

Stoic Ethics as Therapy: Guidance for Military Chaplains

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Religious Studies

August, 2015

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“There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavor with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves.”

Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 3.6

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Idea of Philosophical Ethics as Therapy

In November 2011, British blogger Jules Evans published an article on his internet blog citing recent efforts by the British government in exploring ancient Greek philosophy in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The article was discovered and published in the internet blog “Stoicism Today”¹ The British government has invested a sizeable amount of time and resources into Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT,² and many researchers within the National Health Service are putting together a system of what they call Philosophical CBT drawing on research from psychotherapists Donald Robertson and Tim Lebron³, which Evans says, “could radically change the way people see philosophy and the wider humanities.”⁴ Evans interviewed the two founders of CBT, Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, and found that they were heavily influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Stoicism, which presents a particular way of looking at our lives and perceived problems as well as presenting the Socratic method of allowing, encouraging, and empowering individuals to heal themselves. After a discussion of the benefits

¹ Evans, Jules, 2011, “A Blueprint for a Philosophical CBT,” Stoicism Today, at <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/2015/04/14/features-a-blueprint-for-a-philosophical-cbt/>. Accessed April 17, 2015.

² The article cites a government financial investment of £580 million to research and development of CBT through the British National Health Service (NHS) “to a policy called Improved Access for Psychotherapies (IAPT) which hugely increases the availability of CBT through the NHS, and will train 6,000 new cognitive therapists by 2014. It is the boldest expansion of mental health services anywhere in the world.” (Ibid.)

³ See Robertson, Donald, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, Karnac Books, London, 2010 and Lebron, Tim, *Wise Therapy (The School of Psychotherapy and Counselling)*, Sage Publications, London, 2007.

⁴ Evans.

to government, education in schools, and use in psychotherapy, he concludes his article about the relatively new idea of Philosophical CBT by saying:

Philosophical CBT could be one way forward, combining the evidence-based approach of CBT with the more open-ended and values-conscious approach of philosophy. And it would introduce people to philosophies that connect the personal to the social and political, and that empower us not merely to overcome emotional disorders, but also to follow richer and more examined lives.⁵

While there are many sub-disciplines within the discipline of philosophy, the primary benefit derived in therapy will come from the philosophical sub-discipline of ethics. Ethics, or moral philosophy, addresses the question of how we should live, specifically of how we should behave including not only our actions, but our attitudes and opinions which are often the source of much unnecessary and completely avoidable trouble. Within philosophy's disciplines, ethics will be born from the marriage of ontology, cosmology, physics and logic, but it is in the ancient school of philosophical ethics where therapeutic care is actualized. In her landmark work, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Martha Nussbaum examines closely the link between ethics and therapy underlining the ancient theme of individual choice as being intrinsically tied to attitude and feeling.⁶

The ideas in Evans' article were a confirmation of what I have been doing in counseling as an Army Chaplain for a few years, although not technically trained to any standard approaching that of the psychotherapists in the British National Health Service. I had discovered Stoic philosophy completely by accident. In seminary, a friend of mine gave me an old hard cover 1950s edition of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* and told me I would probably like it. I had no interest, at the time, in reading Greek philosophy, only in graduating from seminary, getting

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Nussbaum, Martha. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 1994.

out of the academic arena and back to the Army where I belonged, so it wound up in the bottom of an anonymous box marked “professional gear” and was rediscovered in my office at Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany several years later when I was the battalion Chaplain for the 52nd Signal Battalion. At the time I had little idea what Stoic philosophy actually was, but I recall a friend of mine reading a book at the Chaplain Captains Career Course at Fort Jackson, SC, earlier that year by Nancy Sherman, entitled *Stoic Warriors*, which piqued my interest on why he would be reading such a thing and what it had to do with us in the Army.⁷ It was later that year, in the fall of 2009 in Stuttgart, that I found my copy of *Meditations*, and out of pure curiosity, I started to read it. By the end of the week I had read it from cover to cover and highlighted nearly every page.

It wasn't the intellectual exercise of studying ancient philosophy that hooked me. It was the extremely practical advice I found that helped me exorcise my own demons that had been with me since my fifteen-month deployment with the 82nd Airborne Division to Afghanistan during President George W. Bush's surge of 2007-2008. I had been out of seminary less than a year when I deployed with an airborne infantry regiment of the famed 82nd Airborne to southeastern Afghanistan, and made my home in a small HESCO⁸ barricaded Forward Operating Base outside the Afghanistan city of Ghazni, in the heart of Taliban territory. Nothing in seminary or my prior service as a career Army officer had prepared me for that experience. Having prior service as an armor officer and a special operations officer (Civil Affairs) with 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and a short deployment with them in 2002-2003, I thought the

⁷ Sherman, Nancy. *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁸ HESCO barriers are 10-15 foot high chain reinforced earth-fillable containers that have been used by the US Military throughout the world since the beginning of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). They are opened and placed around the perimeter of a military base and filled with earth by bulldozers and are very effective walls against intrusion; they are a good defense against direct and indirect fire.

job of a chaplain would be a nice break and a slower paced, gentle, pastoral way to finish my Army career. What I didn't realize was that I would be neck deep in all of the nastiest episodes endured by that entire infantry battalion in one of the longest deployments ever experienced by a military unit in the history of the United States Army. This particular deployment was my baptism by fire as a new Army chaplain. I became very familiar with war during this 15 months, not only experiencing my own losses (my family for such a long period of time, watching men die in horrific ways, loneliness, fear, isolation, and the like) but becoming intimately familiar with everyone else's as well through countless hours of counseling with the paratroopers of the 2-508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. One year later, as I sat in my office in the comfort of Germany, I realized I had not handled that deployment as well as I had expected and still suffered from the effects of post-traumatic stress, while continuing to counsel others suffering as well.

However, in reading Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, I found that it was more of a journal than anything else: the journal of a warrior king, written largely on campaign probably by the side of a fire in the field somewhere close to where I was in Germany. Here was a man who was experiencing the ravages of war, empire, and politics, who was responsible for the entirety of the Roman Empire, writing his thoughts for his own catharsis. The advice he gave himself in these *Meditations* I found to be extremely practical and quite applicable to my own sufferings and that of my Soldiers⁹, more so even than Scripture, which I had been reading since my early youth. I found great comfort in his mere suggestion, indeed a main thesis of Stoic Philosophy, that the things that happen to us are neither good, nor evil. It is only our judgments on these things, these

⁹ Because this document will be used in military circles in the future, the word "Soldiers" will be capitalized throughout this paper as the Army writing style requires it.

indifferent external stimuli, which give them such a subjective value. Indeed, one man's trash is another man's treasure, and one man's pain is another man's pleasure. Having experienced the heart and soul of what I would recognize as the greatest evil, death and my fear of it, I found especially comforting and personally therapeutic his words in Book II:

Let thy every action, word, and thought be that of one who is prepared at any moment to quit this life. For, if God exist, to depart from the fellowship of man has no terrors, - for the divine nature is incapable of involving thee in evil. But if He exist not, or, existing, reckon not of mankind, what profits it to linger in a godless, soul-less universe? But God is, and cares for us and ours. For He has put it wholly in man's power to ensure that he fall not into aught that is evil indeed; and if in the rest of things there had been anything of evil, this too would He have foreseen and enabled us all to avoid.

But how can that which makes not man evil make man's life evil? Universal nature could not have thus sinned by omission: it is omniscient, and, being omniscient, omnipotent to foresee and correct all errors; nor would it have gone so far astray, whether through lack of power or lack of skill, as to allow good and evil to befall the evil and good alike without rhyme or reason.

Rather, life and death, fame and infamy, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty fall to the lot of both just and unjust because they are neither fair nor foul – neither good nor evil.¹⁰

I reasoned that if the truths of this philosophy were comforting to me, they would be comforting and therapeutic to others as well. In the coming months I also began to study Epictetus and liberally used his same style of instruction in therapy, that of the Socratic method of asking key questions that allow the student to explore the depths and root of their problem. I handed out my copy of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* liberally. Soldiers from all levels of education were able to read it, understand, and benefit greatly, so much so that it became my primary method in counseling.

What is it that is so beneficial in Stoic philosophy in therapy? The Stoics (as did many ancient philosophical schools) understood their philosophy in three mutually supporting

¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *Meditations* II.11. Translation used throughout, occasionally modified, is that of John Jackson, *The Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

fundamentals: φυσικς (physics), λογικε (logic, the root of which is λογος, translated as word and reason), and ηθικη (ethics). The contribution of beneficial therapy can be found in all three, but it is in Stoic ethics that we find discourse in how we should live, our attitudes, opinions, and judgments in regard to, as Epictetus puts it, those things which are “up to us.”¹¹ For the Stoics there are two worlds that are to be acknowledged: there is the world of reality and the world of the way we desire things to be. These two worlds always intersect, at least at some juncture, for everyone, for there is something about life that every living person enjoys and appreciates, and therefore desires, even if it is merely our own breath. The Stoics teach that the key to happiness is to merge these two worlds, the world of reality and the world as we would prefer it to be, as much as possible. We do this in two ways, by changing what we can to reflect our own desires (i.e., if it is money that you want, then obtain it, if it is a wife, marry one, and so forth), and in those things that we cannot change, to decide that we either like them or are content with them as they are.

If the source of thy pain lies without, it is not the external that troubles thee, but thy verdict thereon, a verdict which it rests with thee to annul at any moment. If it lies within thy character, change thy principles. For who can say thee nay? And so too, if thy grief proceeds from the omission of some activity that seems good to thee, why not let the grieving be and act? – ‘But an obstacle too strong for me blocks the way.’ –Then bid farewell to grief! The responsibility is not thine.¹²

We find this theme throughout Stoicism: change what we can, and insofar as there is something we cannot change, change the way we think about it and take no personal responsibility for things that lie outside what we can personally influence, those things which are not up to us.

¹¹ Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.1. Translation used throughout is that of Gill, Christopher (ed.) and Hard, Robin (tr.). *The Discourses of Epictetus*, London: Orion Publishing Group, 1995.

¹² Marcus Aurelius, 8.47.

Aurelius takes this theme from the first lines of Epictetus which is important to note because it sums up the thesis of Stoicism for therapeutic means:

Some things are up to us and others are not. Up to us are opinion, impulse, desire, aversion, and in a word, whatever is our own action. Not up to us are body, property, reputation, office, and in a word, whatever is not our own action. The things that are up to us are by nature free, unhindered and unimpeded; but those that are not up to us are weak, servile, subject to hindrance, and not our own. Remember, then, that if you suppose what is naturally enslaved to be free, and what is not your own to be your own, you will be hampered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, and you will find fault with both gods and men. But if you suppose only what is your own to be your own, and what is not your own not to be your own (as is indeed the case), no one will ever coerce you, no one will hinder you, you will find fault with no one, you will accuse no one, you will not do a single thing against your will, you will have no enemy, and no one will harm you because no harm can affect you.¹³

Stoic therapy can, perhaps, be summed up rather nicely in the popular *Serenity Prayer* of American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, officially adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Used ubiquitously in the Twelve Step Programs, the notion behind the prayer echoes accurately the teachings of Stoicism (whether intentionally or not), and the thematic philosophy of Stoicism is completely and appropriately adaptable to forms of therapy beyond addiction.

The United States Armed Services, indeed probably every military, is a very stoic community although the ethos they embrace is usually not recognized as Stoic by the service members, being taken for granted as just conventional military wisdom handed down through the ages.¹⁴ In the preface to her book *Stoic Warriors*, Nancy Sherman introduces her work by

¹³ Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 1.1.

¹⁴ It is important to note the use of the word “stoic” in its capitalized and lower case forms. Capitalized “Stoic” refers directly to Stoic philosophy itself. Un-capitalized, the word stoic is an adjective describing the demeanor of a person or group of people who seem unaffected by changes in fortune, resembling attitudes and behaviors taught by the Stoics.

saying, “This is a book about ‘sucking it up.’ In politer terms, it is about being stoic as part of military bearing.”¹⁵ Published in 2005, in the midst of the turmoil created in the US Military by stop loss and extension, her book makes an excellent case for explaining the Stoic ethos found in the American military, in which Soldiers are trained and indoctrinated in the skills of enduring the hardship of pain, hunger, and fear under extremely austere conditions. The US Military operates in a stoic climate with a stoic philosophy that is taught without scholastic reference. The idea of “embracing the suck” and “loving it” are not uncommon to the US Soldier. It was after reading this book that I became fully convinced of the appropriate nature of using Stoic philosophy in military therapeutic counseling and ministry.

However, Sherman’s book is not the first reference to Stoicism in the military or the use of Stoic philosophy in self-help for service members. Admiral James Stockdale, US Navy (ret.), was Commander of Air Wing 16 on September 9, 1965, when he was shot down over North Vietnam and spent the next seven and a half years as a prisoner in the famed Hoa Lo Prison, popularly known as the Hanoi Hilton. The descriptions of conditions and treatment in the Hanoi Hilton by other survivors is beyond imagination. Stockdale cites his experience in studying Stoic philosophy as the source that carried him through the toughest times, and liberally quotes Epictetus as his primary source of strength during that time. While he was parachuting down from his A-4 Skyhawk he says that “he left the world of technology and entered the world of Epictetus.”¹⁶

To further bolster my belief in the use of Stoic philosophy in counseling for service members is the US Army Chaplains Corps’ strict prohibition against proselytization. Although I

¹⁵ Sherman. *Stoic Warriors*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005. Kindle version accessed from Amazon.com on April 16, 2010, Preface.

¹⁶ In a speech delivered at the Great Hall, King's College, London, Monday, November 15, 1993, accessed on May 13, 2015 from http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/978-0-8179-3692-1_1.pdf.

never considered myself an active salesman for my faith, Army Regulation 165-1 strictly prohibits the active recruiting of military members to a specific religious faith. Upon entry into the Chaplains Corps, individual chaplains must sign a memorandum of understanding with regard to the pluralistic nature of the US Armed Forces and agree to refrain from proselytizing service members. When I first came into the Army as a chaplain, I found it interesting that the large majority of those who approached my office told me they did so with a degree of hesitation because they did not consider themselves to be “religious.” Of course, some came to me seeking specific spiritual guidance, through Scripture, the doctrines of the Church, and so forth, but most were suffering from the rigors of the arduous manner in which military members are employed, and just wanted a way to deal with the tremendous stress and pressure service to their country entailed. What I figured out quickly was that I was being called to minister to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, and agnostics alike, and while words of Christian Scripture and doctrine worked well for Christians, they were irrelevant at best and at worst even offensive to non-Christians. Stoic philosophy, however, is the ethos of the military and applicable to almost every faith in existence. I found it to transcend faith altogether and allow me to be consistent with my Christian ethical principles at the same time. Indeed, much of Christian theological ethics are built on a Stoic philosophical construct.

I have found Stoic philosophical therapy to be extremely well received among military counselees. Christians can readily identify and apply it to their Christian lives, as much of the New Testament is consistent with Stoic ethics. Non-Christians easily embrace it as part of the ethos into which they were indoctrinated in basic training. Finally, it represents a foundational pedagogy of basic truth and understanding, a world view, a *κοσμοθεορία* or *weltanschauung* with which to embrace reality and one’s true place in it which can only lead to a fuller

understanding of Stoic οικειοσις, a word that Stoics use to describe what they hold to be a particular and important aspect of human nature, that of affinity, affiliation, and community with all of humanity, an understanding that carries with it significant ethical standards. Stoicism is not a faith, so it is not subject to the rules of proselytization in the Army. It is, however, a philosophy that transcends, or even joins, individual faith traditions of every sort. Stoicism is a philosophy that has ostensibly been adopted, not officially but in praxis, by the United States Military and is congruent with the Army Values¹⁷ and the values of every service branch. Thus, Stoicism seems tailor-made for use in therapy in the US Military.

Methodology

This thesis begins with a brief, summary of Stoic ethical pedagogy, including basic principles and useful theories, and a list of Stoic ethical axioms. Following the summary of Stoic ethics is a description of a technique of therapy closely resembling that of Seneca in his *Letters From a Stoic*¹⁸ and elaborated by Martha Nussbaum in her book, *The Therapy of Desire*. The doctrines and technique will then be used in three different vignettes describing what a typical counseling session may look like in a military setting. It is my hope that the conclusion of Stoic philosophical therapeutic efficacy can be reached, not only with the descriptions and arguments concerning the value of the given Stoic ethical axioms, but with the demonstration of their usefulness in counseling techniques as summarized in the three vignettes.

