes that do not depend on us and the inevitability that some of our desires will end up being in vain."[175] So what does Descartes mean by appealing to providence as a therapeutic device? Brown argues that for Descartes providence is a means of minimizing regret and repentance when things go wrong. Rather than have us extirpate our vain desires completely, Descartes merely suggests that we use the providential order of the world as a tool to console us when our vain desires go unfulfilled. It is not wrong, on Brown's reading, for us to pursue things that are outside of our control. It is simply wrong for us to regret not attaining them because whether we attain them or not is ultimately a matter of the divine will.

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[174] See: Brown, *Passionate Mind* p.168.

[175] Ibid, p.170.

Brown has picked up on what I think is a legitimate goal of Descartes's, to minimize our regret and repentance when we fail to attain things that we want. But I think that she has failed to note how strong Descartes's appeal to providence is in the text. The above passage is, quite unambiguously, an argument for how we can *eliminate* our desires for things which do not depend on us. In support of her reading Brown cites the letter to Elisabeth of August 4, 1645 where Descartes says "it is nothing but desire, and regret or repentance, that is able to prevent us from being content." But here he mentions desire in the very same breath as regret and repentance. Desire does seem, to me, to be the real culprit of our unhappiness. Let's look at another passage from the *Passions*.

> As for the rest [of our desires], although we must consider their outcome to be wholly fated and immutable, so as to prevent our desire from occupying itself with them, yet we must not fail to consider the reasons which make them more or less predictable, so as to use these reasons in governing our actions. Thus, for example, suppose we have business in some place to which we might travel by two different routes, one usually much safer than the other. And suppose providence decrees that if we go by the route we regard as safer we shall not avoid being robbed, whereas we may travel by the other route without any danger. Nevertheless, we should not be indifferent as to which one we choose, or rely upon the immutable fatality of this decree. Reason insists that we choose the route which is usually the safer, and our desire in this case must be fulfilled when we have followed this route, whatever evil may befall us. (PA II.§146, CSM I p.380 and 81).

A slight ambiguity here is that, in the first sentence of the CSM translation, Descartes suggests that we want to prevent our "desire" from occupying itself with our desires for things which do not depend on us. In the original French text the word "*desir*" is also used in both cases. What I think Descartes's means is that we want to avoid our desire becoming occupied with the *objects* we want which do not depend on us alone. This clarification makes it even more apparent that Descartes is, in some sense, trying to eliminate our vain desires. Consider the rest of the passage. Descartes supposes that we are trying to decide between two different routes home. From the view of providence, one of these routes is safe and the other will result in our being robbed. Nevertheless, we should still try to use reason to determine the best route and, if we fail, be consoled by the fact that our course of action was fated. For Brown, this example illustrates the point that Descartes is not concerned with eliminating vain desires but with eliminating the regret we feel when they go unsatisfied. But if I desired to pick the safest route home and I fail, how effectively am I going to be consoled by the fact that, in retrospect, that sequence of

events could not have gone any differently? So long as I still possess the desire to get home safe – which was not entirely up to me – I will not understand how my regret could have been minimized.

There is another way to understand Descartes's position that retains Brown's insights about regret and repentance while simultaneously giving a more plausible explanation of how Descartes thinks we can effect real change in our desires. Brown's worry is that Descartes cannot afford to get rid of desires for things outside of our control. Her point is that we need to have these sorts of desires in order to be motivated to act. We saw earlier that Descartes thinks the Epicureans were right about happiness insofar as it is the ultimate motive behind every human action.[176] So it looks as though when, in Descartes's example, we desire to pick the safest route home we desire this because we think that achieving this end will make us happy. The concern is that if I eliminate the desire to get home safe on the basis that it may be incompatible with what God has providentially ordained, then I get rid of my motivation towards happiness and my motivation to act altogether. But in the above passage where Descartes outlines this example he is arguing directly against this worry. He says specifically "we should not be indifferent as to which [route home] we chose, or rely on the immutable fatality of [God's] decree." What I think Descartes is getting at is that we need to get rid of our vain desire to "get home safe" and replace it with a different happiness-oriented desire that will utilize our motivation to act, but without creating feelings of regret if we fail to attain it. Rather than desire to "get home safe" we should want to make the best use of our reason when we decide which route to take. This way our desire is in alignment with whatever God may have providentially ordained. To be clear, I am suggesting that Descartes is arguing we can be happier by *changing what we judge our happiness to consist in*. This does not mean eliminating the initial vain desire that we may have to "get home safe." This desire is a necessary product of our body and our passions as Brown points out. Nor should we seek to become motivated by some end other than happiness.

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[176] Brown herself discusses this aspect of Descartes's view on p.176 and 77.

The mistake we make in Descartes's example is judging that we need to get home safe *because* the fulfilment of this desire will make us happy.

Brown notes at the end of her discussion that we cannot fully understand Descartes's appeal to providence without also understanding how the sort of providence he conceives of can be reconciled with our free will. Interestingly, Elisabeth herself takes Descartes's 15 September 1645 response as an opportunity to pose this very issue to him.

> The knowledge of the existence of God and his attributes can console us from the mishaps which come to us from the ordinary course of nature and from the order He has established there, such as losing one's well-being [le bein] in a storm, or health by an infection of the air, or friends through death. But it cannot console us from those mishaps that are brought upon us by other men. For it seems to us that the will of these men is entirely free, as we have nothing but faith alone to persuade us that God cares to rule these wills and that He has determined the fate of each person before the creation of the world (LS p.114).

Elisabeth argues that even if Descartes's general strategy of appealing to providence when things go wrong is feasible there is a problem. We might be able to apply this strategy to the misfortune that results from the course of nature, but it does not make sense to apply it to anxieties which are produced on account of the actions of other people. These people act in virtue of their own free will (as we have already seen Descartes concede). And we have no way of knowing the way God governs their actions. She argues that we must conclude that these actions are the free decisions of human agents and not necessarily dictates of God's will. This argument undermines the power of Descartes's appeal to divine providence. If the actions of other human agents are not subsumed under God's providence, then I cannot be assured that they are, in fact, directed in the manner that God intended. This means that I lose one of the most powerful reasons for concluding that these actions should not bear on the objects I include in my conception of happiness. If God's providence does not in some fashion determine the will of someone who steals from me, then I do not really have any assurance that my life would not have been better without experiencing this theft.

To make Descartes's strategy more plausible we need to show how he can subsume free human actions under God's providence. Descartes tries to address this

concern in a subsequent letter to Elisabeth where he provides an example that has become famous in the scholarship on this issue.

> If a king who has prohibited duels and who knows very certainly that two gentlemen in his kingdom, living in different towns, are quarreling and are so worked up against one another that nothing could prevent them from fighting one another if they were to meet; if, I say, this king orders one of them to go on a certain day toward the town where the other is, and he also orders the other to go on the same day toward the place where the first is, knowing quite assuredly that they would not fail to meet each other and to fight each other, and thus violate his prohibition, he thereby does not compel them. His knowledge, and even his will to determine them there in this manner, do not alter the fact that they fight one another just as voluntarily and just as freely as they would have done if he had known nothing of it, and it was by some other occasion that they had met (LS p.130).

Descartes supposes several things in this example. First, he supposes that the king's law against duels, in this case meant to represent one of God's laws, is not sufficient to bind all persons to it. Even though duels are prohibited both men knowingly choose to engage one another. Second, Descartes supposes that it is possible for the king to give commands which necessarily result in the contradiction of an already ordained law. And finally, Descartes supposes that the decision of each of these men to duel one another is free even though it seems to have been induced (in part) by the commands of the king. The reason that the decision of the two men to duel each other is free is because it is a decision they undertake because of their character. Their dislike for one another causes them to fight, not the king, as Descartes suggests when he argues "they fight one another just as voluntarily and just as freely *as they would have done if* [the king] *had known nothing of it*." But the more important question is how this free decision remains, in another respect, determined by providence. Because the traditional line of thinking, part of which appears in this passage, was that God's knowledge is *not sufficient* to determine. He can know what is going to happen but this knowledge does not *cause* the events that happen as these are brought about by particular parts of his creation. For Descartes, the king knows that the two men will duel and nevertheless *wills* that they meet, and this act of willing in some sense causes the duel to occur.

Here, fortunately, there has been some excellent work done by C.P Ragland. Ragland notes that in Descartes's time the two main philosophical approaches to divine providence where that of the Molinists and that of the Dominicans. Both sets of thinkers sought to explain how God might ensure that our actions follow his divine plan without

necessitating the actions themselves. According to the Molinists, God can do this because his "superior knowledge of creatures ensures that [He] can guarantee the right results by merely creating and sustaining creatures in the appropriate circumstances."[177] This account is very close to the basic account I mentioned above that was popularized in the early medieval period by Boethius (among others). God's knowledge maps out (necessarily) everything that will happen across the entirety of his universe. But this knowledge does not cause anything to happen. What this knowledge does is inform the act of creation that God wills. Included in this act is information about all of God's creatures, their respective natures, and the conditions that will sustain or destroy them. But after creating the universe in this manner God merely allows things to proceed according to the natures of the beings he has created. So, everything is subsumed under providence insofar as it is *known* by God, but it is brought about by the different "natures" of particular creatures themselves. The Molinists appealed to what they called "middle knowledge" to suggest that God has knowledge of what might happen across a range of different scenarios and governs the universe accordingly despite not directly willing that these scenarios come about. In Descartes's example, the king knows that it is very possible the two men come to duel, but he also knows about the scenario in which they do not however likely or unlikely this alternative possibility may be.

The Dominican solution focused on the idea of "premotion" to suggest that "God ensures that creatures follow the divine plan not only by creating and sustaining them, but by 'pre-moving' them to act in the right way – i.e., by causing them to act as they do."[178] Here God's determination of our actions is more concrete. It happens through the causal sequence of events that God brings about. However, it is more difficult to understand what "premotion" amounts to and how we might spell it out in a manner that is consistent with human free will. If God knows what I will do under certain conditions and "premoves" me towards these very conditions, then my resulting action looks like it has less to do with my own nature or character and more to do with the conditions God has

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[177] Ragland, *The Will to Reason* p.195.

[178] Ibid, p.195.

placed upon me. It appears the king really is responsible to some degree for the duel, despite his own law that prohibits duels. Scholars, including Ragland, admit that it is somewhat mysterious what the Dominicans conceived premotion to amount to.

Ragland argues that Descartes is best understood in the correspondence with Elisabeth as adopting a hybrid account that seeks to incorporate features of both the Molinist and the Dominican strategies. According to Ragland, Descartes adopts a Molinist account of the *executive* phase of God's providence but a Dominican account of the *visioning* phase.[179] The visioning phase of providence corresponds to God's initial act of creation which, in order to execute, he must first in some manner envision by thinking about all of the possible future conditionals that can follow upon his creation of the universe. The executive phase of providence is the phase in which God's divine plan for the universe is actually carried out. According to Ragland Descartes is quite unambiguously a Molinist about the executive phase because he intends to put the onus on individual creatures for their actions. The actions of the two agents who duel are their own even though the king set them on course to meet one another. And this, as I noted, is because the actions result from facts about the character of each individual. However, the visioning phase for Descartes, so Ragland argues, is much closer to the position of the Dominicans because Descartes conceives of God as the truth maker of future conditionals. God determines the truth of these conditionals directly by his incomprehensible act of creation. What this means is that, when the two men decide to duel, God has envisioned this scenario and willed that it will be. Though the actions of the two men are brought about by the *natures* of their own souls, and therefore are free, there is a clear conception in God's intellect of what will happen to them before he creates the universe that will produce them and set them on a course towards one another. While Descartes does not invoke the language of premotion, his approach to God's visioning phase mirrors the Dominican strategy and does away with the Molinist notion of "middle knowledge."

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[179] Ibid, p.221.

Ragland's hybrid reading of Descartes's position on providence can help us understand his response to Elisabeth and the Neo-Stoic aspects of his view. Elisabeth worries that providence cannot possibly include the actions of finite human agents in possession of a free will. Through his famous duels example Descartes explains that providence can incorporate the actions of free human beings because these actions are the result of individual natures which God has envisioned prior to the creation of the world. The responsibility for a particular action remains with each individual agent because the action is a product of their nature. But by envisioning the natures of every created being God has clearly in his intellect a conception of all the actions that they will produce. So, his providential plan does, in some sense, include the actions of free human beings. But we should note how this picture changes the way that providence is supposed to alleviate our anxiety. Descartes is not, based on his conception of providence, suggesting that in every instance of misfortune we tell ourselves to accept it because it is "what God willed." Instead, we need to remind ourselves that something being determined by providence means that event was conceived clearly in the divine intellect as a product of the nature of various created beings. Knowing clearly what would ensue from creating these beings God did so anyways, which suggests that God must have had a good reason for this decision.[180] We are supposed to accept gracefully the misfortunes in our life because they are products of the divine intellect, not because they are products of the divine will.

Few scholars have picked up on how the Neo-Stoic view of thinkers like Lipisus maps on to Descartes's account of providence. Like the classical Stoics Descartes argues that providence can free individuals from their vain desire for things outside of their control. However, Descartes also recognizes the binding nature of God's work on our desires themselves. Our desires are the product of natural connections between our body and the passions in our soul directed towards our body's preservation. As a result, Descartes argues that rather than eliminate the *production* of our vain desires completely

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[180] Or perhaps, as many commentators have worried since, God is malevolent and created a world full of sin and misfortune for the fun of it. Descartes's writings do not entertain this worry.

we should seek to eliminate their *influence* on our will. The way we can do this is by removing our desires for things we cannot control from our conception of what will make us happy and reframing these desires in terms of things we can control (like our reasoning). Descartes departs from the traditional Stoic line by acknowledging that we cannot control our desires directly and argues, like Lipsius, that we seek to moderate these desires indirectly. He agrees with Lipsius that we can most easily practice this sort of reframing by contemplating God's providence. Because the world is providentially governed, all the objects outside of our control that we fail to attain were determined as such by God. Recognizing this fact is supposed to weaken the feelings of regret and repentance that emerge when our vain desires go unfulfilled. Consider now our two formulations of the Stoic normative duty of acceptance.

> Stoics: Everything that happens to X should be accepted in light of its determination by N, *where N is some common nature within every X that directs X's activity.*
>
> Lipsius: Everything that happens to X should be accepted in light of its determination by G, *where G is the providential determination of God's intellect that has ordered and structured the rest of the universe.*

Recognizing Descartes's account of providence as a hybrid Molinist/Dominican strategy helps clarify that Lipsius's version of the duty of acceptance is a better fit with Descartes's view. If Descartes were to take the traditional Molinist line unaltered he would end up closer to the classical Stoic account of acceptance.[181] But because Descartes conceives, like the Dominicans, that God's intellect determined in the visioning phase all future conditionals he ends up adopting a position similar to Lipsius. The reason we are supposed to accept what happens to us is because of its determination by G, not because it is the product of some fundamental common nature within each created thing. For Descartes, as for Lipsius, our duty of acceptance is tied most closely to the intellectual aspect of God's providence rather than the material reality of what God wills directly.

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[181] This is not to say that the Molinist's were all Stoics in disguise. Merely that Descartes's view, due to other positions taken on the nature of the passions (discussed above), would end up looking like a classical Stoic view if he were to adopt the traditional line of thinking on providence.

All in all, Descartes appears to adopt a Neo-Stoic position on both our control of the passions and the role that understanding providence can play in this struggle. These positions do not merely bear resemblance to vaguely Stoic views. They are very close parallels to the Neo-Stoic views espoused by Justus Lipsius across his attempts at repatriation of the school. We know that Descartes had access to these texts because he suggests reading Seneca to Elisabeth, and the edition of Seneca that was available to them both would have been Lipsius's 1605 edition. As mentioned above, Descartes makes his appeal to Stoicism as a genuine philosophical attempt to give an account of what good ends a moral agent can achieve on their own by their own power. All of this would be enough by itself to conclude that Descartes is some kind of Neo-Stoic. But to unite all the elements discussed so far let's turn, finally, to Descartes's overall account of virtue to see how these Neo-Stoic threads are woven together.

3.3.3 Virtue and Happiness

Descartes's moderate intellectualist view leaves little room for someone in Elisabeth's predicament to experience joy. Elisabeth's anxieties are a product of her passions. Descartes's normative recommendations in the correspondence and in the *Passions of the Soul* suggest that, in the face of these anxieties, Elisabeth should steady herself and regularly employ her faculty of reason to mediate the disruptive effects of her passions. Given that Descartes concedes that this can only be done after a passion has subsided his view does not leave very much room to prioritize the maximization of happiness and pleasure. When Elisabeth asks him about this topic he answers as follows.

> If I were to think that the sovereign good consisted of joy, I would not doubt at all that one should try to make oneself joyful, no matter at what price it comes, and I would approve of the brutality of those who drown their sorrows in wine or dull them with tobacco. But I distinguish between the sovereign good, which consists in the exercise of virtue, or what is the same thing, in the possession of all the good whose acquisition depends on our free will, and the satisfaction of the mind which follows this acquisition. This is why, seeing that it is a greater perfection to know the truth, even though it is to our disadvantage, than not to know it, I admit that it would be better to be less gay and to have more knowledge (LS p.116).

As we can see, Descartes thinks that it would be better for us to have more knowledge and be less happy. This claim necessarily follows from his approach to the passions and providence. Descartes makes a distinction between virtue – understood as the good we

can possess on our own – and happiness. Happiness is described as the pleasure that follows upon the acquisition of virtue. For Descartes, then, happiness is clearly secondary to virtue. Our duty to develop a strong rational faculty and equip it with as much knowledge as possible takes precedent over any feelings of satisfaction we might attain. How does Descartes intend these distinctions function? Is happiness *only* that pleasure which we experience upon the acquisition of virtue, or, could some other instances of pleasure count as "happiness" despite the fact that they are not pursuant with virtue? The text is somewhat ambiguous about this. Descartes uses the word "joy" [*joie* and *joyeux*] in the early part of the passage and then uses the phrase *satisfaction d'esprit* to describe the contentment that follows the acquisition of virtue. This difference in terminology could suggest that he is talking about two different sorts of spiritual contentment. However, the argument in the above passage implies that it is *because* of the distinction between virtue and happiness ["this is why, seeing… etc"] that Descartes does not approve people who indulge in drugs or alcohol for the sake of joy, suggesting that *joie* and the *satisfaction d'esprit* ultimately amount to the same thing.

How we answer this question will determine how we understand Descartes's response to Elisabeth. If happiness is only the pleasure that follows upon the acquisition of virtue then Descartes is essentially telling Elisabeth to forget about joy. His argument would be that Elisabeth, and the public at large, lack the proper conception of happiness. Let's call this the Stoic response because it mirrors the rhetoric of the classical Stoic school. For them, as we saw, when people pursue happiness instead of virtue it is because they misunderstood what happiness really amounts to. However, if Descartes allows that other sorts of pleasures can create legitimate happiness in the soul then Descartes has to explain the relationship between these instances of happiness and his more austere conception of virtue. His response to Elisabeth would be emphasizing a certain *priority* of goods, namely, ranking virtue above the happiness that is independent of it and subordinating these pleasurable experiences to the pursuit of virtue. This response, while similar to the Stoic line of thought, is closer to the Epicurean view of happiness because it acknowledges the role of other pleasures in addition to virtue.

We have already seen that Descartes agrees with the Epicureans insofar as they conceive of happiness as the end which motivates all human action. For Descartes human beings always act for the sake of attaining happiness. This still allows that virtue be conceived as the proper end towards which our actions *should* aim, after all, whatever end *motivates* us to act is not the same as the end that *makes an action good*. But nonetheless there is room for pleasure to function as a motive in Descartes's view. According to Donald Rutherford, this makes Descartes's view different from the classical Stoic position because Descartes maintains that pleasure in general is an acceptable motive for virtuous action.[182] For the classical Stoics, pleasure was conceived to be fundamentally misleading and the only suitable reason to pursue virtue was for the sake of virtue itself. Descartes, in contrast, emphasizes that the pursuit of virtue has to in some moments feel pleasurable otherwise we would never enjoy it and consequently abandon our pursuit of it. Rutherford explains further that "Descartes agrees with the Stoics in identifying the supreme good with a life of virtue, but he refuses to equate such activity with happiness. Happiness instead is a certain affective state – contentment of mind – that accompanies virtue and motivates us to practice virtue."[183] In so doing Descartes breaks away from the *eudaemonism* of Classical Greek ethics that made virtue and happiness synonymous with one another. He insists that, by running together the concepts of virtue and happiness, both the Stoics and the Epicureans adopt mistaken views about the role of happiness in the good life. Happiness is neither synonymous with virtue nor is it the ultimate end of ethics itself. It is the *means* by which we are motivated to live a virtuous life.

However, missing from Rutherford's account is any mention of the intervention of Neo-Stoicism. Recognizing now the role that Lipsius played in redefining Stoic philosophy, we ought to consider the relationship between Descartes's view and this early modern adaptation of the classical Stoic philosophy. After all it is Lipsius's edition of Seneca that anyone who discussed Stoicism in Descartes's time would have been

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[182] Rutherford, "On the Happy Life."

[183] Ibid, p.188.

reading. Rutherford himself concludes in the end that Descartes's ethics is in fact understood best if we see it as harmonious with the Stoic school. But to piece together why this is the case we need to consider the parallels between Descartes's account of virtue and Lipsius as well as the parallels to more classical Stoic authors.

To start, we need to look at the idea of generosity. Descartes second remedy in the *Passions* for our vain desires, purportedly distinct from reflection upon divine providence, is the passion which he calls "generosity." Descartes describes generosity as follows:

> Thus I believe that true generosity, which causes a person's self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be, has only two components. The first consists in his knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly. The second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well, that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner. (PS.III §153, CSM I p.384).[184]

For Descartes, generosity consists in understanding that moral praise or blame is warranted only for the way we "dispose our volitions." This is a restatement of the moral psychology that we have seen Descartes outline so far in the correspondence and *Passions*. We have freedom only insofar as we can dispose our will, by means of attention, in a particular direction towards particular things. If we dispose our will more often towards the products of our reasoning we become more likely to subdue the negative influence of our passions. However, Descartes argues that generosity requires *knowing* that this is the foundation of our moral praise or blame. First of all, if we don't *know* the way in which we can control the influence of our passions, then we cannot have any hope of successfully struggling against them. But second, understanding how this interaction between our mind and body works can liberate us from any undue responsibility that we feel to control things which are actually beyond our control. Descartes also thinks that generosity involves possessing a "firm feeling" within

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[184] Brown, *Passionate Mind* explains how, for the Scholastics, this idea was instead described as magnanimity or megalopsychia (magnanimitas in Latin) (p.189). Brown has suggested that one possible explanation for the change in terminology is that Descartes intended to emphasize the heroic virtues of the Romans rather than the cardinal virtues of the Greeks and Scholastics (see: p.191 to 192).

ourselves that we resolutely intend to use our freedom in the best possible way. What is meant by this "firm feeling" really is the heart of Descartes conception of virtue. If we lack the feeling that our will is most often inclined towards what our reason judges best, then we will lack the assurance that we will consistently act according to our reason. And acting according to the dictates of reason is, for Descartes, both how we act morally and how we minimize feelings of regret and repentance within ourselves.

We need to consider further what Descartes means by this "feeling" of a firm disposition to use our will well. In addition we need to explain how a person who lacks this feeling could possibly develop it, as this is how we become virtuous in Descartes's picture. In §.161 of the *Passions* Descartes describes particular virtues in more detail and how they may be acquired.

> It should be noted that what we commonly call 'virtues' are habits in the soul which dispose it to have certain thoughts: though different from the thoughts, these habits can produce them and in turn can be produced by the soul alone; but it often happens that some movement of the spirits strengthens them, and in this case they are both actions of virtue and at the same time passions of the soul (PS III.§161, CSM I p.387 to 88).
>
> If we occupy ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it – while also considering, on the other hand, the many vain and useless cares which trouble ambitious people – we may arouse the passion of generosity within ourselves and then acquire the virtue (PS III.§161, CSM I p.388).

Descartes clarifies here that "virtues" are simply habits in the soul which dispose it towards certain thoughts. This is not surprising given what we already know about Descartes's moral psychology. Good habits, or "virtues", can produce good thoughts which in turn produce good actions. Descartes argues that the means by which we cultivate virtues is by "occupy[ing] ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it." In other words, we cultivate generosity by thinking about generosity itself and the sort of advantages it brings. Not simply the virtue of generosity either. Descartes recommends thinking about the nature of free will *in general* and the advantages which follow making good use of it. In other words, thinking philosophically about what is and is not within our power. Say I have a habit of judging that when others in my household fail to do the dishes right away they intend not to do them at all. This habit could lead me to judge,

upon sight of a sink full of dishes, that I am responsible for cleaning them when in fact someone else intends to clean them later. To correct this irrational judgement, which is apt to lead to conflict and perhaps even anger, I have to examine the relationship between seeing a sink full of dishes and the judgement that it is my responsibility to clean them. If I habitually consult reason in these minor instances I can build within myself the "firm feeling" of a rationally disposed will that Descartes is describing.

