

**Cicero's Search for Yoga**

By

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## Abstract

In *Books 3 and 4* of the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero presents the ideal of a Stoic sage, free from the emotions of desire, wild gladness, fear, and distress. The sage is described as having a tranquil mind, and is self-controlled, moderate, temperate, consistent and self-contained. However, Cicero himself struggles to reach the ideal, bringing us to an uncomfortable chasm between precept and practice. The primary aim of this project is to examine this division; how is it that we can conceive of ideals that are so pristine, and yet fall short of them without repose?

This project is divisible into two primary parts. The first involves a general examination of sage-ideals. The ideal of the Stoic sage that Cicero presents happens to have much in common with the ideal of the sage of settled intelligence, which is found in the *Bhagavad Gita* of Indian Philosophy. I argue that these ideals share in common the attributes of having evenness of mind and establishment in intelligence, of being beyond many of the emotions within the typical range of human experience, and of being both self-controlled and able to find contentment within.

The second part of this project examines Cicero's difficulties embodying his own ideal; although he attempts to cast his own distress away and banish it as a useless emotion, even going so far as calling it "entirely voluntary," his reflections do not appear sufficient to remove it. In the face of this difficulty, I argue that the Stoic notion that emotions are voluntary is inaccurate. The reason is that although we possess a capacity for voluntary action (made possible through our capacity to reason), we also have beliefs and emotional responses that were acquired in early, pre-rational development. These are deeply rooted, and cannot be changed through reason alone. In the face of this truth, I turn to Bhakti-Yoga, the Yoga of love and devotion, as an opening to alternative approaches to healing the human heart, and becoming oneself.

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## Introduction

Is human emotion itself a problem, one to eradicate altogether? Or is it that we must learn to channel our emotions towards higher phases of development? — This problem seems to become especially pressing when we consider emotions not in their more amusing or pleasant aspects, but rather in their more damaging and debilitating forms. Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, for example, involve his confrontation with the emotion of grief after the death of his daughter, his only child. In *Books 3 and 4* of the *Tusculans*, Cicero presents a Stoic ideal, free from the emotions of desire, wild gladness, fear, and distress, instead having temperate feelings aligned with reason. The issue, however, is that although Cicero's sage-ideal has a tranquil mind, and is self-controlled, moderate, temperate, consistent and self-contained (52), Cicero himself struggles to reach the ideal, bringing us to an uncomfortable chasm between precept and practice.

The primary aim of this project is to examine this division; how is it that we can conceive of ideals that are so pristine, and yet fall short of them without repose? In attempts to answer this question, this project is divisible into two parts. The first part involves a general examination of sage-ideals; that is, the ideal of the Stoic sage that Cicero presents happens to have much in common with the ideal of the sage of settled intelligence, which is found in the *Bhagavad Gita* of Indian Philosophy. In that work, it is interesting to note that the core struggle of the poem's protagonist comes from a similar emotional place as Cicero's problem; Arjuna is a soldier tasked to fight injustice, but finds himself unwilling because of profound distress, a crippling depression. Arjuna is guided out of his depression by Krishna, a deity representing his symbolic conscience and illumined reason. As a means to remedy Arjuna's depression and guide him towards the performance of his duty, Krishna presents the ideal of the sage of settled intelligence,

someone who is “untroubled in the midst of sorrows and is free from eager desire amid pleasures, [...one] from whom passion, fear, and rage have passed away [...], without affection on any side, who does not rejoice or loathe as he obtains good or evil” (Radhakrishnan 111). — I argue, then, that the Stoic sage and the sage of settled intelligence share in common the attributes of having evenness of mind and establishment in intelligence, of being beyond many of the emotions within the typical range of human experience, and of being both self-controlled and able to find contentment within.