A word about the vignettes: The vignettes used are summaries of the hundreds of counseling scenarios I have experienced during my time as an Army Chaplain. I summarize them in three characteristic scenarios: (1) a young Soldier experiencing his first taste of

¹⁷The Army Values: officially adopted by the US Army in 1995 and listed in AR 600-100 Army Leadership as: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.

¹⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. Translation used throughout is that of Robin Campbell (tr. and sel.). *Letters from a Stoic*. London: Penguin Books, revised 2004.

deployment, combat, and loss; (2) a mid-career Soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress presenting itself in relationship issues, job performance, and loss of reputation; and (3) a more senior Soldier experiencing mid-life crisis in his summation of a successful career at the cost of failed relationships and on the verge of divorce and anonymity as he prepares for Army retirement. No one event describes any particular Soldier's story, but all events described are actual occurrences as told to me by the many men and women with whom I have been honored to serve and to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, not only professionally for being the basis of my own research for this project and my development and formation as a chaplain and an officer in the Army, but personally as well, for defending my freedom as an American and indeed, at times, saving my life. It is to the American Soldier that I owe my life, my liberty, and my freedom to live according to the dictates of my own conscience, and to the American Soldier I dedicate this humble work.

Chapter 2

A Stoic Introduction

A. Stoic Philosophical Ethics

Epictetus would say that Stoicism is not so much a philosophy to be studied, but a life to be lived:

After you have digested these principles, show us some resulting change in the commanding faculty of your soul, just as the athletes show their shoulders as the results of their exercising and eating, and as those who have mastered the arts can show the results of their learning. The builder does not come forward and say “Listen to me deliver a discourse about the art of building;” but he takes a contract for a house, builds it, and thereby proves that he possesses the art.¹⁹

Soldiers would tend to agree. A popular aphorism in the military echoes this statement of Epictetus more succinctly in the typical Soldier’s vernacular: action talks and bullshit walks. Epictetus couldn’t agree more as this was precisely what he was trying to get across to his students. One of the problems with studying Stoicism is the scarcity of ancient texts, primarily because many of the ancient Stoic teachers, consistent to a fault, refused to write.²⁰ They preferred to teach and lead by example, another Army aphorism. Suffice it to say, from the very beginning, Stoicism is not to be merely studied. It is meant to be absorbed by the soul and lived out in one’s life existentially. As a result of their reluctance to write anything down, we have very little from the early Stoics like Zeno, Aristo, Cleanthes and Chrysippus. The surviving texts of Stoic philosophy are primarily Seneca’s letters, dialogues, and essays, Marcus Aurelius’

¹⁹ Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.21.3-4, quoted in Sellars, John, *Stoicism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006, 27.

²⁰ Sellars states: “One thing that immediately stands out in these works (not only of Epictetus but other ancient Stoics as well) is Epictetus’ admiration for Socrates, the ultimate philosophical role model. And like Socrates, so far as we are aware, Epictetus wrote nothing for wider publication.” Furthermore, surviving fragments of the ancient Stoics who did write for wider publication are very scarce (see introduction to Sellars, *Stoicism* for short biographies of many of the most important ancient Stoics).

Meditations, and Epictetus' *Discourses, Fragments, and Aphorisms*. However, it is important to note that Epictetus also refused to write. What we have from him are notes taken by his student Arrian from his own recollection of Epictetus' lectures.

1. Stoic Ethical Principles

As I stated in the introduction, the Stoic system maintains itself in three parts: physics, logic, and ethics, but it is in Stoic ethics where theory becomes practice.²¹ The ultimate Stoic ethical axiom is that the best life is lived according to the reality of Nature. The capitalization of the word *nature* goes directly back to Stoic physics which holds that there is a materialist divine energy that is conscious, intelligent, and exists in everything in the entire cosmos. Indeed, the Stoic god permeates the cosmos. This is why throughout translations of Stoic literature one finds the following words to be capitalized justifiably, and understood to be representative of the divine being: God, Nature, Providence, the Universe, the Logos, and others. To live in concert with God, to live according to Nature, to exist according to the dictates of Providence, to act in accordance with the Universe, to exercise reason in line with the Logos; these are all foundational Stoic ethical principles and are all ways of saying the same thing for the Stoics.

The primary axiom in doing this is that one's first duty is to oneself. Diogenes Laertius, the only source of many of the earliest Stoics, states:

An animal's first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation, because Nature from the outset endears it to itself, as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work *On Ends*; his own words are, "The dearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof."²²

²¹ The summary of Stoic ethical principles in this section is based in discussions by Sellars, Nussbaum, and Cooper, John M. *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2012.

²² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 7.85, as quoted in Sellars, 107-108.

It is important to note, however, that this does not translate into selfishness, as we shall see, because of the understanding of *oikeiosis*. As a citizen of the Cosmos, the individual human being is connected to other humans, animals, and all of creation, at a level where if he is harmed, the Cosmos is harmed, and if he causes harm to another, the Cosmos is harmed, thus harming himself. It is on the basis of this delineation, John Sellars says, that the Stoics draw the distinction between what is good and bad.²³

But what is it that delineates oneself from the rest of the Cosmos? According to Stoic physics humans are separated from the rest of the cosmos by virtue of our reason which comes from God. It is the *λογος* within that connects us with the divine *Λογος* of nature. Seneca writes, “God is near you, is with you, is inside you.”²⁴ The Stoics tell us it is this divine reason within us that separates us from the animals. Epictetus says:

[A human] is a rational and mortal living creature. At once the question arises, from what are we distinguished by the rational element within our nature? From wild beasts. And from what else? From sheep and the like. Take care, then, never to act like a wild beast; otherwise you have destroyed the man in you and failed to fulfil your profession as a man.²⁵

Nussbaum describes Stoic reason thus: “Reason, it is claimed, marks humans out as incomparably higher, and worthy of a boundless respect, and self-respect.”²⁶ Marcus Aurelius furthermore says that we have been given a “godhead” and the wise man lives his life

[E]xecuting every wish of that godhead which Zeus has given man, to be his guardian and his guide – a fragment of Himself. And this godhead is the understanding and reason of each one of us.²⁷

²³ Sellars, 108.

²⁴ Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 41.

²⁵ Epictetus, *Discourses*. 9.1-3

²⁶ Nussbaum, 324.

²⁷ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 5.27.

It is the faculty of reason within us, that piece of the divine that allows us to distinguish between good and bad. Good is anything that is beneficial to our constitution and bad is whatever is destructive to us. However, because Epictetus echoes orthodox Stoicism in the quote above regarding what is up to us, the only thing that is up to us is the disposition of our soul, because that is all we really own, as our bodies are merely “a rotting corpse with a paltry pint of blood.”²⁸ Therefore, while one should take care to protect the body, it is the reasoning faculty of the soul to which we owe our utmost care. John Sellars, in his book *Stoicism*, provides an excellent summary of the orthodox Stoic understanding of those things that are good, bad, and indifferent. Summarizing Zeno through the work of Arius Didymus,²⁹ he describes good as those traditional Greco-Roman virtues, the vices as bad, and for the Stoics, everything else was indifferent. Indifferents are those things that are harmless or irrelevant to the soul. They are neither good nor bad and they consist of everything that is neither virtue nor vice. For the Stoics, therefore, death of the physical body is harmless to the soul. It is neither inherently good nor bad. It is therefore as irrelevant to the soul as the arbitrary choice of Nature in the color of one’s eyes. Pain, pleasure, bodily sickness and health: all are indifferents. Zeno further expounded by adding another category: that of preferred and non-preferred indifferents recognizing that we may prefer something over another (for instance, we may prefer health over sickness or wealth over poverty), but that doesn’t make that particularly preferred thing inherently good or bad.³⁰

This leads us to the topic of emotions. The Stoics characterized emotions as sicknesses of the soul that represent faulty judgments, i.e., treating an indifferent as if it were good or bad.

²⁸ Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.9.33.

²⁹ Sellars, John, citing Arius Didymus’ *Epitome of Stoic Ethics*, cited by the paragraph sections of Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 2.7, printed in Pomeroy’s edition and in Inwood and Gerson’s *Hellenistic Philosophy*.

³⁰ Sellars, 111. To this, Sellars quotes Cicero’s *Academics*, 1.36-37, describing a third category of indifferents, the neutral indifferents which are neither preferred nor non-preferred.

“For the Stoics, the emotions are themselves judgments. As such, they also fall into the realm of things that are ‘up to us.’”³¹ Therefore, we err when we perceive an impression of an indifferent and make a judgment that it is good or bad and consequently feel a particular emotion about it. Recognizing that things happen to us that are outside our control and can have no effect on our soul, the Stoics find fearing them, dreading them, or otherwise suffering under them to be against logic and better judgment. This is not to say that all emotions are bad. Emotions based on non-faulty judgments are healthy. Sellars quotes Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives and Opinions of the Philosophers*:

They say that there are three good emotions: joy, caution, and wishing. Joy, the counterpart of pleasure, is rational elation; caution, the counterpart of fear, is rational avoidance, for though the sage will never feel fear he will still use caution. And they make wishing the counterpart of desire, inasmuch as it is rational appetency.³²

As stated above, Stoic acts must therefore be exercising the ruling faculty of the soul, our reason, calling us to embrace virtue and avoid vice in accordance with Nature. It is in acting in accordance with Nature by embracing the virtues that one will find true happiness expressed in terms of the ancient Greek philosophical term, εὐδαιμονία (*eudaimonia*). *Eudaimonia* is not merely a feeling or emotion of elation, but the highest fulfillment, or τέλος of a human being. It is a teleological state of well-being that is untouched by indifferents that we are conditioned to believe are necessary for our happiness such as those listed in the quote from Epictetus above listing those things that are “not up to us.” *Eudaimonia* is therefore the ultimate goal of every human being but requires the health of the soul which can only be had by living in accordance with Nature, by embracing a life of virtue. In Sellars’ summary, this necessitates “living

³¹ Sellars, page 115.

³² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.116.

harmoniously with oneself, that is, of living consistently and free from internal emotional conflict, ... living in accordance with one's own nature, of living according to one's nature as a rational being and, in particular, of following this rather than passively reacting to external forces, ... [and] bringing oneself into harmony with Nature as a whole."³³ He continues: "As Nature as a whole is organized by the active principle that is God, and as our own nature is but a part of this, there will be no conflict between living according to our own nature and living according to Nature as a whole."³⁴

It is these basic principles that Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius have in mind when giving practical advice on how to handle the daily trauma experienced in human life. When this theory is put into practice, especially keeping in mind the one thing needful, a healthy soul, and remembering that the only thing that can truly harm us is ourselves and our lack of virtue, it is my belief that healing can come much more quickly by an understanding of reality in the world as interpreted by the Stoics.

B. Stoic Therapy

Martha Nussbaum begins her book, *The Therapy of Desire* with a quote from the great Greek Stoic Chrysippus:

It is not true that there exists an art called medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul. Nor is it true that the latter is inferior to the former, in its theoretical grasp and therapeutic treatment of individual cases.³⁵

In her book she outlines a technique of administering Stoic therapy, relying heavily on the work of Seneca. Seneca's therapy is Socratic in method. His *Letters* are written in the typical style of

³³ Sellars, 125.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Nussbaum, 13, quoting Chrysippus from *De Placitis Hippocrates et Platonis (On the Views of Hippocrates and Plato*, P.D. Lacy Edition, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum, Volume 4, 1-2, Berlin 1978-1980.

teacher to interlocutor, or for our purposes, therapist to Soldier. This specific technique requires a doctor who is kind, patient, and caring. However,

[t]he patient must not simply remain a patient, dependent and receptive, she must become her own doctor. Philosophy's medical function is understood as, above all, that of *toning up* the soul – developing its muscles, assisting it to use its own capabilities more effectively.³⁶ [emphasis in text]

It is the dialogue between teacher and interlocutor that allows the patient to release himself from external attachments, the indifferents, those things that are “not up to us.” The typical suffering Soldier is described by Nussbaum:

She longs for things she does not control. She wants to be in charge of her own life and she wants to be in love. And it seems to her that death is a bad thing – and all the more when she feels otherwise happiest and most alive.³⁷

Indeed, which of us doesn't generally feel the same way. Such is the lot of the human condition in our longing for the second world, the world as we would like for it to be, a world in which we are in control of everything that touches us, a world in which we and our loved ones never get sick and never die, a world in which we are able to plan and everything goes according to plan. A Soldier's life is not lived in such a world. An ethical stance in the reality of one's life is to accept it as it is, recalling the Serenity prayer, without anger, resentment, and resignation, free from irrational and self-destructive emotion.

Nussbaum goes further in describing the deepest desires of her Stoic student: “She wants to become more, not less, of a distinct self, healthier and stronger, thinking only her own thoughts, and thinking them actively, rather than being a passive vessel for the dogmas of another.”³⁸ It is no stretch to believe that the men and women serving our nation's military want the same thing. While members of a team, they still suffer under the human condition of needing

³⁶ Nussbaum, 317.

³⁷ Ibid. 319

³⁸ Ibid. 320.

to express their own individuality, although this is limited in a military setting. They are anxious to go out on the weekends in civilian clothes. They get tattoos that express what is uniquely their own. In basic training they are taught how to think and how to act. However, as they progress to leadership positions in the NCO, Warrant Officer, and Commissioned Officer roles, they are encouraged to think “outside the box” and develop their own solutions to problems. The military is not so concerned with exactly how a mission is accomplished, but that it is accomplished. One of the things that separates the US Military from other militaries around the world is the five paragraph operations order. Paragraph Three is the Execution paragraph in which details are laid out as to how the commander wants to accomplish the objective. The first section of the paragraph is called the Commander’s Intent which includes the “end state’ that will mark success. If all else fails to go as planned, officers and NCOs are expected to accomplish this “end state” using their own ingenuity and initiative.

However much precision goes into military planning, the average NCO can tell you that “Murphy”³⁹ lurks in the woods behind every tree and must be controlled as much as we are possibly able. An often combined aphorism in military parlance is “no plan survives first contact” because “the enemy gets a vote.” Recognizing the two worlds we live in, the world as it is, and the world as we would like it to be, the service member knows through the entire training cycle that there are things beyond his control, in both his professional and personal life. While dealing with “Murphy” in conducting a mission is expected, Soldiers often find themselves perplexed when running into this same lack of control in their personal lives. Nussbaum’s Stoic therapy seeks to bring them back to the one thing they can always rely on, available at all times,

³⁹ From Murphy’s Law: anything that can possibly go wrong will certainly go wrong. This is a common aphorism in the US Military, especially in Army Combat Arms.

their reason. “Reason is not just the most important thing about humans: it is also something that is fully their own, in their power to cultivate and control.”⁴⁰ Regarding Stoic reason, she echoes what has been argued above in the first section of this chapter: “Reason, on the Stoic view, is not just divine internally: it is our piece of the divinity that inhabits the whole framework of the universe.”⁴¹ The technique in Stoic therapy will focus on gentle questioning, prodding the patient to exercise their own reason and helping them come to their own conclusion which will teach them what Nussbaum calls, “the most general strategy of Stoic therapy: that the pupil must be watchful and critical of the way in which she sees the world.”⁴² This will be done by correct judgments on appearances and impressions, resulting in virtuous emotions that produce joy, as opposed to faulty judgments which produce a sickness of the soul. The military pupil of Stoic therapy will learn to rejoice in their own reason, their own little piece of God (*λογος*) that resides within them. It is the goal of caring leadership that they will learn to live completely free from the slavery of external burdens, of those things that they cannot control, that are not up to them, and that are killing them from the inside out. The gentle wisdom of the Stoics will be the guiding light on this path and will illumine the way from despair into flourishing.

Finally, Stoic therapeutic technique requires a very gentle, pastoral response to the suffering. We are encouraged to participate in the suffering of others without being caught up in it ourselves. Epictetus is quite clear on this:

We are to sit free from distractions and listen, sometimes to the tragic actor, sometimes to the musician, and not to do as runaway slaves do, for at the same time as one of those is paying attention and praising the actor, he is looking

⁴⁰ Nussbaum, 325.

⁴¹ Ibid. 326.

⁴² Ibid.

around on every side: and then if somebody mentions the word “master,” he is all at once disturbed and alarmed.

... But so long as I have any respite from these [distractions from externals], I too am like the runaway slave watching in the theater; I bathe, drink, sing; but in all fear and wretchedness.