What Descartes is really targeting here is (as he mentions himself) our self-esteem. Descartes emphasized in his definitions of generosity (cited above) that it is "what causes a persons self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be." Possessing generosity matters because Descartes's account of ethics is broadly speaking a psychological account. As he writes in §.156 of the *Passions*,

> [Those who are generous] have complete command over their passions. In particular, they have mastery over their desires, and over jealousy and envy, because everything they think sufficiently valuable to be worth pursuing is such that its acquisition depends solely on themselves; over hatred of other people, because they have esteem for everyone; over fear, because of the self-assurance which confidence in their own virtue gives them; and finally over anger, because they have very little esteem for everything that depends on others, and so they never give their enemies any advantage by acknowledging that they are injured by them (PS III.§156, CSM I p.385).

For Descartes self-esteem is the most potent antidote against the disruptions of the passions. The more firmly we believe in our own our capacity to dispose our will according to reason the less we will reprimand ourselves for failures produced by the desires of our body. If we have generosity, we think that everything worth pursuing is such that its acquisition depends only on us, and we covet nothing that is outside of our power. If we have generosity, we will possess the confidence that we can conquer our fears. Once we take stock of the human situation and our relationship to God (as outlined above), Descartes thinks we will recognize that the only thing we have control over is the development of certain psychological states of mind. So, in the end, virtue for Descartes consists in using our intellect to build as much rational self-esteem as we can. It involves valuing appropriately valuing oneself and constructing a mind whose contentment depends only on this self-esteem and not on anything else in the world. And Descartes makes the move to construe virtue in this way so as to fit his conception of virtue in neatly with what he has already established about providence and the passions.

The psychological focus of Descartes's ethical project brings him in line with the Stoics and with Stoic views. Descartes rejects the *eudaemonism* of ancient philosophy and the classical Stoic idea that virtue is completely self-sufficient. However, the manner in which Descartes fits together his own conceptions of virtue and happiness ends up strongly resembling the Stoic account nonetheless. Happiness, Descartes claims, is the *motive* towards which all human beings act. As such it needs to be happiness that motivates us to be virtuous. But the process of becoming virtuous for Descartes is a process of cultivating virtues which habitually dispose us to be more rational. This is because to be virtuous we need to successfully mediate the influence of our body upon our soul, holding ourselves back from immediately desiring and pursuing everything which our passions dispose us towards. To do this, as we saw above, we need to use reason to effectively re-evaluate the things that we think will make us happy. So we *aim* at happiness as a general goal but, Descartes thinks, when we reason properly about what aiming at this happiness should look like we end up reframing our picture of the things that we think will make us happy. In this picture, the satisfaction of bodily desires is still very much secondary to making the best use of reason. So happiness is, certainly, involved in Descartes account of virtue as an important motive and a psychological state which we all wish to attain. But all this really amounts to saying is that virtue alone with no qualitative experience of happiness whatsoever would not be enough to satisfy a human being. There is no normative privileging of the particular things we *think* will make us happy. Our experiences of pleasure are merely one source of information for our rational reflections on what we should pursue.

This account of virtue and its departures from classical Stoic thinking are extremely reminiscent of Lipsius's Neo-Stoic account of virtue. Descartes thinks, similar to the Neo-Stoics, that the Stoic understanding of virtue as completely self-sufficient is too strict. We need to allow that the happiness derived from experiences of pleasure can, in some instances, provide us with useful information about what we should desire. Just as Lipsius argues in *De Constantia* that we should look inward rather than outward at the state for the source of our troubles, Descartes argues to Elisabeth that she look inward rather than outward towards the outcome of external events she cannot control. The Stoic intellectualist doctrine of rational virtue as the highest good is accepted but modified to

include happiness and pleasure as important motivational states. At times, Descartes's responses to Elisabeth reads as though he is lecturing her for not properly understanding her own rationality. But this is simply because, on Descartes's view, our happiness is a function of our self-esteem which itself depends on understanding the way we reason. The greatest happiness one can attain comes, for Descartes, when it is established from a source within ourselves. And when we are in possession of the firm and constant disposition of our will towards reason we become less likely to be influenced by our passions and our good or bad fortune. So the problem that Elisabeth presents at the beginning of their discussion – namely that, despite her best use of her reason, Elisabeth is still unhappy – is not a possible problem one can have on Descartes's view. The only possible explanation is that Elisabeth is not, in fact, deploying her reason as best as possible. And there is no polite way of putting this point (despite Descartes's best efforts). By prescribing her a moral psychology that draws on modified Neo-Stoic conceptions of providence, free will, and virtue Descartes includes himself in the Neo-Stoic philosophical movement.

3.4 Elisabeth's Neo-Stoicism

3.4.1 Passions

Despite Descartes's valiant efforts to construct a nuanced moral psychology that preserves his intellectualist theses while simultaneously dealing with the problems posed by the passions, Elisabeth does not seem to be convinced of his view. Though she does eventually allow their correspondence to drift to other matters, she never outright concedes to Descartes's position. The heart of Elisabeth's concerns seems to be centred around how she conceives of the passions. In a letter of 16 August 1645, Elisabeth clarifies just how disruptive passions and other external factors can be.

> There are diseases that destroy altogether the power of reasoning and by consequence that of enjoying a satisfaction of reason. There are others that diminish the force of reason and prevent one from following the maxims that good sense would have forged and that make the most moderate man subject to being carried away by his passions and less capable of disentangling himself from the accidents of fortune requiring a prompt resolution (LS p.100).

Elisabeth is emphasizing that passions, and other diseases of the body, can affect the functioning of our reason and make certain judgements and conclusions seem rational while the passion is at its peak intensity. What is worse is that often this happens in matters where “accidents of fortune” require a “prompt resolution,” and we are unable to act rationally at the speed necessary to respond to whatever crisis we are facing. Passions also make us less able to “disentangle” ourselves from these accidents of fortune. When an accident happens driving on a highway, or in heavy traffic, we might notice one of the affected drivers become extremely angry and act disproportionately to the scale of the damage caused by the accident. On Elisabeth’s analysis, this is because the passion of anger has obscured the individual’s ability to see their car accident as an accident of fortune. Their reason is unable to judge matters effectively, despite their best intentions. If passions can temporarily affect the way our reason functions, as Elisabeth describes, then they pose a threat even to those well-entrenched rational judgements that we cultivate through habituation.

What does this disagreement with Descartes over the nature of the passions amount to? First, we should note that in all the early passages in which Elisabeth raises the issue of passions she describes them in such terms that suggest she does not consider them a species of judgement. They are separate from the intellect and the domain of reason. This continues in April 1646 after Elisabeth reads a draft of Descartes’s *Passions*.

> And how are we to prevent ourselves from desiring with ardor those things that necessarily tend to the conservation of man (such as health and the means to live), but that nevertheless do not depend on our free will? (LS p.134)

In my view this line of criticism amounts to a conceptual disagreement with Descartes about the function of passions. Both Elisabeth and Descartes agree that the passions are delivering information to the soul about what it should want. But for Elisabeth there does not seem to be any space at all for rational decision in this process. Recall that on Descartes’s model of how the passions function there are two instances of judgement by the intellect. The first is automatic and the second is a function of the clear and distinct ideas available to assess the course of action that a passion is motivating us towards. Let’s motivate Elisabeth’s worry a little bit more strongly than she does. If passions necessarily motivate us towards certain objects, and therefore induce automatic

judgements about the value of those objects, how is it possible that some notion of reason can affect this process and the output of our judgement? If we are already in possession of whatever rational idea we need to mitigate the passions' influence it seems as though, on Descartes's view, it should mitigate the effect of the passion from the start. So, Descartes appears to be multiplying instances of judgement beyond what is necessary to explain human action. And this sort of criticism conforms with the experience of passion that Elisabeth draws our attention to. My reason does not affirm the object of my anger when I feel angry. In fact, sometimes one can feel internal disagreement with their emotions despite acting based on those emotions anyways. If my reason can affect the influence of a passion, on Elisabeth's view, it should affect this passion from the start or not at all.

This idea that we cannot so easily submit our emotions to the influence of reason is the first of Elisabeth's major critiques of Descartes's view. As Schneck describes

> While Descartes thinks human beings can exercise full control over their thoughts and emotions, and thus are able to make themselves independent of external events as well as of other people, Elisabeth conceives of human beings as inherently entangled with their environment in various ways. For Elisabeth, humans are essentially social creatures that cannot (and should not) free themselves from the emotional involvement that comes with their social nature.[185]

Most scholars agree with Schneck about the philosophical basis of this criticism. Elisabeth departs from Descartes's view because she considers passions fundamentally beyond the rational control of human agents. But how significant of a departure is this from Descartes's view and what explains Elisabeth's insistence upon it? The first wave of scholarship on Elisabeth, including Jacqueline Broad's early work, argued that Elisabeth's departure from Descartes's position is indicative of her offering a "woman's point of view" more concerned with the role of feelings and emotions.[186] But subsequent work has sought to more carefully ground Elisabeth's views in her upbringing and

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[185] Schneck, "Elisabeth of Bohemia's Neo-Peripatetic Account of the Emotions" (756).

[186] See: Ibid, 762-4 for more discussion of these readings. Schneck notes in her paper that Broad has backed away from this reading, as I believe have many others who were quick to make this assertion.

intellectual context. Schneck continues this movement by arguing that we read Elisabeth's criticism as a function of her Aristotelian influence. It is well known that Elisabeth was educated in the classics and was particularly fluent in Greek. Schneck points out that Elisabeth was familiar with the discussions of Stoicism in Seneca and Cicero, including the Peripatetic lines of attack against the Stoic view. Schneck pushes on this connection to argue that Elisabeth's insistence that we cannot control the influence of the passions is tied to Aristotle's view of happiness. Elisabeth and Descartes both think that passions motivate us towards external goods which are good for the body. Fundamental to Aristotle's view of happiness is that happiness depends to some degree on external goods outside of our control, and as a result, we do not have complete control over our happiness.[187] Schneck also emphasizes the similarity between Aristotle's and Elisabeth's view of our connection to others. Both see happiness as a function of bonds we have with other people. They each respectively conclude that we cannot control whether we are happy because we cannot control what happens to the people we love.

Does Elisabeth's view represent some kind of Neo-Peripatetic response to Descartes's Neo-Stoicism as Schneck suggests? I am sceptical of this reading for several reasons. First, I am not convinced that Elisabeth's view is altogether that much different from Descartes on this subject. She makes an important observation, which she stresses in the correspondence, about the difficulty the passions pose and the way our happiness depends on requirements that are outside of our control. I do not think it is a stretch to say that on these points she had some influence on Descartes. But in the end, as we saw above, Descartes concedes that our desire for happiness explains in part the motivational effect that the passions have on us. He concedes that, though he thinks our intellect can reconfigure our picture of happiness and the way certain objects influence our will, his strategy does not promise the complete elimination of our desires for things outside of our control. Unlike the classical Stoics Descartes himself does not suppose that we have complete control over our emotions. He follows the Neo-Stoic line of Lipsius and others who made a concession about our ability to pursue virtue in order to retain the

[187] Ibid, 765.

plausibility of Stoic intellectualism. Descartes allows partial control of the passions by reason whereas Elisabeth allows none. But this is a difference of degree rather than kind. Furthermore, the point that Aristotle makes about happiness and external goods is not particular to him. Many others, including Epicureans and Neo-Stoics made the same point prior to Elisabeth and Descartes's discussion. So, the fact that Descartes and Elisabeth both make this concession, albeit to varying degrees, does not suggest any particular connection to Aristotle because many people seem to have been influenced by him on this point.

However, it stands to reason that some contextual point must have informed Elisabeth's challenges to Descartes's view. And up to this point in the scholarship Schneck's suggestion that Elisabeth was inspired by some Scholastic or Peripatetic line of critique is the most plausible explanation that has been put forward. Schneck is correct that Elisabeth and Aristotle both emphasize our social bonds with other people and the role these play in our happiness. And Descartes does not really discuss this idea. To argue more forcefully against what Schneck is suggesting I want to suggest that there is an alternative explanation for why Elisabeth insists on such a stark conception of the passions. I think that Schneck's method of mining Elisabeth's intellectual background for sources is the most promising way forward. But when we examine this background, in particular Elisabeth's theological context, I think we get another explanation of her critique of Descartes that has very little in common with Aristotle or the Scholastics. To flesh out this view, however, we need to turn our attention to Elisabeth's challenges to Descartes view on providence and virtue respectively. In what follows I will try and bring these lines of argument together with Elisabeth's view of the passions to offer a novel reading of what she is trying to do.

3.4.2 Providence

Elisabeth responds to Descartes's account of free will and providence with two distinct comments which I will attempt to bring together into a complete view. While we do not know that Elisabeth herself intended to develop such a view, I believe certain hints towards pieces of important intellectual context can help us tie her ideas together. In so doing we will begin to see a "Neo-Stoicism" emerge from Elisabeth's thought that is

contrary to Descartes. This will help to discern the common features of a Neo-Stoic moral approach in 17th century thinking. But it will also serve to contrast the conceptual features of Descartes's account that one might have disagreed with.

Elisabeth's first point of contention is with the idea that providence and free will are compatible. Her concern is primarily with the actions that we normally attribute to the free will of individual human agents, as is consistent with her worries throughout the correspondence.[188] She replies to Descartes:

> The reasons which prove the existence of God and that he is the immutable cause of all the effects which do not depend on our free will do not persuade me that he is just as much the cause of those which do depend on it. From his sovereign perfection it follows necessarily that he could be this cause, and that he could have never given free will to human beings. But since we feel ourselves to have it, it seems that it is repugnant to common sense to think it dependent on God in its operations as well as in its being (LS p.123).

Elisabeth makes a distinction between free will depending on God for its operation as opposed to its being. She insists that the feeling of free will we experience is so palpable that it could not possibly depend on God for its operation. While we can conceive of God as the ultimate cause of this power, and so acknowledge that its *existence* depends upon him, we can conceive of no further dependence without eliminating our concept of freedom entirely. Once we allow that God can influence the operation of our will we cannot say that it is free. This is a robust philosophical criticism which appeals to the way we conceive of the will to draw a conclusion about how the will operates. Descartes's letter with the example of the king who prohibits duels constitutes an attempt to show Elisabeth how free will can depend, conceptually, on God in its operation. Elisabeth never comments directly on this example. All we know is that throughout the correspondence she resists the idea that free will is governed by providence, confessing at one point that "it is impossible for me to square them, it being as impossible for the will to be at the same time free and attached to the decrees of Providence as for divine power to be both infinite and limited at once" (LS p.127). Elisabeth seems to insist that this gap

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[188] See: Reuter, "Elisabeth on Free Will, Preordination, and Philosophical Doubt" p.165.

in our ability to conceive of the interaction between providence and free will poses a legitimate problem for establishing such a connection.

There is some important theological context that I think explains the basis of this disagreement. Elisabeth specifies that she is presenting an objection "of *our* theologians" rather than one of her own making (LS p.124, my emphasis). This raises the question of who, exactly, Elisabeth's theologians might be. It is well known that Elisabeth was raised a Calvinist and later became abbess of the Lutheran convert at Herford.[189] We also know that she resisted marriage to Wladislav of Poland because she would have had to convert to Catholicism.[190] So Elisabeth was, in some manner, a Protestant thinker. But there is more to this story. Elisabeth's father was the ruler of the Palatinate. This was a Protestant province of the Holy Roman Empire that had rebelled against the Catholic Hapsburgs and started the Thirty Years War that devastated much of Central Europe. Jeffery explains that, due to the makeup of prominent families in the Palatinate, Elisabeth's great grandfather, Frederick III, had commissioned the Heidelberg Catechism to bring together prominent ideas from both Lutheran and Calvinist denominations and unify the various Protestants.[191] We know from the journal of Elisabeth's sister that Elisabeth was required to recite the Heidelberg catechism on a daily basis during her upbringing.[192] Interestingly, the Heidelberg catechism effectively ignores John Calvin's doctrine of predestination, most likely for the sake of doctrinal harmony.[193] From a philosophical perspective this is crucially important as Calvin's account of predestination was his most significant philosophical departure from the Lutherans.[194] As a result, the synthesis of the

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[189] See: Shapiro's introduction to her edition of the correspondence, Elisabeth and Descartes, *The Correspondence Between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes* [LS].

[190] See: Ibid along with Jeffery, *Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia*.

[191] Jeffrey, *Princess Elisabeth* p.25.

[192] Ibid, p.25.

[193] Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism* p.49 and 50.

[194] Lagerlund and Hill, "Ethics" p.532.

Heidelberg catechism effectively rejects Calvin's philosophical doctrine of predestination, affirming instead the Lutheran conception of the will's absolute power to respond to God's will.

Calvin's strong account of predestination maintained that God elects, prior to his creation of the universe, every soul that will be saved by his grace. This means that for Calvinists God's determination of who will be saved is *unconditional*. His providential plan determines this absolutely in every case with no exceptions. The contrasting view, maintained by many Lutheran inspired branches of reformers, was that God's determination of who will be saved is *conditional* upon the wills that choose God. God determines through foreknowledge those individuals who will choose to follow him, but his grace is granted on account of something to do with the character of a person's will and not on account of their own predestination. The upshot of this contrast is that for strict Calvinists you receive grace based on the actions you perform throughout your life which are themselves part of the divine plan. For other reformed traditions you receive grace based on the use of your own free will. The obvious worry with Calvin's view, which made his account of predestination quite controversial, was that it seemed to threaten the possibility of free will altogether. Once we say that God has determined in advance every action an individual will perform and calculated whether they are to receive grace, we do away with the sense in which their actions are entirely their own. If we maintain only that God foreknows something about the character of a person's will then we can maintain that their actions are part of providence, but, also that they are granted grace freely on account of their own free will to choose God. Taking note of Elisabeth's supposed Calvinism would suggest that she should be more in agreement with Descartes's providentialism than she actually is in their correspondence.

However, observing the reformation synthesis of the Heidelberg catechism allows us to better understand Elisabeth's comments. On the issue of free will and providence Elisabeth was brought up in the traditional reformed fashion which saw it essential that grace is determined based on the character of an individual's will. She was *not* taught, at least not until she was much older, the more hardline Calvinist position on predestination. When Elisabeth responds to Descartes's account of providence by emphasizing an

objection of *her* theologians, we should take the most historically accurate view of who exactly those theologians were and what they would have believed. For the authors of the Heidelberg catechism the issue of providence is conceived in, essentially, Lutheran terms. And this seems to be why Elisabeth so emphatically conceives of the problem in a different manner from Descartes during their correspondence. What happens to a person in their life is a function of *what God wills*, and as such it is useless to try and penetrate God's intellect for consolation concerning the unfolding of this divine determination.[195] In this sense Elisabeth appears to be occupying a similar space as John Mair, who we saw above attempt to synthesize reformation theology with a kind of moderate voluntarism.

This brings me to Elisabeth's second point of criticism. We saw that Descartes's account of providence aims at minimizing our feelings of regret and repentance. Elisabeth responds to this in a subsequent letter.

> In running from repentance for the mistakes we have made as if it were an enemy of our felicity, we run the risk of losing the desire to correct ourselves. The risk is particularly great when some passion has produced the mistakes, because we naturally love to be moved by our passions and to follow their movements, and only the inconveniences proceeding from this course teach us that such mistakes can be harmful (LS p.123).

Elisabeth rejects Descartes's idea that we ought to apply providence to our life to minimize our feelings of regret. For her these feelings represent an opportunity for moral improvement. While it is true that our desire for things to have turned out differently can lead to intense negative emotions, these negative emotions have (as Schneck describes) a "corrective function" because they can prompt us to consider how we might have acted differently. This sort of rationalization leads us to a better understanding of our own role

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[195] To be clear, I am *not* suggesting here that Elisabeth is merely an unthinking vessel for the theology outlined in the Heidelberg catechism. I am drawing the reader's attention to the fact that Elisabeth's theologians, who she herself refers to in her letter to Descartes, did not occupy a standard Calvinist position on the issue of providence. Elisabeth is, *like any other philosopher*, working within a specific intellectual context. When presented with a particular view of the conciliatory power of providence by Descartes, she presents an objection. In trying to understand *why* she presents this objection we owe it to ourselves to examine the resources available that could have informed this objection, just as we would for any other philosopher. Elisabeth gives us no reason to think that she breaks from the line presented in the Heidelberg catechism, in fact her own objections seem to follow the text. Since we know that she was extremely familiar with this text, I think it is only fair to assume that it influenced her thinking on this subject and can provide a richer understanding of her view.

in our misfortune. It gives us some clarity about how we might act differently if a similar situation arises again to avoid another negative result. Schneck argues that this view is a product of Elisabeth maintaining a more complex conception of emotions than Descartes. While some emotions such as fear and anger can cause immoral acts, other emotions like regret and repentance can lead to better preparation and planning and induce moral improvement.[196] Schneck contends that this complex acknowledgement of our emotional entanglement is another point in favour of an Aristotelian reading of Elisabeth's critique. After all, Aristotle maintains that, rather than minimize all negative emotions like regret, we should seek to cultivate the most appropriate response to each emotion as it comes. This means that we should feel a certain amount of regret if, by some accident, our actions cause a significant loss to someone we love. Like Elisabeth, and unlike Descartes, there is an argument in Aristotle that emotions like regret have a role in the character of a virtuous person.

Though I think Schneck correctly understands the force of Elisabeth's comments, I again think the connection to Aristotle here is quite tenuous. Aristotle's remarks about the place of uncomfortable emotions in the character of a virtuous person is part of his larger view that virtue consists in balance or the *mean* between different states of being. But Aristotle's discussion has nothing to do with the notion of providence. Elisabeth is attempting to elucidate what is wrong with Descartes's appeal to *providence* to rid us of our anxiety. Yet again, I think we can more profitably explain the upshot of Elisabeth's criticism by appealing to her protestant background. To see this, consider the following passage from the Heidelberg catechism.

> Question 56. What believest thou concerning the forgiveness OF SINS? Answer. That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God (Good and Van Horne, p.30).

This passage emphasizes the corrupt nature of human beings and the way that virtue requires struggling against it. When we reflect upon divine providence, for someone of

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[196] See in particular: Schneck (2019), p.761.

this theological upbringing, we should probably feel *more* regret and repentance rather than less. This is because part of God's providential plan was to have human beings fall and struggle for the rest of their material existence against the presence of sin. In this hybrid Calvinist/Lutheran picture the struggle against our feelings of regret is fundamental to the pursuit of virtue. Elisabeth argues several times that she thinks our passions naturally drive us towards sin and infirmity. They are flaws built into our nature which we cannot ever completely overcome. But God's providence allows us to resist and struggle against these passions by directing our will towards him and his good nature. Elisabeth thinks that part of this struggle necessarily involves making errors and feeling appropriate amounts of regret about our mistakes. But unlike Aristotle she does not believe this because of a larger view about virtue consisting in the *mean* between different states of being. She believes this because of the influence of a prominent religious text which she was made to memorize. And while she certainly does seem to have been inspired in her argumentation by some Scholastic or "Peripatetic" notions, the ultimate aim towards which she directs these arguments is to affirm a conception of providence that is more consistent with her faith.

Recognizing this distinct aim is important when we try to go beyond Elisabeth's criticism itself and understand what her positive view might have been. Elisabeth explicitly maintains three things about providence. First, that God's providence does not extend to the actions of human free will. Second, that Descartes's account appears to run counter to the ideas of "our theologians" (whoever they may be). And third, that rather than seeking to minimize our feelings of regret and repentance we should embrace these feelings and use them as opportunities for moral improvement. We also know that Elisabeth's upbringing saw her internalize a complex hybrid of Lutheran and Calvinist theology. As a result it is fair to assume that she would have wanted to emphasize personal responsibility before God and the sinful nature of human beings. While it is true that providence governs much of what happens in the world, for her it is false to suggest that a deep understanding of how this is the case will make one more virtuous. Moreover, it would be complete arrogance to someone of Elisabeth's persuasion to suggest that recognizing the inevitability of our misfortune should quell our feelings of regret, or that eliminating this regret is central to the pursuit of virtue. Our obligation instead is to

consistently endure and persevere *in spite of* whatever difficult feelings might arise from the natural course of events in the world. For Elisabeth, though providence is central to how we live our lives, seeking to understand it is no more of a path towards virtue than simply trying to endure it. In this manner Elisabeth's view rejects the intellectualism that underlies all of the versions of the Stoic duty of acceptance that we have seen thus far.

