

# Educating the Stoic Warrior

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IN A REMARKABLY prescient moment, James B. Stockdale, then a senior Navy pilot shot down over Vietnam, muttered to himself as he parachuted into enemy hands, “Five years down there, at least. I’m leaving behind the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus.”<sup>1</sup> Epictetus’s famous handbook, the *Enchiridion*, was Stockdale’s bedtime reading in the many carrier wardrooms he occupied as he cruised in the waters off Vietnam in the mid-sixties. Stoic philosophy resonated with Stockdale’s temperament and profession, and he committed many of Epictetus’s pithy remarks to memory. Little did he know on that shoot-down day of September 9, 1965, that Stoic tonics would hold the key to his survival for six years of POW life. They would also form the

1. From James B. Stockdale, *Courage Under Fire: Testing Epictetus’s Doctrines in a Lab of Human Behavior* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1994).

backbone of his leadership style as the senior officer in the POW chain of command.

It doesn't take too great a stretch of the imagination to think of a POW survivor as a kind of Stoic sage, for the challenge the POW lives with is the Stoic's challenge: to find dignity when stripped of nearly all nourishment of the body and soul. Stoicism is a philosophy of defense, a philosophy of "sucking it up." On a strict reading, it minimizes vulnerability by denying the intrinsic goodness of things that lie outside one's control. In many ways, boot camp is a green soldier's early lesson in Stoicism. In general, it is easy to think of military men and women as Stoics. The very term has come to mean, in our vernacular, controlled, disciplined, not easily agitated or disturbed. Military officers tend to cultivate these character traits. In a vivid way, they live out the consolations of Stoic practical philosophy. In this paper I explore certain aspects of military moral education by returning to ancient Stoic teachings.

My own tour of duty with the military began on a drizzly February day in 1994. A Navy chaplain had invited me to brainstorm with the top brass about moral remediation for some 133 midshipmen implicated in an "EE" or "double E" (electrical engineering) cheating scandal. The chaplain knew I was no Navy insider, but he wanted my input as an academic ethicist. That February meeting in 1994 led initially to a consultancy and visiting ethics lectureship whose audience was the implicated EE students. Then, in 1997, I was appointed the inaugural Distinguished Chair in Ethics at the Naval Academy. I was brought aboard, in naval lingo, to teach what American and European universities had been teaching for the better part of this century—essentially, Ethics 101. But at an engineering school like the Naval Academy, introductory ethics had passed them by. Leadership courses were a standard mix of management and motivational psychology. Yet the far more ancient subject of ethics was somehow viewed as a newfangled, possibly heretical course that would dare to teach what ought to be bred in the bones. I was to teach ethics, ethics for the military. That was

contractual. What wasn't prearranged was what the military would teach me. They would allow me entrance into a world that for many of my generation had been cut off by Vietnam and had remained largely impregnable ever since. And they would offer something of a living example of the doctrines of Stoicism I had studied before only as texts.

The allure of Stoicism became explicit each term at a certain point in the semester. The course I taught covered topical themes of honesty, liberty, virtue, and just war interwoven with the writings of historical figures such as Aristotle and Aquinas, John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, and Epictetus as a representative Stoic. It was when we arrived at Epictetus that many felt they had come home. What resonated with them was what resonated with Jim Stockdale as he read Epictetus each night.

There are things which are within our power, and there are things which are beyond our power. Within our power are opinion, aim, desire, aversion, and in one word, whatever affairs are our own. Beyond our power are body, property, reputation, office, and in one word, whatever are not properly our own affairs.

. . . Remember, then, that if you attribute freedom to things by nature dependent and take what belongs to others for your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will find fault both with gods and men . . . If it concerns anything beyond our power, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you.<sup>2</sup>

Epictetus rightly thinks that our opinions, desires, and emotions are in our power, not in the radical sense that we can produce them, instantly, at will, but in the sense that we can do things, indirectly, to shape them. He is right to think, with the Stoics in general, that our opinions about self and others influence our desires and emotions. In contrast to these things over which we have some control, we have far less control over other sorts of goods. A marine may be killed in friendly fire that he had no way of avoiding, a sailor may be deserving of deco-

2. *Enchiridion*, Hackett, trans. (Indianapolis: N. White, 1983): 11.

ration and promotion, though overlooked because of gender prejudice that she alone can't change, stocks may take a nosedive however prudent one's investments. A Stoic, like Epictetus, reminds us of the line that divides what is and what is not within our control and that we will be miserable if our happiness itself depends too heavily upon things over which we have little dominion. The Stoic recommendation is not complacency or a retreat to a narrow circle of safety. We are to continue to meet challenges and take risks, to stretch the limits of our mastery. We are to continue to strive with our best efforts to achieve our ends, but we must learn greater strength in the face of what we simply cannot change.

### A Brave New Stoicism

Who are the Stoics from whom the military take implicit guidance? Epictetus has been mentioned, but we need to put his writings in historical context. Roughly speaking, the ancient Stoics span the period from 300 B.C. to A.D. 200. They are part of the broad Hellenistic movement of philosophy that follows upon Aristotle and includes, in addition to Stoicism, ancient Skepticism and Epicureanism. The early Greek Stoics, known as the old Stoa (taking their name from the *stoa* or painted colonnade near the central piazza of Athens where disciples paced back and forth) were interested in systematic philosophical thought that joined ethics with studies in physics and logic. The works of the founders of the school—Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus—survive only in fragments, quoted by later writers. Indeed, much of what we know about Stoicism comes through Roman redactors such as Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. These Roman redactors, some writing in Greek—Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius—others writing in Latin—Seneca and Cicero—viewed themselves as public philosophers at the center of public life.