... For Socrates, too, excused the gaoler who wept when he was about to drink the poison, and said, “How nobly he has wept for me.” Was it to him that Socrates said, “This is why we sent women away”? No; but to his friends, to those who could understand; the gaoler he treated with indulgence as though he were a child.⁴³

The Stoic therapist, like any good pastor, is drawn to share in the pain of his client, and goes with them to the depths of their suffering with complete indulgence and empathy. Indeed, he dives into the depths of the bone-chilling waters to save the drowning man. But, careful to not become a victim himself, he remains clear of the distractions of the runaway slave who is likely to be carried away by that which would enslave him, namely his own temptation of faulty judgments on the impressions being presented, and holds on tightly to his reason. For these are treacherous waters, and one is likely to become a second victim to the passions like the would-be rescuer who unintentionally becomes the victim of a drowning man. This is a very real danger for the care-giver. The lists of chaplains suffering from their own demons, being diagnosed with “compassion fatigue,” are longer than one would expect.⁴⁴

⁴³ Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.29.59-66.

⁴⁴ See K.J. Flannelly, S.B. Roberts, and A.J. Weaver, “Correlates of Compassion Fatigue and Burnout in Chaplains and Other Clergy who Responded to the September 11th Attacks in New York City” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 59.3 (2005) Fall, 2005, Vol. 59, No. 3, 213-224, and “Wartime Chaplains Working Through ‘Compassion Fatigue’” *New York Times*, July 3, 2011, available at theepiscopalcafe.com, accessed May 13, 2015.

Chapter 3

Stoic Therapy in Practice

A. Historical Background to the Vignettes

In the evening of January 10, 2007, President George W. Bush, in a nationally televised briefing, told the American people he would deploy an additional 20,000 American troops to Iraq in what appeared to be a last ditch effort to defeat Al Qaeda insurgents, specifically in Baghdad. The surge, as it would come to be called, resulted in a serious strain on an already over-strained US Military. For the first time in the Global War on Terror, all four brigades of the 82nd Airborne Division were deployed and the streets of Fort Bragg, NC were empty; Fort Bragg, the most populated US Army post in the world, became a ghost town. Due to the high numbers of US forces that were deployed, and the fact that the insurgents put up an impressive fight at the beginning, the decision was later made to extend the deployments (which had grown steadily from six months in 2001-2003, to a year in 2006) to fifteen months, the longest combat deployment of troops since the Korean War. By 2008, it was more common than not to find a Soldier in the Army who had participated in the Global War on Terror (either in Iraq or Afghanistan) and had been deployed for at least fifteen months at some time post-January 2007. In fact, when I attended the Chaplain Captain Career Course (a six month long mid-level career benchmark for most officers,) not one of the fifty chaplains enrolled in the course had been deployed less than twice, with many having three or more deployments, and every one of them had experienced a fifteen month deployment. One company first sergeant in 2nd Battalion, 508th PIR (parachute infantry regiment), with whom I became very familiar during our surge deployment, had deployed five times for a total of five years before we started our fifteen months in Ghazni. Interestingly enough, I saw him again as a newly promoted division G-3 Sergeant

Major with the 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Division at Bagram Air Base in 2013 when I was the Command Chaplain for the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan. At this point he had spent literally two-thirds of his career deployed to combat.

The Global War on Terror, with Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, saw more troops deployed for longer durations than any other event in American History. While more troops were deployed in both world wars, the duration of combat, while arguably more intense, was much shorter: World War I US involvement was from 6 April 1917 to the armistice signing on 11 November 1918, barely 19 months. American involvement in WWII was from January, 1942 to September, 1945, three years and seven months. The Korean War dates from 25 June 1950 to 27 July 1953, three years and one month. Vietnam lasted almost 20 years from 1 November 1955 to 30 April 1975. However, the largest number of American troops were deployed there from 1965 to 1973 and the average serviceman was required to serve only one term of 365 days in country. Contrast those wars with the Global War on Terror wherein my entire Chaplain Captains Career Course had each been deployed in combat for no less than 27 months (two deployments: one for 12 months and one for 15 months) in January of 2009. Additionally, almost all of us deployed at least once between then and the time of the writing of this thesis. When one starts crunching the numbers, it is no stretch to argue that the total months of combat deployment from 2001 through 2015 dwarf the number of individual months deployed in any previous war the United States has ever fought.

These numerous long deployments have had their strains on service members, their families, and our society at large. Marriage problems, post-traumatic stress, alcoholism, violence, homelessness, and suicide are all problems facing veterans of this war, arguably, more profoundly than at any other time in our Nation's history. Commanders, military chaplains, and

mental health workers in the military are on the front lines in confronting and dealing with the myriad of issues resulting from the last decade of war.

B. Vignette Number 1: Private Smith's Losses

1. Introducing Private Smith

The first vignette is that of a typical young, newly enlisted combat Soldier in a maneuver battalion. The vignette itself is an aggregate summary of at least nine different suicidal/homicidal young men whom I saw in Afghanistan during the 2007 surge, serving as the battalion chaplain for 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division out of Fort Bragg, NC. Indeed it is a pretty typical story and not far from what one would imagine of an 18-19 year old male infantryman deployed to combat for his first assignment.

It is dark outside. I hear a knock at my chapel door in the evening and I am somewhat annoyed because I am in my tee shirt, shorts and flip flops, eating microwave popcorn and watching a DVD, both of which came to me in a care package from someone at home addressed to: Any Soldier, 82nd Airborne Division. In walk two noncommissioned officers (NCOs) with a very young looking Soldier who I imagine to be around 19 years old. I will call him Private Smith. The senior NCO tells me Private Smith was put on suicide watch at the end of the platoon's last patrol and that the Company Commander ordered him to see the Chaplain. The kid is skinny; his belt barely holds up his filthy ACU (Army Combat Uniform) pants which have a four-inch long tear in the seam. He has blood-shot eyes with heavy bags underneath. His face is pale and he looks like he hasn't slept in days. He has his M-4 rifle slung over his shoulder from which, the NCO tells me, the bolt has been removed, "for his safety and the safety of those around him." The bolt being removed from a suicidal Soldier was an intervention I added in the 2-508, an idea that came out of a Chaplain training meeting. Before this change in policy, the rifle would be taken from the Soldier while on suicide watch, forcing him to walk around the

FOB (Forward Operating Base) with everyone asking him where his rifle was, making a spectacle of him and completely removing the confidentiality of being on suicide watch.

Suicide watch is a term developed in the Army to describe the Army's concern for the large number of suicides that began to increase alarmingly around 2005. When it is determined by a Soldier's chain of command that he is possibly suicidal, all means of committing the act are taken from him and he is not left alone. 24 hour periods of constant around-the-clock vigilance are required to be maintained by a less than happy NCO who is assigned the duty of baby-sitting a private. The person deemed suicidal by the chain of command has to be under constant observation: eating, sleeping, using the restroom, and so forth.

Assuring the NCOs I have it under control, the senior tells me he will leave the watch NCO with Private Smith and me, as were his orders from the Company Commander himself. I assure the senior NCO (I quickly figure out he is Private Smith's platoon sergeant) that I won't let anything happen to him, that I am trained in suicide prevention and the confidentiality requirements of Army Regulation 165-1 in Soldier counseling, and the NCO decides it is most prudent to leave the watch NCO (I then figure out he is Private Smith's immediate supervisor) on the bench outside the chapel to give us the required privacy.

Now with privacy, the young Private Smith sits in the metal folding chair in my plywood office and I introduce myself. He politely tells me that he knows me, that we were on a jump together back at Bragg before the deployment, but he finds it hard to maintain eye contact and can't stop tapping his feet and looking at everything inside my plywood office but me. I ask what is going on and he replies that he doesn't know what's wrong with him or why this is happening. All he wants to do is go back to his platoon. At this point he starts heaving with

great forceful sobs, so intense that his entire body is shaking and I realize at once he is not a faker.

A faker is a Soldier who knows the system. He knows that he can stop any ill treatment, whether disciplinary or otherwise, by simply stating, “I feel like I’m going to kill myself.” At this statement, under present Army suicide prevention policy, the world comes to a halt, training stops, and the Soldier is immediately put on suicide watch until a professional can decide whether they are a threat to themselves or anyone else. Roughly one third of the suicide counseling I have done was for Soldiers who were deemed fakers, malingerers, or unfit for military service and eventually “chaptered out” (a term describing the dismissal of a Soldier under various chapters of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)). I have found that fakers are much more common in the combat support or combat service support units. However, they are very rare in combat arms, especially in airborne or special operations units, units in which they volunteer for much more dangerous duty and in which they endure an arduous selection process. The small units in the Airborne and Special Operations community are extremely close-knit groups of individuals with the highest levels of commitment in the military. While others in the Army may try to achieve the minimum standard and get out as quickly as they can, those among the elite Airborne and Special Operations communities that tend to malingers are few and far between.

Private Smith is no exception. His greatest personal need is to get back to his platoon, currently located in a small COP (Combat Outpost) in the Andar District of Ghazni Province, in an old dilapidated concrete building built by the Soviets during their occupation in the 1980s. I had been there and it was no place to live: constant shelling, highly kinetic (no shortage of enemy activity and combat), no running water or electricity, PVC pipe urination tubes, and a

diesel fuel burn barrel for a latrine. But it is not the amenities of his fifteen month home away from home at COP Four Corners⁴⁵, it is the relationships he has there that are his greatest need. Indeed, I am soon to find out, it is relationships that are at the heart of his problem.

When I finally get him calmed down enough to speak a complete sentence without breaking into uncontrolled sobbing and shaking, he is able to tell me the rest of the story, a story I have heard too many times before and one in which I could predict the conclusion at the outset. The story goes like this: Private Smith is from a small town in Arkansas where his parents were divorced when he was in elementary school. He grew up with his mom, who was more concerned with her latest boyfriend, and too busy to attend the football games where he was the star and a big fish in a small pond at the local high school. He rarely heard from his father who, he told me, was a truck driver in the northeastern US. He made good grades in high school and could have played football at the junior college about a hundred miles away. However, after he watched the twin towers fall in New York City when he was in junior high, he felt it was his duty to serve his country like his father had in Vietnam. Infantry was the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of choice among new recruits post 9/11, but few were able to get in because of the high numbers that wanted to shoot terrorists, especially after watching the Twin Towers go down in New York City. However, his recruiter had some connections, and pulled some strings to get him into Airborne School as well. He reported to 2-508 PIR at Fort Bragg and was extremely proud to put the “eighty-deuce” patch on his left sleeve because his grandfather had jumped into Normandy with the 82nd Airborne in WWII.

⁴⁵ Four Corners was the name given to the Combat Outpost for this particular platoon named for the intersection of the main highway that led southeast from Ghazni City and the road to the town of Miri, the district center for Andar District, Ghazni Province.

After he reported, he immediately found the best friend of his life in Private Jones, from Huntsville, Alabama, whom he had met at Airborne School. The two hit it off immediately and were totally surprised to be assigned to the same squad in the same company in the 82nd. They became room-mates in the barracks, did pushups together, lifted weights in the gym together, and went to the mall on weekends to meet girls. He reminded me of the day when I jumped with his platoon. Private Jones was the tall kid with the embarrassing smile on his face after he threw up on the C-130 before the jump and shouted “Airborne!” I was able to remember him with the telling of that story. I also remembered doing his memorial the week before, but never put the two together.

Private Jones wasn’t the only love of Private Smith’s life. Because of the scarcity of young women in Fayetteville, NC, there was no shortage of strip clubs and plenty of money to be earned by the local talent from lonely young men experiencing their first taste of freedom from the confines of home on the weekends. A couple months before deployment, Privates Smith and Jones decided to go to the strip club on Bragg Blvd. There, Private Smith met the love of his life, Jasmine. He fell immediately in love with this stripper who loved him like he’d never known love before. He was sure this was the girl for him and they married two weeks before the deployment, with Private Jones standing up with him as his best man before the Justice of the Peace. That was the happiest day in Private Smith’s young life.

Because of the busy pre-deployment schedule, Private Smith and Jasmine had very few precious moments to spend with one another. Being a frugal and faithful young man, he had saved every penny he made from the moment he had joined the Army and now had a few thousand dollars in the bank. Furthermore, being the responsible husband he had imagined himself to be, and fully trusting the love his new wife showed him, he signed a general power of

attorney for his accounts over to Jasmine on the eve of the deployment. The happiest day of his life was shortly followed by the saddest day of his life, the day he said goodbye to her at the Green Ramp passenger terminal on Pope Air Force Base. I totally understand. It was my saddest day too. However, he had the comfort of the best friend of his life deploying with him. They would be facing the greatest adventure of their lives, bringing justice to the Taliban, and returning as war heroes. Then, the three of them would live happily ever after.

The months following deployment were fast paced. The two of them went on many patrols together, talked of home and future plans, and gained a profound spiritually intimate relationship. Private Smith told Private Jones of his plans to redeploy and buy a house so he and Jasmine could start having children. Private Jones was going to get out of the Army and attend college and maybe come back in as an officer. The two of them became very close on those endless hours standing watch, patrolling the villages of Miri and Qarabaugh, and doing pretty much everything together, and when news came of the extension of the deployment to 15 months, they took it in stride, knowing that they had each other.

However, happily ever after came to an abrupt halt just a week before our meeting. Because of the increasing insurgent use of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), Smith's platoon discarded their vehicles and had been on foot in village presence patrols. On this particular occasion they had been moving in a file down a narrow road entering a village that was known to hide a man who had become quite the prolific IED manufacturer. On one side of the road was a field with a white van parallel parked on the roadside. On the other side of the road was a large mound of dirt recently dug in excavation for the foundation of a building about one hundred meters from the first buildings which marked the entrance to the village. Private Smith was walking in file behind Private Jones just as Jones was moving beside the van. It was

at that time that someone in the platoon noticed a bearded man talking on a cell phone from the rooftop of a building near the entrance of the village. He heard someone shout from the head of the column and then everything went black. The van had held a 105mm artillery round that exploded a shaped charge in the direction of the road using the dirt mound as a backstop. The concussion of the blast knocked Private Smith on his back and knocked the wind out of him. Private Jones received the blunt of the blast which propelled his body, turning it 45 degrees and slamming him face first into the dirt pile on the opposite side of the road. Private Smith immediately rushed to the aid of the best friend he had ever had. He found his body with his right leg amputated below the knee and the rest of his body smashed flat into the dirt mound. He and the members of the squad pulled him out of the dirt and laid him flat on his back. He was already dead, but the last memory Private Smith has of his best friend is his futile attempt at digging the packed earth out of Private Jones' nose and mouth in an attempt to allow him to breathe before he died.

Horried, shocked, and heartbroken, Private Smith got a chance to use the phone when they returned to FOB Ghazni for the commander's inquiry. He was anxiously awaiting the opportunity to telephone Jasmine back in Fayetteville so they could grieve together and perhaps comfort each other in the terrible loss of their mutual friend. Private Smith knew that Jasmine understood him and cared for him at a level where he could be comforted, just by hearing her voice. However, it wasn't her soft voice he heard that answered the phone in his apartment. It was another voice, the deeper voice of a strange man that told him Jasmine didn't want to talk to him, that she was filing for divorce. He did hear Jasmine's voice in the background telling this man what to say on the phone. While he was still asking questions and wanting to know what had happened, the phone line went dead. He tried desperately to call back but the Bagram Air

Base multi-function switch would not connect the call. He went to the computer and sent her a heartfelt email, trying to explain what had happened and how much he loved her. He sent it and then something told him to check his bank account. The fifteen thousand dollars he had saved was gone. The bank account was empty.

That was one week ago. Since then, he has been unable to hold any food down and is unable to sleep. He is suffering from constant panic attacks and feels like his life is falling apart. He loved his job but is unable to be part of the team because he is physically, mentally, and emotionally combat ineffective. He can't stand the pain he is in and is unable to process any thought of any future he might have. He is unable to control his bouts of extreme anger and sadness and feels himself slipping away. He told his first line NCO he would be much better off if he were simply dead, and he was placed on suicide watch and delivered to me. Then he looks at me with red, tear-stained eyes and asks, "Chaplain, can you fix it?"

2. A Stoic Therapeutic Intervention for Private Smith

Quickly convincing Private Smith that his life can, and will, be rebuilt with the greatest possibilities of success yet to be realized is a tall order at this point. His present situation is a culmination of years of decision-making and paradigm building and it will probably take at least an equal amount of time to regain his financial and relational stability. His salvation from the pit of despair will likely take as long to climb out of as it did for him to dig the hole in which he finds himself. Because Private Smith characterizes himself as "not very religious" (he believes in God, but doesn't buy the whole doctrine of Christianity), Stoic therapy may be appropriate for his situation. The therapy will probably take a while, but the first order of business is to get Private Smith to the battalion surgeon for an Ambien prescription so he can get some sleep and ward off any further sleep deprivation psychosis that will interfere with his ability to mentally

sort through what has transpired. After he gets some sleep and a couple meals in him he will be ready to start therapy. Stress is cumulative. Most of us can handle one stressor at a time, as long as everything else is going as we expect and anticipate. However, when multiple stressors hit us at the same time, they all add up and, as they say, when it rains it pours.

a. Diagnosis.