Martina Reuter has suggested in passing that this view is, in a sense, *closer* to classical Stoicism than Descartes's own view. Reuter's view is based on understanding Elisabeth and Descartes's disagreement in light of the distinction between faith and reason. Elisabeth puts forward a set of scenarios, in particular the actions that result from free will, which look like they escape being explained by God's providence. Descartes responds by working out an elaborate scheme by which these actions are simultaneously free yet also providentially determined prior to God's act of creation. But Reuter argues that for Elisabeth what Descartes is doing amounts to blind faith in God's will rather than a rational explanation of the misfortune that befalls us on account of other human beings.[197] From Elisabeth's perspective Descartes's solution amounts to simply saying that what happens to us *has to be* part of God's plan so we should condition ourselves to accept it. But saying that something has to be part of God's plan does not explain rationally how, in fact, it is a result of providence. Reuter suggests that this move goes against what we might expect from Elisabeth's Calvinist background.[198] However, once we recognize that Elisabeth's religious upbringing was not strictly Calvinist, but a Calvinist/Lutheran hybrid which cut out Calvin's understanding of predestination, we can start to understand how her background does in fact inform her response to Descartes. For someone of Elisabeth's religious persuasion Descartes's view does amount to blind faith. This is because central to Elisabeth's upbringing was the idea that we cannot comprehend God's ways. So a strategy such as Descartes's which seeks to minimize our anxiety by intellectually comprehending aspects of the divine plan is, to Elisabeth, really just blind faith. This is why Reuter is correct to assert that Elisabeth's explanation of

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[197] Reuter, "Philosophical Doubt" p.169 and 70.

[198] Ibid, p.170.

regret and repentance is, in some sense, a more rational explanation than Descartes's. By arguing that we must necessarily experience and struggle against anxiety, distress, and regret, along with other negative emotions, Elisabeth espouses a view that is more Stoic in certain respects than Descartes's position.[199]

On the face of it, it appears difficult to tie Elisabeth's view to the Neo-Stoic projects of Lipsius and Descartes. After all Elisabeth rejects Descartes's claim that providence extends to the actions of free human wills, as well as the idea that we ought to appeal to providence to minimize our feelings of repentance and regret. Not only are these key ideas in Descartes's own account, they are exactly those ideas which led me to draw a link between Descartes's view and Lipsius's Neo-Stoicism. But Elisabeth does seem to think that we are all subject to providence in one respect, that is, that we need to be granted grace in the struggle against our desires and affections. And, if we take Elisabeth's view to be strongly informed by her Protestant background, we might understand this struggle against our desires as the struggle to direct our will towards God, however, in a very different manner than the intellectualism espoused by Lipsius and Descartes. Elisabeth is essentially melding together ideas from Aristotelian virtue ethics with the emphasis on personal remonstration of Protestant theology. She uses this framework to warp Descartes's Neo-Stoic ethical vision into an account which ends up more closely resembling the views of the classical Stoics themselves.[200] While we might expect Elisabeth to have spelled out her views differently were she able to write a treatise of her own, her context required that she glue together these various philosophical traditions through engaging with Descartes, and this context should affect how we understand her thought. We can think of what Elisabeth is doing with Descartes's Neo-Stoicism along the lines of how classical Stoicism has been used in modern culture. In

[199] This is not to suggest that Descartes's view is in fact one of blind faith in God. Hopefully it is clear from the preceding sections how I think Descartes understood the rationality of his own view. I am simply suggesting that from Elisabeth's perspective what Descartes outlines would not have seemed rational. And this I think explains the source of their disagreement.

[200] Who, of course, themselves owed a great debt to Aristotelian virtue ethics.

what follows I want to flesh out this suggestion in more detail by turning my attention, finally, to what Elisabeth has to say about Descartes's views on happiness.

3.4.3 Virtue and Happiness

What does Elisabeth have to say in response to Descartes's Neo-Stoic picture of virtue? We've already seen that she largely disagrees with Descartes's move to make virtue a matter of minimizing our feelings of regret. However, she also provides a more substantive philosophical critique of the approach Descartes lays out in his letters. Descartes has argued that we will be happiest and most virtuous when we a) cultivate a strong and enduring self-esteem within ourselves that is grounded in reason, b) reflect on the nature of divine providence and the fixed determinations of God's will, and c) seek to know divine providence as far as our human understanding will allow. In one of the final letters discussing ethics (25 April 1646), Elisabeth attacks this view as follows.

> I find it much less difficult to understand all that you say on the passions than to practice the remedies you prescribe for their excesses. For how is one to foresee all the accidents that can come upon one in life, as it is impossible to enumerate them? And how are we to prevent ourselves from desiring with ardor those things that necessarily tend to the conservation of man (such as health and the means to live), but that nevertheless do not depend on our free will? As for knowledge of the truth, the desire for it is so just that it exists naturally in all men. But it would be necessary to have infinite knowledge to know the true value of the goods and evils which customarily move us, as there are many more such things than a single person would know how to imagine (LS p.134).

Elisabeth is pointing out that it is impossible to avoid desiring things which do not depend on our own will. The strategy that Descartes outlines in the passions is still susceptible to the main idea Elisabeth sketches in this passage. We cannot possibly foresee all of the accidents that will come upon us in life because we are not omniscient like God. We also cannot accurately assess the value of the goods and evils which normally influence us. Think of how often two people meet, fall in love, and decide to get married only to discover years later that they are not really compatible. This phenomena occurs because we do not have infinite knowledge about the people or objects that we love. We see things and discern that they are, for some reason, worthy of pursuit. But we do not see all of the extensive history that makes them the person they are. To rationally determine without failure what is worth pursuing and what we should avoid, we would again need to possess God's perspective on the universe. And we would need to have an

infinite set of ideas (what Elisabeth calls an "infinite science") in order to properly understand the nature of the things that happen to us the way that God understands them. So it seems that Descartes's remedy for the passions and strategy for virtuous action can only go so far. And once we properly acknowledge the limited nature of human beings Descartes's account appears wholly inadequate. For, after all, our knowledge is so limited that once we consider all of the possible variables we are unaware of that might influence our conclusions, we start to become skeptical of whether our reason can achieve anything meaningful at all.[201]

This is perhaps the most enduring of all of Elisabeth's potent philosophical criticisms. By attacking the power and extent of human reason she attacks the engine of Descartes's Neo-Stoic account of virtue. Descartes thinks that we need to use reason to reevaluate our bodily desires. Rather than conceive of the objects our body directs us towards as what will make us happy, we need to reframe our conception of happiness around only what is within our control. The main thing within our control happens to be our capacity for reason. But if, as Elisabeth suggests, we cannot even reason effectively about most potential outcomes given that we have such a limited view of the universe, the potential for legitimate happiness in Descartes's model is reduced. This argument yet again seems to have been informed by Elisabeth's theological context. The Heidelberg Catechism has several important things to say about the pursuit of virtue.

> Why sayest thou, that thou art righteous by faith only? Answer. Not that I am acceptable, to God on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and that I cannot receive and apply the same to my self in any other way, than by faith only (Good and Van Horne, p.32).
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> But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God? Answer. Because that the righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law: and also that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin (Good and Van Horne, p.32 and 3).

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[201] And, of course, this was a bourgeoning theme in the early modern period as authors such as Montaigne had begun to rally against the faith that was ordinarily placed in human reason.

The passages quoted above depict a very stark picture in which individual accomplishments have little to no bearing on the determination of one's virtue. For a Protestant of Elisabeth's denomination, our good works in this life are only themselves worthwhile for the sake of proving our faith and earning God's grace. They do not determine our virtue by themselves. Consider how someone of this viewpoint would react to Descartes's moral psychology. For Descartes, discrete acts of willing are the building blocks of habits that in turn become virtues. We are virtuous when we habitualize being inclined towards the determinations of reason. And, as Descartes himself emphasizes, this pursuit of virtue is (correctly understood) entirely within our control. This would have struck Elisabeth, who we know had to memorize the Heidelberg Catechism, as completely backwards to the most theologically correct understanding of virtue. I think it is fair to see these passages and others like them as informing Elisabeth's response to Descartes.

Notice how this view seems to coalesce with certain features of the Aristotelian reading given by Schneck. One important point for Aristotle, as for Elisabeth, is that we acknowledge how virtue depends on our connections to other people. We have important bonds to friends and family which affect how we reason. When someone I love is in pain it is fundamentally more difficult for me to ignore the intense feelings of distress I feel on their behalf and consult only the best determinations of my reason. Importantly, for both Aristotle and Elisabeth, this experience is not something I should seek to reduce or eliminate. The pain I feel on behalf of my pained loved one is part of being a virtuous agent. But for Elisabeth the reason why this is the case is very different than it is for Aristotle. As we have seen, virtue for Elisabeth growing up would have been seen as only a matter of personal faith and the proper management of one's desires. The struggle against the sort of feelings she describes in her letters would have been considered an irreducible part of human experience that we must struggle against to be virtuous, not something that could be overcome or altered by reason as Descartes suggests. So attaining happiness is something that depends on recognizing the pain we feel on behalf of other individuals. Contra Descartes, we are not supposed to reframe our conception of happiness so as to exclude being pained by these experiences. But contra Aristotle, our emotional connections to other people are neither something we should seek to balance

nor rationally accept. These connections are an irreducible part of human experience meant to provoke certain feelings against which we test our faith and prove our virtue. And the crux of Elisabeth's problem is that experiences such as her brother converting to Catholicism, for which she believes he might very well be condemned to hell, provoke such anxiety and distress in her soul that she does not know whether her faith can withstand it.

What are we to make, then, of Elisabeth's views on the pursuit of virtue and happiness? Elisabeth works within Descartes's philosophical framework to carve out her own conception of virtue and happiness that is strongly informed by her theological and philosophical upbringing. She appears to meld together central ideas from the Protestant Reformation with tenets from Aristotle's virtue ethics and Descartes's own moral psychology. Elisabeth is especially critical of exactly those of Descartes's claims that seem to bear a resemblance to Lipsius. So her view does not seem to fit into the burgeoning Neo-Stoic movement. However, there is a different sense in which her thought still might be considered "Neo-Stoic." In Elisabeth Cochran's *Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics*, a basic account is given of how core tenets of the reformed faith find counterparts in classical Stoicism. Cochran argues that there are four axes of similarity between the reformed faith and Stoicism.

> First, trust in, or consent to, the benevolent providential direction of divine being is central to the moral life and is a necessary foundation for an ethic of genuine concern for those human beings who stand outside our immediate circles. Second, virtue is a unity, and the unified character of virtue stands in keeping with recognizing the possibility of a transformative experience as crucial to an agent's pursuit of moral good. Third, a divine being providentially guides the world, and yet human beings are morally responsible for our actions and decisions. Fourth, emotions play a complex role in the moral life, at times fostering an individual's embodiment of virtue but at other times problematically interfering with virtue.[202]

Based on Cochran's account a Protestant Neo-Stoic affirms that: a) that the foundation of ethics is in the way providence structures the world, b) virtue consists of a transformative experience of one's character in pursuit of the moral good, c) human beings retain responsibility for their actions despite their relationship to divine providence, and d)

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[202] Cochran, *Protestant Virtue and Stoic Ethics* p.4.

emotions play a complex role in the attainment of virtue sometimes helping and sometimes interfering with our ability to act as God commands. Throughout this chapter we have seen that Elisabeth accepts all four of these core tenets. The first idea that providence is the foundation of ethics may seem slightly dubious. However, if one accepts my arguments about the influence of her Protestant background I think it follows. Points b) through d) are all theses that Elisabeth explicitly maintains at one point or another throughout the correspondence. In fact, these points seem to be exactly those conceptual features of Descartes's own Neo-Stoic account that Elisabeth seeks to modify.

Additionally, there are some distinct similarities between Elisabeth's approach to virtue and the way that Stoicism has been taken up by contemporary advocates. Christopher Gill's account of Stoic virtue and happiness makes several key modifications to the classical Stoic view.[203] First, he suggests that we can understand "living according to nature" in terms of living according to human nature, rather than living according to the nature of the universe. Second, he deflates the Stoic claim that virtue is independent of happiness by arguing that we understand Stoic virtue as consisting in the knowledge of how to live a happy life. And finally, he pushes on the Stoic notion of "preferred indifferents" to suggest that we do not have to eliminate our inclinations towards goods other than virtue. Whether or not these are satisfactory modifications to the Stoic view is up to the reader to judge. But the brand of Stoicism offered by Gill and other modern commentators tends to do away with the bulk of what Elisabeth finds problematic. She too thinks that it is more important to try to live in accordance with our human nature than whatever God's providential plan happens to be. This involves struggling to direct our will to the things we think best, acknowledging that this will be made difficult by our emotional connections to our friends and family. After all, fully understanding God's providence is beyond the grasp of our finite intellect. Elisabeth also agrees that virtue is not independent of our happiness. While she seems to think that we must struggle against passions that make us unhappy this is ultimately because God has given us a great challenge. From this theological perspective, virtue is something that we pursue for the

[203] See: Gill, *Learning to Live Naturally* ch.1 in particular.

sake of, eventually, attaining the most perfect and blessed state of unwavering happiness in the afterlife. And finally, Elisabeth's view, because it does not seek to reduce or eliminate our emotional experiences, seems to allow a much greater influence of external goods upon our will than classical or Neo-Stoics.

What I aim to illustrate with this comparison to Gill is simply that Elisabeth, when presented with Descartes's Neo-Stoic account of virtue, modifies it in a very similar manner to the way contemporary authors have sought to modify classical Stoicism. In this sense, I think it is fair to read her as a "Neo-Stoic" thinker in the loose sense which this dissertation aims to mediate against. She does not accept the key positions that tie together Lipsius's and Descartes's accounts. As a result I do not think she should be included in our idea of early modern "Neo-Stoicism" insofar as that term designates a clear and specific philosophical movement. But I do not think that her objections to Descartes's view can necessarily be so easily tied to other theoretical perspectives like Feminism or Aristotelianism as past scholars have suggested. What Elisabeth is doing is working within the confines of letters to articulate to Descartes problems with his view and alternative ways that he might think about the pursuit of virtue. Since his view is Neo-Stoic, she is necessarily engaging with Neo-Stoic concepts and ideas. But when we consider her remarks in light of her theological and intellectual backdrop, we notice that she takes these concepts and morphs them into a view that is much more loosely "Stoic" but also seeks to use some core ideas of Stoicism to explain the pursuit of virtue. If Elisabeth had gotten the opportunity to write a treatise on moral philosophy it is entirely possible that it would have looked very Aristotelian. But all we actually have is the hybrid view in her letters that loosely combines Stoic thinking with ideas from Scholasticism and Protestantism. However, this view is extremely important. Although it does not represent a Neo-Stoic project in the same sense as Descartes. It represents the way in which Descartes's and Lipsius's readers (of which there were many) would have responded and adapted their views colloquially. As such, Elisabeth's objections and the views they imply constitute an essential part of the contextual backdrop to early modern Stoicism.

Chapter 4

4 Malebranche and the Realization of Descartes's Neo-Stoic Ethical Vision

4.1 Against the Stoics

In the previous two chapters I outlined the emergence of a Neo-Stoic revival in late 16th and early 17th century discussions of ethics. Unfortunately, the ethical visions presented by Descartes and Elisabeth in their correspondence are incomplete. Descartes only began writing explicitly about ethics very late in his life and never completed this project. Elisabeth was confined to write about philosophy only in her letters. But the Neo-Stoic themes and positions that permeate their discussion have a legacy outside of their own work. In what follows I will argue that Nicolas Malebranche, perhaps the greatest synthesizer of Cartesian philosophy, developed a systematic account of moral philosophy that is best understood as the realization of Descartes's Neo-Stoic ethical vision.

Malebranche (in)famously provides several protracted critiques of the Stoics and Stoicism in his *Search After Truth* (1674–5). Malebranche's remarks against Stoicism in these passages constitute a significant barrier to any kind of Stoic interpretation. The first goal of this chapter is to try and undermine these critiques to show how, despite what Malebranche says, there remains room in his philosophy for Neo-Stoic positions. In what follows I have organized Malebranche's criticisms into three closely related areas: materialism, pride, and vanity. In each of these I aim to capture a particular aspect of Malebranche's analysis of Stoicism. This will allow me to more effectively argue against the idea that these criticisms represent a significant and meaningful departure from a Stoic or Neo-Stoic approach. While Malebranche has powerful reasons for wanting us to think that his moral philosophy is antithetical to Stoicism, when we look more closely at the texts, we can recognize several reasons to scrutinize his explanations more carefully. I contend that this opens the way to assessing Malebranche's relationship to Stoicism based on his theoretical positions rather than practical comments made based on the

influence of his intellectual context. This clears the road for the Neo-Stoic interpretation of Malebranche's thought that I make in the subsequent sections of this chapter, based primarily on the way Malebranche's theoretical account of ethics embraces certain Neo-Stoic ideas.

4.1.1 Materialism

Malebranche's first problem with Stoicism is with Stoic materialism. He argues in book one of the *Search* that

> [The source of the Stoic's errors] is their belief that sensible pleasure and pain are not in the soul but only in the body. This false judgment then serves them as a premise for other false conclusions: e.g., that pain is not an evil, nor pleasure a good; that the pleasures of senses are not good in themselves; that they are had by both man and beast, and so forth (SAT I.xvii p.77).

Because the Stoics were thoroughgoing materialists, we know that Malebranche is correct to characterize them as holding that sensible pleasure and pain occur in the body. If pleasure and pain are only states of the body, a human mind, whose power of freedom is understood fundamentally in terms of the power to give assent, can simply not assent to these feelings. So, the Stoics (on Malebranche's reading) conclude that pleasure and pain are not necessarily indicative of what is good or evil. Malebranche thinks that this view is quite problematic when faced with the evidence of experience. "All these pompous and magnificent arguments" he says, "vanish with all their brilliance as soon as the soul is affected by some sensible pleasure or pain" (SAT IV.x p.307). In Book I of the *Search* Malebranche establishes that pain and pleasure are states of the *soul* and not states of the *body*. Malebranche's argument is, essentially, that two implausible things would have to be true for sensations to occur in our body. First, our soul, which receives sensations of pain and pleasure, would have to be extended so as to occupy the physical space in which our body feels these sensations. And second, our sensations would always be accurate representations of the world around us.[204] The first point is a non-starter for Malebranche because, qua Descartes, the soul is fundamentally an immaterial non-extended thing. But

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[204] Consult *Search I.xiv* for a summary of these points which Malebranche develops throughout the entirety of the first book.

even if one supposes that the soul is extended, Malebranche thinks that the second point should be persuasive that sensations do not occur in our physical body. Two separate people can put their hand under running water and one can conclude that it feels hot while the other concludes that it feels lukewarm. Their experiences do not tell us anything about the actual temperature of the water. A person walking in the desert can see optical illusions like mirages which represent objects to them which do not actually exist. For there to be such a gap between our sensations and the reality we inhabit, Malebranche thinks that sensations must occur in our soul and vary based on our soul's varying perceptive faculties.

Malebranche concludes at the end of Book I that the senses' "proper use is only to preserve [the body's] life and health, and that they are to be thoroughly rejected when they attempt to dominate the mind" (SAT I.xx p.85). Malebranche's position on sensation generates a view about the role of pleasure and pain that (he thinks) puts him in opposition to Stoic materialism. He summarizes this view nicely at the beginning of the *Search*.

> I grant, then, that pleasure and pain are the natural and indubitable characteristics of good and evil: but (1) this holds only for those things that, being neither good nor bad by themselves, cannot also be recognized as such through clear and evident knowledge; and (2) this holds only for those things that, being below the mind, can neither reward nor punish it; finally (3) this holds only for those things that do not merit the mind's attention, and since God does not will that we attend to them, He leads us to these things only by *instinct*, I.e., by pleasant or unpleasant sensations (SAT I.iv p.21).

Because Malebranche thinks that sensations occur in the soul and can vary based on the varying perceptual faculties of a particular mind, he thinks that they are not sufficient to serve as clear indicators of what is good and bad. However, he maintains that they still must constitute some kind of legitimate signal about the value of an object. This is because he thinks that God would not have designed us to feel sensations of pleasure and pain if they did not have some purpose. So, he argues that, given their unreliability, sensations of pleasure and pain must be indicators of what is good or bad for the body that we cannot otherwise recognize through "clear and evident knowledge." They are instincts which lead us towards or away from things which do not merit the attention of our intellectual faculties. This does put Malebranche in tension with the Stoics, at least insofar as he represents them. The Stoics maintained that pleasure and pain are feelings in

the body which the mind must seek to rationally overcome. They agree with Malebranche insofar as they think that sensations of pleasure and pain should not dominate the mind or distort the judgements of the intellect. But they disagree with Malebranche (or so he says) insofar as they hold that sensations of pleasure and pain are *never* accurate representations of the value of an object.

Later in the *Search* Malebranche explains how he thinks the Stoics made this mistake in response to the Epicureans. Epicureanism, he argues, contends that pleasure and pain are nature's signs of what is good and what is evil. As a result (Malebranche thinks) the Epicureans famously held the view that we should nearly always and infallibly follow our sensations of pleasure and pain in moral matters (see: SAT V.iv p.358).[205] For Malebranche this view is partially correct because, as discussed, pleasure and pain are indeed a mechanism God devised for signalling to us what is good and evil. However, when we follow our sensations without question, as the Epicureans recommend, Malebranche thinks that we are more easily drawn into sin because we end up prioritizing the concerns of the body. The Stoics recognized the potential problem of pleasure and pain drawing us towards material goods and away from virtue. But, Malebranche argues, "having been unable to undo the knot [of the Epicureans], Zeno's group immediately cut it by denying that pleasure was a good and pain an evil" (SAT V.iv p.359). And we know that Malebranche thinks the Stoics were only able to do this because they did not sufficiently recognize the distinction between the soul and the body. Once we properly understand this relationship, Malebranche thinks we can easily arrive at the correct view that pleasure and pain are necessary and reliable indicators of what is good or bad for the body, but not *always* what is good or bad for the soul.

Malebranche's criticism does not effectively attack any view that forms the basis of Stoic ethics when we take a broader view of what is essential to the philosophy. Consider the two main normative duties I have focused on throughout this thesis: acceptance and character development. Whether or not one is a materialist and thinks that

[205] Of course, proper Epicureans will contextualize this claim to make it more plausible. But the success of this view does not concern us here.

pain and pleasure occur in the body is not connected with maintaining either of these positions. For instance, Descartes and Lipsius are both dualists of some sort positing a clear distinction between the mind and the body, and yet, they both still argue that we ought to condition ourselves to accept what happens on account of God's providence. Just the same, character development – understood in terms of cultivating a strong intellect – does not seem to be connected with being a materialist. In fact, Malebranche's own analysis of how feelings of pleasure and pain distort our judgments itself seems to imply some kind of normative responsibility to control the way that we judge.[206] The basic point here is that whether one is or is not a materialist does not really have any bearing on whether one can accept a Stoic view of ethics, once we take a broader view of the philosophy. And since we have examples of Neo-Stoics in Lipsius and Descartes who made this same departure we should not take Malebranche's criticism too seriously when it comes to assessing the Neo-Stoic elements of his view. Malebranche's remarks on Stoic materialism are a subtle and interesting analysis of our sensations of pleasure and pain. But they do not constitute as strong of a conceptual departure from Stoicism as Malebranche seems to think.

4.1.2 Pride

Malebranche's next line of criticism concerns excessive pride. This is perhaps spelled out clearest in Malebranche's famous remarks on Seneca in book two of the *Search*. In this section of the text Malebranche is critiquing broadly those thinkers who have relied on what he calls "excessive imagination" to convince their readers of the truths they espouse. With regards to Seneca, he argues that the portrait of the wise man Seneca presents is itself a product of this excessive imagining.

> There are no walls and no towers in the strongest places that battering rams and other engines of war cannot shake and eventually topple. But there are no machines sufficiently powerful to disturb the mind of [Seneca's] wise man. Do not compare him to the walls of Babylon breached by Alexander, nor to those of Carthage and Numantia, breached by a single army, nor finally to the capitol and the citadel that even today bear signs that enemies once overcame them. Arrows shot at the sun cannot reach it. The sacrileges committed in overthrowing temples and breaking their images do not disturb divinity. The

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[206] I will talk more about this view and its Stoic parallels shortly.

> gods themselves can be buried beneath the ruins of their temples, but his wise man will not be buried by them; or if he is, he cannot be hurt by them (SAT II.III.iv p.177).