Cicero (106–43 B.C.), well-known Roman political orator, consul, and ally to Pompey, turned to specifically philosophical writing at the end of his political career after Caesar's assassination (which Cicero

viewed as a tyrannicide) and while in hiding from his own future assassins, Antony and the other triumvirs. Though himself not a Stoic (rather he identified as a member of the New Academy or school of Skepticism), he wrote extensively on Stoic views and his work, especially *On Ends* and *On Duties*, remained highly influential throughout the Renaissance and Enlightenment as statements of Stoic positions. Seneca, writing in the mid-first century A.D., was the tutor and political adviser of the young emperor, Nero. He wrote voluminously on, among other things, the passions and how anger, hatred, and envy, if not understood and properly reined in, can ruin a ruler and bring down a commonwealth, as well as about attachment and fortune, and how we can learn to become less vulnerable to their vicissitudes. Epictetus, a Greek slave-turned-philosopher who also wrote in the time of Nero's reign, greatly influenced Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus's aphoristic writings, summarized in a popular handbook, teach about the power of our minds and imagination to find a measure of mastery and fulfillment even in enslavement.

Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor and warrior, wrote his famous *Meditations* in A.D. 172 in the fleeting moments of quiet he was able to snatch during German campaigns. In contrast to Seneca's writings, which are often addressed to others, Marcus's meditations are exhortations to himself, about his status as a citizen of the world and the community of humanity and god linked through reason and law with nature. He warns how one can be lured away from reason by the attractions of place or wealth or pleasurable indulgence, and how a zeal for glory can pervert happiness. A repeated theme is that we live in a Heraclitean world of flux. To find happiness, we cannot hold on too tightly to what is transient and beyond our control.

The Stoics teach self-sufficiency and the importance of detaching from dependence on worldly goods that make us vulnerable. In a similar fashion, they advocate detachment from sticky emotions that mark our investment in things beyond our control. In a manner of speaking, the soldier preparing for battle heeds that advice. A Navy flier with whom I taught at the academy once told me that before he went on a mission,

he took control of his emotions by uttering the mantra “compartmentalize, compartmentalize, compartmentalize.” The trick, of course, is to know when to compartmentalize and when not to. Mission-preparedness seems to require it. But full Stoic detachment from emotions that record connection as well as loss can be too high a price to pay, even for the warrior. In particular, the capacity to grieve, to mourn one’s dead, is crucial for warrior survival. Consider Coriolanus, the legendary fifth-century B.C. warrior who turns against his native city for banishing him. He is portrayed by Shakespeare as the paragon Stoic warrior. Physically strong and detached, more at home in the battlefield than with his wife and son, he is the military man par excellence. Fearless, he sheds few tears. And yet the play’s turning point comes when Coriolanus remembers how to weep. “It is no little thing,” he concedes, “to make mine eyes to sweat compassion.” It is Coriolanus’s mother, Volumnia, who reawakens his soul. Her entreaties persuade him to quit his siege of Rome and to restore peace. In weeping, Coriolanus finds human dignity.

Coriolanus may be a loner, a mama’s boy at heart, touched only by a mother’s tears. But for most soldiers, combat itself nurtures a camaraderie akin to the family relationships of childhood. The friendship of Achilles and Patroclus, central to the *Iliad*, symbolizes brothers-in-arms for all time. We can’t begin to understand Achilles’ near suicidal mourning for Patroclus without appreciating the sheer intensity of that bond. Moreover, we’re misled if we think, as many readers have, that a friendship so passionate must be sexual, that only warrior-lovers could grieve as Achilles does for Patroclus.<sup>3</sup> Whether sexual partners or not, Achilles’ grief for Patroclus could not be greater. The *Iliad*, like much of Greek culture, celebrates *philia*, the bond of friendship, with all its passion and shared journeys and recognizes the dignity of grief that comes when death or separation breaks the bond.

3. For a good discussion of this, see Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

## Educating the Stoic Warrior 91

In contemporary war, too, where soldiers put themselves at risk to defend each other, where Marines risk the living to save the dead or those with little breath left, the camaraderie of brothers- and sisters-in-arms tempers the sacrifices. Contemporary combat soldiers don't always have time to grieve. In missions where combat rarely stops, where pilots catapult from carriers only seconds after learning that the sorties before them will never return, where veterans come home in ones and twos aboard commercial airlines (as they did from Vietnam) and not en masse with their cohorts (as my father did from World War II aboard the converted *Queen Mary*), there is little time or place to sweat tears of compassion, yet deferring grief has devastating psychological costs.

The issues are raised penetratingly by Jonathan Shay in *Achilles in Vietnam*. As a Vietnam veterans' psychiatrist, he urges that communal grief work must again take place, as it did in the ancient world of the *Iliad*, if we are to help soldiers avoid the living death of postcombat trauma. Many of his patients say, "I died in Vietnam." Like Achilles at the death of Patroclus, they view themselves as already dead, dead and deadened by losing a close friend, "another self," as Aristotle would say.