Any car mechanic can tell us that before we can fix something we have to know what's wrong with it to a certain degree of specificity, the more specific the better. A good Stoic therapist would listen carefully, asking probing questions to get to the root cause of the suffering and would probably come to the conclusion that Private Smith is suffering from extreme emotional turmoil resulting from a series of faulty judgments that have him convinced that his well-being is dependent on goods that are external to himself and beyond his control, namely: love, intimate friendship, and money, most likely in order of desire from highest to lowest. Private Smith had these and was happy. They were taken away all at once and he finds himself in the depths of despair. Indeed, his first error in judgment, according to the Stoics, is that he believes he needs something external to himself to be happy. However, and more important, it is altogether necessary for Private Smith, under the guidance of the Stoic therapist, to come to a correct diagnosis of his own suffering. This will be accomplished through gentle, pastoral, Socratic questioning in the realization that only Private Smith can help himself out of the mire that only he could put himself in. After spending some time with him my diagnosis is that he is suffering from damaging emotion resulting from several faulty judgments about the external events that have happened in the past week: (1) That he never truly lived and enjoyed life before he met Private Jones and Jasmine; (2) that Private Jones' death is a terrible thing and that he should be focused on his loss instead of the benefits of having befriended Private Jones; (3) that

Smith will never be able to fall in love, get married, and have a good relationship again; and (4) that he can't trust himself, that in losing his friend, his wife, and his money, he has lost everything of any worth, and that this entire episode has had no redeeming value whatsoever.

In dealing with Private Smith, I, like Nussbaum, will rely heavily on a Senecan-Socratic dialogue in the attempt to allow him to become his own physician and learn to self-comfort relying on the faculty of divinely-given reason, his own *λογος* within, with which he will be able to sort through the reality of what has happened, his place within it, and the way out of this suicidal mire. Because we are dealing with loss of loved ones, I will use as a personal resource Seneca's *Consolation to Marcia*, an essay he wrote to a female friend of his who lost a son who was taken in his young adulthood, in the prime of life, with talent and opportunity to do great things in the Roman society, and dearly loved by his mother. In this particular work, Seneca confronts a woman who has been grieving inconsolably for years, much longer than what Seneca believes is healthy. He believes her grief has been going on so long that it has become somewhat of a comfort to Marcia:

Just as all vices become deeply implanted unless they are crushed as they spring up, so this state of unhappiness and misery, with its self-inflicted anguish, feeds finally on its own bitterness, and the pain felt by an unhappy mind becomes an unhealthy pleasure.⁴⁶

Notwithstanding the fact that initial grief after loss is a human reaction, we must be mindful of when it crosses the line into unhealthy thoughts and habits, like Marcia's unhealthy pleasure-pain combination and Private Smith's contemplation of suicide.

The wise words of Seneca are directly applicable to my enjoinder to Private Smith that he not succumb to grief but, like a Soldier, move out, not just in duty to country, but in duty to self.

⁴⁶ Seneca. *Consolation to Marcia*, translation used throughout is from Davie, John, *Dialogues and Essays*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008, here at 54.

The excerpts from Seneca's wisdom will remind him of the necessity to remove himself from the world of grief and into the world of reality at some near approaching time:

[D]o not bow yourself down, but on the contrary plant your feet firmly and support whatever burden falls from above, showing fear only at the noise of its onset. Nothing displays a greater contempt for Fortune than an untroubled spirit.⁴⁷

But if no amount of wailing recalls the dead, if all distress is powerless to alter a fate that is unchangeable and fixed forever, if death holds fast whatever it has carried away, let sorrow, which runs its course, cease. Let us, therefore, steer our own vessel, and not allow this force to drive us off course. It is a poor ship's pilot who lets the waves wrest the helm from his hands, or abandons his sails to the strength of the wind, leaving his craft to the mercy of the storm; but even in the case of the shipwreck we should extol the helmsman whom the sea overwhelms as he still grips the rudder and does battle with the elements.⁴⁸

"But it is natural to mourn our loved ones." Who denies this provided it is done in moderation? For even when our dearest ones merely part from us, far less when we lose them, we feel an inevitable pang, and even the strongest of hearts is wrung. But what opinion adds to our grief exceeds Nature's prescription. Consider the mourning we see in dumb animals, how intense it is and yet how short-lived ... No creature spends a long time in mourning ... except man, who nourishes his grief and has as the measure of his affliction not what he feels but what he has decided to feel.⁴⁹

Through our patient and sincere dialogue with Private Smith, we will allow him to remind himself of the things that his own reason knows for certain:

1. That death is a natural part of life; every man dies:

[T]hose that you love, or revere, and those you despise will be made equal by a single quantity of ash.⁵⁰

What is man? A vessel that the slightest shaking, the slightest buffet, will break. ... A weak and fragile body, naked, in its natural state without defense, in need of another's assistance, exposed to all the insults of Fortune, and, once it has given its muscles a good exercise, food for the first wild beast, prey to everyone; a patchwork of feeble and changing elements that pleases the eye only in its external features, unable to endure cold, heat, or toil, and yet doomed to decay

⁴⁷ Ibid. 39.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 63.

from mere corrosion and idleness; ... drawing its breath futilely and maintaining it with difficulty ... it constantly nurtures its own anxiety ... from the most trivial of complaints it falls ill and rots with disease; it began life with tears, and what a commotion meanwhile this despicable creature makes, what great thoughts it entertains, forgetting the end to which it must come!⁵¹

2. What is it that is the specific cause of his grief?

This grief you feel, assuming it has some rational basis, does it look to your own misfortune or that of the one who has died? In the loss of your son [or friend] are you influenced by the notion that you derived no pleasures from him, or is it that you might have known greater ones had he lived longer? If you say you derived no pleasures, you will make your loss easier to bear; ... If you admit you have derived great pleasures, your duty is not to complain about what has been taken away but to be thankful for what you have been given. ... "But it could have lasted longer, it could have been greater." Yes, but you have been treated more kindly than if you had never had a son [or friend]; for, if we were given the choice whether it is preferable to be happy for a short time or never to be happy, it is better for us to have blessings that will depart than to have none at all.⁵²

3. What is it that is terrible about Private Jones' death or death in general?

What, then, is upsetting you? If it is his death, then you always had cause to mourn; for you always knew he would die.

"But he was taken before his time." ... You will discover that the men most generously treated by Nature are those whom she quickly takes back into a place of safety, since this was the kind of penalty life had in store for them. Nothing is so deceptive as the life of man, nothing is so treacherous: no one, I swear, would have accepted it as a present, if it were not given to us in a state of ignorance.⁵³

4. Regarding that he was taken before his time, at such a young age, Marcus Aurelius speaks of the young man's death compared to the old man:

In sum, the difference in time [that they were alive] is small; and look how it must be spent! What an infinity of trouble; what scurvy companions; how frail a body must we expect! So think not life a treasure to be lost with tears, but look to the abyss of time behind thee and the unbroken tract ahead, and ask: In this what differs three days or thrice the years of the Gerenian sage?⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid. 63-64.

⁵² Ibid. 64.

⁵³ Ibid. 78.

⁵⁴ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.50.

Much of the same analysis can be given to the loss of Private Smith's wife as has been given to the loss of his friend. Again, the goal is for Private Smith to come to these conclusions after specific gentle, but direct, questioning. Once he reaches these conclusions on his own we might show him a passage or two from Seneca that confirms his conclusions.

The loss of Private Smith's money can also follow Epictetus' original statement from Chapter 1 of *Enchiridion*, on what is "up to us" and cited above. Personal property, including money, certainly does not belong to us, but rather, like our loved ones, are loaned to us for a certain period of time. None of us will take any of it to our grave. Not even our bodies belong to us, teaches Epictetus, in the same passage. It is all temporary. The past is an interpretation by our neglectful memory. The future is an imagination of something that doesn't exist. We can plan and hope our plans come to fruition, but there is no guarantee of what it will be, or if it will be at all. All we have is the present. Marcus Aurelius says:

And remember that no one lives more than this infinitesimal point of time, the present: the rest of his days are either lived out or hidden from him. Thus the life of a man is a little thing; and a little thing is the corner of earth that is his home; and a little thing is the most enduring renown. For it passes from mouth to mouth, from one poor mortal to another, all of whom are racing towards death and none of whom know themselves – far less one who died in a far-off day.⁵⁵

Private Smith can be led to understand that although he had money in a bank account with his name on it, the money was never actually his. He exchanged a temporary object for a temporary service. His money, indeed all his material possessions of such a minuscule scale, for a temporary time during his miniscule life, will merely be given to another person for their miniscule use in their miniscule life, "passed from mouth to mouth, from one poor mortal to another." Again, he can be reminded that he has lost nothing because he never owned anything

⁵⁵ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 3.10.

in the first place except his reason, which will never leave him as long as he doesn't voluntarily give it up.

We will remind Private Smith in his grief of the words of Marcus Aurelius that, "[P]ain is neither unbearable nor everlasting."⁵⁶ And that regarding his pain, if he feels it is unbearable: "If the source of thy pain lies without, it is not the external that troubles thee, but thy verdict thereon, a verdict which it rests with thee to annul at any moment."⁵⁷ Finally, Marcus Aurelius would encourage Private Smith to seriously contemplate the following:

Say not, "I once was fortunate." A fortunate man is fortunate under all vicissitudes. For the word denotes one who has chosen for himself "the better part." And this better part is the Good in character, in impulse, and in action.⁵⁸

Indeed, Marcus Aurelius believes Private Smith is fortunate right now. For he has his reason which is his, and his alone, and can carry him through any storm life may throw in his path. That is something for which to be very thankful.

Armed with the foregoing wisdom, my conversation with Private Smith will go something like this (my speech in italics).⁵⁹

b. Intervention

Good morning Private Smith. You look better since I last saw you:

Yes, sir. The doc gave me some Ambien. I was able to get some sleep, and I don't feel so panicky.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 7.64.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 8.47.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 5.36b.

⁵⁹ N.B. on this dialogue and in the vignettes to follow: The dialogues are representative of real dialogue occurring between the therapist and the Soldier. They are intended to be therapy for a suffering Soldier, not instruction to a student of Stoicism. The dialogues represent only a goal and do not account for the numerous objections and unforeseen directions counseling sessions could take. The reader should pay less attention to the outcome and more attention to the therapeutic approach and technique demonstrated in these vignette dialogues and remember they are intended to be demonstration only, not proof. Trained counselors would also be ready to refer the Soldier to a clinical practitioner if evidence of a more clinical problem is presented, i.e., deep depression, neurosis, psychosis, and other problems beyond the scope and practice of a military chaplain.

Ever read Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy? Number one rule in life: don't panic, right?

Yes sir. That makes sense. But I still can't get over what's happened. My life was going so well for the first time ever and then it all came to a halt in a matter of a couple days.

That's interesting. What do you mean your life was going well, "for the first time ever?" From what it sounds like, you were damn successful in high school football.

Yes sir. Rushed for 1200 yards my senior year and we went to states, not that it mattered then, or now.

Well, didn't it make a difference to you then? We went five and five my senior year, and my best high school memories are of sitting on the bench. What's it like to rush for 1200 yards and play in a state championship?

It was pretty cool sir. We played the game at University of Arkansas Razorback Stadium. The crowd was packed.

Pretty cool. I'm envious. I've always been envious of people who were taller, better looking, and more athletic than me.

Yes sir. That was a helluva season. (He says while staring at the floor)

Funny thing though.

What's that sir?

You told me your life was going well "for the first time ever". Was rushing for 1200 yards your senior year and playing in a state championship football game really that crappy of an ordeal that you didn't start living till you joined the Army?

[Smith laughs for a second.] Well, I guess it wasn't all bad.

So you did have some good times, and life was worth living before you met Private Jones and Jasmine?

Yes sir, but I was a kid then.

Oh yeah? How old were you then?

Turned 18 in the middle of football season.

And how old are you now?

19 sir. Yeah, I know. It's not like it was that long ago.

Yeah, about 18 months. You've been in the Army for what, 15 months? And you say you just now started living?

OK, well, I guess that was an overstatement. I had some fun in high school.

[Faulty judgment number 1, that he never enjoyed life until he met Private Jones and Jasmine, exposed. For the sake of brevity in this paper, at this time I would go into further detail in his earlier life to allow him to recall that he actually had a lot of fun and had moments of memorable enjoyment. I will then ask him about the Army, which he loves, and have him recall the seemingly numerous amount of mundane, aggravating, and menial treatment he receives as a private to remind him his life in the Army with Private Jones and Jasmine was not all sunshine and roses before moving on to a discussion of his grief for Private Jones' death.]

Let's get to the real reason you are here, your grief over Private Jones.

Yes sir. He was like the brother that I never had. And now he's gone. And the way he died, [starts crying again and I let him go for a moment.]

Yep, that's a tough thing. Did you attend the memorial?

Yes sir. I said some words.

Of course you did. I was there! You really honored him. I hope someone says something even close to that about me when I go!

Yes sir. He was a hell of a guy.

Yes he was. But he's not sitting in the chaplain's office because he wants to end his life. You are. Did Jones ever want to kill himself?

No sir. He loved life.

And so did you, up to this point anyway. What has changed?

You know what happened sir!

Yes, I know what happened to Private Jones, and I know the apparent decisions Jasmine made, but what has happened to you?

I lost my best friend and my wife!

Yes, I know. But step outside of your grieving, just for a moment, and with Private Jones' death, what actually happened to you?

I saw him die! I saw him get blown up! I tried to dig the dirt out of his mouth so he could breathe!

So you did your best to save your friend?

Yes!

A very noble and loving act. Why is that bad?

That's not bad. It's bad that he died in such a way, and when he had so much more life to live! I mean, a dude is not supposed to die so young!

Really? How would you explain that to the infants that die in childbirth, or the children that die from cancer before they reach ten, or the teenager that dies in a car crash?

But he died violently! In combat!

Have you been in a fight since you've been here?

Yes sir.

Did you kill anyone?

Yes.

How?

Well, I shot this one guy with the 240B.

Did he die?

Yeah. Big time.

Is it better to get blown up by an IED or blasted with a crew served weapon?

I guess it really doesn't matter. Maybe with an IED, I guess. Well, that depends. I guess it really doesn't matter.

Tell me more about Private Smith. Did he volunteer for the Army?

Yes.

For the infantry?

Yes.

For the airborne infantry?

Yes.

Why?

Because he wanted to go to combat. He even once said that dying in combat is a pretty cool way to go.

Agreed. It is. So why are you feeling so sorry for him? He's either completely at rest, or in Heaven, or in Valhalla drinking a beer and telling war stories with heroes.

But he was my best friend.

Right. Why was he your best friend?

[At this point I will get Private Smith to recite for me every single attribute and every single thing he can remember about why he loved Private Jones so much.]

Wow, sounds like the greatest friend anyone could ever have. Not everyone has a friendship like that, at all, ever! You must be really thankful!

Yes, but it could have been greater, with more time together.

Right, and maybe I'll win the lottery when I get home and can get out of the Army and live in the Virgin Islands too. I'll invite you. There's plenty of girls, a beach, and no IEDs or barracks maintenance.

I just wish he was still here and it hurts that he's not.

Of course it does. I wish he was still here too. But this pain you are feeling. The only way to not be feeling it now is to never have known him. Is that what you'd rather be experiencing? No pain because you never had him as your friend?

Of course not.

What would Private Jones say to you if he was sitting here with us?

He'd probably punch me in the face.

[Faulty judgment number 2 is now exposed: that Private Smith should be focused on his loss instead of the benefits of having befriended Private Jones.]

The Loss of Private Smith's Wife

Let's talk about Jasmine.

I can't believe I'm such an idiot. She totally wrecked me. I was so in love with her and she left me and took all my money that I worked so hard to save. I'm such an idiot!

Yeah, kid. That's a tough one. Got a picture of her? [He shows me a picture on his phone.]

Wow, she's gorgeous. You're not an idiot, Private Smith, you are a dude. A dude with outstanding taste!

Yeah, she's a hotty, but living proof that beauty is only skin deep.

Yeah, underneath the skin it's just bones and marrow. Kinda nasty actually.

God, I loved her. I'll never be the same again!