This passage, dripping with sarcasm, is meant to illustrate to Malebranche's readers how ridiculous Seneca's idea of a Stoic sage really is. Seneca asks us to believe that, even though walls and towers built by thousands of people working together can be toppled, no one can assail the mind of a virtuous person. This is to effectively compare the virtuous person to a massive celestial object like the sun, or to some kind of divinity. And we know based on our experience of our own mind that this sort of person does not exist. No matter how hard I try to concentrate on the delicious cake I am going to eat later this evening (or some analogous idea), I cannot dull the sensation of a pinprick on my finger in the current moment. Pain and pleasure are, as we've seen, *natural* sensations, which means for Malebranche they are the products of natural laws ordained by God himself. No amount of imagining can make it true that Seneca's model sage Cato was impervious the physical pain of being struck. This is simply not a power that we find in human beings.

Later in the *Search*, Malebranche suggests that the foundation of this misguided picture of virtue is excessive pride. He acknowledges that a Stoic may, indeed, have some practical success with conceiving of virtue in the manner they do but tries to deconstruct this phenomenon.

> [The Stoics] did feel some joy in following the rules of their imaginary virtue because joy is a natural consequence of our soul's knowledge that it is in the best state it can be in. This joy of the mind was able to keep up their courage for a while, but it was not strong enough to resist pain or overcome pleasure. Secret pride and not joy was the source of their bearing (SAT V.iv p.361).

Malebranche again picks on the Stoics insistence that pleasure and pain are not involved in virtuous actions. If a virtuous action was not pleasurable in some sense, then performing it would not make us genuinely happy. And following Descartes, Malebranche thinks that we would not be motivated to perform any further virtuous actions if we did not experience some happiness or pleasure as a result. Malebranche argues that the Stoics supposed they were happy due to the misleading sense of joy that followed from embodying their austere sense of virtue. But this feeling of joy was in fact simply the misguided sense of pride that the Stoics felt from believing that their mind

was in the best possible state of being. Essentially, Malebranche is contending that this person is like a more positive version of the excessively stubborn Chesty Puller. They believe that they can control their own happiness, tell themselves that they are always happy, and so believe that they are unaffected by experiences of pleasure and pain in the world. But no human mind can separate itself from the influence of its body in this manner. It is only our pride which convinces us that we have, in fact, achieved such a state of impervious happiness. Ultimately, for Malebranche, the account of the Stoic sage is based on an imagined and prideful vision of human autonomy that sorely disregards our relationship to the rest of our surroundings and to other people.

Christopher Brooke has argued that Malebranche's attack against the Stoics, particularly on the issue of pride, constitutes the "culmination of the tradition of French-Augustinian anti-Stoicism."[207] For Malebranche, the Stoics are right to privilege reason over the senses but they reason *incorrectly* about the influence that sensations of pleasure and pain have on the mind. The Stoics make this mistake because they do not have the adequate conceptual tools to deal with the complex relationship between the soul and the body that Malebranche thinks is at the heart of experiences of pleasure and pain. But Brooke argues that Malebranche's critique is even more refined. Malebranche develops his line of thinking on pride in the section of the *Search* concerned with excessive imagination. Here, Malebranche's primary concern is to illustrate to readers the contagion of strong imaginations. This contagion arises in virtue of certain *natural ties* that we possess to other people in our society. Malebranche argues

> It is necessary to know that men need one another, and that they were created that they might form several bodies, all of whose parts have a mutual correspondence. To maintain this union God has commanded us to have charity for one another. But because self-love can gradually destroy charity, and break the bond of civil society, it was appropriate for God to preserve it by also uniting men through natural ties, which subsisted without charity and appealed to self-love (SAT II.III.i, p.161).

In short, Malebranche thinks that when we see someone strong or powerful we seek to imitate their behaviour and form a connection with them so that we too may achieve the

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[207] Brooke, *Philosophic Pride* p.92.

same strength or power. This means that particularly skilled rhetoricians like Seneca who espouse views based on excessive imagining are particularly dangerous. Because they argue from their own sense of pride, rather than right reason, their conclusions will seem enticing to the masses and threaten to further distort others capacity for reason. Brooke connects this view with Malebranche's critique of Stoicism based on the way that the Stoic's excessive pride mimics God.[208] Because they suppose themselves to possess a power that human beings ordinarily do not have, the Stoics allow their pride to make them into Gods. So, Stoicism represents the pinnacle of pagan thinking.

While Brooke's framing of this discussion does make Malebranche look like one of the chief Christian detractors of Stoicism, I am not sure that there is as much in the actual arguments as he suggests. There is no doubt that, opposing the classical Stoics, Malebranche wants to recognize the relative value of sensations and passions which he conceives to be part of God's design for the world. It is quite interesting that Malebranche worries that Seneca has not reasoned *well enough*. Malebranche thinks the Stoics have overestimated the rational capacities of a single human mind and ignore the influence of sensations as a result. But there does not seem to me to be substantial philosophical support for the idea that Malebranche thinks Stoic pride will distort our piety. Malebranche himself argues strongly throughout several books of the *Search* that we must follow reason over sensation and avoid letting our sense-experiences dominate the mind. And the foundation of Stoic pride, as described by both Malebranche and Brooke, is the privileging of reason over experience. While surely Malebranche thinks Seneca arrived at the wrong conclusion, I do not see a plausible explanation of how Seneca's *process* of thinking about our happiness itself is impious. Because Malebranche himself similarly wants to ground the pursuit of happiness in the use of our reason. Yet again I am skeptical whether there is a legitimate conceptual disagreement in these passages.

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[208] Ibid, p.91 and 92.

On the issue of pride we certainly do have a more persistent and effective criticism than on the issue of materialism. We know that it is essential to Malebranche's system that human beings are subject to the constraints of embodiment. This means that as much as we would like to judge perfectly in every instance, on account of original sin, we are bound to our body and strongly influenced by our sensations of pleasure and pain. That these sensations will at some point distort one's rational judgment is inevitable for Malebranche. This idea makes anything like the classical Stoic picture of virtue impossible to maintain. But my reading of Malebranche does not require that he maintain the classical Stoic sense of virtue as absolute mastery of our feelings. We saw in Chapter One that one of the main modifications made by Lipsius and other Neo-Stoics was to weaken the Stoic sense of virtue so as to not require that one has absolute mastery of external influences on their mind. I am quite happy to concede that Malebranche seeks to offer a more restrained and measured account of a reason-entrenched moral psychology than the Stoics, so long as we also acknowledge that he could still be using *Neo-Stoic* conceptual tools for the sake of establishing this view. Modifying the Stoic view to avoid the pitfalls of excessive pride would not change any theoretical parallels between Malebranche's view and our Stoic descriptive theses. And moderating Stoicism in this manner would be consistent with the developments of the late 16th century Neo-Stoic revival.

4.1.3 Vanity

The final line of criticism Malebranche advances against the Stoics closely parallels the previous two. Not only does Malebranche think the Stoics are excessively prideful by seeing themselves as more rational and more autonomous than other human beings, he also thinks they demonstrate *vanity* by failing to recognize God's role in our pursuit of virtue. This is, of course, somewhat less of a philosophical point and more of a contextual and theological point. The classical Stoics' intellectual context did not allow for a discussion of the sort of God who is so inseparable from Malebranche's own

philosophy.[209] But there are still some interesting points being made here, and examining this criticism in detail can help us tie all of Malebranche's points together to assess how much he distances himself from orthodox classical Stoicism.

After critiquing the Stoics on the basis of their pride and their materialism in Book Four of the *Search*, Malebranche summarizes the account of virtue that he thinks is missing from their view.

> We must speak to men as Jesus Christ did and not as the Stoics, who knew neither the nature nor the malady of the human mind. Men must be told unceasingly that it is in a sense essential for them to hate and despise themselves, and that they must not search for settlement and happiness here below; that they must carry their cross, or the instrument of their supplication, every day, and presently lose their life in order to preserve it eternally. Finally they must be shown that they are obliged to act in a manner completely contrary to their desires, so that they may feel their impotence for good (SAT IV.x p.310).

The problem that Malebranche presents with the Stoics in this passage is that they place too much value and power in the capacities of individual human beings. For Malebranche, the pursuit of virtue requires that we recognize our impotence and our weakness. To understand this view we need to know a little bit about Malebranche's account of original sin. For Malebranche, our close connection to our material body was intended by God as a punishment following upon the first sin of Adam. He argues that before original sin Adam "sensed pleasures and even pains, or involuntary and prevenient displeasure. But these pleasures and pains could neither enslave him nor make him unhappy" (SAT I.v p.22). Adam received the same information about the state of his material body as we do, however these sensations were not as intoxicating to his mind as they are for us. On Malebranche's account of original sin, after Adam committed the first offence against God, God retreated from human beings allowing our senses to enslave us to the pursuit of bodily goods. Malebranche's moral theory broadly involves shunning and rejecting bodily goods as a sort of sacrifice in favour of our more noble part (the soul) which stands closer to God himself.

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[209] In particular due to the doctrines of occasionalism and vision in God which I will discuss in the next sections of this chapter.

Colin Chamberlain argues that Malebranche must explain why an all good and all-powerful God would allow human beings to experience this pervasive close connection to their bodies.[210] On Chamberlains's view there are two possible explanations for this. The first and most obvious is survival. We need to have a close connection to our bodies because we need to be informed of the potential goods and harms that will preserve or injure us. But Chamberlain thinks that this is by itself an insufficient explanation. He argues, "once we've granted that a tool – like the senses – is good relative to its proper function [i.e.survival], there is a further question about whether it is good that someone be given a tool."[211] Chamberlain thinks that we need to explain why it was good for God to unite minds with bodies in the first place. The explanation of this point, he thinks, comes from several passages in Malebranche's *Christian Conversations* in which Malebranche describes rejecting the senses as a kind of self-sacrifice following upon Christ's original example.[212] Chamberlain supposes that when presented with some sensory pleasure, for example the smell of baked apple pie, we are presented with the opportunity to *sacrifice* our bodily pleasure for the sake of some more pious action (in Chamberlain's example, prayer). For Chamberlain, Malebranche's view involves stacking these instances of self-sacrifice into a kind of self-annihilation in favour of God. On this reading, the above passage in which Malebranche contrasts the Stoics with Christ might be read as an extension of this rather dark view. The Stoics are *vain* because they suppose that virtue is a matter of strengthening one's self-esteem, rather than eradicating the self in ultimate deference before God.

If Chamberlain's reading is correct, then I think the above passage has to be understood as a legitimate point of conceptual disagreement between Malebranche and the Stoics. There is certainly nothing like Chamberlain's notion of self-annihilation in

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[210] Chamberlain, "Our Bodies, Our Selves" p.531.

[211] Ibid, p.533.

[212] See Chamberlain (2018) §3.2 for these passages, which I will not discuss here. They are important to Malebranche's view, but as they are so intertwined with his theology the project of understanding how they fit with what Malebranche says in the *Search* and *Treatise on Virtue* are beyond the scope of this thesis.

classical Stoic or Neo-Stoic thinking, despite the fact that both camps (to some degree) reject the senses as good sources of information about the relative value of objects. However, an obstacle for Chamberlain's interpretation is that there is much textual evidence in the *Search* and other less theology-centric texts where Malebranche's considered philosophical view is not so dark. Consider the following passage in which Malebranche gives us cause to scrutinize his motivations.

> It is nonetheless true that without the grace of Jesus Christ, the delight the soul takes in yielding to its passions is greater than that which it experiences while following the rules of reason, and it is this delight that is the source of all the disorders that have resulted from Original Sin… For in the final analysis, what I have just been saying on behalf of joy of the mind against sensuous joy *is true only among Christians, and it would be absolutely false coming from the mouth of Seneca*, or even Epicurus, or any of the seemingly most reasonable philosophers, because the yoke of Jesus Christ is sweet only to those who belong to Jesus Christ (SAT V.iii p.356, my emphasis).

Malebranche claims here that without "the grace of Jesus Christ" we do not derive the same joy from following the rules of reason. On Chamberlain's interpretation this is problematic because we should not be deriving any "joy" from following the rules of reason over our sensible pleasures, this act should always constitute complete self-sacrifice before God. But Malebranche suggests here that, not only is there joy to be derived in following reason, but that *Christians* specifically can feel this joy to a greater extent on account of receiving God's grace. This implies that feelings of joy, which are a function of our self-preservation for Malebranche, are a factor in motivating us to be good. Malebranche also specifies that the *foundation* of all the disorders which have followed from Adam's original sin is the disproportionate relationship between sensible delight and delight of reason in those who have not received God's grace. Yet again, I think Malebranche is indicating that the problem with our desires is not the way they manifest our self-interest. It is simply that they tend to dominate our minds. Furthermore, Malebranche proceeds to argue that his own view on the value of reason over sensible pleasure is true "only among Christians." Indeed, Malebranche thinks this same view would be "absolutely false" put forward by Seneca or any other Stoic. And his reason for this seems to be simply that these pagan thinkers did not, and could not, receive God's grace. The problem that Malebranche really seems to have with the Stoics here is that they are vain because they neglect God's essential role in morality, not that they refuse to sacrifice themselves completely before him.

Once we understand Malebranche's point in this way, however, the appearance of a significant conceptual gulf between his view and Stoicism disappears. Both parties strongly emphasize the joys of a rational mind and argue that a moral life involves rejecting the influence of sensation in favour of following reason. The only difference is that Malebranche wants to emphasize how we need God to do this. Without God's grace, the relationship between the joys of our reason and the joys of sensation will be disproportionate, as it is necessarily for all the unfaithful due to Adam's original sin. This disproportionate relationship privileges the joys of sensation so strongly that even the most rational minds (i.e. sages) will succumb to the influences of their body. Since we need God to overcome this relationship Malebranche argues that a moral life also involves a disposition of faith towards God. Through faith we can receive God's grace which will allow us to persevere against the pervasive influence of the body. But the Stoics, being pagan thinkers, lacked the appropriate conception of God and could not really possess this faith in any meaningful sense. Their moral philosophy vainly neglects God's essential role. As good historians, we should recognize that this departure from the Stoic view hinges on a particular feature of the context of Ancient Greek and Roman Stoicism (i.e. belief in God). Once we remove this contextual barrier and consider the Stoicism put forward by "pious" thinkers such as Lipsius and Descartes, we should recognize that there is room to maintain the core of Stoic philosophy without neglecting the role of God's grace.[213] And Malebranche and the Stoics seem to occupy the same philosophical space with their emphasis on rejecting sensation in favour of reason.

We also have some textual evidence that sees Malebranche praising what his contemporaries have done with Stoic philosophy. After his critique of Seneca in book two of the *Search* he says the following:

> It is true that not all the thoughts of Seneca are false and dangerous. This author can be

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[213] One way to think about what Malebranche is doing here is to think about the voluntarist/intellectualist continuum. Like Descartes and the Stoics, Malebranche wants to maintain a staunch intellectualist position. However, like Elisabeth, Malebranche is also trying to recognize the fundamental role that God's will must play in our moral lives. Malebranche is trying to make his orthodox Catholic philosophy more compatible with some of the strong voluntarist doctrines that emerged from Reformation accounts, in essence effecting a kind of intellectual "counter-reformation."

> read with profit by those who see things correctly and know the foundation of Christian morality. Great men have used him well, and I do not care to condemn those who, in order to accommodate themselves to the weakness of other men who have too much esteem for him, have drawn from the works of this author to defend the morality of Jesus Christ, thereby fighting the enemies of the Gospel with their own weapons (SAT II.III.iv p.182).

Malebranche admits several important things here. First, he thinks that Seneca can be read with profit by those who properly understand Christian morality. This immediately puts him on closer ground to Lipsius and the Neo-Stoics. Second, Malebranche takes particular care not to criticize those who have worked to draw from Seneca a defence of the Christian doctrine. Malebranche does not tell us specifically who he is thinking of here. He could just mean Descartes given that Descartes's published letters to Elisabeth see him seeking to take profit from Seneca's work. However, Descartes never really engages in the Neo-Stoic project of demonstrating explicitly how Stoicism is consistent with Christian morality. The fact that Malebranche describes exactly this sort of philosophizing suggests to me that he is thinking of Lipsius or, at the very least, someone close to Lipsius's orbit. So, we have evidence of what looks like approval of the Neo-Stoic project by Malebranche. In my view this is another strike against Chamberlain's interpretation. Because if it is true that Malebranche thinks Stoic authors can be used with profit by Christian thinkers it does not seem likely that he advocates the level of self-sacrifice Chamberlain ascribes to him. The Stoic philosophy emphasizes individual self-esteem and happiness too strongly for it to be used towards this end.

4.2 Malebranche's Moral Psychology

Now that we have seen how Malebranche's critiques of the classical Stoics may not be so potent, we can begin to consider the theoretical argument in favour of reading him as a Neo-Stoic. This argument consists of two parts. First, I need to demonstrate that Malebranche's theoretical positions embrace Neo-Stoic descriptive theses and employ them to argue for Neo-Stoic normative claims. Then I need to demonstrate that interpreting these positions as "Neo-Stoic" actually makes sense given Malebranche's philosophical context. The remainder of this chapter will be (roughly) divided in two along these lines. In the following section I will begin unearthing Malebranche's Neo-

Stoic positions by giving an overview of his most distinctive philosophical doctrines: occasionalism, vision in God, and strict intellectualism. In each of these cases I aim to show how Malebranche's philosophical account of the human being's place in the world mirrors key descriptive theses maintained by the classical Stoics and by Lipsius. My argument will be that by backing into these descriptive theses Malebranche also backs into a Neo-Stoic account of providence, fate, and the normative responsibilities of human beings. In the final section of this chapter, I will try and argue more forcefully for this Neo-Stoic reading by showing how Malebranche, in his *Treatise on Ethics*, actually applies these Neo-Stoic descriptive theses to argue for the normative duties of acceptance and character development that I outlined in my earlier chapters. This will show that Malebranche uses his Neo-Stoic descriptive theses to argue for Neo-Stoic normative claims.

4.2.1 Occasionalism pt.1: Necessity

Perhaps Malebranche's most famous philosophical doctrine is his doctrine of occasionalism. Occasionalism is the view that God is the only true efficient cause and that human agents are (at best) only "occasional" causes of their own activity. If we aim to speak precisely, Malebranche thinks, then God is the cause of everything that happens, and human beings are not capable of producing anything of their own volition. Malebranche establishes this view by two routes: one negative and one positive. The negative route is to argue against the claim that human beings are capable of legitimately causing anything to happen. Here Malebranche's arguments are largely borrowed from other Cartesian occasionalists who preceded him.[214] He provides a series of discrete arguments meant to attack the idea that the human will or material bodies can produce motion or activity on their own. The positive route to occasionalism is to argue in favour of the claim that only God can cause anything to happen. This involves arguing that there is some distinctive feature of causation that can only be found in the activity of an

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[214] See: Platt, *One True Cause* ch.8. While Malebranche does give his own formulations of the "no knowledge" and "no self-movement" arguments, I am in agreement with Platt that these are largely borrowed from Cordemoy and La Forge.

omnipotent deity. It is this claim that I am primarily concerned with here. While Malebranche's arguments against self-motion and efficacious willing are an interesting and important part of his case for occasionalism, they do not by themselves establish that God is the one true cause. And in our examination of Malebranche's Neo-Stoicism this is the claim we really need to understand because it has implications for his view on providence and fate.[215]

Malebranche has two main positive arguments for occasionalism. The first has come to be known as the "no necessary connection" argument [NNC]. This argument posits that a cause must be necessarily connected with its effect and contends that God is the only thing that contains such a necessary connection with what he brings about. The second argument is known as the "continuous creation" argument [CC]. According to CC, we must conclude that God is the true cause of every effect because created beings depend on God's act of preservation for their existence. On this argument God's act of preserving his creatures is equivalent to re-creating them from moment to moment.[216] Therefore, God is causally responsible for the activities of all created beings and the one and only "true" cause. Platt (2020) has effectively argued that CC is not actually a separate positive argument for occasionalism. This is because all the same premises of CC were accepted by advocates of divine concurrence, an alternative view to occasionalism. These thinkers, according to Platt, agreed with Malebranche that God must continually preserve created beings from moment to moment. However, they did not agree that God was the one and only true cause. This is because the concurrentists ascribed motive power to bodies and supposed that bodies could be true causes through this power of self-motion. They thought that God's will simply "concurs" with these actions by continually preserving the motion of bodies as they themselves manifest it. Therefore, Platt (correctly) argues, CC is not a successful argument for occasionalism

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[215] Readers who are interested in Malebranche's negative arguments for occasionalism by elimination, as well as their history in Descartes and other Cartesians, should read all of Platt's excellent (2020) book *One True Cause: Casual Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism*.

[216] Ibid, p.330 and 31.

unless one also includes the premises of the NNC argument which preclude material bodies from rising to the level of a true cause.

So, Malebranche's most important and powerful argument for occasionalism is his NNC argument. On the face of it this argument looks extremely simple. Causes require a necessary connection to their effects and only God possesses such a necessary connection. Therefore, God is the only true case. Malebranche's clearest statement of this argument comes from *Search* VI.II.iii,

> A true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect. Now the mind perceives a necessary connection only between the will of an infinitely perfect being and its effects. Therefore, it is only God who is the true cause and who truly has the power to move bodies (SAT VI.II.iii, p.450).

There are two different readings of what Malebranche when he says the mind "perceives a necessary connection." The first, which Platt calls the "intelligibility" reading, suggests that Malebranche literally means that we do not perceive any necessary connections other than those between the will of God and what he produces.[217] Platt argues that the main issue with this reading is that we do not, according to Malebranche, possess an intelligible idea of God or God's will. It does not seem possible to conclude that we only perceive a necessary connection between the will of God and its effects, because on Malebranche's view we cannot literally "perceive" such a connection.[218] More recent scholarship has suggested that Malebranche is concerned, not with intelligibility, but with modality. Sukjae Lee suggests that Malebranche's point is more of a conceptual point concerning what necessary connections we can or cannot *conceive* of.[219] As Lee argues, "the necessary efficaciousness of divine volition could be thought to follow from the conception of divine omnipotence, even though we do not know the exact content of

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[217] Ibid, p.317.

[218] See: Ibid, §8.3.

[219] See: Pyle, *Malebranche* and Nadler, "Malebranche on Causation" for two other variations of this reading, which Platt refers to as the "modality" reading.

God's will."[220] So the necessary connection that we "perceive" between God and what he produces is actually a conceptual connection that falls out of our understanding of the requirements of God's omnipotence.

One way to draw out what Malebranche is talking about more clearly is to consider his main negative argument against the idea that the human will can cause anything. This argument has come to be known in the secondary literature as the "no knowledge" argument, and it is fairly instructive as to what Malebranche thinks is conceptually required for something to be a cause. Essentially, Malebranche thinks that finite minds lack the knowledge sufficient to produce the actions that they appear to produce.

> For how could we move our arms? To them, it is necessary to have animal spirits, to send them through certain nerves toward certain muscles in order to inflate and contract them, for it is thus that the arm attached to them is moved; or according to the opinion of some others, it is still not known how that happens. And we see that men who do not know that they have spirits, nerves, and muscles move their arms, and even move them with more skill and ease than those who know anatomy best (SAT VI.II.iii p.449 and 50).

Malebranche argues that there are all sorts of different physical interactions involved in the motion of one's arm that we do not know, or at the very least do not have in mind when we move our arm. We can see this because physicians with a much more intimate knowledge of the way the arm moves are no more able to move their arms than other ordinary people. The issue that Malebranche seems to have in this passage is that human agents lack of knowledge puts them in no position to meet his standard of what is required to produce an action. To be a true instance of an action or power for Malebranche seems to require that our act of willing is *by itself* sufficient to *explain* the motion of our arm. We must not be able to conceive of a scenario in which our volition to move our arm fails to produce this result. To meet this standard, we would need to know all the various motions and interactions in our body involved in moving the arm. Because if we do not have this knowledge then the content of our volition *may* not be sufficient to specify all the conditions necessary to produce this motion. One can see how

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[220] Lee, "Necessary Connections and Continuous Creation" p.543.

Malebranche's argument is entirely based around the modality of what is conceptually possible. It does not matter that often my volition to move my arm produces this motion. What matters are the exact conditions necessary to produce this motion and whether my volition is sufficient to determine all of them.

This picture of what is required to be a cause makes it more apparent why Malebranche thinks God's will is the only thing with a necessary connection to its effects. God is omniscient and therefore possesses infinite knowledge of everything that exists and every single process in the world. This means that when God wills something he unfailingly specifies every single condition that might be necessary to produce the intended consequence. What happens on account of God's will could not possibly fail to happen, and therefore it rises to the level of a "true cause." It becomes somewhat vacuous to say that nothing else can be a cause according to this definition. Malebranche has simply understood causation so narrowly so as to exclude anything other than God's will. But, this being the case, the entirety of Malebranche's NNC argument seems to hinge on how much we are compelled by his underlying assumptions about the nature of causation. We need to examine these assumptions more closely.