The second part of this project examines Cicero’s difficulties embodying his own ideal; although he attempts to cast his own distress away and banish it as a useless emotion, even going so far as calling it “entirely voluntary,” his reflections do not appear sufficient to remove it. In the face of this difficulty, I argue that the Stoic notion that emotions are voluntary is inaccurate. The reason is that although we possess a capacity for voluntary action (made possible through our capacity to reason), we also have beliefs and emotional responses that were acquired in early, pre-rational development. These are deeply rooted, and are not subject to change through reason alone. Thus, we must accept these emotional parts of ourselves as carrying a momentum which is beyond complete voluntary control. — In the face of this realization, I shift the focus to the work of Vivekananda, who argues that the human personality is comprised of four different faculties: thinking, feeling, willing, restraining. — If this is the case, then the flourishing of one’s personality demands much more than merely the effective exercise of reason. One will never be on the winning end of the war against themselves without a balanced approach. And so, in the face of the problem of wisdom, I turn to Bhakti-Yoga, the Yoga of love and devotion, as an opening to alternative approaches to healing the human heart, and becoming oneself.

## Part 1:

### Similarities Between Sages of East and West

#### 1.1 Virtue's Void

*Book 3* of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* involves a confrontation with the concept of grief, in search for a satisfactory concept of wisdom. The discussion begins with Cicero stating, "What am I to think, Brutus? Are we not made up of a mind as well as a body?" (Cicero 3). And yet, Cicero points out that although the science of healing the body has been extensively explored, there appears to be no equivalent for the mind (3).

What nature has in fact given us are only the tiniest sparks of understanding, which we, corrupted as we are by our wrongful habits and beliefs, quickly put out again. Seeds of the virtues are inborn in our characters, and if they were allowed to mature, nature itself would lead us to perfect happiness. But as it is, no sooner are we born and received into the family than we are surrounded by all kinds of corrupting influences, and the most wrongheaded beliefs (3).

There is a distinct illness that is insufficiently attended to, found in the mind: "the judging faculty itself is infirm" (3). — One witnesses this illness taking manifestations in the most multifaceted of forms, as society at large corrupts us; "it is then that we become thoroughly infected with corrupt beliefs and secede from nature absolutely" (Cicero 4). Thus we witness people chasing a shadow-shape of virtue, as false-ideals are praised.

For real glory is a solid thing, clearly modelled and not shadowy at all: it is the unanimous praise of good persons, approval sounded without bias by those who know how to judge excellence of character. [...] But there is another sort of glory, which pretends to imitate the first, and which is rash and ill-considered, frequently praising misdeeds and faults [...], a perverted caricature of the beauty that belongs to true distinction (4).



Philosophy, Cicero claims, is the medicine of the mind (5), clipping away false belief in the name of letting *true virtue* emerge. — The search, then, is for wisdom, as the latter represents one’s embodiment of true virtue.

## 1.2 The Stoic Scheme

To understand Cicero’s portrayal of the wise ideal, we must first turn to his explanation of the Stoic classification of emotions. — In his discussion of the emotions, Cicero preserves the common distinction between *emotion* and *reason*, espoused by Pythagoras and Plato (Cicero 43). “In the part which has a share in reason they put tranquility (that is, a calm and quiet consistency); in the other, the turbulent motions of anger and desire, which are opposed to reason and inimical to it” (43). According to this distinction, a mind in alignment with reason is *wise*, which brings us to Zeno’s definition of emotion, supported by Cicero: “a movement of mind contrary to nature and turned away from right reason” (43).

There is, according to the Stoic scheme, a fourfold division of emotion based on two primary categories: things thought to be good, and things thought to be evil. Of things thought to be good, we find on one hand the emotion of desire, which is directed at future goods; on the other hand we find the emotion of excessive gladness, which is directed at present goods. Of things thought to be evil, we find on one hand the emotion of fear, which is directed at future evils; on the other hand we find the emotion of distress, which is directed at present evils. Moreover, the things we fear are the things which bring one distress when actualized, and the things we desire are the things which bring one excessive gladness when actualized (Cicero

43-44). — Cicero further comments that excessive gladness involves “a hollow sort of uplift,” making it “an unreasoning elevation of mind” (44).