Well, let's hope not. If you never marry a stripper whom you've only known for a few weeks, whom you give all your money to, who cheats on you and divorces you after you go off to fight for your country, that'd probably be a good thing.

[Private Smith chuckles for the first time since I've been meeting with him. A significant milestone is reached when the client can actually see a little bit of humor in their situation.]

Yeah, I guess that was pretty stupid.

Well, I don't know if I'd say stupid. She's absolutely gorgeous. It'd be easy to fall in love with her.

Sergeant Roberts says he knows her. That she's done this kind of thing before.

That wouldn't surprise me. You know, money talks ...

And bullshit walks. Right sir.

So apparently it's happened to others just like you?

Yeah, I'm not the only one to get duped by her I guess.

She sounds like a professional that makes a living this way.

Yeah, she's good.

Sounds like she's an expert and knew exactly what she was doing.

Yeah, and I'm such an idiot.

*How are you an idiot if she's done this, convincingly and successfully, to so many others?
Are you any dumber than them?*

No, I guess not.

I don't think you are.

But I shouldn't have trusted her so much.

*Well, I agree. A certain amount of caution can avoid a certain amount of pain. But is it
inherently wrong to trust anyone?*

I don't think I'll trust anyone again the rest of my life.

Really? Then what are you doing here baring your soul to me?

Well, that's different.

How?

Because you are a chaplain.

I'm still a human being, just like Jasmine!

Yeah, but you have this confidentiality rule. And I've seen you. You jump with us, hang out with us at the COP, go on patrol with us. You are like one of us.

Ahh, so you can trust another human being, under certain conditions.

Yeah, under certain conditions.

*Would you trust me with your money? Would you give me a general power of attorney
over everything you have?*

Well, no.

And why not?

Because, I mean ...

*You mean you can trust some people with some things, and some people with other things.
That trust is conditional on the relationship that's been established?*

Well, yes sir, when you put it like that.

And what's unreasonable about that?

I guess that's reasonable.

[Faulty judgment number 3 exposed: that Jones will never be able to fall in love, get married, and have a good relationship again.]

I think so. You are 19 years old. If you live to be 75, you'll have plenty of opportunity to find someone that you can trust again, at some level. But right now, you trust me with your problems, but not your money. Who can you trust with everything?

I guess no one.

Really? How about yourself and your own reason?

Well obviously I can't trust myself. I fell in love with a stripper and gave her everything.

Now hold on. I said can you trust yourself. I agree that Jasmine is not trustworthy, what about you?

Well obviously I made the wrong decision there!

I'm not talking about trusting your judgment. You are only 19 years old. The judgment faculty of your brain isn't even fully developed yet. Hell, I don't even trust my own judgment completely and I'm 46! None of us can tell the future. For all you knew when you met her, Jasmine could have been completely trustworthy. I mean can you trust your own reason?

What do you mean by reason?

I mean that guiding faculty of your soul that separates you from an animal. That part of you that can contemplate right and wrong, good and evil, life, death, and eternity, the part of you that recognizes truth, love, and beauty.

I can recognize beauty and I can tell good from evil.

And was Jasmine beautiful, at least on the outside?

Definitely!

And she gained your trust, deserted you, and took your money. Was that loving or selfish, honest or deceptive?

Definitely selfish and deceptive.

So she did a dishonest thing that is definitely her dishonor. How is her dishonor your dishonor?

I guess it's not. She did those things, not me.

So while your judgment in giving your trust to someone who hasn't demonstrated trustworthiness over a period of time was rather high-risk, your reason was never faulty, was it?

I guess not, sir. I didn't know she was going to do that.

There's no way of knowing or controlling the actions and decisions that belong to other people. The only thing we can do is choose to trust or not trust, and that will always be a gamble because we can't control others. But sometimes we trust others and it works out well. For instance, how about your decision to trust Private Jones; was that a bad decision?

No sir. He was the best friend anyone could ever have.

So your judgment is sometimes correct, and as your reason develops, so does your judgment. Do you think it is possible that it will develop more, say, in the next ten years?

I hope so.

I'm pretty sure that it will, and will continue to do so as long as you live. After all, who is closer and more dependable to you than yourself?

No one.

Exactly. Do you do PT (physical training)?

Absolutely! I work each body part twice a week!

[I now get Jones to describe his workouts and the benefit in physical ability that has come throughout all his years of physical training.]

That's impressive. Sounds like your PT regimen has actually saved your life! What do you do to train your reason?

I've never done that before.

How about just living. Has that trained our reason and your judgment, in living and having experiences? For instance, have you learned anything from this whole experience?

Of course. Not to marry a stripper!

Well, at least not one that you've only spent a few hours with, right? Let's call it a lesson that cost some heartbreak and 15 thousand dollars. Relatively cheap considering others have done the same thing as you and lost much more. Furthermore, you are a private in

the Army and you've only been saving for 18 months. When you are a sergeant, you'll be able to save much more. And at the end of the day it's only money, that you lost, not your reason. Which would you rather have?

Well, obviously, my reason.

Let's talk about money. Where is your money now?

With Jasmine.

Are you sure she hasn't spent some, or all of it already?

Probably.

So what happens to all money, and all things eventually?

I guess they just get passed back and forth from person to person.

Yeah, kind of like a hooker, right?

Huh. Yeah, I never thought of it that way.

How about those legs that squat 485 lbs.? Are you guaranteed to keep them forever?

Might lose them in the next IED.

I see. If money, friendship, love, and even your own body is temporary, and can be taken away from you at any time, but your reason is the one thing that you own, which should you really spend your time developing?

Well, obviously, my reason.

I think so to. Let's talk about some ways we can train your reason to make it just as powerful as your body, and even more so.

[Faulty judgment number 4 is exposed: that Jones can't trust himself, that in losing his friend, his wife, and his money, he has lost everything of any worth, and that this entire episode has had no redeeming value whatsoever. At this point we will talk about training the reason and I will probably introduce him to the Stoics, maybe with Seneca's letters or Epictetus' *Enchiridion*.

The above discourse, while shortened for brevity, would probably take a few sessions and move much slower as I spend time over the days, weeks, and months with Private Smith. Much

of this discourse would take place out of my office and in his training area as I walk or ride in patrols with him, work out in the gym with him, or in those long periods of time during a deployment, hanging around a picnic table in complete boredom. By the time we return from deployment, it is my hope that I have participated, in some small way, in a paradigm shift for Private Smith in which he will obtain a new and healthier worldview and go on to live a life of wellness in his soul with the aid of the Stoics.

C. Vignette Number 2: Staff Sergeant Black's Disintegrating Career

1. Introducing SSG Black.

SSG (Staff Sergeant E-6) Black is a mid-career NCO at a Signal Battalion in Germany. Uncharacteristically, it is my battalion commander in Germany who instructs me to get to know SSG Black and help the command decide whether to retain him in the Army. The Battalion Command Sergeant Major tells me he is a "dirt bag" and needs to be kicked out of the Army. The commander is leaning in that direction but has yet to make up his mind, waiting on my input.

Upon first meeting with him I am rather surprised. SSG Black does not fit the picture I had in my mind of the unfit Soldier who is being considered for chapter from the service. I expected to see an overweight individual with unkempt hair, perhaps in need of a shave who was less than engaging. SSG Black is quite the opposite: a tall, broad-shouldered and handsome man with a deep and confident, yet humble voice and impeccable military bearing. I wonder, for a moment, if I have the right SSG Black and he assures me that I do.

He notices my 82nd Airborne combat patch on my right sleeve, I notice his 3rd Infantry "Audie Murphy" patch, and we begin to swap stories of our time in the "sand box." He has never been to Afghanistan, but had three deployments to Iraq. Like the others, he has endured multiple deployments and, during the surge, he was deployed to Baghdad with the brunt of US Forces in Iraq in 2007-2008. A 25B, Information Technology Specialist (Army computer networks and communications operator), during the surge he was assigned to a Cavalry Squadron in the 3rd Infantry Division in the particularly kinetic Baghdad neighborhood of Adhamiyah. The losses to American forces in the early part of the surge were particularly heavy and SSG Black lost 15 friends in his squadron alone in the first few months of the deployment

before the surge started to take effect in the summer of 2008. As we continue to get to know each other during the coming days and weeks, I find out he received numerous commendations in Iraq during the surge, including a BSMV (Bronze Star with “V” device for valor). As a newly promoted E-5 Sergeant, he took over the “commo platoon” when his platoon sergeant was killed. He accompanied every infantry patrol in sector, and after his heroism under fire, his squadron commander personally selected him, above all the infantry NCOs, to be the NCOIC (non-commissioned officer-in-charge) of the commander’s own PSD (personal security detachment). This particular commander, an infantry officer himself, had not only selected him to be in charge of his personal body guard, but had also adopted him as his own communications officer whenever he left the FOB. When he was reassigned, the squadron officers and NCOs celebrated his successes at Fort Stewart, GA with a hero’s sendoff, wishing him all success and a well-deserved break with a non-deploying signal battalion in Germany.

However, it wasn’t long after he arrived that he missed the close-knit community he enjoyed among his band of brothers from the 3rd ID. Furthermore, he is less than impressed by the “pogues” (pejorative military slang for non-combat support personnel) in the soft signal battalion that is our present assignment, the commander and executive officer of which have not deployed at all in the Global War on Terror, but have camped out in Germany while everyone else was in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Coming to this signal battalion from an infantry battalion in the 82nd Airborne, I well appreciate his sentiments, but am very grateful to be in Germany, sitting at a desk, and going home to my wife and kids at 1700 every day. He agrees it is a good break, but he misses the comradery of combat troops and, strangely enough for him, he misses Iraq.

He tells me his problems began shortly after his arrival in this battalion. Being unimpressed with, virtually, the entire chain-of-command, he felt alone. The fact they were initially impressed with him, constantly asking him what it was like in combat, only further separated him from the others, despite the fact that he was placed in charge of the top-secret security vault and the squad of Soldiers that managed the entire corpus of classified information that was transferred via satellite networks for all of EUCOM (US European Command).

Initially he noticed that he couldn't sleep, and stayed awake at night drinking large amounts of alcohol. He had met a local German girl, with whom he had fallen in love (both with her and the bar she owned). His late night drinking bouts had caused him to miss a couple formations, which for an NCO who is charged with accountability for troops at morning formations, is a serious infraction. He had no respect for the non-combat NCOs who attempted to correct this shortcoming which further isolated him from his peers in the battalion's NCO support channel. Finally, he was arguing with his girlfriend in the bar, someone called the Polizei, and they were waiting for him when he started his car and drove onto the public road. He was charged with DUI and the battalion leadership had had enough. He was now facing a criminal charge that would be handled by the Army pursuant to the current German-American SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement which allows for American military prosecution of crimes committed in Germany by American military personnel), the loss of his career, and the loss of his security clearance with which he was planning on a post-Army career after retirement. Furthermore, he had been recommended for warrant officer by his previous commander. If/when the Warrant Officer Selection Board saw his DUI and Article 15 UCMJ non-judicial punishment, he would certainly be rejected, even if he did manage to stay in the Army, which was not likely.

However, what seemed to hurt him more than any of this was his loss of reputation. He was used to being the “go to guy” for his unit, not the screw-up that everyone talked about. He had been highly acclaimed by his former command for superior service, above and beyond the call of duty, in an extremely arduous combat mission during the most kinetic operation in Iraq. Regarding his current situation, he continues to say, “That’s just not me,” over and again. He doesn’t want to be in Germany in a non-combat unit (although this present assignment is critical in his career progression as a Signal NCO), he doesn’t want to lose his career in the Army, and he can’t stand the fact that the entire command cares nothing for his previous achievements and sees no value in him at all. If they had, they wouldn’t have placed him in such a non-essential job, guarding a security vault. He feels like the best days of his life were spent in the company of warriors, and his life is about to be completely done. Although he is far from suicidal, he wonders what there is to live for.

After a cursory investigation around the unit, I find out some interesting things: From both my observations and the rumor mill, it appears that the chain of command hates SSG Black. Although a DUI is a very serious offense, I also find out that in this unit it isn’t necessarily an automatic expulsion from the Army. In fact, I learn that another NCO, more senior than SSG Black, was convicted of a DUI in that unit a mere two years prior, and he was running the battalion operations section, a relatively popular guy among the command. This led me to wonder why they had such a more visceral response to Black’s DUI. Further investigation reveals that the DUI was not what mattered most to the command, but his public statement in a fit of anger, overheard by the Commander and the Command Sergeant Major that “this unit is full of pagues!” It seemed the command was so offended, perhaps because according to front line combat arms Soldiers, they were indeed rear echelon types, or perhaps that lowly SSG Black

fractured already fragile egos at the highest levels of his battalion, or a combination thereof.

Either way, it seems both the punishment and negative attention he is receiving far outweigh the crime. Indeed, he is going through the harshest Article 15 UCMJ Non-Judicial Punishment treatment I have ever seen in my entire career, in which he lost two pay grades and endured menial tasks, normally performed by a private, for extra duty.

Like other “non-religious” Soldiers, SSG Black would probably not have reached out to me had the commander not initiated my involvement, perhaps to soothe his own conscience. SSG Black is not a Christian, and doesn’t believe Christianity has anything to offer him. He classifies himself as a pagan, a student of Greco-Roman mythology. He believes in many gods and mostly recognizes those of the ancient Greeks. I ask him if he is familiar with Stoic philosophy. He says he has heard of it, but can’t name any Stoic philosophers. I decide that, given he is a student of ancient Greco-Roman mythology, Stoicism is right up his alley and go to work.

2. Diagnosis.

SSG Black, traditionally a high performer in his Army career, is used to holding a very high reputation among his peers and from his command. He is now suffering from a very serious loss of reputation and continues to tell me of his accolades from previous assignments. He furthermore chafes significantly at being demoted to Specialist (E-4) and being forced to pick up cigarette butts in the parking lot as part of his extra duty. It is clear to me that both reputation and ambition mean everything to him and both seem to have fallen significantly due to a short series of misjudgments brought on by post-traumatic stress, drinking, and dissatisfaction with his current assignment. He is also suffering because his future career, and therefore, his future security, are in jeopardy. His diagnosis is one of faulty judgments in three areas of this scenario:

(1) Loss of reputation: SSG Black identifies his self-worth as valued in his reputation, not as a human being endowed with reason. (2) Humiliation at being forced to perform demeaning tasks: This is a faulty judgment based in the idea of entitlement assumed by a person of status in the Army, i.e., the status of a noncommissioned officer. (3) Loss of his imagined future: He believes the only possibility for happiness lies in a secure career in the Army and can't imagine having to scrape by in the civilian world where he would have to start from scratch, including finding a job. I believe the Stoics have much to offer and can help SSG Black compare the world as he wants it to be with the world in which he lives.

a. Regarding reputation.

Marcus Aurelius would tell SSG Black: "Within ten days they who now look on thee as a species of wild beast or ape, will hail thee as a god, if thou return to thy philosophy and the worship of reason."⁶⁰ Obviously reputation is salvageable, and usually rather quickly. Everything changes with time. Indeed SSG Black's once solid reputation was changed through a combination of unhealthy attitude, decisions, actions, and circumstance. It is a fact that a further combination, this time, of healthy attitude, decisions, actions, and circumstance can change it again. However, reputation being an external, the Stoics would tell SSG Black that it is of no real consequence. Indeed, in *On the Shortness of Life*, Seneca criticizes the poor fool who "is exhausted by an ambition that constantly depends on the judgment of others."⁶¹ He further says, "How shameful it is for a man to expire in court when, advanced in age and still trying to win the approval of an ignorant crowd, he is pleading the case of some utterly obscure litigant."⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid. 4.16.

⁶¹ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*.

⁶² Ibid..

In this case, as in most every other case we find, Epictetus' now familiar discourse on what is up to us and what is not up to us is directly relevant and Marcus Aurelius' exhortation to change what you will and accept what you cannot is at the heart of SSG Black's therapeutic needs.⁶³ While he readily admits that his own wrong-doing brought him under this present yoke, it appears his punishment has more to do with the command's revenge on his insult to their prestige than addressing his failures as a Soldier. Given the fact that the more senior Soldier who was guilty of DUI received a much lighter punishment, SSG Black's punishment seems to be a case of unfair selective enforcement, and the harsher-than-normal treatment he is receiving would be perceived as unfair by many military jurists, including his own Army Judge Advocate Trial Defense counsel. Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius all speak rather specifically to those enduring hardship which they feel is undeserved. Whether hardship is deserved or undeserved is of no concern to the Stoics. It is of concern to them if the "sufferer" is complaining about hardship being undeserved when he's actually done something to bring it on himself. They will insist he live in reality, not in the second world in which he's the "good guy" and everyone else is mistaken or corrupt. Actual guilt or innocence and the appropriateness of charges and punishments will take place in a UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice) hearing with both sides presenting their evidence and argument. In this particular case, SSG Black believes he is responsible, to a certain degree, for his present situation. His problem is with being treated more harshly than he believes is fair. While embracing personal responsibility is important to the Stoics, a primary concern for them is how we deal with perceived hardship and that it can be a blessing and a sign of nobility. Seneca writes much about this in his discourse *On Providence*:

⁶³ Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 1 and Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 8.47.