Malebranche assumes both that there must be a necessary connection between an efficient cause and its effect such that it is inconceivable the cause occurs without producing the effect. Platt notes that it is not immediately clear that Malebranche's audience would have accepted this idea. There are two different explanations in the secondary literature of what arguments Malebranche has in favour of this assumption. Walter Ott has developed an explanation based around intentionality. According to Ott, Malebranche conceives as causation in such a way that a cause must be capable of specifying the exact content of the effect it produces. Ott draws from this assumption a rather interesting argument that he thinks is implicit in Malebranche's view.

> There is a connection between God's will and its effects that physical substances or events simply cannot have. For a divine volition includes its effect in the sense that that effect is specified as the content of that volition. When God wills that this chair move, and it does, the two events are linked not by the mere sequence God's volition/chair moving, but by

> God's volition with this particular content and the realization of that volitional content.[221]

In other words, when God wills that a chair move he is able to conceive of the very beginning of that motion of the chair through to the end. Because God possesses this ability, he also possesses the *intentionality* necessary to legitimately produce effects. We human beings may *intend* to move our arms, and therefore possess part of what makes something a cause (on Ott's view, volition). But we don't *intend* to initiate the neural networks involved in sending blood down to our arm to help contract our muscles and initiate motion. At least, this is not how we conceive of things when we will to move our arm. In this manner Malebranche assumes that omniscience is necessary for something to be a cause because he has an implicit argument that causation requires a high degree of intentionality. One reason why we might think this is plausible is because we think that causes are supposed to explain their effects. If a cause possesses intentionality for every aspect of the effect it produces, then this cause presents a sufficient explanation of why the effect happened. God's omniscience makes it such that his will is always capable of serving as a sufficient explanation.

One problem with Ott's view is that we have to do a lot of work to make it seem compelling. To really explain the argument behind such a position one would arguably have to go into much deeper analysis than I have here. But it is not clear that Malebranche thinks such deep analysis is necessary to see why causes must have a strong necessary connection with their effects. Platt argues against Ott that, in the text, Malebranche consistently presents this assumption as one that seems obvious, even trivial. Take, for example, the below passage (which Platt also cites).

> If a man cannot turn a tower upside down, at least he knows what must be done to do so; but there is no man who knows what must be done to move one of his fingers by means of animal spirits. How, then, could men move their arms? These things seem obvious to me and, it seems to me, to all those willing to think, although they are perhaps incomprehensible to all those willing only to sense (SAT VI.II.III, p.450).

Malebranche states point blank the key assumption of his positive argument for occasionalism, that a cause must necessitate every aspect of its effect, and yet he does not

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[221] Ott, "Causation, Intentionality, and the Case for Occasionalism" p.180.

argue for it. He simply insists that it should be obvious to those who are willing to think beyond the influence of their senses. Platt's view is much more straightforward than Ott's. He thinks that Malebranche simply sees his assumptions about causation as an obvious result of clear thinking. The only reason that the assumptions are not obvious to most people is because their minds are dominated by the influence of their senses. Our senses lead us to think that we cause the movement of our arm because it happens so quickly after our willing it. But once we reflect on what reason demands we will recognize that we have neglected the conceptual requirements of necessary connection.

Platt has suggested that Malebranche's assumption can be further explained by considering Malebranche's doctrine of vision in God. The claim that we see all things in God is presented in *Search* Bk.III.2 as an explanation for the source of our ideas. Malebranche argues that ideas, strictly understood as mechanisms that present to our mind what it cannot perceive directly, necessarily possess several qualities which make God their only possible origin.[222] First, ideas are properties of minds and not bodies. This means that, even if they represent bodies, they cannot come from bodies directly. Second, ideas represent the things that they represent *accurately*. This is because ideas always and necessarily contain accurate information about their objects, despite the fact that we form incorrect judgments about them. It follows that the source of ideas cannot be any human mind because, being finite and fallible, human minds tend to represent things incorrectly. Because ideas always present us with some accurate information about the world, it follows that the source of these ideas must be an infinite mind. And the only infinite mind that exists is the mind of God. So, it follows that we see all of our ideas in God's mind. They are perfect, reliable, and infinite sources of information which God reveals to us, through our connection with his mind, based on what we perceive, feel, think, and do. Platt argues that "Malebranche's occasionalism parallels this account of divine illumination: occasionalism implies that the actions of created beings depend entirely on the power of God; similarly, Malebranche's epistemic theory implies that our perceptual

[222] See SAT Bk.III.2 chapters one through six for Malebranche's extended argument for this point.

knowledge depends entirely upon God's illumination."[223] So once we start thinking rationally about the source of our ideas, on Platt's reading, we will recognize that causes should also depend equally on the divine will.

My issue with Platt's reading is that this conceptual similarity does not amount to an explanation of why Malebranche's philosophical assumptions about causation are obvious. While the discussion of divine illumination does precede the discussion of occasionalism in the *Search*, it is not clear to me that they depend on each other. Suppose I grant that God is the source of all my ideas. It does not seem that I need to also suppose that God is the source of all causal power. Sure, my ideas may all result from divine illumination, but I can still will to move my arm and consequently observe that my arm moves. God could just be illuminating these ideas such that I get an accurate and reliable representation of what is happening between my will and my body. Unless I also suppose that there is some requirement that a cause be *necessarily connected* with its effect, I can still reject occasionalism. But on Platt's reading, the doctrine of vision in God is supposed to explain why this assumption about necessary connection is so obvious. In my view it does not seem sufficient to serve as this sort of explanation even if there is a conceptual parallel between divine illumination and occasionalism.

Platt seems to have missed that there is a more straightforward explanation of Malebranche's assumptions in the text. Malebranche's most fundamental observation with respect to occasionalism is that the power to act is divine.

> If we next consider attentively our idea of cause or of power to act, we cannot doubt that this idea represents something divine. For the idea of a sovereign power is the idea of a lower divinity, but a genuine one, at least according to the pagans, assuming that it is the idea of a genuine power or cause. We therefore admit something divine in all the bodies around us when we posit forms, faculties, qualities, virtues, or real beings capable of producing certain effects through the force of their nature; and thus we insensibly adopt the opinion of the pagans because of our respect for their philosophy (SAT VI.II.iii p.446).

Platt notes this passage himself but suggests that it is simply representative of Malebranche's theological motivations for adopting occasionalism. Despite noting how

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[223] Platt, *One True Cause* p.368.

philosophy and theology were intertwined in the period, Platt ignores that this passage hints at a philosophical explanation deeply intertwined with Malebranche's theology. Malebranche's issue with the pagans is that they "admit something divine" in bodies when they suppose that they possess causal power. But why would Malebranche think that causal power is divine? So far, we have seen only that Malebranche thinks a cause must be necessarily connected with its effect. We know that Malebranche thinks only God can have this sort of connection with things. But why? What exactly does Malebranche think is divine about this sort of necessary connection? The biggest clue we get in the above passage is that Malebranche has a problem with real beings producing effects "through the force of their nature." Suppose I raise my arm. If I perform this action through the force of my own nature and this force alone, then my nature is sufficient to explain the act of raising my arm. What happens if we ask for an explanation of *why* I raised my arm? If it is only the force of my own nature that brings this about, then, there is no further explanation. We cannot ask why I did what I did because the answer does not depend on anything other than my own nature. But suppose we find out that I am sitting in a classroom where a teacher asked a question that I know the answer to. What do we say now? It appears there is an explanation for why I raised my hand that goes beyond the force of my own nature.

What I am getting at here is that Malebranche has an even more fundamental assumption that Platt has neglected to identify. Recall the discussion of Della Rocca and the PSR from chapter two. Della Rocca's contention was based on the idea that a good rationalist, someone who endorses the PSR, will always be able to ask a further explanatory question about why something happened. Malebranche, following Descartes and other Cartesians, does not want to limit our capacity to ask for explanatory information. A "cause" is at bottom supposed to explain why a certain effect happened. If we accept that a being produces something through the force of its nature alone then we cannot ask for any information about what factors might have contributed to this force. We cannot ask what prompted the creature to act in the way that it did. But once we allow that actions can result from influences beyond the force of the creature itself, we start to recognize how far the chain of influence travels. If I raised my hand in response to a teacher asking a question, then do we not also require some sort of explanation of why I

was in that classroom at the time that I was? And do we not need to explain why my mind possessed the information that made me feel I could sufficiently answer the question asked? The chain of rational explanation, as we have already seen, can be easily made to extend *ad infinitum* such that no finite being is ever by themselves a sufficient explanation of why they acted the way that they did.

Malebranche has theological as well as philosophical reasons for accepting this kind of argument. A cause makes something occur that was not happening in the world prior to the cause inciting it. If the cause does this irrespective of the resources available to it (i.e. by its own nature), then it makes this event happen *from nothing*. This is why Malebranche suggests that the ancients posited something divine in bodies when they ascribed to them this kind of causation. If instead we say that the "cause" makes its effect happen from *something*, i.e. from some kind of resources, then we can ask a further explanatory question about those resources, how they came to be, and how they were available for the cause to utilize. In other words, we admit that what we initially supposed to be a "cause," while it seems like a cause, is not a cause in the strict theoretical sense of the term. This I think is the essence of Malebranche's position. It is clear and obvious that a cause must necessitate its effect because anything less than this strict standard demotes the explanatory power that a good rationalist imagines causes possess. Once we accept this assumption, Malebranche's NNC argument for occasionalism follows quite naturally. Because there is nothing other than God's that possesses this kind of explanatory power such that it is, always, the global explanation of what happened and why. Rather than see Malebranche as working through some implicit argument about intentionality as Ott suggests, or as connecting occasionalism with vision in God as Platt suggests, I think we should see occasionalism as a product of Malebranche's thoroughgoing use of the PSR.

Consider now where this leaves us. Malebranche holds that all events are caused by God's will because God's will is the only thing in the world sufficient to rise to the level of a cause. He supports this argument with a rigid assumption about the nature of causation, namely that causation requires necessary connection, and I contend that he makes this assumption on account of his thoroughgoing universe of the PSR. This means that Malebranche conceives of the world as fundamentally rational and explainable. As a

result, he ends up arguing that all events in the world occur as a result of the divine will of an omnipotent creator. Does this sound familiar? Just as we saw the classical Stoics and Lipsius maintain in chapter two, and Descartes in chapter three, Malebranche moves from a rationalist commitment about the nature of the world to the thesis that God is the ultimate explanation for everything that happens.[224] All this is enough to establish that Malebranche maintains some version of the Stoics "fate principle."

> FP: For every X, there is some relation (R) to some Y such that R determines (at least) some quality of X.

This is to say that for each thing, there are always some relations that explain why that thing is the sort of thing that it is. For Malebranche this principle is ultimately always connected with God. The R that connects X and Y are ultimately always determinations of God's will. This leads in quite nicely to the Stoics's "providence principle." Because God determines all the relations which determine things, God governs everything that happens in the universe. However, Malebranche is very careful about exactly how God's will determines all of these things. Next, I will explore this account and argue that it strongly parallels Lipsius's Neo-Stoic modification of the Stoic account of providence.

4.2.2 Occasionalism pt.2: Providence

There are two problems which Malebranche needs to be able to solve in order to maintain his thesis that God is the only active power in the universe. First, Malebranche needs to explain how it is the cases that "natural" or "occasional" causes (i.e. the human will) appear to produce the effects that they do while still being most properly understood as instances of the true causal power of God's will. Second, Malebranche needs to explain how accepting that God is the necessary cause of everything that happens in the world does not make God responsible for the existence of evil and sin. Both problems require a more detailed description of how God acts. In the *Search*, Malebranche is clear that God's activity is best understood in terms of laws.

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[224] This is not to suggest that all of these thinkers have identical views. There are important differences between Descartes's view and Malebranche's occasionalism, which ch.2 of Platt (2020) explains quite well.

> [God] moves all things, and thus produces all the effects that we see happening because He also willed certain laws according to which motion is communicated upon the collision of bodies; and because these laws are efficacious, they act, whereas bodies cannot act (SAT VI.II.iii p.449).

Malebranche argues here that, when we perceive the motion of a body, it is not the body that acts but the *laws* of motion determined by God's will which act. This allows God to, essentially, establish a system of bodies and initial motions that remains governed by his will for eternity because every subsequent motion is determined through laws. An individual body is the "occasional cause" of the effect it produces because its motion, consequent with some divine law, is an occasion for the law to produce the resulting effect. Without the divine law, however, the individual body would be causally impotent. God's activity is understood here through a set of divine laws which he established through his omnipotent will.[225]

How does understanding God's activity in terms of laws answer our second question about God's role in the production of evil? Here we need to consider Malebranche's theodicy. In the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, Malebranche argues that God works using the simplest laws. The idea here is that God, being omnipotent, would only choose to work in the most efficient way possible. Malebranche is primarily concerned with the efficiency of God's volitions because other variables such as instruments and effort are not applicable for an omnipotent being (TNG I.xii, p.116).[226] So God acts using the smallest possible number of volitions with the simplest content. This move helps Malebranche escape the problem of evil. Malebranche concedes that God could have made a better world, i.e., one in which tectonic plates never shift to cause massive earthquakes or, to quote Andrew Black, "rain always falls on fertile ground"

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[225] That is, excepting the instance of divine miracles where God intervenes in the world by means of a particular volition. This is a category which Malebranche certainly accepts, though he does not think it occurs very often (if at all) in modern times. As such it is not relevant to the claims in this thesis project.

[226] Malebranche argues that an omnipotent being has no need of instruments, otherwise they are not all powerful. Likewise, there is no such thing as "effort" for God because his power is always sufficient to accomplish whatever he does.

(p.31).[227] But according to Malebranche such a world would have required that God use either a greater number of volitions or volitions with more complicated content. As Black argues, God is off the hook for producing evil because God did not create the world for us. He created the world for his own glory to emphasize the sheer capacity of his will. This means that, if bad things for humanity result from the laws God has chosen it does not necessarily reflect poorly upon his choice. It simply illustrates that not everything God does is done for the sake of humanity. Readers should note that this theodicy implies that God's laws are *general* in content. If the laws God chose were particular in content, then God would need a new law for each thing that happens and would no longer act through the simplest laws. For Malebranche, it appears that God must act in the world through laws with general content.

However, scholars have been divided between two different ways of reading Malebranche's position on God's laws. First, what Timothy Miller has called the "general content interpretation" [GC] which argues, based on the above theodicy, that Malebranche's view demands that God act only through volitions with general content.[228] If God's volitions carry information about particular things, then, as explained above, Malebranche's argument that God acts using the simplest means fails. However, since the beginning Malebranche was criticized for thinking that God can act efficaciously through general laws. The main criticism of Malebranche's theodicy in his day (given by Antoine Arnauld) was that Malebranche's account fails to establish God as a providential agent. Arnauld insisted that if God does not have a particular volition for each event that occurs and only acts through the simplest and most general laws he lacks the care necessary to providentially govern the lives of individuals.[229] If I crash my car but by fortune my life is spared in the accident, Malebranche's explanation of God's involvement in the crash can only appeal to the general laws which he established that

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[227] Black, "Malebranche's Theodicy" p.31.

[228] Miller, "Malebranche on General Volitions" p.26.

[229] See: Black "Theodicy" p.33 and 34 for more on Arnauld's argument.

govern the motions of bodies for all time. For God to be considered a truly providential agent with a special design for the life of each human being he needs to have decided and willed specifically that my life would be spared in such a car crash. A contemporary version of this objection has been made by Steve Nadler.[230] Nadler suggests that God acting through laws with general content would undermine Malebranche's occasionalism. The problem is that laws which lack particular content underdetermine whether certain events will happen or not. Once we recognize this, it seems as though we are forced to concede a greater causal role to bodies and finite minds who, so to speak, "activate" the general laws of nature through their own actions. In this picture, Nadler argues, God is no longer the sole efficacious power of activity in the universe.

In response to these issues scholars have developed the "particular content interpretation" [PC].[231] Perhaps the strongest version of this view can be found in Nadler's work. He argues, based on the idea that GC undermines Malebranche's occasionalism, that Arnauld's criticism of Malebranche fundamentally misunderstands Malebranche's description of God's action. For Malebranche God acts, as we have seen, through general laws using general volitions. But Arnauld assumes that general volitions also have general *content*. And nowhere does Malebranche say any such thing. According to Nadler, it is possible for Malebranche to maintain that God acts through general volitions with *particular content*, i.e., what Arnauld would call "particular volitions."[232] How can God do this and simultaneously act according to the greatest means possible by creating and preserving the simplest system? Nadler argues that God's volitions can still satisfy this requirement because they remain bound by his own predetermined set of general laws. This is to say that, in the course of the world God causes particular things to happen from moment to moment, but he does this in accordance with the simplest and most general laws of motion and activity that he has already established. This is the

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[230] Nadler, "Occasionalism and General Will in Malebranche."

[231] Miller, "General Volitions" p.26.

[232] Nadler, "General Will" p.43.

simplest possible system God could create because it is the simplest system which retains his providential care for individual people and objects. On Nadler's reading, PC is able to satisfy *both* the requirements of Malebranche's theodicy and remain consistent with his Occasionalist thesis that God is the only active power in the universe.

Miller has argued against Nadler's reading (among others) in favour of GC. According to Miller most scholars have missed something important about Malebranche's account of creation. Drawing upon Black's account of Malebranche's theodicy, Miller argues that we can sidestep a lot of the problems that face GC when we pay closer attention to God's initial act of creation.

> There is reason to think that when Malebranche refers to the efficacy of God's general volitions, he should be understood as referring elliptically to their efficacy in conjunction with the particular volitions by which God established the first occasional causes. Put abstractly, a general volition is sufficient to guarantee that all A-events are followed by B-events. However, since this law cannot, by itself, establish any specific distribution of A-events, it cannot, by itself, guarantee the occurrence of any particular B-event. But once the particular volitions that establish the first occasional causes are added into the mix, the distribution of A-events is fixed, and hence the distribution of B-events is fixed as well.[233]

What Nadler and previous commentators ignore is that God does not *simply* act by general volitions. He acts by general volitions most of the time. But, importantly, this excepts his first and most important act of willing, namely, that act of will by which he creates the world and everything in it. God is not a scientist who sets up the components of an experiment simply to "see what happens."[234] God has meticulously considered through the power of his infinite intellect all the motions that will follow subsequent upon the initial motions that his primary act of will establishes. Miller argues that, once we take this into account, we recognize that God can act through volitions with general content and still have providential care for everything in his creation. He need not will directly every discrete event that leads to my getting in a car crash to ensure my survival. God knows from his initial act of contemplation the way that his general laws will shape the infinite sequence of motions in the universe. In knowing this he knows exactly how

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[233] Miller, "General Volitions" p.39.

[234] As put by Einstein, "God does not play dice."

the initial motions he creates through a particular act of will result in my getting in a car crash which I end up surviving. If he deems that this is the scenario which reflects true providential care for my life as his creation, then he can bring it about through simply willing a particular set of initial motions alongside a set of simple and general laws.

To clarify which of these two readings makes the most sense of Malebranche's thinking about providence, let's consider some text. The clearest discussion of this topic occurs, not in the *Search*, but in Malebranche's *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*. In Dialogue X, Malebranche's spokesperson Theodore defines providence as "two things: the laws of the communication of motion, since everything happens in bodies by means of motion; and the wise arrangement God introduced into the order of His creatures at the time of creation" (DMR X.xiv p.187). Here Malebranche provides support for Black's and Miller's readings that God's activity consists in only the general laws that he established through his initial act of creation. But he further specifies as well that God's act of creation had to take in mind the natures of all his creatures and arrange them "wisely."

> ARISTES. Who doubts that God foresaw all the consequences of that first impression of motion which in an instant formed the entire species of a particular insect in that portion of matter? He even foresaw generally all the consequences of the infinite motions – all different – which He was initially able to bestow upon that same portion of matter. Moreover, He foresaw all the consequences of all the combinations of that portion of matter with all others and their various motions, on all the possible hypotheses involving particular general laws.
>
> THEODORE. Therefore, Aristes, admire and adore the depth of God's wisdom which regulated that first impression of motion on a particular tiny portion of matter, after an infinite number of comparisons and relations, all effected through an eternal act of His intellect (DMR XI.iii p.197).

We can see here how Malebranche considers God to have taken the individual care that Arnauld thought necessary for a satisfactory conception of divine providence. Providence is established on the basis that all the infinitely complex processes in the world cannot, just as Arnauld and Nadler suggest, be explained by only general laws. Malebranche specifies that God willed the first impression of motion *after an infinite number of comparisons and relations*. This specifies that God's act of creation depends on an act of his infinite intellect. Through this intellectual comparison God takes the care necessary to determine a providential plan for each part of his creation.

Malebranche also makes it clear in the text that he conceives of God's providence extending over all types of activity. Theodore argues "combine the physical and the moral, the motions of bodies and the volitions of angels and people… it is not likely that in the first impression God communicated to matter He neglected to regulate His action to the relation these motions would be able to have" (DMR XI.iv p.198). If God had to consider all the implications of his first act of creation for the motion of matter, it also follows that he would have had to consider the implications for any type of order established. Malebranche's spokesperson Theodore concludes as follows:

> All the effects of general providence are so connected together that the least movement of matter can, in consequence of general laws, contribute to an infinity of considerable events, and that every event depends on an infinity of subordinate causes. Again, wonder at the profundity of God's wisdom which, before He took His initial step, certainly compared the first motions of matter not only with all its natural or necessary consequences but also, much more so, with all the moral and supernatural consequences, on every possible hypothesis (DMR XI.v p.199).

Malebranche argues that, since all events in the world are connected in a complex chain of causes, the smallest change in the initial impression of motion which God gave to the world could have resulted in a world different than the one we have now. Considering God's omniscience, it had to be the case that he contemplated every possible permutation that might result from this first impression in conjunction with his established general laws. This appears, again, to strongly support Black's and Miller's GC readings. Note that on this reading, beyond just the motions of matter, God's providence must also extend to moral and supernatural matters as well. God's "initial" contemplation and subsequent creation of the world alongside certain general laws governs, with providential care, every type of event that occurs in the course of the world (not just physical motion). So, after considering the arguments for Malebranche's occasionalism and the positions he thinks follow from it, we can see that he accepts, in addition to the Stoic fate principle [FP], the providence principle [PP] that "there is some nature (N) such that N is inherent in all X, and N organizes all X according to some end."

One perhaps wonders why, in his debate with Malebranche, Arnauld never accuses Malebranche of a holding a "Stoic" position. Malebranche and Arnauld's debate, after all, concerned the very nature of God's ways and how God's will is executed throughout his creation. If the position I have outlined above really is a Neo-Stoic

position, then why did Arnauld not recognize it as such and criticize Malebranche accordingly? While I do not have a complete answer to this question, there is an interesting historical anecdote that provides some explanation. We know for a fact that Arnauld did not like Stoicism and did not like the way it was revived by contemporary 17th century authors. In his (1641–2) treatise *On the Virtues of the Pagans*, Francois La Mothe Le Vayer defended a number of ancient schools of philosophy, including Stoicism, and argued against the claim that the pagans were incapable of true virtue. Le Vayer condemed Seneca on very similar grounds to what we saw from Malebranche above, arguing that he made the Stoic sage too close to God, but on the whole Le Vayer found much of moral value in the classical Stoic writings.[235] Arnauld wrote a refutation of Le Vayer's treatise, but this refutation (*De la nécessité de la foi en Jésus-Christ pour être sauvé*) was not published until 1701 because Arnauld was afraid of Le Vayer's anti-Jansenist protectors.[236] This strikes me as a pretty powerful reason why Arnauld would not have wanted to speak about Stoicism in the interim. Even if he did suspect Malebranche of drawing upon Stoic or Neo-Stoic wisdom in a manner like others at the time, pointing this out could have opened him up to attacks which he wanted to avoid. So I do not think that Arnauld failing to recognize the Stoic themes in Malebranche's account of providence necessarily defeats my interpreting them as such.

Having established the presence of these Stoic theses, it remains to consider whether it is better to think of Malebranche's views on providence and fate as classically Stoic or Neo-Stoic. The answer here is straightforward. Much as was the case for Lipsius, it is not possible for Malebranche given his intellectual context to accept exact formulations of the classical Stoic account of necessity and providence. As we saw above the classical Stoics characterized God as the active principle *pneuma* and conceived of *pneuma* as active within material bodies themselves. This is quite plainly not how Malebranche conceives of God's activity because he consistently attempts (for the sake of his theodicy) to explain God's activity in terms of general laws. Rather than act

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[235] See: Moriarty, "Stoic Themes in Early Modern French Thought." p.9.