All people seek what they think is good, and turn away from what they think is bad (Cicero 44). The problem is that the manner in which these functions are performed is often unwise. Firstly, people can mistakenly think that things are good or bad, and secondly, they can have feelings that are out of proportion with the goodness or badness of things. — These unwise judgements, when manifested as one’s feelings, constitute emotion. And so, to the Stoics, emotions are unwise. — And yet, it appears that we acquire appraisals of the ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ of things through the same process between individuals. For example, “As soon as a person receives an impression of some thing which he thinks is good, nature itself urges him to reach after it” (44). We can therefore distinguish between a *reasoned* and an *unreasoned/foolish* grasping.

When this [grasping] is done prudently and in accordance with consistency, it is the sort of reaching which the Stoics call a *boulēsis*, which I shall call a “volition.” They think that a volition, which they define as “a wish for some object in accordance with reason,” is found only in the wise person. But the sort of reaching which is aroused too vigorously and in a manner opposed to reason is called “desire” or “unbridled longing,” and this is what is found in all who are foolish (44).

When the thing one thinks is good is obtained, after the grasping, there are two possibilities that arise. “When the mind is moved quietly and consistently, in accordance with reason, this is termed “joy”; but when it pours forth with a hollow sort of uplift, that is called “wild or excessive gladness” which they define as “an unreasoning elevation of mind”” (44). Thus, the portrait of a wise person is that of a tranquil mind, which moves in accordance with reason. It

does not have the emotions of desire or excessive gladness, but rather has the more temperate equivalents felt in having volitions/wishes and feeling joy.

When considering the emotions which relate to things thought to be bad, we notice a similarly formed classification. “Just as it is by nature that we reach out after the good, so also it is by nature that we withdraw from the bad” (Cicero 44). A withdrawing in accordance with reason is termed “caution,” and a withdrawing which is not according to reason is called “fear”. And yet, although present evils result in distress for the unwise person, the wise person is free from distress. “Hence the first definition for distress is this: “a contraction of mind contrary to reason”” (44). — This becomes clearer when Cicero explains that “classed under distress, for instance, are envying [...], rivalry, jealousy, pity, anxiety, grief, sorrow, weariness, anguish, mourning, worry, sadness, affliction, despair, and whatever else is of that kind” (45). As these movements of mind are all claimed to not be aligned with reason, they cannot be said to serve a useful purpose. This is why the wise person would be free from distress; it would be unreasonable to feel the emotion, it would merely be a case of needless suffering caused by an illusion of the mind. — For example, in the case of envying, “the person who truly envies is the one who is annoyed at another’s gains even though they do no harm to himself at all” (45).

Cicero also provides specific examples for the emotions of fear, desire, and excessive gladness, which the wise person would not feel.

Under fear are classified indolence, shame, terror, fright, panic, petrification, agitation, and dread. Under pleasure [i.e. excessive gladness] come spite [...], enchantment, vainglory, and the like, while under desire come anger, heatedness, hatred, rancor, soreness of heart, need, yearning, and other things of this kind (Cicero 45).

The cause of the emotions is, Cicero explains of the Stoic position, a “loss of control,” which means “a rebellion in the mind as a whole against right reason. This rebellion has turned away from what reason dictates to such an extent that there is no way the mind’s impulses can be directed or restrained” (46). In contrast to an emotional mind, then, “self-control soothes the impulses and makes them obey right reason, considering and maintaining the judgements of the mind” (47). Thus, a loss of control is “reason’s enemy, it lays flame to every state of the mind, throwing it into disturbance and riot” (47).

To stress the extent to which emotions are deleterious, Cicero discusses their interaction with the character of individuals.

Just as sicknesses and infirmities of the body come into being when the blood is impure or when there is an excess of phlegm or bile, so also the confusion of crooked opinions and the conflict of one with another robs the mind of health and disturbs it with sicknesses (Cicero 47).