We see wrestlers, who concern themselves with physical strength, matching themselves with only the strongest opponents, and requiring those who prepare them for a bout to use all their strength against them; they expose themselves to blows and hurt, and if they do not find one man to match them, they take on several at a time. Excellence withers without an adversary: the time for us to see how great it is, how much its force, is when it displays its power through endurance. I assure you, good men should do the same: they should not be afraid to face hardships and difficulties, or complain of fate; whatever happens, good men should take it in good part, and turn it to a good end; it is not what you endure that matters, but how you endure it.⁶⁴

b. Regarding unfair treatment.

The Stoics continually call upon the example of Socrates:

In your opinion was Socrates badly treated because he drank down the well-known drink that the Athenians mixed for him just as if it was the elixir of immortality, and discoursed on death right up to the point when it claimed him? Was he ill-used because his blood grew cold and gradually stopped pulsing in his veins, as the chill stole over him? How much more should we envy him than those who are served with goblets of gold, whose wine is diluted with snow held above in a golden bowl of catamite, trained to submit to any treatment, his sexual parts removed in abeyance! These men will measure out whatever they have drunk in vomit, tasting anew with twisted lips their own bile, but he [Socrates] will drink down poison cheerfully and with a happy heart.⁶⁵

In typical Stoic fashion, Seneca also gives a soldierly metaphor SSG Black will surely appreciate, assuming Providence as his ultimate commander:

Why does God afflict the best men with bad health, or grief, or other misfortunes? Because in the army, the bravest men are ordered to carry out dangerous missions: it is the picked soldiers whom a general sends to take the enemy by surprise in an attack by night, or to reconnoiter a route, or to force a garrison to yield their position. Not one of them as he goes off says, “the general has done me a bad turn”, but rather, “this is a sign of his favour.” The same should be said by men who are ordered to undergo trials that would make the faint-hearted and cowards weep: “God has judged us worthy instruments of his purpose to ascertain how much human nature can bear.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Seneca, *On Providence*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 11.

Seneca cautions SSG Black to not be discouraged by his misfortune and ill treatment: “Shun luxury, shun good fortune that makes men weak and causes their minds to grow sodden, and, unless something happens to remind them of their human lot, they waste away, lulled to sleep, as it were, in a drunkenness that has no end.”⁶⁷ And finally, Seneca exhorts, “your good fortune consists in not needing good fortune.”⁶⁸

SSG Black will find similar wisdom, in a less pastoral but much wittier manner, in Epictetus. Epictetus, himself once a slave, certainly has experience in menial tasks, much more menial than a staff sergeant in the United States Army would willingly endure. Continuing on his theme of the worthlessness of all things external to one’s reason, he launches on a discourse of what some would consider a menial task, that of holding another’s chamber pot:

“Shall I hold the pot or not?” [Asks an interlocutor.] I will tell you, it is a more valuable thing to get a dinner than not; and a greater disgrace to be given a thrashing than not to be: so that, if you measure yourself by these things, go off and hold the pot.

“Yes, but that would be beneath me.”

It is you who are to consider that, not I: for it is you who know yourself, and what value you set upon yourself, and at what rate you sell yourself: for different people sell themselves at different prices. [But] ... as soon as a person even considers such question, comparing and calculating the values of external things, he draws close to those who have lost all sense of their proper character.

Only consider at what price you sell your own will and choice, man: if for nothing else, that you may not sell it cheap.⁶⁹

This passage is especially important for SSG Black, who is currently living in his battalion commander’s world, and is miserable because he is being forced to do things which he believes are beneath him, like picking up cigarette butts in the battalion parking lot. SSG Black makes no

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 16.

⁶⁹ Epictetus, *Discourses* 1, excerpts from 2:11-33.

mistake about the fact that it was his own actions that caused his present predicament, but he truly believes his punishment is too harsh and that he is being punished more for expressing his opinion about the command (pogues and REMFs⁷⁰) than anything else. The battalion commander's punishment is having the desired effect of humiliating SSG Black. However, Epictetus would remind him that he has sold his soul to the battalion commander very cheaply. He has done so because he has forgotten his power of choice: the choice to make judgments on externals (like his punishment) in deciding whether they are good or bad. One man's trash is another man's treasure. Instead of being thrilled that he is currently gainfully employed and has no responsibility other than picking up cigarette butts, he chooses to mire himself in personal misery over what he has decided is an unfair punishment. Because his dinner is conditional on picking up cigarette butts, and because he values dinner, why not pick up cigarette butts and happily go to dinner?

Instead of focusing on the demeaning nature of his outward task of extra duty, Epictetus would remind SSG Black that he is failing to focus on the important thing, which lies not outside himself, but inside himself, where he can find the answer to all his problems:

From this day forward, then, whenever we do anything wrong we will ascribe the blame only to the judgment from which we act; and we will endeavor to remove and extirpate that, with greater care than we would abscesses and tumors from the body. In like manner, we will ascribe what we do rightly to the same cause; and we will blame neither slave, nor neighbor, nor wife, nor children as the causes of any evils that befall us.⁷¹

SSG Black has made a judgment on an external. His judgment is that his chain of command are tyrants, treating him unfairly, threatening his career and, thereby, his future well-being, and humiliating him with demeaning tasks. Epictetus has an entire chapter dedicated to

⁷⁰ Initially coined by Vietnam era Soldiers, REMF is a colloquial acronym used in military vernacular that stands for "rear echelon mother fucker."

⁷¹ Epictetus, *Discourses* 11.35.

such an issue in his *Discourses*, specifically entitled “How Should We Behave Toward Tyrants?”⁷² SSG Black could well be reminded of several things Epictetus has to say here. In typical snarky fashion, Epictetus tells us how to deal with bullies:

A tyrant [interlocutor], for instance says, “I am the mightiest of all.” – Well, then, what can you do for me? Can you procure in me desire that is never subject to hindrance? How can you? For do you have it yourself? Or aversion that never falls into what it would avoid?

... In what then, does your power consist? – “All men attend to me.” So do I, to my writing tablet. I wash it and wipe it; and knock in a peg for my oil flask. “Are these things, then, superior to me?” – No: but they are of some use to me, and therefore I attend to them. Why, do I not attend to my ass? Do I not wash his feet? Do I not clean him? Do you not know that everyone pays attends [attention] to himself, and to you, just as he does to an ass? For who pays attention to you as a man? Show me. Who would wish to be like you? Who would desire to imitate you, as he would Socrates? – “But I can cut off your head.” – Well said. I had forgotten that one ought to attend to you as to a fever or the cholera, and that there should be an altar erected for you, as there is to the goddess Fever at Rome.⁷³

More to the point of the real discourse, Epictetus continues:

What is by nature free, cannot be disturbed or hindered by anything but itself. But it is a man’s own judgments that disturb him.⁷⁴

And back to the tyrant interlocutor:

“I will chain your leg.” He who values his own leg cries out, “No, have mercy,” while he who sets the value on his own will and choice says: “If you think it to your greater advantage to do so, chain it.” – “What! Do you not care?” – No: I do not care. – “I will show you that I am master.” – You? How could you be? Zeus has set me free. Or do you think that he would suffer his own son to be enslaved? You are master of my carcass. Take it. – “do you mean to say that when you come into my presence, you will not pay due attention to me?” - No; only to myself; but if you want me to say that I pay due attention to you also, I will tell you that I do, in the same way as I do to my water jug.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Such is the discourse of Epictetus, not the slave, but the free man. The previous teachings of Epictetus above are discourses to free human beings, “offspring” of god, endowed with divine λογος and reason.⁷⁶ As long as SSG Black holds to that reason, he is inherently free, apart and independent from whatever external influence tempts him to slavery, even his own body. One can never be enslaved unless he/she voluntarily submits to slavery by action and choice of reason, and one who voluntarily submits to slavery, who can be freed upon their own decision, can never be a slave or subject to anything at all. This is a very important message for SSG Black, who feels himself a victim, even a slave, to his circumstances; circumstances which he, no doubt, influenced, but were also heavily influenced by his chain of command. So, by employing his reason, it is our goal to help him to first recognize, and second actualize, his God-given freedom from enslavement to the externals which he believes are presently tormenting him.

Marcus Aurelius only affirms the sentiments outlined above as he believes wholeheartedly that, “all unrest proceeds solely from opinion within.”⁷⁷ Instead of blaming his lot on other people and circumstances beyond his control, he would find great peace and personal dignity by focusing solely on what is firmly in his control, namely, his reason:

What infinite vexation is spared the man who looks not to what his neighbor has said, done, or thought, but only to his own deeds, that they be just and holy! For it behooves the good man to cast no curious glance on the character of others, but to run his race straight towards the goal, looking neither to right nor left.⁷⁸

c. Regarding SSG Black’s loss of future security

⁷⁶ Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.13.3: “Slave, will you not bear with your own brother, *who has Zeus as his forebear* and is born as a son of the same seed as you, and is of the same high descent? But if you chance to be placed in some superior station, will you at once set yourself up as a tyrant? Will you not remember what you are, and what people you are ruling over? That they are by nature your relations, your brothers; that they are the *offspring of Zeus?*” (Emphasis mine).

⁷⁷ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.3

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 4.18.

SSG Black must be encouraged to see the world and the source of his vexation as they truly are: the results of his own opinion, his own judgment on what appears to be a harmful thing. He further counsels SSG Black regarding his present predicament that has placed him at odds with his command, presently, and his future career and security:

Call to mind, again and again, the rapidity wherewith all things – existent and quasi-existent alike – are whirled past us and withdrawn from our sight. For substance is an ever-flowing stream; action consistent only in mutability; causes subject to ten thousand variations; and nothing, or next to nothing, holds its place; while hard at hand stretches that abyss of past and future time wherein all things are swallowed up.

Who then but a fool, in the midst of all this, will be puffed with pride, distracted by anxiety, or reduced to wretchedness by the belief that his troubles can endure for long?

Does my neighbor sin against me? Let him look to that himself. His character and his actions are his own. But I now have that which universal Nature wills me now to have, and am faring as my own nature wills me now to fare.⁷⁹

The Stoics, indeed, have much to say to SSG Black regarding his situation. However, they would also advise us to handle his situation gently and pastorally, just as we did with Private Smith. While SSG Black fully appreciates, understands, and takes responsibility for his own actions, again, he feels his punishment is not only much too harsh, but more than he can bear. It will therefore be important to ask the questions which will lead SSG Black from the dark world of his imagination and the impossible world of how he would have it be, and back into the clear lucidity of the world as it actually is: a world in which he agreed to serve in the Army, in which he broke a certain agreement with the Army and is now agreeing to abide by the standards given by his UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice) Article 15 punishment, keeping in mind that he is completely free to refuse should he find the consequences of refusal, which would

⁷⁹ Ibid. 5.23, 25.

certainly be harsher UCMJ punishment, to be preferred. Thus he remains a completely free man and must be reminded of such.

3. Intervention

The dialogue will go something like this, again with my words in italics:

Good afternoon SSG Black. How are things today?

Not good sir. I've lost my reputation, I'm being treated like a dog, and I'm losing my career.

So things haven't gotten any better since we first talked?

No sir. Worse. You know everything that's going on with my Article 15, my loss of rank and pay. But I've lost my reputation as well.

What makes you say that?

Because everyone thinks I'm a terrible Soldier.

That's not true. I think you are a fine Soldier, a hero, a savior of our country. And I'm sure your former chain of command and entire unit at Fort Stewart would attest to that.

Yes sir. But I'm not there now. I'm here in this crappy place and I am not even being respected like an NCO, nothing like I was back in the 3rd ID.

Well, it's a different place, and these are different circumstances. Tell me, how did they treat you when you first arrived here.

Some were impressed that I had just come from Iraq. Some acted like they didn't care.

But the chain of command, they were impressed, right?

Yes sir. They were. That's why they gave me the CMDSA assignment (*responsibility for the classified security vault*). I hated that job. Sitting down in the basement and never seeing sunlight.

But it's a position of great responsibility. It's also necessary for your career progression as a 25B, right?

Right.

So when did you sink in the eyes of your command? Was it when you got the DUI or when you called the commander and command sergeant major "pogues" in front of everyone in the dining facility?

Right sir. I know what you are saying. I just want to get back to where I was.

Ssg Black, we can't go back, we can only go forward. Going back would be regression. Do you think you'll be around this same group of people your entire life?

No sir.

And do you think there is no other group in the entire world where a person of your knowledge, skills, and abilities could be admired, appreciated, and put to work?

Maybe at McDonald's.

Probably a few other places than McDonald's too. So tell me, why is your reputation so important to you in the first place? I mean, why do you care so much what others think about you?

Because reputation is who you are professionally. Publius Syrius said "A good reputation is more valuable than money." My reputation is what gets me promoted and paid in the long run. Furthermore I take a certain amount of pride in who I am.

Right. And what do other people's opinions have to do with who you are?

Well, it's who they think I am.

Who cares what they think? Who cares what anyone thinks? How is it that what anyone thinks matters at all to who you really are?

Because they think I'm a turd!

Are you a turd?

No sir!

Do their thoughts and opinions belong to them or to you?

They belong to them sir.

Who is responsible for their thoughts, you?

No. They are entirely responsible for their thoughts.

Only their thoughts? How about their attitudes and opinions?

Yes, of course they are responsible for that.

So if they think ill of you, or wrongly, or unfairly of you, how is that your responsibility?

It's not.

And if how they think of you is their responsibility, their choice, what does that have to do with you?

I guess it has nothing to do with me.

If it has nothing to do with you, then why should it affect how you feel: happy or sad?

I guess my happiness shouldn't really depend on the attitudes or actions of others. My happiness is up to me and me alone.

[Faulty judgment number 1 exposed, that it is necessary for people to think well of us in order to be happy.]

So whose problem is it?

Well, it's their responsibility for thinking wrongly, but their error in judgment will result in my misfortune. After all, I'm picking up cigarette butts on the parking lot after this meeting.

And how is that misfortune?

Because they are forcing me to do it against my will!

Against your will? Were you drafted into the Army or did you volunteer?

I volunteered.

And you knew that they could send you to any assignment at any place?

Yes.

OK, so you are here voluntarily, by choice, right?

Right.

So tell me, is a gun being held to your head while you pick up cigarette butts?

No, but if I refuse I will be charged with refusal to obey a direct order under an Article 15 and I'll wind up in the stockade.

Would you rather be charged and put in the stockade?

Of course not!

Well then, if you would prefer to pick up cigarettes on the pavement to being charged and sent to the stockade, you should probably do what you prefer, and continue picking up the cigarette butts. Does that make sense?

It's my only option.

No, it's not. You just told me of another one, and I imagine there are a few others we could come up with as well. But the bottom line is, you aren't being forced to pick up cigarette butts. You are doing it voluntarily because you have decided to do so. Is that a fair statement?

Yes. I mean, I could quit doing it at any time. No one can make me pick up cigarette butts or do anything. At the most basic level only I can decide those things.

Exactly. You are a son of God, endowed with freedom. Right now you are choosing to voluntarily pick up cigarette butts. You may quit at any time should you decide that you prefer the alternative, which wouldn't make too much sense. After all, what's so bad about picking up cigarette butts?

Well, it's humiliating?

Why is it humiliating? I pick up cigarette butts on my driveway next to the road every time I mow the grass. Are you not serving everyone who works, visits, or lives in this entire community who comes across the parking lot? Are you not serving your fellow man?

Well, when you look at it like that.

How else do you recommend we look at it SSG Black?

[Faulty judgment number 2 exposed: that certain types of treatment are humiliating and therefore harmful.]

Tell me about your other concern. Was it about how this will negatively impact your future?

Yes sir. This whole thing is going to destroy my future. First of all, I'm trying to get into the warrant officer program and this will seriously hamper that.

Didn't you already try, before this event?

Yes sir, my application was sent back as a "fully qualified" non-select. My commander wrote a stellar recommendation.

Were you under any article 15 or administrative punishment at the time?

No sir. I've never been in any trouble before this.