[236] Ibid, p.10. Moriarty names Richelieu in particular.

directly within the nature of his creatures, God acts through the general laws he has established and the interaction his initial impression of motion has with these laws. He still efficaciously determines every instance of activity in the universe, but he does so in virtue of infallible general laws. Malebranche does conceive of providence as a general plan or schematic that God arrives at through his initial comparison of worlds prior to his act of creation. This is not dissimilar from the classical Stoic view. But it is much closer to Lipsius's version of PP: "there is some *agent* (A) such that A has determined intellectually each individual nature (N) for every X, organizing all X according to some end." This is reason, I think, to understand Malebranche's view as Neo-Stoic. Just like Lipsius, he accepts verbatim the Stoic's rationalist account of necessity while adopting a modified version of their account of providence that is more suitable to his theological aims.

4.2.3 Freedom

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Malebranche's picture of occasionalism has implications for his account of moral psychology. If God is the sole efficient cause of everything that happens, then it follows that he is also the sole efficient cause of human thought and action. To understand how this is so, we need to know a little about Malebranche's theory of inclinations. We saw earlier that Malebranche thinks God, in creating the world, gave an "initial impression of motion" to matter which subsequently interacted with the general laws of nature to dictate the motion of all material bodies for all time. Malebranche argues that "the mind's inclinations stand to the spiritual world as motion does to the material world, and that if every mind were without inclinations or never willed anything, there would not be, in the order of spiritual things, the variety that arouses admiration" (SAT IV.i p.265). The key idea here is that, just as material bodies are governed by the laws of motion, human minds are governed by their inclinations. Sean Greenberg describes these inclinations as motivational states which direct the mind towards different sorts of goods.[237] Essentially, God wills an initial impression of motion,

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[237] Greenberg, "Malebranche on the Passions" p.194.

and this initial act of creation produces analogous inclinations in created finite minds which, as they unfold, cause finite minds to act in certain ways in pursuit of different sorts of goods.

That some kind of necessity dictates the inclinations which God establishes in his initial act of creation is required, to some extent, by Malebranche's commitment to occasionalism. If human minds do not possess any real causal power, Malebranche needs to explain how it is we think and act in the way that we ordinarily do without ascribing to us any "true" powers of our own. A human mind that floats freely detached from the rest of the universe forming its own inclinations independently would not fit with Malebranche's picture. But Malebranche has a very particular explanation of how our finite minds are embedded in this system of inclinations, ultimately connected with God's will. He argues that God's will can have no other end for its operations other than God himself. If God were to place his ultimate end in a being other than himself, he would be placing it in a finite being, and as such, a being which contains less perfection than he does himself (SAT IV.i p.266). The thought here is that this would threaten God's perfection and his omnipotence because his will could have been directed towards a greater end (i.e. himself). Since inclinations are impressions of the divine will upon the mind, it follows for Malebranche that all our natural inclinations must be in some way directed towards God himself (SAT IV.i p.266). This seems to fly in the face of experience. When I look inward at my own inclinations, I notice that almost all of them are towards particular goods, not God. But Malebranche argues that human minds are only inclined towards particular goods due to a more fundamental inclination towards the good in general. He subsequently contends that the love of the good in general (or love of God as the source of the good in general) is foundational to any particular inclination that we might have (SAT IV.i p.267). What happens when I am inclined towards a particular object is simply that I take that object to be representative of the good in general, which is most properly found in God himself. In other words, I make an intellectual mistake by judging that in some finite particular object I perceive the good in general, when in fact this general good is only properly ascribed to God.

Just like the initial impression of motion that God gives to matter, the inclination towards the good in general stands over all our more particular inclinations, trickling down to influence the thoughts and actions of individual finite minds. But this poses a serious problem for Malebranche's philosophy. If our inclination towards the good in general dictates our thoughts and our actions, then our thoughts and actions are not free. As we saw above, God creates according to the simplest and most general laws, and this sometimes results in physical "evils" which are not good for humans, but which cannot be avoided without diminishing God's act of creation. However, this same explanation fails to explain moral evil if human beings are not free. Human sin is, fundamentally, the responsibility of individual human sinners. And Malebranche's system does not seem able to explain how sinful acts are possible without making God responsible for these sinful acts. Put simply, human beings need to possess, minimally, the power to sin of our own accord. And if our actions are completely determined by God's inclining us towards the good in general then it looks as though we do not have this power.

As a result, Malebranche insists that we do have some degree of freedom. But explaining this power of freedom in a way that avoids contradicting Malebranche's occasionalism is one of the core challenges of scholarship on Malebranche. Perhaps the most thorough and convincing explanation of Malebranche's conception of freedom has been given by Julie Walsh.[238] Walsh pays particularly close attention to the definitions of "the will" and of "freedom" that Malebranche gives at the beginning of the *Search*.

> I propose to designate by the world WILL, or capacity the soul has of loving different goods, the impression or natural impulse that carries us toward general and indeterminate good; and by FREEDOM, I mean nothing else but the power that the mind has of turning this impression toward objects that please us so that our natural inclinations are made to settle upon some particular object (SAT I.i p.5).

Malebranche understands the will as a vehicle for our inclinations. This means that whatever our soul is *inclined* or *carried* towards is what we "will" at any particular moment. But we have already seen that these inclinations are determined by God's will through their relationship with our inclination towards the good in general. So whatever

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[238] Walsh, "Intentional Volitions."

object we are inclined or carried towards at a particular moment is a function of more a more fundamental inclination which we cannot change. Walsh argues for this reason that Malebranche's sense of "freedom" is inherently negative. We do not have the power to consent to whatever inclinations we have. The mind will naturally be inclined towards some particular object in virtue of its inclination towards the good in general. We can, however, suspend our judgement in the face of persistent inclinations towards certain objects and ask whether we have correctly assessed the relationship of these objects to the good in general.[239] Walsh explains this redirection of our attention by connecting it with Malebranche's doctrine of Vision in God. She argues, "by its union with God the mind can bring other objects under consideration to redirect its attention away from the desirable but unworthy object of pleasure… we pray to God for illumination and God answers us by representing a new idea to us."[240] Our freedom is expressed by suspending our judgement regarding the inclinations that draw us toward particular things, allowing space for more rational ideas of the good in general to dictate our thinking.

How, then, is it that we mistake particular objects to constitute the good in general such that we are inclined towards them? It appears, if God himself implants all natural inclinations in the human mind, our inclinations shouldn't err and take particular goods for the general good of God. Malebranche's explanation of why we fail in this respect begins with his analysis of pleasure and pain. He argues that "all pleasure in His institution inclines us toward some right action or rewards us for it, and all pain deters us from some wrong action or punishes us for it" (SAT IV.x p.308). God has created pain and pleasure to, in optimal circumstances, indicate to our soul which things are good and which things are bad. Because God is all good and directs all things towards the good that is in him, we naturally find ourselves inclined towards the good things represented by our pleasures and away from the bad things represented by our pain. However, as we saw above, Malebranche thinks that the current circumstances human beings find themselves

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[239] Ibid, p.40-41.

[240] Ibid, p.42.

in are far from optimal. Original sin has subjugated the soul to the body, and our soul confuses the objects represented by sensations as the true cause of our pleasure and pain. This results in loving those particular objects which we are inclined towards despite that they are good only for the body or, as Malebranche puts it, "loving what we should not love at all" (SAT IV.i p.267). God has punished us by giving us the freedom to, through the determination of our attention, freely love things that turn us away from God and towards sin. In this manner we are now capable, when we use our will improperly, of becoming inclined towards particular material goods without recognizing the inclination towards the good in general that motivates all other inclinations.

Walsh manages to pinpoint more specifically what Malebranche's notion of freedom involves by responding to an objection from Charles McCracken. McCracken argues that, if it is the case that we may suspend our judgement concerning inclinations toward particular things and turn our attention towards general ideas of the good (i.e. God), then we must at some point possess a *desire* to direct our attention in this way. But this desire would be yet another species of inclination and, if we do possess it, then like all our other inclinations God must ultimately be the cause. But this, yet again, makes God turn out to be the cause of our good or bad moral behaviour. One issue with McCracken's reading that Walsh does not note is that it seems to assume a Humean desire-belief model of action. While it is very difficult for us today to conceive of activity in the mind occurring without first having a desire to act, in Malebranche's context this view was not so obvious. It is entirely possible, and in my view likely, that Malebranche did not conceive of desire as the first stage of mental activity. However, Walsh also suggests that "in response [to McCracken], we can point to Malebranche's insistence that while loving the good in general is *not* something over which we have control, loving God *as the general good* is in our control."[241] In other words, for Malebranche we do not control our inclinations, but we do control our beliefs. We can control what we recognize the good in general to consist in. And if we have the correct belief about this then this belief will produce the right inclinations, or we might say, the right desires.

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[241] Ibid, p.45.

Where does this leave us with regards to Malebranche's position on freedom as compared with the Stoics? The classical Stoics, as we saw, made a foundational assumption about freedom. They assumed that *every human being has the power to give or withhold assent to any proposition*. Malebranche quite plainly does not accept this thesis. Malebranche conceives of our inclinations as a fundamental part of our nature that, through sensations of pleasure and pain, direct us towards particular objects. We do not, in his view, have the power to *give* assent to any proposition because this happens automatically. We only have the power to withhold assent. We saw that Lipsius's main innovation on the topic of free will was to make free will a matter of assent to or dissent from *inclinations* rather than *propositions*. This was a result of the changing early modern picture of human psychology which allowed a much stronger influence on the human mind from the external world. While Lipsius's view is certainly closer to Malebranche's because he focuses on our control of our inclinations rather than all propositions, Malebranche's view goes further. Lipsius allowed that we might give our assent freely to a certain inclination whereas, as we have seen, Malebranche understands our freedom only in terms of our ability to suspend judgement. So, Malebranche does not really have a Neo-Stoic view on freedom. His account is both stark and innovative, and goes beyond what was in the conceptual lexicon of Stoic or Neo-Stoic approaches.[242] However, the way in which Malebranche understands human freedom is framed in a very similar fashion to the Stoic and Neo-Stoic views. And this in itself is important because it sets the stage for his account of human action and moral responsibility to parallel the Neo-Stoic account much more closely.

4.2.4 Action and Passions

Malebranche still has a problem. His occasionalism requires that God be the only true causal power. However, to avoid making God culpable for acts of sin Malebranche gives human beings the power to suspend their judgement and explains how this power of suspension can be used to avoid moral errors. But as Walsh argues, Malebranche still

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[242] For more on Malebranche's innovative view of freedom and how it potentially influenced Locke, see the rest of Walsh's excellent dissertation.

needs some kind of explanation as to how this power to sin or not sin does not amount to causing anything real.[243] Malebranche needs to explain human action in a manner which sees it as both a product of our freedom to suspend judgement, yet also somehow "non-causal." Fortunately, Walsh has developed a very thorough explanation of Malebranche's view on this topic which will get us a long way towards seeing how his account of action relates to the view of the Stoics.

The first point to note is why particular goods are not sufficient by themselves to determine the assent of the will, leaving room for Malebranche's conception of freedom. Walsh argues that this is because, while particular goods fill the soul with pleasure, they do so incompletely because they fall short of the general good that is in God. This gives us the opportunity to withhold our assent if our ideas of the good are rationally attuned. Walsh emphasizes that God does this in *collaboration* with us. He provides the necessary ideas of sensible pleasure and pain along with the necessary rational ideas, and he determines everything that ensues *according to how we dispose our attention*.[244] Walsh then argues based on this understanding that human actions produce nothing real.

> Malebranche explains that we do nothing real when we sin, nor is anything real produced. Sin is a discontinuation of examining or searching that corrupts God's action in us, but cannot destroy the natural impression towards the good. When we sin, we do nothing. Malebranche states that all we do is stop and rest. But exactly is this resting? It is not resting in the intuitive sense of the word where there is a cessation of events something only God can bring about. Rather, it is the failure to do our duty manifested by the love of that which is not clearly perceived. In these cases we rest content with the love of a confused perception.[245]

Malebranche thinks that when we sin, we do not "cause" anything real because we simply cease our pursuit of rationally informed attention. Suppose that I tell a lie to one of my friends. Not a small lie, but something clearly morally reprehensible like telling them I will be taking them on a vacation free of charge when I have no intention, and no financial means, to do so. How would Malebranche explain this case of moral failure?

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[243] Ibid, p.47.

[244] Ibid, p.48.

[245] Ibid, p.49.

Well first, I have clearly allowed my will to settle on some kind of particular inclination rather than my inclination towards the good in general. Let's suppose that the reason I've told this lie is because I want my friend to feel indebted to me and spend more time with me. I am inclined towards a particular object; in this case my friends love and attention. On Malebranche's view this attraction happens because I see, in my friend, some aspect of the good in general that is in God himself. However, I mistake that this good begins and ends with the affection of my friend and, as a result, I try to completely possess their time and attention. My sin consists in what Walsh calls "resting" because I cease rationally contemplating the good that I perceive and the actions that are most suitable for attaining it. From this point on God takes over. He acts (through general laws) in such a way that my brain conjures up the lie I intend to use, fires the neurons that move my mouth and cause me to utter such a lie to my friend, and causes everything else that follows this act. But he only does all of this because I have made negligent use of my freedom and disposed my attention improperly.

I think most Malebranche scholars fail to properly note just how strange this view of action is. It is a fundamentally anti-Humean account because it supposes that, in any instance of human action, belief occurs prior to the desire to act. Rather than argue that I have some particularly reprehensible desire to possess my friend's time, Malebranche's view requires that this desire is itself a fixed desire for the good in general that only manifests itself unhealthily because I possess an incorrect belief. On Malebranche's view, beliefs are the morally salient properties of human minds. But our beliefs do not *cause* anything. They simply interact with God's efficacious general laws of inclination and motion, and because of this interaction they lead to the production of actions in the world. Beliefs are "moral" properties but not "real" properties so we can be responsible for them without possessing any "real" causal power. At least this is how Malebranche seems to think things go. Walsh argues that, on the basis of this view, Malebranche adopts what she calls "strict intellectualism" – the view that "to know the good *is* the good."[246] This

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[246] Ibid, p.59. For a more thorough discussion of this intellecualist view readers should consult the rest of ch.1 of Walsh's thesis, in which she discusses arguments against her reading and against the cogency of Malebranche's position. I am not concerned here with the arguments for or against reading Malebranche

basic formulation of Malebranche's intellectualism puts his view, at the very least, alongside Stoic intellectualism. The classical Stoics also thought that our control of our actions somehow came down to control of our beliefs, and that once we possessed certain virtuous beliefs virtuous actions would naturally follow suit. However, as Walsh herself notes, intellectualist theories of human action have a rich history going back all the way to Socrates, if not earlier. It remains to be considered just how closely Malebranche's account of action relates to Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism.

To more clearly identify the parallels between Malebranche's intellectualism and the Stoics we need to look at his account of the passions. Malebranche follows Descartes by defining passions as "impressions from the Author of nature that incline us toward loving our body and all that might be of use in its preservation" (SAT V.i p.338). Malebranche's understanding of the passions closely parallels his account of inclinations. The passions are impressions from God that incline us towards certain things, particularly those things which are useful for the preservation of our body. Just like inclinations the passions are meant to guide us towards things that are good. However, what is unique about passions is that, like sensations and unlike inclinations, they are a product of our soul's embodiment. We only need passions because we need to be guided towards what is good for our body. Passions, for Malebranche, are where our will meets with the particular demands of being embodied. Our mind by itself could be sufficiently guided by the inclination towards the good in general that God gives to all creatures. But when God plants a soul inside a physical body he introduces requirements for more specific types of motivational states. This allows for a more specific form of moral corruption. As Susan James has nicely put, a soul which is strongly influenced by the passions constitutes a soul that has been "distorted" by the concerns of its body.[247] To really get at the heart of

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this way, as I am assuming Walsh's view is successful. I am much more interested in how this view of Malebranche's is or is not connected with classical Stoic intellectualism, which I consider in the remainder of this section.

[247] James, *Passion and Action* p.113.

Malebranche's account of action we need to consider the passions as the particular species of bodily influence that distracts our will. Without a body, and without passions, we would not mistake particular goods for the good in general whatsoever.

Let's consider some of the ways that passions can motivate us towards bodily goods. The first and most obvious is protection of our physical body. If I am hiking in the woods and I spot a bear, the fear that I experience in my soul puts me on high alert. It makes me hyper aware of my situation, apt to flee at the slightest sign of further threat, and it activates adrenaline in my body, which makes me more capable of protecting myself. This aspect of the passions was not lost on Descartes, who as we saw above often took note of the way that passions can protect our body from physical harm. However, James argues that for Malebranche the function of passions extends beyond mere preservation of our physical body:

> Like his predecessors, Malebranche takes it that we respond passionately to anything we perceive as beneficial or harmful. He allies this to another traditional view, that while God has given us a natural inclination to love all his works, our strongest inclination is to love other human beings. As humans, we are exceptionally responsive to each other's emotions, a sensitivity made possible by the natural bodily manifestations of our passions. Much of the time we express emotion involuntarily. And much of the time, whether we like it or not, we read and respond to the passions of others.[248]

Malebranche uses the passions to emphasize the "natural ties" we possess to other human beings. Recall his worry about Seneca. In Bk.II of the *Search*, Malebranche is concerned that Seneca's powerful rhetoric will lead other people to excessively imagine, like him, that they too can be free from the influences of pleasure and pain through the use of their reason. This worry is informed by the above account of emotions. The reason that strong rhetoric is so threatening for Malebranche is because we are naturally inclined towards other people, in particular other people who we perceive to be powerful. We see someone who we think projects an aura of strength and our body incites feelings of lust and joy on account of wanting to possess this same power. Misused, this can lead us towards people like Seneca who Malebranche thinks promise a false sense of strength based on excessive pride. But James's point in the above passage is that our emotions can also incline us

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[248] Ibid, p.119.

towards people in a way that is genuinely good for us. For example, it benefits us that we are more sensitive and responsive to the emotions of other people. This allows us to effectively move around and interact in a complex society full of different types of people. And for Malebranche these positive results chalk up to the fact that our passions are a mechanism designed and instituted by God. Since God devised them as a means of informing us of the state and well-being of our body, they must have some level of positive influence on our soul, otherwise God made some kind of mistake in his design.

The twofold nature of Malebranche's account seems, on the face of it, inherently contradictory. Malebranche appears to suppose that the passions necessarily and automatically motivate us towards things which are good for us, while simultaneously interposing them as the cause which can explain freely chosen sinful actions.[249] How can we avoid sinning if sin is induced by the very passions that lead us towards things that are ordinarily good for our body? Sean Greenberg has argued against this sort of objection by stressing the difference between Malebranche's notion of "following" our passions and his notion of "free love." Our passions incline our will towards certain objects *automatically*. This process is to be distinguished in Malebranche's system from the inclinations that result from determinations of our intellect. Greenberg describes as follows:

> Since agents do not need to, and in fact ought not to, exercise control over the passions in order for the passions to fulfill their function of preserving the body – bodies 'would soon be destroyed if they depended on our vigilance' (OM.2.149/LO 351) – and since, according to Malebranche, it is only consent that is up to agents or under their control, it cannot be the case that in order for agents to be led by the passions, as Malebranche urges that they should be, they must consent to being led by them[250]

What Malebranche means in suggesting that we should be led by our passions is that we need to experience the automatic inclinations which they produce. It is good that I feel fear at the sight of a snake because this feeling *can* service the preservation of my

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[249] See: Bowditch, "Malebranche" and Hoffman, "Three Dualist Theories" for more on this line of objection.

[250] Greenberg, "Malebranche on the Passions" p.204.

physical body. However, being so inclined does not amount to freely loving the goods that the passions dispose us towards. We can still re-examine the intellectual judgements that our passions induce concerning their objects and suspend our consent if these are not fitting. Greenberg explains this by distinguishing between enjoyment and use. I can *use* some object for the sake of my own self-preservation without necessarily enjoying that object. Perhaps I'm running late one evening and the only place open where I can buy dinner is the McDonalds down the road from my house. As a result, I buy McDonalds, knowing that it is unhealthy for me, and eat it for the sake of surviving for one night. In this scenario, the choice to buy McDonalds seems somewhat forced. If I have no other food around the house, what else can I eat? But I still can control the judgements I make about the fast food when I eat it. I might sense that it tastes good, and yet remind myself that I should not enjoy this sensation because habitual consumption of this sort of food is bad for my long-term health.

Let's now situate Malebranche's intellectualist thesis that "to know the good *is* the good" in the context of this nuanced account of the passions. Malebranche thinks that our actions are, ultimately, the result of our beliefs. If our will is inclined towards reason, then when our feelings of pleasure and pain dispose us towards some particular object we are more likely to suspend our judgement about the object and re-assess its value to us. This will ultimately result in actions aimed at the general good we see in God rather than the good we perceive in some particular thing. But add in, now, that the reason our feelings can direct our will towards particular objects is because of our passions. On account of being embodied our soul needs a way to know about the concerns of its physical body. And because our physical body can be in danger that threatens the soul, the way we receive this information must be fairly arresting. As a result, God made it such that we are ordinarily inclined towards particular objects on account of the well-being of our body. Following Greenberg, we can make this view consistent with Malebranche's intellectualism by seeing actions as a product, not of our basic desires for particular things, but of the beliefs we have *about* those particular desires. Like in Descartes's view, our action is really a function of a second-order property. I experience the desire for candy automatically. I have no control over this as this desire is a product of certain passions I have, and the way sensory information affects my body. But my

action does not immediately follow having this desire. My action is a result of certain beliefs that I possess about this desire. For example, on Malebranche's view, if I believe that my desire for candy is not *actually* indicative of something relevant to my survival then I won't gorge myself on candy.

Hopefully it is now clear how Malebranche's intellectualism parallels the classical Stoic view. Malebranche follows Descartes's Neo-Stoic account of the methods by which we act virtuously. Malebranche establishes a nuanced intellectualism that sees human actions as the result of beliefs, and he establishes this view through understanding our power to act in relation to powerful and automatic emotional responses that our body experiences. Like the Stoics, Malebranche thinks that our emotions helpfully tie us more closely to the world around us. We could not survive if we were to eliminate the desires these passions generate in us. However, he also thinks that the way we act is mediated by the beliefs we have about our emotions. Our actions, at bottom, are products of how our will attends to ideas of reason. Malebranche holds this view because there is nothing else we could possibly control that would not violate the occasionalist thesis that God is the one true cause. The Stoic version of this view is informed, not by occasionalism, but by their materialist claim that human beings are nothing more than bodies situated in a complex causal network with the rest of the material bodies that exist. Nevertheless, both groups effectively endorse the Stoic action principle: *for every affective state, there is some judgement such that, if the content of this judgement were different, the affective state would be different.*

4.3 Malebranche's Ethics of Virtue

The above constitutes the main set of theoretical considerations which I think are in favour of a Neo-Stoic reading of Malebranche's philosophy. In what follows I want to further develop how Malebranche makes good on these Neo-Stoic theses and uses them to argue for both of our key Neo-Stoic normative claims. To do this I will examine some passages from Malebranche's *Treatise on Ethics*, in which he draws upon the ideas developed in the *Search* to argue for a particular vision of moral philosophy. Rather than

give a systematic account of this text, I simply want to draw readers' attention to the fact that the heart of Malebranche's ethics consists in Neo-Stoic duties of character development and acceptance. By using Neo-Stoic principles to argue that, a) we have a duty to cultivate our intellect as far as we are able, and that, b) we have a duty to accept what happens to us as a result of God's providence, Malebranche follows Justus Lipsius and deploys Neo-Stoic concepts to establish a morality more sympathetic to Christian ideas.

4.3.1 Knowledge and Virtue Epistemology

Malebranche's moral psychology asserts that to know the good is itself constitutive of virtuous action. Malebranche begins the *Treatise on Ethics* by reasserting this intellectualist framework.

> Since man's mind is finite, he does not see all the relations between the objects which he knows. He may therefore err in judging the relations he does not see. But, *if he would judge only and precisely what he sees*, which he doubtless is able to do, then even though he has a finite mind, though he be ignorant, though by nature subject to error, he would never err. For then it would not be so much he, but universal Reason within him which would pronounce the judgments he would make (TE I.ix p.46 and 47, original emphasis).