Of course, the orthodox Stoic might say loss is not real loss if it falls outside what we can control through our own effort and virtue. We'd do better to change our habits of attachment than to pamper those whose false attachments create their losses. But we can learn from Stoicism without embracing its strict letter. What we can learn is that in the midst of our grieving, we still have a home in the world, connected to others whose fellowship and empathy support us, that we have inner resources that allow us to stand again after we have fallen. This human side of Stoicism can toughen us without robbing us of our humanity. I am reminded here of a stony-faced Marine colonel, who confided in me one evening that his most wrenching experience in war came not on the battlefield but in leaving behind his firstborn, a one-and-a-half-year-old boy. Going down to the plane, to begin his unaccompanied mission, his guts seized up on him. "I literally became sick to my stomach and vomited the whole way. I was violently ill the whole flight."

Another colleague told me that flying planes was easy. He said he was even amazed that he was paid to do what he loved. What was agony was leaving his wife and child behind. Nothing made that easier. Nothing could. These are tough warriors, Stoic warriors, but they are made of human stuff. They sweat tears of compassion. They heave their guts out when they leave their loved ones.

Other traditions, before and after Stoicism, present a philosophy with softer, human lines from the start. So Aristotle emphasizes throughout his ethical and political writings that the attachments of friendship are an irreducible part of a good life, and to lose a beloved friend is to lose part of what counts for happiness. One's own goodness cannot make up the difference, but necessarily relies on the goodness of others for completion. Similarly, Judeo-Christian traditions emphasize the healing power of love and compassion. In Exodus 15.26, God is portrayed as fearful and awesome, but also for the first time in the biblical narrative as a healer, ready to protect the Israelites against disease and provide them with water and bread in their forty-days-and-forty-nights trek through the wilderness.

The Stoics may struggle to capture the full palette of emotional attachment, but they profoundly recognize our cosmopolitan status in the world and stress, in a way significant for military education, the respect and empathy required of citizens of the world. Seneca in *On Anger* reminds his interlocutor, Novatus, that he is a citizen, not just of his country, but of that greater city of his, that universal commonwealth of the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> Each of us is a world citizen, the Stoics emphasize, following Diogenes the Cynic's notion of the human as a *kosmopolitês*, literally, "cosmic, universal citizen."<sup>5</sup> We are each parts of an extended

4. Seneca, "On Anger," II.31, in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, John M. Cooper and J. F. Procop, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

5. As noted in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, R. D. Hicks, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972): 6.63. See also Epictetus, *Discourses*, W. A. Oldfather, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925): 2.10.3, I.9.2.



commonwealth and risk our individual integrity when we sever ourselves from the fellowship of that community. Marcus Aurelius makes the point graphically in terms of a much-used Stoic metaphor of the organic body:

If you have ever seen a dismembered hand or foot or head cut off, lying somewhere apart from the rest of the trunk, you have an image of what a man makes of himself . . . when he . . . cuts himself off and does some unneighborly act . . . For you came into the world as a part and you have cut yourself off.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, on the Stoic view, it is as if we mutilate ourselves when we cut ourselves off from the global community. The notion of extended world citizenship became relevant to my Navy students as they prepared to risk their lives in foreign corners of the world and serve in multinational coalitions. Many students actively wrestled with what they saw as competing views of allegiance—to one's country and its leaders and to one's allies and their leaders. I recall one student who questioned whether he was really obligated to take orders from foreign commanders who might head integrated units to which he found himself assigned. His ultimate loyalty, he insisted, was to the Constitution of the United States, and after that, through a chain of command from the commander-in-chief to American commanders. In swearing to uphold the American Constitution he had not explicitly sworn to serve NATO or other international coalitions or agreements. This student wasn't alone in his skepticism. Many midshipmen, on their initiation day as plebes, have only the faintest idea that in swearing to uphold the Constitution they are pledging to a broader kind of world citizenship. The most compelling rebuttal to their skepticism often came from officers at the Academy who had themselves served in foreign coalitions as part of their military duty in the Persian Gulf and Bosnia. Many were engaged in training other nationals for more cohesive membership in coalitions.

6. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, A. S. L. Farquharson, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 8.34.

Most understood implicitly that patriotism to country is not undermined by broader community allegiances. One can be fervently loyal to country and still serve under or command foreign officers who are part of broader international coalitions. Marcus Aurelius commanding troops and writing his memoirs today would most likely guard against a patriotism that demands narrow nationalism. For a nation and its military to sever itself from the larger alliance of nations would be an act of self-mutilation, a dismemberment of hand or foot from the whole body.

The Stoic Hierocles, writing in the first century A.D., adverts to the notion of cosmopolitanism as follows: "Each one of us [is] entirely encompassed by many circles, some smaller, others larger . . . The first circle contains parents, siblings, wife, and children." As we move outward, we move through grandparents, to neighbors, to fellow tribesmen and citizens, and ultimately to the whole human race. He insists that it is incumbent upon each of us "to draw the circles together somehow towards the center," to respect people from the outer circles as though they were from the inner. We are to do this "by zealously transferring those from the enclosing circles to the enclosed ones," to bring what is far to what is near, "to reduce the distance of the relationship with each person."<sup>7</sup>

Hierocles himself neither tells us exactly how we are to psychologically assimilate those in outer circles with inner ones so that we can come to identify with their circumstances, nor does he explore the nature of our duties, military or otherwise, in terms of which we show respect for others as we move outward in those circles. Later philosophers, themselves influenced by the Stoics, fill in the psychological story. We can do no better than turn to Adam Smith, the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment writer. Sympathy, Smith argues, is a cognitive transport, a cognitive moment of becoming another. In his apt words, it involves "trading places in fancy," requiring an active

7. See A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 349.

transference of the mind onto another, a simulation or role-play of what it is like to be another in his or her circumstances. “To beat time” to another’s breast, he says, requires a projective capacity by which we imagine another’s case:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving of what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. . . . It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter, as it were, into his body and become in some measure the same person with him; and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.<sup>8</sup>

The description brilliantly presages what contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive psychologists now refer to as a “simulation” process by which we come to identify with others and, in some sense, “read” their minds. But again, we do well if we not only go forward in time, but backward. Smith was an avid reader of Cicero (as were most philosophers of the enlightenment period), and the notion of “placing ourselves in another’s situation” becomes far clearer if we bring to bear Cicero’s notion, in *On Duties*, of the different personae we wear.<sup>9</sup> To read another’s mind one must “recenter” oneself on another, by imagining, as Cicero would put it, the shared personae we all have as rational

8. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976 [1759]): 47–48.

9. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins, eds. *On Duties* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991): I.96ff. For a very helpful commentary, see Christopher Gill, “Personhood and Personality: The Four-Personae Theory in Cicero, *De Officiis* I” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. VI (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

human beings, but also the personae we wear that are different from person to person. To empathize with or simply understand others, we must imagine what it is like to be another with distinctive temperaments and talents, in another's situation and circumstances, living life with life choices. It is not just that we "change" circumstances; we also change who we are in those circumstances. Thus, we don't simply put ourselves in others' shoes. We imagine ourselves *as others in their own shoes*. Sometimes we do this almost unconsciously. But at other times, as Hierocles says, we must keep zealously working at the transference.

We don't tend to think of the contemporary warrior as a "cosmopolitan" of this sort, but this is a central part of ancient Stoic teaching, and one that current-day warriors need to embrace as they increasingly face the demands of international coalitions and long-term peacekeeping missions in foreign countries. It is a notion we all need to take to heart as the demands of global citizenship become more and more a reality.

### Sound Bodies and Sound Minds

Stoicism within the military revives another ancient Greek educational theme—the belief that strong bodies and minds must be cultivated together. Even in leg irons, with a broken leg and in solitary prison, Jim Stockdale forced himself to do more than a hundred sit-ups each morning. Controlling his own body, in the face of relentless torture and deprivation, was his way of staying alive and sane. He lived and breathed the Stoic doctrine that effort, endurance, and inner virtue are major components of human goodness. Self-endurance began with gaining control back of his own body, even in shackles.

For a public obsessed with consumption and consumer products, hungry for epicurean novelties but tired of pleats of adipose, the stripped-down life of military endurance and discipline offers an attractive tonic. Whether at eighteen or fifty, the military officer makes physical discipline part of the daily regimen. It shows up in the unmistakable, steel-gripped handshake, in workout regimens that begin or end each

day, in physical training tests and weigh-ins that are part of a military record. All of my students participated in sports at the end of each class day, and most had additional workout regimens. The retired officers I worked with closely kept up their training, sporting youthful bodies well into their late sixties. My office suite mate, retired Adm. “Bud” Edney, a former pilot and commander in chief (CINC) of the North Atlantic region, became an avid spinner with his wife in his retirement years, and kept up with his biking and skiing as family activities. Adm. Larson, the four-star superintendent of the Naval Academy during my term, had a workout schedule in his home that began each day before 6 A.M. Others, who were once submariners and consigned to a treadmill on board, vowed now only to run outdoors, however inclement the weather.

For the military, strong bodies are mission-critical. The military trains warriors to have the strength to endure on the battlefield and the stamina to test human limits. Marine boot camp epitomizes the goal. The eleven-week moral and physical training culminates with what is called the crucible, two days of sleep and food deprivation, followed by an obstacle course in grueling environmental conditions. Survival is group survival. The goal is for the team to return as a team, even if it means coming home on the back of another.

As civilians, how should we view physical fitness when strong bodies are not exactly mission-critical, when there aren’t jungles to pass through, daily thirty-mile hikes to endure, ammunition, persons, and bodies to carry to safety? In most white-collar professions, fit bodies are simply not part of the job description—legs of steel and arms of iron are neither here nor there. True, how we look in our clothes might subtly matter for job success, but there is nothing like the ubiquitous (if unwritten) military requirement to look good in a uniform.

This misses the obvious point. Civilian fitness *is* mission-critical in the very sense that any sort of healthy living requires it. Current worries about the significant rise of child and adult obesity are not misplaced. We need weight that doesn’t overly tax vital organs, a strong heart to pump enough oxygen, adequate release of endorphins, serotonin, and

other hormones to give us vitality and zest, bones that are dense enough to bear our own weight, and so on.

Ancient Greek and Roman thought is again an important source of guidance. For Plato and Aristotle, the great Greek philosophers who preceded the Stoics, virtue is as much a disposition toward self as toward others, and care of self includes how we care for our bodies. Temperance, for Aristotle, is a kind of internalized control in which we no longer have excessive bodily appetites and can moderate ourselves without much internal conflict. In short, we master indulgence and its impulses—lose the temptation, as one might say, to do otherwise. The prior developmental step is *egkrateia*, self-control or continence. Here we master appetite, but not without active struggle and forbearance. When we lapse from either of these forms of control, we are *akratic*, literally lacking in control or weak-willed. Appetite gets the better of judgment when we know what is best, but act against our knowledge. We avert our eyes. At times, Aristotle (and before him, Socrates) suggests that weakness of will is a kind of ignorance.<sup>10</sup> But we do best to think of it as *motivated* ignorance. We are ignorant only in the sense that we don't want to be reminded of what we know to be best.