OK, so what I am understanding here is that we have a completely qualified Soldier, with rave reviews from his commander, combat experience, in the middle of a war, you've never had a single negative counseling statement, but you weren't selected.

Timing was bad, I guess.

And what makes you think that if any of this stuff in Germany had not happened the timing would have been any better?

Nothing, I suppose.

So what is the issue then about your future?

I could lose my security clearance because of this. I could get chaptered out of the Army because of this and have to take a job at McDonald's!

Yes, you could also trip on the stairs and bang your head into the concrete and die. But all those futures you are describing have one thing in common.

What, they all suck?

No, they are all non-existent. All that exists is the eternal present in which we live. Tell me one thing that you can guarantee me about the future.

Uhh, that it will come?

Can you guarantee that?

No. I guess you can't really guarantee anything about the future.

Exactly, because it exists only in imagination, not reality. Otherwise it would be the present and not the future. So you are exhausting a lot of time and energy stressing about things that don't even exist.

But we can affect the future.

Exactly. So affect it as much as you can, as much as is in your power, and leave the rest to someone else, or to Providence. Those things you are worried about, your career, your security clearance: you do whatever you can to effect those. But what about the things that are out of your control, the decisions and actions that belong to others, the weather or even your own health; can you affect those after they have made up their minds or after you become ill or injured?

No, they all belong to someone else or to Providence.

Are you responsible for those decisions or their outcomes?

No, I'm not.

So why worry about them when there are so much better uses of your effort than worrying about something that may or may not even exist when that time comes?

That's a waste of time.

Indeed. However, there is one thing I can guarantee you about the future, if indeed you are here and conscious for it.

What's that sir?

As long as you are on this earth, and perhaps far longer than that, you will have your reason, your little piece of God that rests within you. That will never leave you. And honestly, that's all you will ever need.

[Faulty judgment number 3 exposed: that there is any such thing as future security in externals.]

Through this exercise, though substantially longer in actuality, we can see how a therapeutic conversation might take place with SSG Black who is suffering from faulty judgments of loss of reputation, loss of career, and loss of a secure future. While much more could be said, his therapeutic homework would probably be some selections mentioned above from Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius. Time will tell how SSG Black will prevail through his ordeal and how much he'll be able to bounce back from this event. However, armed with the tools of the Stoics, if he applies them, his chances are very good.

D. Vignette Number 3: CW4 White's Troubled Retirement

1. Introducing CW4 White

In this vignette, I am at Fort Bragg in a Special Operations unit. We are not currently deployed, but the unit and the Soldiers on the teams have deployed numerous times in the past 13 years. In fact, it was Soldiers from this very formation who were the first Americans in Afghanistan in 2001, and they are projected to be the ones to close it down because they are regionally aligned in that area.

The Soldiers in this formation are either special operators or serve in direct support to special operators. Very rarely does one see a private or a 2nd Lieutenant here. They are all seasoned professionals who have had previous careers in other jobs in the Army before coming to Special Operations Command. They underwent a very long and arduous selection before they were assigned here, a selection which the greatest percentage of the Army doesn't even attempt, and of those who attempt it, only a small percentage pass and move on to the unit. When it comes to unconventional warfare, however, these are the world's experts.

They can typically be described as extremely confident, perfectionists. They speak multiple languages, hold various degrees, are in the physical condition of a professional athlete, and have an extremely diverse kit-bag full of skills, from hot-wiring a vehicle and driving it at extreme speeds, to building a house. They can carry on a persuasive conversation in several languages with a local thug on one day and a head of state on another with equal influence. They typically operate in small numbers far away from any US infrastructure, support, or supervision. They are the closest thing to James Bond we have in real life.

Although these Soldiers are much more mature and with many more personal resources than the average Army Soldier, the number of failed marriages in this community is higher than

in other parts of the Army. While these men (currently there are special operations jobs that are only open to men) possess an enormous amount of interpersonal skills, their families suffer because they are deployed more than any other groups of Soldiers in the Army. They stay on the same team for much of their career and develop significant intimate relationships with their teammates in very arduous conditions. The bond that develops between these men takes on an almost sacred quality that rises above their marriages and families. As a result, it is not uncommon to see members of this community that have had multiple marriages in the past 13 years. Being deployed for years, often to the same location, they have developed other relationships in far off corners of the globe where they have lived different lives. Many of these relationships are significant to their mission but become something more, and it is often reported that these men have families abroad as well as their families at home.

However, this particular Soldier, who is the subject of Vignette Number 3, has managed to stay clear of that messiness during his career. I will call him Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CW4) White. CW4 White considers himself a professional in every sense of the word. I met him on our last deployment when he was working on the command staff, an assignment every operator eventually finds himself in when he becomes too senior to stay on the operational team. The command staff is full of former operators, taken from the action before their time, and sentenced to a life of emails, power point, and endless command briefs. Serving as the command chaplain, I saw him every day in the Joint Operations Center (JOC). We both ride motorcycles and are SEC Football fans. He came to the chapel to watch football games and that is where I really got to know him. After the deployment, now that we are back in garrison, he is a frequent visitor to my office to get coffee from my Keurig and chat before he goes back to work. It is common knowledge that he will retire in six months.

One day he comes by for coffee and asks me if I have a minute. I look around my office, put my hands in the air and tell him it is rush hour, as busy as I can possibly get making my third cup of coffee. He smiles at my attempt to show him how busy I am, comes in, and closes the door. It is a rarity that such a senior special operations Soldier would seek out the advice of a chaplain and would not have happened if he did not know me from our time in Afghanistan. In this meeting and ones that follow I learn that his marriage is falling apart. He wife had an extra-marital affair on our last deployment. His second child is about to graduate high school and leave the house. He will shortly be retired, the children will be gone, and he will be living with a woman to whom he's been married for 22 years, but doesn't know anymore. However, she told him about a week after we returned from Afghanistan that she wants a divorce. In the past, he has regaled me with some crazy stories of living his life in Africa, the invasion of Iraq, and his numerous years in Afghanistan, mostly in the Panjwai Valley of Kandahar, but he doesn't recall much about his family. Now he feels like he has lost his operational team and his family. His career is coming to a close and so is his marriage.

His wife is not interested in marriage counseling. She is already living with the person whom she met while we were deployed on the last rotation. He is very angry at her for the affair and for leaving him without fighting for their marriage. He tells me, in her view, there never really was a marriage. She was essentially a lonely single parent who raised two children by herself in the last 22 years while he was having fun globetrotting the world and chasing bad guys. She has now found love and plans to pursue it. The children just want to see her happy. When CW4 White retires, he tells me he will have nothing: no team, no career, no family, and no future without any of that. He is sinking into depression and can't figure a way out. He is not a very religious man and has had negative experiences with church and religion in the past. It

appears to me, however, that he may welcome some advice from the Stoics. He is familiar with Marcus Aurelius, primarily because of the character in the movie *Gladiator*. He says that character reminds him of himself sometimes: an older man who has lost his family and is at the end of his career. I tell him there is much more to the story than that.

CW4 White is familiar with Stoic philosophy much more so than most of his fellow service members in the Army, having been forced to come to grips with hard times and emerge victorious on the other side. However, he has never put the two together. I will start with Epictetus's introduction in *Enchiridion*, on what is up to us and what is not, but he will be able to move quickly onward. His problem seems to be with going through the changing seasons of life. It is very unfortunate that his wife is leaving him, but he has the opportunity to pursue a new relationship. His children may not know him well, but now that he is retiring, he will have time to reengage with them and further develop a relationship with them. However, he is having a hard time recognizing these things right now because of some faulty judgments he is giving to several different things.

2. Diagnosis.

In examining CW4 White's story I can point to two at least two significant faulty judgments he is making in his present situation. (1) His rising in rank and seniority and retiring at a high position with a good pension is not seen as a good thing. Instead, he is dwelling on loss of his team, his self-identity as a "team guy," and his career in the Army. (2) He is extremely angry at his wife. He can't believe she cheated on him and left their marriage after so many years. He feels betrayed and has difficulty sleeping at night because of this. He is unable to forgive her. He feels like she does not deserve his forgiveness after what she did. After all, he was serving his country and his family by constantly putting himself in harm's way for so many

years while she spent the money he earned. He was completely faithful to her while he was deployed. He says he will never be able to forgive her. We will have to specifically address these two issues in order for CW4 White to be restored to health and this will require some patient, gentle, and pastoral dialogue, again, using the Socratic method to encourage him to come to a wiser conclusion on his own.

a. Regarding Uncomfortable Change

The Stoics, mostly discoursing late in their years, are very familiar with change. In Seneca's Letter XII he writes about the change he endures in becoming an old man. In it, he sees himself in a childhood playmate of his who has become old. CW4 White, in losing his team, his status as an operator, and assuming the anonymity which must surely come with retirement, is actually grieving old age. The Army is, after all, a young man's game which is why we are forced out no later than our 61st birthday. CW4 White has loved his career and has much to be thankful for, but believes he has very little to look forward to.

Seneca would readily disagree. He tells us in Letter XII:

[W]e should cherish old age and enjoy it. It is full of pleasure if you know how to use it. Fruit tastes most delicious just when its season is ending. The charms of youth are at their greatest at the time of its passing. It is the final glass which pleases the inveterate drinker, the one that sets the crowning touch on his intoxication and sends him off into oblivion. Every pleasure defers till its last its greatest delights. The time of life which offers the greatest delight is the age that sees the downward movement.⁸⁰

While CW4 White is certainly healthy in body and only 45 years old, he is not thinking about the death of his body, but the death of his long, enjoyable career. But Seneca is speaking broadly about life and necessarily, constant change; the beginning and end of endless cycles of life and

⁸⁰ Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 12.

existence. Regarding his uncertain future, which is wide open and full of possibilities, Seneca would tell CW4 White:

If God adds the morrow we should accept it joyfully. The man who looks for the morrow without worrying over it knows a peaceful independence and a happiness beyond all others. Whoever has said "I have lived" receives a windfall every day he gets up in the morning.⁸¹

CW4 White should therefore be eternally grateful for his career in Army Special Operations instead of focusing on the bitterness that it is now over. He was chosen out of a very few, and envied by many, for serving in such a capacity for his career. Indeed, his retirement should be a joyful time of gratitude for the blessings of God that gave him such a joyous life of service to his fellow man.

It is interesting to note that CW4 White has an interest in Marcus Aurelius, himself an aged man at the writing of *Meditations*, and also a military man who understands the changing seasons of life and that there is nothing to be feared by change:

Does any man fear change? Why, what can happen without change? What is nearer and dearer to the universal nature? Canst thou thyself take a hot bath without wood undergoing change? Can thy body receive nutriment save by a process of change in the food? Can any useful action whatever be consummated without change? And canst thou not see that this dreaded change in thyself is of the same ilk with these, and equally necessary to the nature of the Whole?⁸²

In capitalizing the word "whole," the translator references the view of the divine nature of the universe itself in Stoic physics, addressed in Chapter 1, and specifically to the understanding of our communal relationship to the cosmos. He continues on this theme of change being necessary in our teamwork to the Whole by stating, "All bodies are passing through the universal substance, as through a wintry torrent; all concrete and co-operative to the [W]hole, as the bodily

⁸¹ Ibid., 59.

⁸² Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 7.18.

members to each other.”⁸³ CW4 White understands teamwork, and a popular Army aphorism is, “There’s no ‘I’ in team.” He understands that what’s best for the team is change. New personnel get trained and gain experience while they are a junior member of the team, after which they are promoted to senior status and are charged with training the juniors. Eventually they rise to the rank wherein they lead the entire team, training their subordinates who will eventually take leadership of the unit and, if they are trained properly, will do it even better than the previous leadership. CW4 White intuitively understands this, and can now be led to apply this in a manner consistent with universal *oikeiosis*. He already understands this on the micro, or team level. Taking it to a more macro, or universal level, should not be hard for him.

Marcus Aurelius would leave him with these words regarding his future, an aphorism which will undoubtedly sound familiar as he has already considered similar ideas on his own, many times, going into uncertain combat, not sure whether he would survive:

Think of thyself as one that is dead, - one that whose existence is now closed, and live the days that are left thee in harmony with Nature, as though they were but a sequel to thy life. Love whole-heartedly that which befalls thee and is spun with the web of thy fate. For what more fitting?⁸⁴

No doubt, CW4 has faced uncertainty and death many times. It is now his opportunity to face an uncertain future outside of the Army with the same courage with which he comforted himself while in combat. With the wisdom of the Stoics and the character displayed in his past, he is certainly up to the challenge if his thinking can be adjusted to reflect the nature of reality.

a. Regarding forgiveness of his wife.

Forgiveness is something most everyone considers to be a good thing, however misunderstood the notion may be. Western civilization, with its basis in Christian Ethics,

⁸³ Ibid. 7.19.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 7.56-57.

understands it as a virtue. After all, most of us are quite familiar with Alexander Pope's famous line from *An Essay on Criticism*, "To err is human. To forgive is divine." Christians understand this as a mandate from God, given by Christ many times over in the New Testament. However, it seems the New Testament primarily teaches we should forgive because if we do not, God will not forgive us.⁸⁵ Not being a particularly religious man and not necessarily fearful of eternal punishment that would be entailed in an otherwise arbitrary commandment, CW4 White is in need of a more substantive discourse on forgiveness rather than what he considers to be a superstitious enjoinder carrying the threat of eternal damnation. In this particular case, Seneca's *On Anger* gives some noteworthy instruction regarding why forgiveness is so important, not nearly as much as to the one forgiven as to the one who has been wronged:

How much better it is to heal a wrong than to avenge one! Vengeance takes considerable time, and it exposes a man to too many injuries while only one causes him resentment; we always feel anger longer than we feel hurt. How much better it is to change our tack and not meet fault with fault! No man would consider himself well balanced if he returned the kick of a mule or the bite of a dog. 'Those animals,' you say, 'do not know they are doing wrong.' In the first place, how unjust is the man who thinks that being a human debars one from forgiveness! Secondly, if the fact of their lacking judgment exempts all other creatures from your anger, you should place in the same category every man who lacks judgment; for what does it matter if he does not resemble dumb animals in his other qualities if he does resemble them in the one respect that excuses dumb creatures, however they offend, a mind shrouded in darkness?⁸⁶

And reminiscent of Christ's admonition in Mathew 18:21-22 of forgiving a person multiple times (up to "seventy times seven"), Seneca goes into detail to explain why:

He did wrong. Well, was it his first offense? Will it be his last? There is no reason for you to believe him even if he says, 'I will not do it again': not only will he offend, but another will offend against him and the whole of life will be a cycle of error. Unkind error should bring out our kindness. ... If at some time, how much better is it for you to abandon anger than to wait for it to abandon you? Or will this inner tumult continue forever? Do you see how troubled a life you

⁸⁵ Found primarily in the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 6:14, Mark 11:26, and Luke 11:4, all commands issued by Christ, and a foundation of Christian Ethics.

⁸⁶ Seneca, *On Anger* 3.27.

are condemning yourself to? For what will a man's life be like if he is swollen with anger?⁸⁷

CW4 White needs to be healed of the wound his wife gave him. In being angry and refusing to forgive, he will merely be picking at the scab, like a child, and not allowing healing to take place.

Marcus Aurelius goes directly to the reality of the heart of human nature regarding our need to forgive others:

When any man sins against thee, let thy first reflection be: "With what conception of Good and Evil did he commit this sin?" When this is clear to thee, astonishment and anger will give place to pity. For if thy conception of the Good be still identical with, or similar to, his, it is a matter of duty to pardon him. But if thou hast passed the stage in which these things seem either good or ill, thou wilt be the more ready to show kindness to one who is yet in darkness.⁸⁸

Reflecting with Seneca, Marcus Aurelius believes it is necessary to consider whether the offending person actually knows better. For what good is it to beat a child for not understanding quantum mechanics? Would we kill a horse for kicking us? They simply don't know how to comprehend such matters. All the more, the Stoics say, should we treat an adult human who doesn't know right from wrong. It only makes sense to pity them, not punish them. In a discourse entitled *On Mercy*, written to the Emperor Nero (apparently without much effect), Seneca says,

It is surely in no way fair that a man should be ruled more severely and harshly than a dumb beast. And yet when a skillful breaker of horses is at work he does not subject the creature to the terror of frequent beatings; for it will become timorous and obstinate if you do not soothe it with caressing hand.⁸⁹

However, as far as treating a human being who is unskilled in knowing right from wrong, Seneca says, "No creature is more fretful, or to be treated with greater skill, than man, and none should

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 7.26.