For the most part this resembles Descartes's position on judgement from the Fourth Meditation. We should strive, so far as we are able, to give assent only to those propositions which we perceive clearly and distinctly through our reason. However, Malebranche adds the important piece that when we judge only what we clearly and distinctly perceive it is not us judging but the "universal reason" that is in God. This is a callback to the vision in God thesis established in the *Search*. Malebranche is convinced that finite minds by themselves cannot explain veridical perception of the world. As such, it must (minimally) be the case that all our rational concepts are ideas that we see in God's mind. Malebranche's goal in this passage, and in the opening chapter of the *Treatise on Ethics* as a whole, is to tie human beings' capacity for virtue more closely to God through our rational ideas. Because we need to attend to our intellectual judgement to act virtuously, and God is the source of these intellectual judgements, it follows that we ought to attend more closely to God himself. This is why Malebranche argues "supposing that man is reasonable, certainly we cannot disagree that he knows something of that which God thinks" (TE I.vi p.46). When we cognize things clearly, give our assent

correctly, and act virtuously as a result, it is because we have some connection to God's mind and the ideas contained therein.

We need to be a little more precise about what it means to see all things in God. If we see all our ideas in God as Malebranche suggests, then it seems as though we should also see our ideas of pleasure, pain, sensible goods, passions, and all the other things that Malebranche thinks distract the will from the pursuit of virtue. This would make God as responsible for what leads us to sin as he is for what leads us to virtue, which was the main problem that Malebranche's intellectualism is supposed to avoid. However, Malebranche clarifies in the *Search* exactly how he imagines that we see ideas of sensible things God.

> Although I may say that we see material and sensible things in God, it must be carefully noted that I am not saying we have sensations of them in God, but only that it is God who acts in us; for God surely knows sensible things, but He does not sense them. When we perceive something sensible, two things are found in our perception: *sensation* and *pure idea*. The sensation is a modification of our soul, and it is God who causes it in us. He can cause this modification even though He does not have it in Himself, because He sees in the idea He has of our soul that it is capable of it. As for the idea found in conjunction with the sensation, it is in God, and we see it because it pleases God to reveal it to us (SAT III.II.vi, p.234).

The ideas of sensible things that we see in God in the instance of a sensation are best thought of as pure perceptions. They are ideas that God has without having the corresponding sensation. God "reveals" them to us when we have a sensation because he sees it fit that our perception contains veridical information. Tad Schmaltz explains that "sensations are correlated with motions in the sense organs by means of the laws of soul–body union, whereas pure perceptions are correlated with acts of attention, and ultimately linked to pure ideas in God."[251] So Malebranche separates our sensations and passions from the ideas in Gods mind by insisting that the experiential component of these processes is a result of the laws that govern the soul-body union. In every instance of a passion physiological responses in the body are triggered which motivate us towards an object in a particular way. However, every instance of passion also has a divine intellectual component that our reason reveals. The upshot of Malebranche's view is that

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[251] Schmaltz, "Pure Perception" p.99.

if we pay attention to the *idea only* in our experiences of sensation and passion then we will never be led astray because we will perceive things according to universal reason (i.e. God's intellect).

Based on this view, Malebranche proceeds, in the *Treatise on Ethics*, to derive his conception of right and wrong.

> Man is free, presuming the necessary aids. Concerning Truth, he is able to search for it, in spite of his difficulty in meditating. Concerning Order, he is able to follow it in spite of the forces of concupiscence. He can sacrifice his peace of mind for the sake of Truth, and his pleasures for the sake of Order. But he can also prefer present happiness to his duties, and fall into error and disorderly conduct. He can in a word, earn merit or demerit (TE I.xv p.48).

We have already explored the way in which Malebranche thinks the human mind is free. Presuming the necessary aids (as he caveats here) we can always seek to judge according to our reason by attending only to judgements that are its product. This means that we are free enough to seek out the truth regardless of what difficulties the passions and sensations might pose. We are also free enough, in light of our freedom to seek the truth, to sacrifice our desires for particular goods on account of a more rationally informed desire for the good in general. Malebranche does not tell us what this looks like, but I think we can easily imagine. Pretend you are a business owner presented with an opportunity, through some kind of endorsement deal, to massively increase your profits. However, you can only benefit personally from this course of action if you neglect to report to your employees the increase in earnings, as they will consequently negotiate higher wages. On Malebranche's view, bending the truth to satisfy your own personal greed amounts to neglecting your more rationally informed idea of the good in general. Once you meditate upon where your desire for more money comes from, i.e. your desire for the good that is in God himself, Malebranche thinks you will recognize that some sacrifice of the particular good you desire is required on your part. And of course, Malebranche thinks that this kind of sacrifices helps glorify God. When we succeed in executing the most rational judgements possible by means of the ideas we see in God's mind, we follow order and as a result act in the most virtuous way possible, earning what Malebranche calls "merit." When we fail in this responsibility, we allow ourselves to fall into sin and earn "demerit."

Dennis Biggie has described this conception of reason as it functions in Malebranche's ethical theory as follows:

> From the first pages of the *Traite du Morale* it is evident that Malebranche does not understand 'reason' as it appears in either of its guises in ethical theory — as the principle of non-contradiction (Kantianism) or the commitment to efficiency in realizing some end (Consequentialism). The 'reason' Malebranche describes would seem to have more to do with the Stoic concept of *logos* which is evident throughout nature to the discerning human mind.[252]

Biggie's comparison to the Stoics is apt. For Malebranche there is no general rational principle we can use to determine what we ought to do. Right actions depend not on utility maximization or avoiding contradiction, but on whatever the best use of our reason determines in a particular case. And what our reason is able to determine corresponds with the connections throughout nature which we discover by paying attention to our pure perceptions. So, essentially, the normative recommendation Malebranche makes that we ought to follow the judgements of our reason so far as we can amounts to a normative recommendation to cultivate as much knowledge as possible. The more that we understand things by pure ideas, essentially as close as we can get to God's understanding, then the more our inclinations will be properly directed towards the most virtuous objects and result in the most virtuous actions. This amounts to virtually the same normative claim that we saw the classical Stoics make above with what I have called the duty of character development. Again, for Malebranche, developing our character amounts simply to becoming as rationally disposed (in his terms as disposed towards God) as one can. And in the *Treatise on Ethics* this normative recommendation flows directly from Malebranche's intellectualist claims about freedom and action.

However, as soon as Biggie makes the above comparison to the Stoic notion of logos he walks it back. This is because Malebranche himself tries to separate his view on this point from the Stoics. As Biggie argues, Malebranche does not want to understand following the dictates of reason in terms of "following nature" as the Stoics recommend. Following nature, for Malebranche, amounts to following the base inclinations of our

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[252] Biggie, "The Moral Philosophy of Nicolas Malebranche" p.71 and 2.

passions and our senses. Allowing ourselves to be directed in this manner is the opposite of what Malebranche is trying to argue for. As a result, Biggie tries to establish that the seemingly Stoic notion of reason in Malebranche's moral thought is more likely drawn from Augustine, who himself was also influenced by the Stoics. But does this really denote a fundamental conceptual difference? I think when we pay closer attention to the details, we again notice that Malebranche's view is closer to the Stoics than he would like.

Setting aside how close Malebranche's view is to Augustine, which I do not have space in this thesis to consider, I think we can illustrate that there is not really a conceptual departure from the Stoics by thinking about how Malebranche conceives of God's grace. Suppose that I act virtuously by giving up my seat on the bus to someone in need. In Malebranche's view, as we have seen, this happens because I attend to the way my particular desire to be comfortable sitting down is really a species of a more rational desire for the good in general. Recognizing this, I ignore my emotions and *sacrifice* my own personal desire for the sake of someone else who may be more needing. But did I need a discrete instance of God's grace to accomplish this? Certainly, it does not seem reasonable for Malebranche to maintain that every time I embark on such an act I have to pray for forgiveness and enlightenment. My "enlightenment" comes from the way my understanding is connected to God. God's grace, in Malebranche's picture, consists in the manner in which God presents us, in every perception, with pure ideas. And God does this automatically otherwise we would not consistently be able to attend virtuously to these pure ideas. It is, certainly, *by* the grace of God that Malebranche thinks we have opportunities to be virtuous. But this is not really a conceptual difference from the Stoic view. The Stoics, absent God, maintain virtually the same position that in every perception there is information relevant to the pursuit of virtue which we can train ourselves to attend to.

We have now seen evidence that the foundation of Malebranche's ethical project rests on a Stoic picture of the relationship between knowledge, virtue, and action. However, I want to stress how profitable it is to recognize this as a *Neo*-Stoic position rather than just a view bearing similarities to the picture developed by the classical

Stoics. Malebranche thinks our virtue is grounded by our access to divine ideas in God's mind. Where Malebranche and the classical Stoics agree is that our reason allows us to access ideas and relations which represent a sort of "schematic" of the world, which itself can ground our efforts towards a virtuous disposition. But Malebranche differs from the classical Stoics by arguing that we can only access these pure perceptions in virtue of our relationship with an omnipotent and omniscient God. While I do not think this is a legitimate point of conceptual departure, I do think it connects Malebranche's view more closely with Lipsius than it does Seneca or Epictetus. We saw in Chapter Two that one of the key moves made by Lipsius in his adaptation of Stoicism was to claim that our virtue depends on accessing a common nature which we share with God to see the world as it is structured by the light of providence. While I do not think Lipsius's view is as sophisticated as Malebranche's doctrine of vision in God, I think that both thinkers ground Neo-Stoic accounts of the pursuit of virtue — understood in terms of cultivating a strong rational character — in some kind of clear and distinct perception that we have on account of a deity.

4.3.2 Divine Law

To conclude that Malebranche's ethics is Neo-Stoic we should want to see that, beyond the method by which we cultivate virtue, a virtuous character itself consists in similar attributes as a virtuous character for the Stoics and Neo-Stoics. In the text, Malebranche tells us explicitly that he thinks virtue consists in agreement with the divine law.

> It is the obedience we render to Order, our submission to the Divine Law, which is virtue in the complete sense. Submission to nature, to the consequences of Divine decrees or to the power of God is not really submission at all; it is necessity rather than virtue (TE I.xx p.49).

It should not surprise us that Malebranche adopts providentialism. We saw above that Malebranche accepts variations of both the Neo-Stoic providence principle and fate principle, and sees the world as completely determined by the will and ordinances of God. What matters to us is whether the sort of agreement with providence which virtue requires is the *same* as the agreement with "God" (or nature) proposed by the Stoics and the Neo-Stoics. And on this score, it looks initially like we have a problem. Malebranche specifies that agreement with "nature" is not the sort of agreement with God he is

describing. We agree with "nature" necessarily because we simply could not do otherwise than what the forces of nature compel us to do. We follow nature simply insofar as we are animals created by God operating according to certain principles. But this sort of agreement, he thinks, has nothing to do with virtue. Quite plainly, Malebranche does not appear to accept a normative duty of acceptance as it was formulated by the classical Stoics. But what about Neo-Stoicism?

Foundational to Malebranche's account of divine law is the notion of a love of God or, as he calls it, a love for "Order". It is this virtue "which alone makes virtuous the habits or dispositions of the mind" (TE II.i p.53). To understand how Malebranche thinks about our agreement with the divine law we need to consider in detail his notion of love of God or love of order. Malebranche takes issue with the way that past thinkers have dealt with virtue. He argues that it has become common for philosophers to confuse virtue with duties, citing Neo-Stoic thinker Guillaume Du Vair as an example. Malebranche argues,

> It is obvious that virtue must make virtuous the man who possesses it. Yet a man can acquit himself of his duties, and with ease carry out deeds of humility, generosity, and liberality without having any of these virtues. Hence, the disposition to acquit ourselves of such duties as these is not properly a virtue, if without the love of Order (TE II.v p.54-55).

It is interesting that Malebranche cites only Du Vair on this point. While it may be an accurate reading of Du Vair's Neo-Stoicism, it seems to me that what Malebranche is taking issue with can be extended to both Stoicism and Aristotelianism more broadly. Both schools, influenced heavily by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, saw virtues as discrete qualities which manifest in particular situations based on the way an agent's character is balanced. Malebranche insists that this approach necessarily multiplies virtues such that they become confused with duties. I may have a *duty* to be humble about my own accomplishments around my friends. But I can perform this duty without possessing any real humility. I can mask my pride around my friends and act humble when I am, in fact, quite the opposite.[253] Malebranche argues that possession of a love of

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[253] Stoics and Aristotelians alike will complain here that Malebranche has not properly understood virtue ethics. For a person to truly express humility it *cannot* be the case that they merely feign it. This might be

order is such that it makes possession of other virtues like humility truly virtuous such that they could not be feigned.

For these arguments to be compelling, we need to explain how it is the case that Malebranche's meta-virtue of "love of order" functions in the way he suggests. The answer, perhaps expectedly, is that a love of order involves a strong respect for the determinations of reason. Malebranche consistently explains love of order by contrasting it with a love of bodily goods.

> Anyone who makes the body's dispositions the object of his desire and the subject of his glory, has a base soul, a petty spirit and a corrupt heart. But no matter what a rebellious imagination might think about it, it is neither base nor servile to submit ourselves to the law of God Himself (TE II.i p.53).
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> I admit that immutable Order is not easy to reach; it dwells within us, but we are always spreading ourselves out to the world around us. Our senses spread our soul out to all parts of the body, and our imagination and passions spread it out to all the objects around us, often even to a world having no more reality than imaginary spaces; this is incontestable. But we must try to silence the senses, imagination and passions, and not to imagine that we could be reasonable without consulting Reason (TE II.x p.56).

Both of these passages imply that the "order" Malebranche insists we must love is the order of God's reason. Or, as Lipsius might say, God's providence. We have a link to God's reason within us in virtue of pure perceptions we see in God's mind. This link allows us to, at least partially, trace out the connections between things that God's will has determined through creation of the world. By loving this immutable order, Malebranche thinks that we can restrain the influence that our sensations, imaginations, and passions have on our mind by restricting them to their proper domain. This is because, as we saw above, proper rational recognition of the goods that our senses and passions incline us towards will in most cases restrain our excessive pursuit of these goods. Malebranche's intellectualism specifies that this method of cultivating a love of reason is itself what allows us to control the influences of our sensations. I think,

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correct. But I think the important point Malebranche is trying to make in the above passage is that, in his view, there needs to be some foundational meta-virtue. Possession of this meta-virtue itself *makes* all of the other virtues virtuous. And so by failing to posit such a thing prior schools of virtue ethics have failed.

however, it is important that Malebranche specifies this "love of order" is not simply a disposition to be rational but a form of love. If all we possess is a disposition to judge rationally, we may certainly succeed in judging and acting virtuously most of the time. However, we are not really insulated against extreme potential instances of emotion which may have the power to distort our judgement in the future, no matter how consistently rational we are in the present. If we possess, not just a disposition, but a *loving* disposition of God's providential order then I think it is more plausible that we will enthusiastically pursue the good of reason over all other goods, no matter how difficult this may become in the future.

So, a love of order for Malebranche constitutes a love of reason. And loving reason makes all other virtues virtuous because it ensures that we do not act according to what is good or bad for our body. In the above scenario where I feign humility in front of my friends, I do this because secretly I have succumbed to the pride I feel about my own material accomplishments (degrees I have earned, expensive items I possess, etc…). But if I truly possessed a love of order, I would not value these accomplishments the same way. My pride would (supposedly) evaporate because I would recognize how insignificant these things are before God's wisdom, and I would be truly humble because I would recognize the feeble nature of my finite accomplishments.

We can now see that by the "divine law" Malebranche means that rational order that God has established that only other rational minds can penetrate.[254] The sort of agreement with this divine law that Malebranche wants us to cultivate is a disposition of love. When we love the immutable order, we carry respect for it that enables our will to judge more consistently according to reason. We might be able to agree on what this disposition is conceptually, but what does Malebranche's notion of a love of God actually look like in practice? The following passage offers some further elucidation.

> It is not enough to love [order] only at those times when it agrees with our self-love. Rather, we must sacrifice to it all that it requires of us – our present happiness, and then, if

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[254] Presumably all other creatures, for Malebranche, are left to follow the order of nature by necessity. Therefore, they are not really moral agents in his picture.

> it demands it, our very being. For virtue consists only in the dominant love for immutable Order. Our heart is perfectly governed only when it is disposed to conform itself to Order in all things. Anyone who would will that on some occasions Order should conform itself to his own particular inclinations, by so doing would have an untrustworthy mind and a corrupt heart (TE III.xvi 65).

This passage suggests that a love of order is something independent of our self-interest. If it requires us to sacrifice our present happiness, or even our entire being, then it is virtuous to do so. Recall that it is our desire for pleasure that Malebranche thinks grounds all the desires of the body. If we only love order insofar as it conforms to these desires then we do not possess the sort of love that can distance our mind from the influence of the body, and as such we do not possess virtue in the sense that Malebranche requires. So our love of God needs to be, to some extent, disinterested or independent of us. It also seems to require that we accept, and love, whatever course of events happens to us as though it were fundamental to the determination of God's intellect. In other words, Malebranche's account of divine law amounts to the principle: "everything that happens to X should be accepted in light of its determination by G, where G is the providential determination of God's intellect that has ordered and structured the rest of the universe." This is, of course, Lipsius's Neo-Stoic formulation of the Stoic normative duty of acceptance.

Important to stress here is that, yet again, once we distinguish between Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism the major obstacle to seeing Stoic ideas in Malebranche's thinking evaporates. Malebranche's problem with the Stoic account of divine law as "following nature" disappears when we recognize that one of Lipsius's chief innovations was doing away with "nature" as a kind of in-dwelling principle in things. Instead, as we saw, Lipsius suggested that we follow God's providence understood specifically as a determination of God's intellect. This means that if we have access to God's intellect, which we do in Malebranche's system through our pure perceptions, then we can use this information to try and act differently from however "nature" (in the classical Stoic sense) dictates. Though Malebranche certainly tries to distinguish himself from the classical Stoic view, I do not think he success in divorcing his account completely from Stoic principles. And so yet again a Neo-Stoic reading helps explain how both of these points can be true.

4.3.3 Moral Duties

In the second half of the *Treatise on Ethics*, Malebranche pivots his attention to the particular duties that are suggested by his theory. Here Malebranche attempt to show how the moral duties prescribed by God in the Bible can be derived from his theoretical understanding of the pursuit of virtue. Malebranche takes the proposition that we are dependent on God's wisdom (because we see all things in God) and attempts to demonstrate that this proves the Christian truth that Jesus Christ is our one and only teacher. He starts from the idea that there is only one faculty of reason, and this reason ultimately comes from God himself. He extrapolates from this idea that "when we go back into ourselves, to discover any truth whatsoever, it is not we who reply but the inner teacher who dwells within us" (TE II.III.x p.155). When we are taught something by another person Malebranche thinks it is not really that person who teaches us, but the voice of God within us, and our "teacher" is what Malebranche would call a *mentor* who leads us to the truth.[255] Malebranche contends that this inner light within ourselves is really the light of Jesus Christ, and so, Christ is our one and only teacher. He then proceeds from this derivation to draw out a collection of moral prescriptions for living according to the model of Christ, as Christ was a direct and unmediated instantiation of God's voice among human kind. In this manner, Malebranche thinks he has successfully tied his account of virtue to all the most sacred Christian moral duties.

Passages of argument like the above have led scholars to conclude that Malebranche's ethical theory is just a divine command theory. This is not an objection to what I have proposed in the preceding two sections. Malebranche certainly adopts the intellectualist thesis that acting virtuously amounts to nothing more than knowing virtuously, and as a result argues that we have a duty to train and develop our rational capacities. He also clearly argues that we have a duty to obey the commandments of divine law, understood in terms of the providential laws determined by God's intellect. But Malebranche, so most think, puts these two conceptual claims together simply to

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[255] It might be useful here to recall Socrates's instruction of the servant boy in Plato's *Meno*, which Malebranche's view certainly evokes.

endorse obeying the moral duties prescribed by the Bible.[256] Unfortunately, perhaps because scholars take this idea to be too obvious, no one has really provided an explicit *argument* for this interpretation.[257] So I will give it my best attempt, considering that I do not find it very convincing. Surely, the duties prescribed in the Bible come from God himself and therefore constitute determinations of his intellect that he has formulated into laws. They also represent laws which, if we use our reason correctly, one might discover the truth of within themselves in an intellectualist manner. Consider the prescription "thou shalt not kill." There are numerous ways we could meditate upon the notion of killing and discover a rational moral prescription against it. Perhaps, it constitutes destruction of part of God's creation for the pursuit of sensible goods. Or perhaps there is a way we could explain murder using Malebranche's moral psychology such that it is an action which only occurs at the behest of an intense passion. But, nevertheless, it seems like we can use both of Malebranche's "Neo-Stoic" normative claims to argue for the Christian duty not to kill, among other Christian duties.

I am not sure that this constitutes an argument against my view. After all, it was common for Neo-Stoic authors to use their modified versions of Stoicism to support quintessentially Christian views. But let's suppose that Malebranche's extension of his intellectualism and providentialism in this manner is too far for what we would like to include under the Neo-Stoic label. His moral philosophy looks too much like Christian dogmatism under this interpretation for the label to be meaningful. If one is compelled by this sort of reasoning, I think I can show, using passages from the latter part of the *Traite du Morale*, that it is not the best interpretation of what Malebranche is doing. While Malebranche certainly does attempt to connect his theoretical account of virtue with

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[256] For example, Patriack Riley suggests "the God-centeredness of Malebranche's thought determined everything he said about morality and justice." Riley, "Malebranche's Moral Philosophy" p.221.

[257] According to Lennon, Easton, and Sebba (1992) there has only been one significant book-length study of Malebranche's ethics published in the scholarly literature, Craig Walton's *De La Recherché Du Bein* (1972). To my knowledge there has since been published only Dennis Biggie's dissertation and some sections of Julie Walsh's dissertation that have improved upon the lack of work in this area, alongside a few notable papers. Aside from these contributions, there is not much in the English language literature to rely on when accurately reconstructing his views on morality.

Christian duties, we need to remember that doing so would have been a point of merit in favour of his philosophy in his own time. I do not think that this move is foundational, or *constituitive*, to everything that Malebranche's moral philosophy has to offer. In what follows, I offer two arguments to show that his understanding of our moral duties extends beyond the prescriptions of Christian moral thinking.

First, we need to recognize that Malebranche's moral prescriptions go beyond the justification of a particular list of duties. While he does provide lists of particular duties that he thinks follow from his view, and these duties happen to be Christian tenets, he also argues that acting virtuous is more fundamentally based on a broader outlook and process of reasoning.

> First, we must examine the action itself, and all of its attendant circumstances, as much as we are able to do. Second, suspend consent until evidence tips the scales, or else suspend carrying out the act until necessity forbids further postponement. Third, we should obey known Order promptly, exactly, and inviolably. The *strength* of the mind should make us courageously carry out the effort of attention. The *freedom* of the mind should arrest and wisely govern our desire to consent. The *submissiveness* of the mind should make it follow the light step by step, without either jumping ahead of it or straying away from it. And the *love of Order* should animate these three powers through which - however hidden at the bottom of the heart – that love is able to appear to the eyes of the world and sanctify all our steps before God (TE II.I.iv p.144, original emphasis).

The first part of this passage outlines a *process* of thinking. We first examine the intended action itself in the context of its circumstances, then we suspend our judgement until we have clear and distinct ideas about what is right, and finally we should seek to obey the order (in particular the order determined through reason) that is already known us. This is not surprising as we have already seen that Malebranche locates virtue in how we think rather than in the actions that follow automatically from our thinking. Then Malebranche provides a list of psychological traits and explains how they contribute to the cultivation of a virtuous disposition. Strength of mind focuses our attention, freedom allows us to suspend our judgement, submissiveness to God makes us follow God's providence, and a love of order animates all these powers with a special kind of respect. It is true that in certain moments Malebranche ties these qualities to Christian moral values. But he also extends them more broadly beyond the doctrines of his faith. For if we have an obligation to a) examine the action itself, b) suspend our consent, and c) obey what is known of providence, this obligation must extend even to matters where there is no clear rule

prescribed by Scripture. The number of moral duties that we can derive from Malebranche's account is far greater than the list provided by any Christian texts.

Malebranche also thinks that our duty to follow reason is more fundamental than any particular set of Christian duties. Further into the text, Malebranche provides an example of how his general moral prescriptions might, in certain cases, cause us to challenge established Christian tenets.

> For example, it is a duty arbitrary in its principle that we should enter a church with our heads uncovered. But, to enter into the presence of God without respect and without any religious movement is not [to violate] some arbitrary duty, but is [to violate] an essential duty. Anyone who cannot uncover himself, for some particular reason, can still take part in the Sacrament while covered; women are dispensed from this duty; and, provided that it was known that it was not contempt but a need which required someone to remain covered, a dispensation is not ordinarily needed. Only those who are in spirit falsifying, who are rebellious or weak, should be found at fault (TE II.V.vii p.165).