Plato's dialogue, *The Republic*, has long influenced Western culture in its advocacy of an early education that includes gymnastics as well as music. But Plato insists that in the best education "the exercises and toils of gymnastics" are not mere "means to muscle;"<sup>11</sup> like music, bodybuilding is a way of shaping the psyche as well. It is a way of building mental discipline and spiritedness, a way of storing the general habit and procedures of control in mind as well as in muscle memory. The lessons of athletics are wasted, Plato insists, if their point is only to make a body more chiseled or agile. I have heard similar remarks from college athletic coaches who encourage young people to go into sports, not

10. See his discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.3, Davis Ross, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): VII.3.

11. Plato's *Republic*, G. Grube, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974): Book III.

simply to become athletes, but to become individuals who have internalized the rigors of discipline and self-control. As Cicero remarks, strength of soul resembles “the strength and sinews and effectiveness of the body.”<sup>12</sup>

In the contemporary world of the military, temperance and bodily fitness are monitored by external judges who test and keep records, who have the power to remove a sailor or marine if there is a lapse. Some of that surveillance can be harsh and, at times, insensitive to personal and gender differences. Women’s bodies, by nature more fat-rich than men’s, pose difficult challenges for the military in measuring body fat. Shortly after I left the Naval Academy, a woman who was an exemplary student and recipient of a prestigious prize for an ethics essay was eventually dismissed from the Academy on the grounds that her body fat exceeded the appropriate standard for her height. Even if the charts are different for men and women, the danger in a male culture, especially one that so prizes uniformity and cohesion, is that women will be shoehorned into male molds. For years, the military struggled with what sort of physical fitness requirements to impose on women, given women’s different centers of gravity and strength. Standards now in place reflect reasonable gender differences, but resentment still lingers among some men that women are getting off the hook too easily. The reply to these complaints, as one of my colleagues at the Naval Academy once said, is easy. Ask the guy who objects to the women’s standards if he would like his acceptable weight range pegged to the *women’s* charts. Silence usually ensues.

In the civilian world, physical fitness and bodily health are more a matter of private virtue. Doctors have always taken records of weight and height and, in recent years, increasingly discuss smoking, diet, exercise, and alcohol consumption with patients. Their influence is typically at the level of recommendation rather than requirement. By

12. J. E. King, trans., *Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927): IV.13.30.

and large, the disciplined care of one's body sits squarely on one's own shoulders. Like most provinces of morality that fall outside legal purview, it is one's own business. This is as it should be. And yet with one out of two Americans overweight, the virtue of temperance seems to have become a personal virtue that is viewed as optional. "Self-indulgence is a human condition," Seneca writes, "even if in some pleasures wild animals are more intemperate than humans."<sup>13</sup> As with most virtues, temperance corrects a standing human condition, in this case, the tendency toward excessive appetite on the one hand, or bodily neglect on the other. We might add, temperance also corrects overcontrol.

If the Stoics are to offer inspiration, then the lesson to celebrate is not human control in excess, but in moderation. The Stoics constantly remind us how and in what way we have more dominion than we might at first think, whether it be in the physical sphere, moral, or emotional arena. But no plausible Stoicism can urge that we have unlimited dominion, even over our own virtue.

### Good Manners, Good Morals

Strong characters and bodies are part of the military appeal, but so are manners. For those who believe manners build morals, the military offers the lesson in spades. At the mealtime formation at the Academy, visitors line up daily to see a brigade of crisply pressed uniforms and taut, straight bodies. Officers and midshipmen generally greet civilians with a "sir" or "ma'am," locked eye gaze, and firm handshake. They are helpful and courteous, polite and civil. The question that came to nag me as an ethicist was "how deep does surface conduct go?" Do manners lead to morals, etiquette to ethics? Should the civilian world, baffled by the degeneration of civility in public life, take better notice of the role of decorum in military culture? Is good conduct a part of good char-

13. J. M. Cooper and J. F. Procop, eds., "On Anger" in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): I.3.



## Educating the Stoic Warrior 101

acter? It is easy to be skeptical here. Codes of conduct are highly local. What one group finds a pleasing sign of respect, another may find overly formal or off-putting. Given the variability of conduct codes across cultures, how can behavior that is so culture-specific get to the heart of what matters morally? Moreover, much military conduct is mindless drill and compliance motivated by fear of those higher up in the chain of command. Can motivation so pegged to punishment still help an individual achieve inner virtue?

These legitimate concerns are not easily dismissed. They are criticisms most civilians would bring to a military environment, myself included. Yet I have become persuaded that the military is right in thinking that manners matter. Like moral acts such as helping or rescuing, showing courage or generosity, moral manners are also ways we routinely express our concern or respect for others. To look another in the eye but not stare them down, to listen without interrupting, to be mindful of what would offend, insult, or shame are in many cultures simply ways to acknowledge others as worthy of respect. True, certain manners may have more local coinage than others, but the fact that codes of etiquette vary culturally and that some codes are morally problematic does not generally impugn the connection of a good code of etiquette with morality.<sup>14</sup>

Stoic teachings are again instructive here. Seneca writes a lengthy, seven-book treatise on the subject of how to give and receive favors. It is a subject we might think, at first blush, befitting only the interests of Miss Manners and her readership. But as we read “On Favours,” Seneca shows us how the matter is central to morality and crucial for human fellowship. Even a Stoic, bent on hardscrabble integrity and self-reliance, has an obligation to give and take gifts with grace: “When we have decided to accept [a gift], we should do so cheerfully. We should express our delight and make it obvious to our benefactor. We must show our

14. For a lively discussion, see Sarah Buss, “Appearing Respectful: The Moral Significance of Etiquette,” in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1999).

gratitude by pouring out our feelings and bearing witness to them, not only in his presence but everywhere.”<sup>15</sup> These attitudes are part of how we care for others and show our gratitude when cared for. Similarly, in *On Duties*, Cicero limns in considerable detail how “our standing, our walking, our sitting and our reclining, our countenances, our eyes and the movements of our hands” all are the outward expressions of our character.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the Stoics hold that moral virtue requires a progression that moves from doing actions because they are appropriate and externally in accord with rules of right action, to doing actions that are right because they are motivated by virtue itself. What is mere good conduct in one person can in another be a morally worthy action because of its motivation.