⁸⁹ Seneca, *On Mercy* 1.16.

be treated with greater forbearance.”⁹⁰ If we forgive animals, and treat them kindly, then so much more should we treat our fellow human beings, acting out the principle of *oikeiosis*.

CW4 White will very likely reply that he was married to this woman for 22 years, and that she knows better. Marcus Aurelius can give him the further direction he needs with nine practical steps to take when we perceive that someone has sinned against us:

[1] When thy neighbor sins against thee, consider first what is thy relationship to mankind [*oikeiosis*], reflecting that we all exist to serve each other, and that, in especial, thy life-work is to champion thy fellow-creatures as the bull defends his herd and the ram his flock. Again, approach the matter from the first principle that, if the atomic theory is false, Nature must be the power that governs the universe; and, in this case, the worse is created for the good of the better, and the better for the good of one another.⁹¹

Here, Marcus Aurelius refers to the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis*, that we are members of the human community with God as Nature, or Providence, ruling over all, and to the Stoic view that nothing happens that is not for the ultimate good of every member of the cosmic community. Therefore, when something happens that we cannot control and that we do not prefer, we should not be indignant because Providence works for the good of all, and if it is for the good of all, as members of the cosmopolitan community, it is for the good of us individually, as well.

[2] Secondly, call to mind what manner of men these sinners are, at their tables, on their couches, and in the rest of their life. Chief of all, remember the many forms of constraint laid on them by their principles, and the foolish pride with which their very sins inspire them.⁹²

Here he calls us to consider the human challenges of the person who grieved us: that they have problems, issues, and wounds, all constraining them from acting rationally and according to their reason. They often act out of ignorance and foolish pride. We certainly can't expect them to act like sages, and we shouldn't. CW4 White's wife has certainly endured many hardships in the

⁹⁰ Ibid. 1.17.

⁹¹ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*. 11.18.

⁹² Ibid.

past 22 years of his Army career and indeed bears her own emotional scars from both the Army and from CW4 White's neglect during all those years of war. The sum of these hardships with a myriad of causal factors has likely resulted in her decision to leave him and pursue another and anger is not the appropriate response.

[3] Thirdly, reflect that, if these actions of theirs are right, it is no duty of thine to take them amiss; while if they are wrong it is clear that they err through ignorance, not of free-will. For as no soul is willingly deprived of truth, so neither is it willingly deprived of the power of treating every one according to his merits. Whence it comes that nothing pricks a man more than to be spoken of as unjust, cruel, avaricious, or, in a word, as a bad neighbor.⁹³

Marcus Aurelius, here, calls us to remember that if CW4 White's wife either erred through ignorance, as in the paragraph above, or through some misjudgment on her own part. She is not, at her heart, evil. After all, she dedicated herself to him and his children for 22 years under very harsh circumstances and would not want to be recognized as "unjust, cruel, avaricious, or a bad neighbor."

[4] Fourthly, bethink thee thou has vices enough of thine own, and art a sinner with the rest. True, thou holdest aloof from certain errors, yet thy character is prone to fall into them, though cowardice, love of reputation, or some equally despicable motive may save thee from such overt commission.⁹⁴

Here, CW4 White is reminded that he is no saint himself and that a little humility is, perhaps, in order. Perhaps he has been tempted to cheat on his wife, as well, on lonely deployments. Perhaps he has seen others do it, but out of a cowardly fear of reputation and standing in the Army's leadership, he didn't succumb to the temptation. Perhaps it could be said that he cheated on her with the Army and war as his mistress. While he is to be lauded for remaining faithful, at

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

least in form, perhaps his reasons for remaining faithful aren't necessarily out of love and purity, but out of vice. This is another reason why anger is not an appropriate response.

[5] Fifthly, remember thou has no sure knowledge that they sin at all. For many acts are merely means to some hidden end, and, in general, much is to [be] learn[ed] before one man can pronounce with certainty on the action of another.⁹⁵

While, in western society, people are quick to judge spousal cheating and leaving, there are some circumstances we could all find that would make it at least understandable and very forgivable.

Unless CW4 White can climb into the soul of his wife and fully understand why she made the decision to cheat and leave (an impossible task), he can never pronounce, with certainty, that she did an evil thing because he can never truly know her side of the story with perfect intimacy.

[6] Sixthly, when utter vexation and impatience overpower thee, take refuge in the thought that man's life is but for a moment, and anon we shall all be under the sod.⁹⁶

Here, CW4 White is reminded that life is extremely short and this act of his wife, and the entire drama it has produced in his life, are but a tiny, infinitesimal event that will have no harm whatsoever to him after his life on earth is over.

[7] Seventhly, consider that it is not man's actions that trouble us, - for they are situate in the agent's ruling faculty, - but purely our own opinions on them. Then take this judgment of thine that pronounces this or that an object of terror, dare to cast it out, and anger vanishes with it. - 'How is this to be done?' you ask. - By reflecting that another's sin is not thy dishonor.⁹⁷

This particular instruction goes back to Epictetus' enjoinder that those things that are not up to us cannot hurt us; that this particular action (in leaving and filing for divorce) comes from the ruling faculty of CW4 White's wife, not himself, and is no cause of terror to him. Her sin is not his dishonor and nothing by which he should be threatened or harmed.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

[8] Eighthly, bear in mind how much harder to endure are the consequences of the anger and grief that ensue on an act than is the act itself which evoked these feelings.⁹⁸

This enjoinder is particularly powerful. It is not loneliness that is bothering CW4 White as much as it is anger, hurt, and resentment. After all, he has thrived in the majority of his career being absent from his wife. It is the specific act of unfaithfulness and the wrongfulness, in his mind, of the episode that is giving him sleepless nights, anger, angst, and resentment, not just mere absence from his life. He will feel much better when he decides to accept what he cannot change and move on with enjoying life.

[9] Ninthly, reflect that kindness is invincible, provided only it be genuine and not the specious grin of hypocrisy. For how can the extremity of insolence touch thee if thou preserve thy good will to the sinner, meekly admonishing him as opportunity offers and quietly pointing out the error of his ways at the very moment he is meditating thy injury.⁹⁹

CW4 White takes pride in his rather manly career of service in Army Special Operations. He takes pride in his historic display of manly courage, strength, nerve, and bravery. Marcus Aurelius understands the Soldier and his need to fulfill these obligations of service. He understands the need for constant self-improvement in the Army Infantry aphorism of, “Always continue to improve your fighting position.” It seems he is speaking directly to CW4 White as Aurelius closes this discourse:

Remember these nine rules and guard them as though they were so many gifts from the Muses. Begin even now, while life is still left thee, to be a man. But shun flattery as diligently as thou shunnest anger. Both are detrimental to the community and both lead to harm. And in anger let the thought be ever present that indignation is not a form of courage, but that meekness and gentleness are not only more human but also more manly, and it is he who possesses these that has strength, nerve, and bravery, not the angry and discontented.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

... To ask that the wicked shall not sin is an act of madness, inasmuch as it aims at the impossible. But to give them leave to sin against others and demand they shall not sin against thee is not madness, but cruelty and tyranny.¹⁰⁰

The above teachings from both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius are directly relevant to CW4 White's present predicament in the two primary faulty judgments he has brought up: (1) That the change brought on from losing his place on his team of operators, and his retirement from service is a bad thing, and (2) that forgiveness of his wife is both unjust and impossible.

3. Intervention

My dialogue with him over a few visits will probably go something like this (again, with my words in italics):

How's it going today, Chief (Chief Warrant Officers in the Army Special Operations community are referred to a "Chief.")?

Well sir, I'm one day closer to becoming a civilian.

Nobody wears the uniform forever, Chief.

Yeah, the guy checking ID cards at the Yadkin Road Gate is a retired Command Sergeant Major. Hard to believe he was once the CSM for 4th Brigade in the 82nd.

That would be a great job for you, Chief, checking ID's at the gate. All those years of special operations training and experience would probably come in real handy!

Right sir [laughing and shaking his head]. Nope, I'm gonna get as far away from this place as I can. But it's gonna be weird being a civilian. I've been wearing this uniform since I was 21 years old. I'm not sure what it's like to live outside of the Army.

Well, it must be ok. People do it all the time and most of them want nothing to do with the military.

Right, but it's just going to be really weird. I've identified myself as a Soldier for so long, and as a Green Beret. Now I'm just gonna be "Joe civilian."

What's so bad about that? You've earned it.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

I don't know. I went to my sister's house for Memorial Day weekend. The wife was with her boyfriend and the kids were hanging with their college buddies. I was hanging around my sister's family and friends and really felt out of place, like I didn't belong there.

How's that?

They were a bunch of civilians. They don't understand me or what I've done with my life. They are living in a completely different world.

Yeah, so are the aboriginal tribes in Australia.

I might as well be living with them. I've got nothing in common with them at all. *You sure about that Chief? I mean how many fingers and toes did they have?*

I get it. Yeah, we are all human.

Exactly. So what makes you different?

I'm a Soldier!

That's what you do, what you have done, and what you will continue to do for six more months. Are you defining yourself by what you do or what you are?

I've always defined myself and my personal identity by what I have done, sir.

But you won't be doing that six months from now. When you entered the Army 24 years ago who were you?

I was a new college grad.

No, not what you did. Who were you?

I was Bob White.

And who or what is Bob White?

I don't know, a person? A human?

So what about that has changed in the past 24 years?

I've had some experiences that have grown me, made me wiser.

So Bob White is an older, more experienced person now. And that's a bad thing because ...?

It's not a bad thing.

All those experiences you have had, all the knowledge, wisdom, and insight you have been given: don't you think you have something to offer?

I suppose so. It's just a huge change.

And this change, that's a new thing for you?

Sure is.

So in the Army you never experienced change, i.e., from civilian to basic trainee, from basic trainee to infantry NCO, from infantry NCO to Special Forces NCO, from Special Forces NCO to Warrant Officer and detachment command team? From detachment command ...

Roger sir. I got it. Yeah, there's been lots of changes and this next one is another change in life.

Yeah, that appears to be the case.

But I'm getting divorced because my wife cheated on me and my kids treat me like they don't know me.

Well do they?

I guess not like other kids know their fathers.

How could they. You've been called to perform a very special service for them and for our entire country. You sacrificed time with them for the better whole of society.

Yeah, but the price was in losing out on my kids.

Have you lost out on them permanently? What's stopping you from starting a new relationship with them? Hell, neither one of them has even finished college or gotten married yet. They haven't even had kids. Sounds to me like you've got a lot of living with them left to do.

Well, that's one thing I'm looking forward to, sir.

Yeah, me too.

[Faulty judgment (1) exposed: that the change brought on by retirement is a bad thing and there is nothing to look forward to in a future outside of the Army.]

I'm just so pissed at my wife, I won't ever forgive her for what she did to me while I was down range serving our country.

You know, Chief, you've eventually got to let that anger go or you are going to wind up a bitter old man.

She doesn't deserve forgiveness!

I'm not worried about her. I'm worried about you, and you deserve to be free of the decision that she made.

And how do I do that?

Well, first let's consider some things that Marcus Aurelius said.

Because CW4 White is already familiar with Marcus Aurelius, and therefore receptive to what he has to say, I will talk him through the nine steps of forgiveness outlined above and will help him expose faulty judgment number 2, that his wife is undeserving of forgiveness and he can't forgive her. As time goes on, I will give him some readings from Seneca as well, probably short excerpts from *On Anger* and *On Mercy*. Perhaps CW4 White will come to admire the Stoics and will focus on this wisdom more after he retires and has more time to reflect on himself and his family.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

1. Summary.

At the beginning of this paper I inserted a quote from Cicero regarding his admonition that we learn to doctor ourselves. This notion is an important for therapists to consider. After all, the oft quoted aphorism from Maimonides, “If you give one man a fish, you will feed him for a day, but if you teach him to fish you will feed him for a lifetime,” stands to reason. Stoic philosophy is the perfect venue to conduct such training and has thus been the thesis of this paper from the very beginning.

This thesis began with the notion given in Nancy Sherman’s *Stoic Warriors*, that members of the military community are already Stoic in their thinking, that the entire military is Stoic in ethos. Having existed in the military community for almost all of my adult life, I would have to agree, even though the military wouldn’t call this a Stoic ethos as much as they would merely call it an ethos of reality. A friend once told me before I became an Army chaplain that life happens 100 miles per hour faster in the Army than it does in civilian life. While many civilians live rugged lives, the large majority of civilians in the United States are relatively sheltered from the rawness of war. After all, this continent has not been invaded by a foreign army since the War of 1812, and the last great war of suffering that took place on American soil was the American Civil War, which came to a close 150 years ago. Having a traditional life of hardship, more so than their civilian counterparts, military service members have developed a philosophy that is very Stoic in nature quite simply because the nature of their business demands it. It therefore stands to reason that Stoic philosophy itself would be directly relevant to therapists in the military, as most of its tenets are already understood by service members.

After a brief sketch of Stoic philosophy centering in ethics, I have provided three vignettes in which this theory is tested. The subjects of these vignettes have been combinations of a whole cast of characters with whom I have shared many years in the Army. Each vignette represents real issues in which I have used Stoic philosophy as a therapeutic resource when the Army's "Solution Focused Counseling" ran out of options. The main problem with Solution Focused Counseling is that it assumes what the Soldier is complaining about is a legitimate problem just because the Soldier believes it is. Soldiers don't want to have problems and, in my experience, have derived great comfort from Stoicism.

The first vignette is of the young Soldier in combat who experiences existential loss for the first time in his life. The second is a mid-career Soldier who has grown comfortable with the idea of a secure future which he is about to lose and has never considered the idea that there probably isn't any such thing as a secure future dependent on externals in the first place. The third Soldier is a senior warrant officer preparing to enter the uncharted waters of retirement who is also suffering from a divorce and unable to forgive his wife. All three Soldiers are in need of seeing reality as it truly is, that is, to see the room with the lights on. Once the lights are turned on, and the darkness is illuminated, the world becomes a much less scary place.

2. A Way Ahead

I have attempted to show in this paper a way ahead for therapy in the US Military for caregivers, primarily chaplains. As the military moves further toward a secular ethos, the role of the chaplain-therapist in a pluralistic environment, and the lines that must necessarily be drawn, often leave the chaplain with no tools in his/her kitbag when using their own faith as the primary source of therapy. Chaplains have had to become much more creative than the standard line, "Because God said so," that has been overused in the past with disastrous results. It is time for a

serious look at ancient philosophy in general and Stoic ethics in particular for aid in answering how to live life with whatever comes.

When the subject of ethics comes up, most people in the military, as in most professions, immediately conclude that ethics is a system of professional standards of conduct. I have had many “ethics” classes in my professional training as an officer. By and large the classes consist of a list of rules that must be followed to avoid losing one’s career: rules and standards of conduct on fraternization with subordinates, the limits on monetary value of gifts one may receive, the proper expenditure of appropriated funds, and the like. As a licensed attorney I had to take a professional ethics class entitled Professional Responsibility and pass the Multi-State Professional Responsibility exam which tested an understanding of the Code of Professional Responsibility regarding attorney-client privilege, zealous representation of clients, the rules regarding client trust accounts, and many others. Suffice it to say that ethics in today’s professions are a compilation of standards of professional responsibility. They are, in essence, a list of rules and have little, if anything, to do with therapy.

However, these standards of professional responsibility, while they are not ethics in strict definition, are based upon ethical norms, the foundation of which is ethical philosophy. Ethics, in the philosophical sense and in the sense used in this paper, more aptly describes the action-inducing ideas, attitudes, and opinions that have their basis in a proper understanding of reality based in physics and logic. As has been stated numerous times above, our emotions are based on our own judgments about reality as it truly is versus the way we prefer it to be. Philosophical ethics deals with a proper relation between ourselves and our own decision and action-inducing attitudes as we both contemplate and live in reality. A healthy disposition toward the world and our place in it, the Stoics argue, will produce a healthier, more satisfying life. It is in this vein

that ethics becomes therapeutic and well-suited for use in the arduous existence of military service.

Because Stoic philosophical ethics is not a faith, and its tenets seem to agree with virtues that cross religions, faith groups, and cultures, it is an excellent resource in a post-modern secular Army. As explained and demonstrated above, Stoic ethics can be useful in many situations military therapists may encounter. Certainly further research involving chaplains, social workers, and mental health professionals should be conducted to determine how best to implement these tactics into a military therapeutic setting. In my professional experience, the wisdom given by the ancient Stoics has been both helpful and well-received by Soldiers of many different faith backgrounds and belief systems, and with positive, and even life-changing, results. Certainly much is to be gained by following the advice of ancient wisdom.

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