Malebranche clarifies here that though there is in principle a stated duty not to enter a church with one's head covered, this duty can and should be violated in certain contexts where reason determines that it is necessary. We can imagine someone who is being harassed wanting to take refuge in a church and covering their head to avoid being identified. In this instance, it seems much more important that the church allow violation of this duty than force the refugee to expose themselves to some kind of danger. And reasoning in this manner does not shame or diminish God as it constitutes an instance of setting our emotions aside to follow what is reasonable. What this example tells us is that Malebranche's account of ethics extends much further than simply justifying established Christian tenets. His moral psychology offers a description of the *process* involved in moral thinking, and consequently moral action. And because it is this *process* and its associated psychological attributes that most fundamentally determines our virtue, it follows that even if we use this account to justify a Biblical morality, we also need to allow that the same theory might push us to think beyond the confines of this approach. Reading Malebranche as simply a divine command theorist does not capture this aspect of his moral thinking.

The main reason Malebranche allows for this sort of exception to Christian tenets is because he acknowledges the finite nature of human foresight. His basic idea is that the

circumstances we face in the world are constantly changing, and our minds have only a limited ability to penetrate God's divine plan for the universe.

> Since these, then, are the diverse circumstances which change and govern the order of our duties, and since these circumstances are impossible to foresee, therefore everyone must examine them with care and return into himself to consult the immutable law, without any regard for false interests which the passions constantly present. If this leaves us uncertain, then let us address ourselves to those who are more learned than I in these matters. Let us consult, I say, those who have much charity, prudence, and capacity, rather than those who have a memory full of certain general rules, insufficient for deciding in particular circumstances (TE II.VII.xv p.177).

Ultimately, no matter what God has prescribed for us in the past, the course of his divine plan is ever shifting with the complex nature of the infinite universe he created. In Malebranche's view, this means that we constantly need to be suspending our judgement, rationally assessing our actions, and looking upon the results of providence with a love of order. This view of morality is not conducive whatsoever to a list of moral duties because it admits at its foundation the capacity for circumstance to alter our responsibilities. And Malebranche even goes so far as to say that we should follow people and follow leaders based on their virtues rather than their memory of certain general rules and responsibilities. This view that our moral duty is contingent upon our circumstances and needs to be determined through our own power of reasoning, is much more closely connected with the Stoic and Neo-Stoic accounts outlined earlier in this thesis than it is with a divine command theory of ethics.

All this to conclude, finally, that reading Malebranche's philosophy as a Neo-Stoic extension of Cartesian thinking is the most profitable way of understanding his moral project. Malebranche argues from Neo-Stoic descriptive claims about providence, necessity, freedom, and action to several key normative claims. First, that we have a responsibility to train and cultivate our intellect to consistently judge according to reason, and not according to what our sensations and passions incline us towards. Second, that everything that happens to us is a function of some providential determination by God's intellect, and as a result we have a normative duty to try and (rationally) accept the outcome of events as part of God's divine law. And third, but perhaps most important, that these two normative claims are more foundational than a list of particular duties prescribed to us by any other authority. So long as we are able, the most foundational

principle of moral action consists in meditating upon and following the judgements of our intellect. In the end, this sort of meditation itself amounts to the greatest form of glorification we can give to God because we make use of the tools he has provided us to follow the right course.

Chapter 5

5 Conclusion

5.1 A Conceptual Story

At this point my view should be apparent. I understand "Neo-Stoicism" in the 17th century to denote the movement of philosophers who, knowingly or unknowingly, drew upon the conceptual resources of Stoicism and Christianity together to develop a moral psychology that addresses concerns raised by preceding voluntarist and intellectualist accounts of moral philosophy. I also conceive of this movement of to consist in a tightly connected web of descriptive philosophical theses and normative claims about virtue. I think that Lipsius, Descartes, Princess Elisabeth, and Nicolas Malebranche are each best read as adopting such a view, to varying degrees and in varying respects. What I would like to do in closing is summarize for the reader the more general conclusions one might draw if they accept the results of my study.

5.1.1 How we should identify Neo-Stoicism in the 17th century.

First and foremost, this study demonstrates clearly that we miss out on the rich history of Stoic thinking when we understand the philosophy strictly in terms of people who accept the views of the ancient Stoic school. The most basic version of this conclusion is, to some degree, trivial. In the Early Modern period, nobody really accepted Greek Stoicism in *all* of its context because they were so removed from Ancient Greek society that doing so would involve accepting scientific claims about the physical properties of the universe that had been long contradicted by empirical data. But we also should not define a Stoic so narrowly so as to only include people who end up proposing a view equivalent in their own context to that of Marcus Aurelius or Seneca. No one defines Platonism or Aristotelianism *only* in terms of what Plato or Aristotle said. Most serious scholars will be quick to include the views of the rich history of commentators on Plato and Aristotle's thought. There is an equally rich history of commentators on the Stoic tradition. One of the peaks of this history is, without doubt, Lipsius's work on Seneca at the close of the

16th century. And this thesis demonstrates that, besides being very popular within his own time, Lipsius's ideas had an impact on the development of moral philosophy in thinkers such as Descartes, Elisabeth, Malebranche, and potentially many more. While the views propagated by these Neo-Stoics may not be the best philosophical reconstructions of what Seneca actually said, they do constitute an important chapter in the history of Stoic thinking, and even further in the development of moral philosophy. Any understanding of "Stoicism" which excludes the respect in which these thinkers are Stoic is just not serious about capturing all the different permutations the philosophy can have.

How, then, should we define Stoicism, broadly speaking? I think the first thing to observe is that my two Neo-Stoic normative claims constitute what we might call "pillars" of Stoic thought. The claim that doing what is good depends on *knowing* what is good, and that virtue on this score amounts to nothing more than good thinking, is a central tenet of any Stoic philosophical view. So, for one, I think to be a Neo-Stoic you must adopt this kind of strict intellectualism about the good and about virtue. But what else? Too many philosophers have ended up defining the good as involving, in some way, "good" thinking. There needs to be some additional component to Stoicism that marks out something distinctive about it. Here we can look towards my other key normative claim. This is the idea that what happens to one is – in a providential sense – inevitable, and that on account of this fact we ought to dispose ourselves in a way that will be most accepting of our fate. This view certainly marks out a Stoic more distinctively than the intellectualist thesis. So, most 17th century Stoics combine some degree of intellectualism with some degree of providentialism. Importantly, however, it is not the mere combining of these two theses that makes one a Neo-Stoic in the period but combining them in a particular way. All the Neo-Stoics we've examined in this study *use* their intellectualism and providentialism to argue for a particular account of what it means to be virtuous, where virtue consists in understanding the nature of the world *so that* one will develop a strong character and resolve to accept the decrees of fate.

We might also think about identifying Stoics in the 17th century based on their descriptive philosophical claims about the world. These consist, minimally but not exclusively, in views on providence, fate, freedom, the passions, and human actions.

Looking on a topic-by-topic basis like this is much closer to the way 17th century Stoicism has been identified thus far in the secondary literature. However, I think my thesis demonstrates that we need to be careful when we go about identifying Stoicism or Neo-Stoicism in this fashion. Based on this methodology we might conclude that Princess Elisabeth is a "card-carrying" Neo-Stoic, when in fact she pushes back quite strongly against certain elements of Descartes's Neo-Stoic views. The descriptive theses outlined in this project can, I think, serve as a road map for identifying themes and positions in other philosopher's work that appear Stoic. But to read someone as a Neo-Stoic thinker we need more than just the presence of these descriptive claims. We need to see that these descriptive claims are brought together and used to argue for the account of virtue based on intellectualism and providentialism outlined in this project. It is this application of Neo-Stoic themes and positions that, in my view, gives us reason to label a historical figure "Neo-Stoic." In the case of Elisabeth this nuanced methodology is quite useful. It allows us to identify that she meaningfully draws upon Stoic conceptual tools and resources to argue for some Neo-Stoic ideas, whilst simultaneously pushing back against the strict intellectualism present in full-fledged Neo-Stoic accounts of virtue. I think this is a testimony for how the more systematic method of defining and understanding Neo-Stoicism I have proposed can be more fruitful than the point-and-click methodology that appears in other papers on 17th century Stoicism.

A further point about how we should define Stoicism concerns the role of historical figures like Lipsius. Once we recognize his important place in the history of commentary and translation of Stoic thought, we can start to define who is and is not Stoic in the early modern period specifically in reference to his work, as opposed to texts written a thousand years earlier that were lost or forgotten. Stoicism was transmitted in the early modern period through the work of Lipsius and other commentators. Their interpretations of the school should be central, not merely on the periphery, when we are trying to assess who in that period is and is not a Neo-Stoic figure. While this study has primarily focused on Lipsius, there is a lot more work to be done on other important commentators. I've mentioned that Guillaume Du Vair did similar work on Epictetus as Lipsius did on Seneca. While Epictetus was not as important or well discussed in the 17th century as Seneca, this work still bears upon how we understand Stoicism in the period.

Du Vair's works are not as systematic as Lipsius, but they deserve to be studied nonetheless. Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Charron also have important things to say about Stoicism, albeit more skeptical and less intellectualist than the Neo-Stoic vision of Lipsius. The tradition of commentary upon Stoicism continues, however, into the 17th century with many more authors who (less prolifically) followed Lipsius's model of reappropriating Stoic wisdom. A full conception of what Stoicism looks like in the period needs to include the work of all these authors, and hopefully the account of Lipsius in my second chapter can incite further research and study toward this end.

Finally, I think it is important to note how this methodology may, or may not, be extended to diagnose other "Neo-Stoicisms" apart from Neo-Stoic ethics. The Stoic positions on physics and logic are today considered perhaps even more distinctive and influential than their positions on ethics. I have not made any attempt in this study to map out how these views impacted 17th thinkers. The reason for this is quite simple. Lipsius, though he did flirt with Stoic materialism in a few short passages, does not really see the physics or logic as integral parts of his interpretation of Stoicism. As a result, tracing out the conceptual legacy of Lipsius's interpretation just does not involve tracing out the legacy of these other Stoic ideas. It is possible, to be sure, that Stoic materialism and Stoic logic had some impact on the Early Modern period, given that the texts rediscovered in the 15th and 16th century contained some of these classical Stoic discussions. But the path to establishing this is much more complicated than most scholars tend to acknowledge. To show, for example, that certain 17th century materialists were influenced by some form of Stoic materialism, we would have to tell as a similar story about the interpretation of these ideas as I have told about Lipsius's work on the ethical and moral views. But determining a source for the transmission of Stoic materialism is quite difficult, as most thinkers who were intrigued by such a view did not mark themselves out so clearly as "Stoics." More research needs to be done to make any kind of compelling claims about these other Stoic themes. But, at the very least, my thesis provides a road map for other scholars who are interested in completing such a project.

5.1.2 The relationship between Neo-Stoicism and Cartesian philosophy.

Another general conclusion to draw from this study is that there is a tight relationship between Cartesian philosophy and Neo-Stoic ethics. Fundamental to Descartes's project is his desire to emphasize the good use of human reason. Later in his philosophical career when he is pushed by Elisabeth to start writing about ethics, it is not surprising that he seeks to draw upon ethical doctrines – like Stoicism – which are also based upon this goal. Not all Cartesians are intellectualists. Descartes himself seems quite clearly to be trying to balance intellectualist and voluntarist intuitions. However, most Cartesians follow Descartes in making the use of our reason the primary thing under our control. Combine this with a mechanical philosophy that sees nature as a big machine automatically moving all its parts according to laws of cause and effect, and you create the conditions for thinking about virtue along the same lines as the Stoics.

But these connections have been noted in some form prior to my own work. What I think my thesis demonstrates is that there is an even closer and more intuitive relationship between Cartesian thinking and Neo-Stoicism when we understand Neo-Stoicism on Lipsius's terms. Lipsius makes several innovations to conventional Stoic ethical doctrines. First, he excises the idea that we can pursue virtue self-sufficiently. We need God's help, and his forgiveness, in the pursuit of knowledge and proper disposition of our will because there are objects in the world which, on account of certain laws of nature, will inevitably distract us from our rational pursuit of the good life. Lipsius also ties Stoic philosophy more closely to God through providence, and through grounding our understanding of providence in ideas that ultimately have their foundation in God's mind. Though he does not espouse this view with the sophistication and precision of later Cartesians like Malebranche, he anticipates something that is also an important feature of Cartesian accounts of the mind. Namely, that our reasoning must have its foundation in God. By making these changes to the classical Stoic picture Lipsius's Neo-Stoicism manages to argue for a Stoic notion of virtue where a virtuous person is self-reliant, independent, unflinching in the face of misfortune, and so on. But Lipsius does this in a manner that is much more sympathetic to the concerns of Descartes and his followers.

Another reason for the close connection between Cartesian ethics and Lipsius's Neo-Stoicism concerns the voluntarist/intellectualist continuum. Intellectualists ultimately wanted to explain how virtue can be achieved using our intellect. Voluntarists wanted to explain virtue as in some way dependent upon God's will. Stoic ideas were invoked frequently throughout the renaissance to try and navigate this continuum because the Stoics themselves faced their own "pagan" version of this predicament. The Stoics wanted to see human activity as ultimately the product of a divine spirit or "fiery breath" active within all material things in the universe. But they also wanted to explain how our virtuous actions are the product of the mental disposition that each individual person painstakingly cultivates. Their attempts to navigate this conceptual space were noticed in the renaissance and adopted by Lipsius and others to try and solve the same issue as it arises in Christian theology. Descartes himself clearly intends to walk the line between voluntarist and intellectualist intuitions in his texts (as we saw). As a result, when he starts discussing ethics with Elisabeth it is not surprising that he ends up making use of the same conceptual tools that we saw first in the classical Stoics and then in Lipsius's interpretation thereof. Neo-Stoicism as it is presented in this project situates a person's actions within the world the inhabit, explaining them as a natural product of forces that are ultimately determined by God. However, through a nuanced moral psychology it also preserves a small degree of freedom that individuals exercise over their beliefs for the sake of pursuing virtue on their own accord. It is not surprising to me that several Cartesian inspired thinkers found this sort of view intuitive.

Why, though, if there is such a tight conceptual connection between Cartesian ethics and Neo-Stoicism, does no Cartesian cite Lipsius? There are several practical considerations that inform why references to Lipsius are so scant. One reason for this is because the main influence that Lipsius's understanding of Stoicism exerted in the period was through his edition of Seneca. Editing Seneca's work involved making choices about how his views would be presented. Lipsius's interpretation of Stoic philosophy would have, no doubt, informed these choices and informed the character of the edition that he produced. But someone could be influenced by these choices without really recognizing that Lipsius exerted such an influence, because in their mind they are reading Seneca's words, not Lipsius's. Yet conversely, another potential reason to not immediately

associate Lipsius with Stoicism at the time was because Lipsius's interpretation of Stoic thought was quite popular, whereas Stoicism itself was not. Descartes and Malebranche both take varying degrees of care to explain why they do not wholly endorse the views of Seneca and the other classical Stoics. This was because of perceived issues with Stoicism as a pagan system of thought, which I have described at length above. On the other hand, *De Constantia* was so popular that it was reprinted in countless European languages. It is possible that Lipsius's dialogue was so well known and separate from the issues the plagued classical Stoicism that Descartes and Malebranche saw no need to explicitly mention it.[258] I am not sure which of these potential explanations makes the most sense, if any, but I do not think a lack of explicit citations to Lipsius threatens the idea that there is some sort of conceptual connection or influence, given that his work was so widely read.

I think there are also further conceptual connections to explore between Cartesian and Neo-Stoic views. For one, there are many more figures than Descartes and Malebranche alone who discuss Stoicism and espouse similar ethical mandates on the pursuit of virtue. Antoine Le Grand (1629–1699) was a French Cartesian who ended up writing primarily in English and devoted his early works to giving a Cartesian interpretation of Seneca's thought.[259] While I did not have space to consider Le Grand's treatise within the argument of this thesis, my sense of it is that he is engaged in a very similar project as Lipsius and Du Vair, and he deserves to be studied as a Cartesian who takes after Descartes's suggestions about the wisdom of Seneca. Particularly interesting was that Le Grand's work was republished in English, as he ended up spending much of his life writing in England. This is because we have two other English Cartesians who had a lot to say about virtue, and who also happened to be heavily influenced by Malebranche's *Search After Truth*, namely John Norris (1657–1711) and Mary Astell

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[258] Recall, however, that there are isolated instances of text that see both Descartes and Malebranche referencing the Neo-Stoic project in various ways. So they did seem to know about it, and even in some instances endorse the motivating ideas behind it.

[259] See: Easton, "Antoine Le Grand." and Le Grand (1662) *Le Sage des Stoiques, ou l'Homme sans Passions, Selon les sentiments de Seneque,* published later as "Man Without Passions" (1675).

(1666–1731). Norris and Astell's *Letters Concerning the Love of God* see them grapple with a problem that arises from Malebranche's analysis of pleasure and pain. If God is ultimately the source of all our pleasure, and this is itself our reason to love him, then could we not say that God is also the source of all our pain and equally worthy of our hate? In discussing how to avoid this problematic conclusion both Astell and Norris land on a solution that sees them embrace our experiences of pain and suffering as, in some way, providentially directed. If this argument could be connected with Le Grand's and Lipsius's interpretations of Stoicism, it would constitute an example of two Cartesians who read and understood Malebranche along the Neo-Stoic lines I have sketched in this thesis. This would be strong evidence in favour of reading Malebranche as a Neo-Stoic figure, because it would denote that he was read as such in his own time.

But the relationship between these figures and Neo-Stoicism is interesting even independent from what it tells us about how we should read Descartes and Malebranche. Astell herself, in both her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* and *Reflections Upon Marriage*, relies on intellectualist ideas about the pursuit of virtue to argue for practical claims about the education of women and the attitudes both men and women ought to take towards one another in their relationships. These are considerations that are more of the ilk of Princess Elisabeth's practical concerns which prompted her correspondence with Descartes on moral topics. And we do not often find any examples or arguments like this in Malebranche's work and in other Cartesian writings. Investigating the theoretical connection between some of the arguments Astell makes and the Neo-Stoic system of moral philosophy that I have sketched in this thesis could tell us more about how Neo-Stoic moral philosophy was applied in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is an important part of the history of Stoicism since classical Stoicism itself is full of practical examples given by Seneca, Cicero, and others illustrating how the virtuous "sages" acted in their day-to-day life. Since Stoicism has always been a practically oriented philosophy, intended as a way of life, it would be nice to have a fuller conception of this aspect of Neo-Stoic ethics in the 17th century. Studying figures like Astell, Norris, and Le Grand presents one potential way to discover this.

5.1.3 A shift in the way Stoicism was depicted.

Finally, I want to draw my readers attention to one last historical example that I think clarifies the extent of the impact of 17th century Neo-Stoicism. In David Hume's *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Hume writes an essay entitled "The Stoic."[260] The essay is, as one would expect of Hume, a sarcastic and witty mockery of the Stoic view which Hume himself seems to have found quite silly. But Hume's criticism is distinctly different from the criticisms of Seneca levied by Malebranche and his 17th century contemporaries. I will provide here one example of Hume's tone throughout the essay:

> Can vigorous industry give pleasure to the pursuit even of the most worthless prey, which frequently escapes our toils? And cannot the same industry render the cultivating of our mind, the moderating of our passions, the enlightening of our reason, an agreeable occupation; while we are every day sensible of our progress, and behold our inward features and countenance brightening incessantly with new charms? Begin by curing yourself of this lethargic indolence; the task is not difficult. You need but taste the sweets of honest labour. Proceed to learn the just value of every pursuit; long study is not requisite: Compare, though but for once, the mind to the body, virtue to fortune, and glory to pleasure. You will then perceive the advantages of industry: You will then be sensible what are the proper objects of your industry (Para. 9/20 mp. 150 gp. 206).

Hume's worry is that the Stoic makes the cultivation of our intellect out to be central to the attainment of happiness when, as he argues, any hard labour can make the pursuit of something seem as though it is worthwhile. Hume argues that deep contemplation of our pursuits is not necessary. We only need to compare once "the mind to the body" and "virtue to fortune." Notice how even Hume's language seems to be aimed at something different from the classical Stoic views we saw Malebranche criticize. Malebranche's worry was that the Stoic does not think deeply enough. Seneca makes his sages out to be separate from the influence of the passions and the body, separate even from nature and God, and this is prideful arrogance. Hume, rather, attacks the Stoic for thinking too deeply. For making the pursuit of virtue too arduous without adequately justifying the gains to be had from following this course. And throughout the rest of the essay he proceeds to mock "the Stoic" for espousing a view of action that amounts to never acting. The Stoic view fails because it advocates in every case the suspension of our judgement

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[260] Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Part 1, essay no.16.

and never-ending process of rational analysis. Stoicism, for Hume, amounts to some kind of paralysis.[261]

The fact that Hume's criticism of the Stoic shifts is evidence, I think, that the conception of Stoicism has shifted in some significant respect by the time Hume is writing. The views that Hume's criticism calls to mind are much more reminiscent of Lipsius, Descartes, and Malebranche's moral philosophy than they are of anything we can find explicit in Seneca's work. Hume even mentions the intellectual comparison of the mind to the body and virtue to fortune. This sort of analysis is, according to my thesis, the heart of Descartes and Malebranche's Neo-Stoicism. I do not know if Hume has in mind specifically these rationalists. But the fact that the presentation of Stoicism and its problems seems to have changed in the manner that Hume depicts is extremely interesting, and suggests that further study of the criticisms of Stoicism in the 18th century might be relevant to assessing the impact of 17th century Neo-Stoicism. Alongside Hume, John Locke and Immanuel Kant, among many others, have their own criticisms and analyses of moral views that resemble what Hume attacks in this essay. So, I think there is potential to reconstruct more of the development of moral philosophy and – so to speak – "moral psychology" based on the reaction to Neo-Stoic ideas. The legacy of Neo-Stoicism appears to extend much further than we might first imagine.

All this to conclude, finally, what has been a significant undertaking on my part to map out the contours of a view that I think is crucially important to understanding the development of ethics in the 17th century. From the above, it should be clear to the reader that I do not think I have exhausted everything that can be said of Neo-Stoicism. Nor do I think I have defined every aspect of the philosophical movement. However, there is in the above study a core set of descriptive theses and normative claims that are used together to generate a particular moral outlook. This outlook on life would have us look for virtue within ourselves, using our reason, and through such a process cultivate a strong, enduring, and rational character that can bear whatever sorts of misfortune or accidents

[261] Credit to Manuel Vasquez Villavicencio for giving me this expression of Hume's view.

the course of the world sends our way. Continuing to map the evolution of this view throughout the development of philosophy, in different times and different intellectual contexts, is the only way we can hope to understand the impact that it has had on our thinking today.

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Curriculum Vitae

Name: James Mackey

Education

2024 PhD in Philosophy, University of Western Ontario
Thesis: *The Legacy of 17th Century Neo-Stoicism*
Supervisor: Dr. Benjamin Hill

2020 MA in Philosophy, University of Western Ontario

2019 Honours BA in Philosophy, University of Victoria

Funding and Awards

2024 Eastern APA Travel Stipend

2020–24 Western Graduate Research Scholarship

2020 Western Dean's Entrance Scholarship

Conference Participation

Jan 2024 "A Cleanthean Theodicy? The Contribution of Justus Lipsius to the Stoic Doctrines of Providence and Fate", presented at the APA Eastern divisional program, New York, NY.

Jun 2023 Comments on MacLeans-Evans "They'll Always be With You: Spinoza, Love, and Eternal Minds", at the CPA meeting program, Toronto, ON.

Jun 2023 "A Cleanthean Theodicy? The Contribution of Justus Lipsius to the Stoic Doctrines of Providence and Fate", presented at the CPA meeting program, Toronto, ON.

Jan 2022 "Neo-Stoic Themes in Malebranche's Philosophy", presented atthe APA Eastern divisional program, Baltimore, MD (virtual).

Nov 2021 "Leibniz and the Problem of Personal Identity", presented at the Fifteenth Annual Leibniz Society of North America conference (virtual).

Teaching Experience

2021–22 Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario,
PHIL 1020: *Introduction to Philosophy*
Instructor: Dr. Dennis Klimchuk

Spring 2021 Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario,

PHIL 1040G: *Ethics, Law and Politics*
Instructor: Dr. Tracy Isaacs

Fall 2020 — Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario,
PHIL 1130F: *Big Ideas*
Instructor: Dr. Robert DiSalle

2019–20 — Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario,
PHIL 1020: *Introduction to Philosophy*
Instructor: Dr. Anthony Skelton