Even if we grant the contribution of good manners to good morals, we might still doubt whether the military is the right model to watch. Consider Robert Duvall, playing the role of career officer in the movie *The Great Santini*. He painfully discovers that he can be the military colonel at home to his wife and children only at risk of losing them. He takes the gamble, for he knows no other way of winning respect. (Similarly, one midshipman told me after returning from Thanksgiving break that he was confused at home as to how to address his parents. Should he call them, “Sir” or “Ma’am” as he does his commanding officers, or just “Mom” and Dad” as he always has? The appropriate forms of respect had become fuzzy in his mind.)

Santini’s notion of respect is based on hierarchy and rank as captured by the idea that a military person salutes the uniform, not the person, and the uniform higher up in the chain of command. (The sight is a common one at the Naval Academy as students with almost mechanically hinged forearms salute officers whom they pass in the

15. J. M. Cooper and J. F. Procop, eds. “On Favours” in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995): II.22.

16. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins, eds. “On Duties” using *Cicero: On Duties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): I.128.

yard.) Outside the military, respect is a more democratic notion. Parents and elders may deserve special honor, but all, simply as persons, are worthy of basic respect. Moreover, respect in the civilian world is often conveyed in caring about the feelings of others, that one not shame, humiliate, or slight insofar as such attitudes offend a person's dignity. This is certainly an underlying theme in Seneca's treatise, "On Favours," but it is the rare commander who is terribly worried about the nuances of hurt feelings or squashed egos. Most officers would contend that a goodly amount of ego deflation is requisite for strong unit cohesion and achievement of the mission. Finally, there's the nagging issue of appearance, so critical to the military. *Appearing* respectful matters. Yet, why put so much emphasis on the pretense and artifice of behavior? Why reward the person who may be only a hypocrite or dissembler? Moreover, how does a straight back or hair pinned impeccably in place actually reflect on the goodness of a soul? In the ladies' room at the Academy, I saw women fix each strand of hair in place with bobby pins and spray so that not a wisp fell below regulation shoulder length. They clearly cared about the well-groomed look of an officer.

What underlies such care for decorum other than the desire to please? Both Cicero and Seneca argue that much decorum is underpinned by a desire to please and to take others' opinions into account.<sup>17</sup> They don't explicitly defend the stance, but imply that some degree of concern for how one is viewed is intimately connected with respect for others. Desiring to be agreeable, not to offend or disdain, not to slight, is part of what is involved in taking another seriously. We oughtn't make ourselves servile in the task or violate our own views of what is morally right in order not to offend. In cases where there is no conflict, concern for another at the level of emotional and formal comportment seems a part of moral respect for them. For this reason manners matter.

Even Immanuel Kant, the eighteenth-century German Enlightenment philosopher, notorious for his austere Stoic-inspired philosophy

17. See for example, Seneca, "On Favours," II.1–2, II.13; "On Duties," I.93–124.

104 Nancy Sherman

of duty, urges that duty is not just inner virtue but a matter of manner and affect as well:

No matter how insignificant these laws of refined humanity may seem, especially in comparison with pure moral laws, anything that promotes sociability, even if it consists only in pleasing maxims or manners, is a garment that dresses virtue to advantage, a garment to be recommended to virtue in more serious respects too.<sup>18</sup>

### Controlling Anger and Rage

It is often said that anger is the underbelly of courage, that it mobilizes us to fight, that we need to keep the flame of anger kindled to be warriors. Cicero rehearses the view: “no stern commands” can rally ourselves or others, whether on the battlefield or off, “without something of the keen edge of irascibility.” Irascibility is “the whetstone of bravery.”<sup>19</sup> Both Cicero and Seneca deny the claim. Indeed, the Stoics argue strenuously that anger and rage are pernicious emotions that do more damage than good. “No plague has cost the human race more,” Seneca says in his famous treatise, “On Anger.” A true Stoic warrior doesn’t rely on anger to fight his battles.

Part of the problem with anger, according to the Stoics, is that it can’t easily be moderated—once turned on, it can’t easily be turned off. It is a runaway passion, the Stoics say, whose stride outpaces the command of reason. It is “the most rabid and unbridled of all emotions,”<sup>20</sup> says Seneca. It perverts the body and mind, and literally disfigures the face. Seneca is graphic in his portrait. Those who are angry have

eyes ablaze and glittering, a deep flush over all the face as blood boils up from the vitals, quivering lips, teeth pressed together, bristling hair

18. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Mary J. Gregor, trans. (The Hague: Nijoff, 1974): 282.

19. See *Tusculan Disputations* IV.19.21.

20. See “On Anger,” III.16.

## Educating the Stoic Warrior 105

standing on end, breath drawn in and hissing, the crackle of writhing limbs, groans and bellowing . . . the hideous horrifying face of swollen self-degradation—you would hardly know whether to call the vice hateful or ugly.<sup>21</sup>

Seneca insists that we can control this hideous frenzy and rid ourselves of its corrosive effects by a bold straightforward method: let go of the kinds of attachments to honor or reputation, or victory or wealth, which when threatened make us angry. These are not real goods, he teaches, following ancient Stoic doctrine. True, the Stoics concede, they are the kinds of goods that we might like to have and that we prefer rather than not prefer, but having them adds nothing substantive to our happiness. They are not genuine parts of happiness which in the Stoic view (which closely follows Socrates' teachings) is only a function of inner virtue. Its prosperity is the prosperity of virtue, not of wealth, fortune, or the opinions of others.

The full Stoic view may be hard to swallow. We do depend on others' opinions of us, and think our reputation in a community matters. We would be different creatures, far less social and communal, far less able to achieve the very *Stoic* goals of community and fellowship, if we were indifferent to others' praise and blame, compliments or slights. We couldn't raise children without praise and blame from parents. Yet, in holding that certain emotions, like anger, involve mistaken values, the Stoics presuppose something more fundamental and more revealing, namely, that emotions are themselves evaluations or appraisals, ways of judging the world. Aristotle holds that emotions involve construals about the world, though on his position those construals are neither systematically false nor misleading.<sup>22</sup> They are part and parcel of knowing the world accurately and wisely—a view that has been reappropriated by contemporary cognitive psychologists. In that view, emotions involve cognitive assessments of the environment that lead to

21. Ibid., 1.2.

22. See, for example, the account of emotions in *Rhetoric* II.

arousal and desiderative responses. So sadness involves an appraisal that I have been hurt, love the idea that he is attractive, or pity the thought that someone has suffered unjustly. The Stoics go whole hog, though, in holding that emotions are nothing but beliefs, and consequently, that we can change emotions in their entirety by changing beliefs. There is no remainder. We might say they are the first to advocate a thoroughgoing cognitive therapy as a method of emotional change. Under their aegis, the particular form that cognitive therapy takes is philosophical dialectic. "Row the oars of dialectic," Cicero says, if you are to transform the soul.<sup>23</sup>

Few of us hold with the Stoics that emotions are nothing but beliefs or as corrigible as them. Nor are we likely to endorse the Stoic doctrine that the kind of beliefs emotions involve predominantly embody false values. Rather, most of us probably think, with Aristotle and current cognitive psychologists, that emotions often give us truthful views of the world, even if sometimes exaggerated or magnified. We also tend to think that the desires that lace emotions and the physiological arousals expressive of emotions make for states that are as much body as mind and hence hard to relinquish by a sheer act of will. Few of us are ready to embrace wholeheartedly the Stoic doctrine that all goods other than the pure goodness of our souls ought to be matters of complete indifference to us, things from which we can fully detach in a search for a meaningful life. Yet despite the harshness of some of their views, the Stoics propound a view that we are likely to have considerable sympathy with, and this is that to some degree, emotions embody ways of thinking about the world and evaluating it. Emotions judge the world, and when we subtly shift those ways of thinking (i.e., stop thinking that something is an offense, loss, injury, or attraction), we shift our emotional states. What most of us probably dispute is that the cognitive shift is itself sufficient for an emotional shift, that feeling can be reduced to believing.

23. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, J. E. King, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945).

We now need to return to the original specific Stoic claim that anger is an emotion needing extirpation. Can a Stoic, who roots out all anger, be trained to kill? Does this feature of a Stoic education make sense for a military person? I would suggest the harder conceptual problem is not in considering the possibility that a warrior lacks anger, but that a virtuous person is devoid of all anger. To be a soldier, defending principle, abiding by rules of engagement, cognizant of the constraints of just war and just conduct in war embodied in such documents as the Law of Land warfare or the Geneva Conventions, in fact, requires a principled response to the demands of warfare. To act out of frenzy or rage, to systematically dehumanize the enemy in the way that anger toward an enemy often requires, for a commander to incite his troops by bloody thirst for revenge, for a pilot to be battle-happy in a way that makes him nonchalant about the no-fly zone, is to risk running afoul of the moral framework of war. No one can fight without the adrenaline rush of aggression and competitive spirit, and it is a drill sergeant's job to push his troops to know those emotions well. But that physiological arousal may not itself be underpinned by the kinds of judgments that Seneca claims underlie irascibility and rage.

Even if we can conceive of a warrior who fights best because of principle rather than anger, can we conceive of a virtuous person who leaves behind his senses of anger, moral indignation, and outrage? Consider retired Chief Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, the man some have called the hero of My Lai.<sup>24</sup> On March 16, 1968, he was flying his observation helicopter when he spotted several wounded people on the ground and a dike where a group of GIs approached an injured, unarmed woman of about twenty. Later one officer prodded the woman with his foot, then killed her. Minutes later Thompson saw dozens of bodies in an irrigation ditch, their writhing movements suggesting that some were still alive. American infantrymen beside the

24. For my account, I have drawn on the report by Michael Hilton and Kevin Sim in their *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

ditch were taking a cigarette break from battle, taking off their steel helmets for a moment of respite. Several minutes later, he saw one of the sergeants shooting at people in the ditch and his worst fears were confirmed. With his side gunner, Larry Colburn, and his crew chief, Glenn Andreotta, Thompson landed the helicopter, telling Colburn to “open up “ on the GIs—“open up on ’em, blow ’em away”—if they opened fire at him as he intervened.

After some thirty years of silence, the Army belatedly decorated Hugh Thompson with the prestigious Soldier’s Medal for his valor on that day in My Lai. Shortly after, he visited Annapolis for a public address, and we spent some time talking together. What were those moments of sighting the massacre at My Lai like, I asked. What did he feel? In carefully chosen words, he remembered thinking that what he witnessed was much like Nazi behavior during the Holocaust. At the time, he thought American soldiers didn’t behave that way. They didn’t commit genocide. He had shared similar thoughts with the midshipmen that day, and the traces of anger and disbelief were still visible in his face and audible in his voice as he recalled approaching the GIs wielding weapons against innocents. He himself didn’t use the words “moral outrage,” but it was clear that his judgments about the horrors he saw that day were the judgments that constitute moral anger. Thirty years later, upon returning to the village of My Lai for a memorial, he was met by one of the village women who survived the slayings. He remembered her then as a young mother. She was now a frail, aging woman. She yanked at Thompson’s sleeve and implored, “Why did the American GIs kill my family? Why? Why were they different from you?” He broke down in tears and said, “I don’t know. I don’t know. That is not how I was taught to behave.”<sup>25</sup>

If we follow Seneca, do we support an education that would have forced Thompson to look on with dispassionate disinterest, a kind of

25. I am remembering the gist of the conversation as it appeared on CBS’s *60 Minutes*.



Stoic apathy, that could incite neither rage nor grief? Would we root out the core of Thompson's virtue and humanity? Seneca himself is inconsistent on the point. Anger is the clear enemy in his essay, yet he closes his piece with the following exhortation, "While we still draw breath, while we still remain among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity."<sup>26</sup> A Stoicism committed to the cultivation of humanity and human fellowship cannot, in fact, eliminate all human anger. As frenzied and blinding as anger's outbursts are, as dehumanizing as rage can be, anger expressed in the right way at the right time is the sure sign of humanity. Aristotle, not the Stoics, got this point right: anger can be morally fine and praiseworthy. If the Stoics improve upon Aristotle it is in reminding us that emotions are, more often than we think, a matter of our responsibility. The Stoics urge that the emotions are volitional states. We are not just *affected* when we suffer emotions, but as the Stoics put it, we *yield* or *give assent* to certain judgments implicit in those emotions.<sup>27</sup> Even if we reluctantly embrace a notion of emotions as voluntary, it is undeniable that over time we have considerable dominion over how we respond emotionally. We take charge of how we cultivate our humanity, including, I would add, our anger.

### Conclusion

The Stoics offer important lessons for the military, and, I would urge, for civilians as well. They give guidance in shaping a character education that takes seriously the values of discipline and self-mastery, while recognizing our dependence upon others not only in small communities, but also globally. We have seen that Stoic lessons of self-sufficiency and self-mastery are crucial antidotes to the indulgences of consumer-

26. "On Anger," III.43. For an insightful discussion of "On Anger," see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton University Press, 1994): Chapters 10 and 11.

27. For a nuanced description of the voluntary and involuntary aspects of emotional experience, see Seneca's "On Anger," II.1–4.

ism and appetite that plague the contemporary scene. The point is not to idealize the life of deprivation or slavery (as a Stoic like Epictetus may seem sometimes to do), but rather to cultivate the inner resources and virtues that allow for a measure of control in the face of strong temptations and hard losses. The Stoic wisdom is that we have dominion in more areas of our lives than we acknowledge. Our physical strength can be built, our emotions affect us, but we also regulate them and learn habits of mind and expression that convey our cares.

The Stoics make the latter point by suggesting that proper emotions are forms of judgment that we openly accept and willfully allow. In the case of an emotion like anger, they say we can control the judgments we consent to and endorse. We have seen how this stance has both attractions and dangers. We know without being card-carrying Stoics that reflection allows us to revise overly hasty views about what may annoy, insult, or offend, and that these revised judgments help us to change how we feel, in some cases releasing us from the grip of unreasonable anger. The Stoics, however, insist that all anger is poisoned and that the truly virtuous person is rid entirely of its venom, but we have argued against this extreme view. Anger can also show its face as moral outrage, indignation, and a sense of injustice. There are human moments when anger is precisely the right response, however much we may lose ourselves in the reaction. Similarly it is so for grief, compassion, and love. Perhaps the Stoic lesson is that there are ways of *recovering* our mastery even after we have let go, forms of resilience and self-governance that allow for stability in the face of the strongest winds.

The Stoics also insist upon our cosmopolitan status as citizens of the universe, not isolated individuals or isolated nations. Military and civic education must emphasize not only loyalty to country, but also loyalty to values beyond national borders. My midshipmen needed reminders of their broader citizenship in the urgent circumstance of chain of command: from whom should they take orders? For many, the question of whom to respect, obey, and assist are more diffuse, but the young civilian, no less than the junior military officer, needs to know

Educating the Stoic Warrior 111

that moral obligations and wider circles of allegiance extend beyond national borders. It is not just our economy that is global, but in a pointed way, our moral community as well.

I have turned to the military as a case study for exploring Stoicism and have done so upon the military's own lead. Many Navy officers I have worked with have implicitly and explicitly embraced Stoicism for guidance. I argue that we have much to reap from the rich Stoic texts. But I also urge a critical attitude in the face of more orthodox Stoic tenets. The task as moral educators is to shape a Stoicism with a human face. As Coriolanus, Shakespeare's legendary Stoic warrior realized, "it is no little thing to make mine eyes to sweat compassion."