In parallel to bodily conditions, then, Cicero explains that one’s mind can develop *sicknesses* and *infirmities*. Their emergence occurs as follows: “although emotion itself is turbulent and inconsistent, constantly in movement through shifts in belief, it sometimes happens that this simmering and agitation of mind becomes habitual, settling into the veins and marrow, as it were” (47). Sicknesses arise from desire and excessive gladness, or fear. For example, a person might develop a desire for money which brings about excessive gladness when reached, and yet, this can easily turn into greed, a persistent infirmity over the mind. Similarly, Cicero explains that this process could apply to the liking of women. Arising from fear, we have the examples of the hatred towards women and the human race. Whereas sicknesses are the conditions

themselves (e.g. a persistent, mistaken desire) (47), infirmities consist of a vigorous opining that something is worthy of pursuit or avoidance, which is mistaken (47-48).

To understand the difference between individual characters, Cicero uses the term “proclivities.” Some can be more prone to developing sicknesses and infirmities. Thus, some may have the proclivity to feel anxious, developing the long-term sickness of anxiety. Meanwhile, a facility represents a tendency towards developing what is good or neutral (Cicero 49). The development of one’s proclivities or facilities, determines not only the story of one’s character development, but also can be said to relate to one’s level of wisdom. According to the Stoics, with respect to the mind, “the distinction between “sickness” and “infirmity” is only theoretical, while “faultiness” is a condition or state of being inconsistent and out of agreement with oneself over one’s whole life. There are, then, two sorts of infection in the beliefs, one of which gives rise to sickness or infirmity, the other to inconsistency and self-contradiction” (49).

These are important distinctions to determine the level of health of a mind. — Here Cicero speaks of the health of the mind as being analogous to the health of the body; the body is healthy when it is “in a balanced condition, with all its elements fitting properly together” (Cicero 49). Similarly, the mind is healthy “when its judgements and beliefs are in harmony” (49). — Cicero, however, notes that health of mind is not necessarily exclusive to the wise person, as a mental disturbance can be removed “by medication and the care of doctors” (50). And yet, the mind of a wise person is more resilient; a beautiful mind involves “an evenness and consistency in the opinions and judgements, together with a certain toughness and stability, either following upon virtue or identical with it” (50).

### 1.3 Cicero's Compression

Cicero proceeds to present a rhetorical treatment of the Stoic ideal, which makes its most salient points shine. He explains that his theme is virtue,

a consistent and harmonious condition of mind, one which makes its possessors worthy of praise and which is worthy of praise on its own account, even without considering its utility. From virtue proceeds every honourable activity, whether in volition, speech, or action, and all right reasoning. Indeed, in the most concise formulation virtue may itself be termed "right reason" (Cicero 51).

The embodiment of virtue is a person's wisdom; virtue is seen as the cure for the folly that the emotions bring upon us. — To describe the wise person, Cicero uses the term "frugality" to subsume all of the qualities of being self-controlled, moderate, temperate, consistent and self-contained (52). "That person, then, whoever it may be, whose mind is quiet through consistency and self-control, who finds contentment in himself, and neither breaks down under adversity nor crumbles with fright nor burns with any thirsty need nor dissolves into wild and futile excitement, that person is the wise one we are seeking, and that person is happy" (52). Cicero stresses the resilience of such a character. "Nothing in human life is so difficult for him to bear that he must be downcast, nothing so excessively delightful that he must be carried away by it" (52). What immediately follows are qualities even more extraordinary to ponder.

For what in human life would seem great to one who has grasped the magnitude of all eternity and of the entire universe? What concern within the brief lifespan of a human could seem important? So constant is his vigilance that nothing unforeseen can happen to him, nothing which he does not anticipate, nothing strange at all. So keen is his glance in every direction that he sees always some resting-place where he may live without sorrow or anxiety, and so he endures with calm and decency whatever fortune may inflict (52).

## 1.4 Are All Cultures Cultivating Wisdom?

The search for wisdom is perhaps a human universal; we have no choice but to confront the harshness of the world as limited beings, and some are better able to bear the blows and navigate the territory of a human life than others. *Wisdom* seems to be precisely that quality in oneself which enables a human life to be well-lived. Suffering so often being the norm, wisdom can be regarded in contrast as the holy grail that rescues us; it represents the higher quality/dimension within us that ensures effective navigation; it is the pairing of higher awareness with the execution of the right action at the right time. Some might even say that it is the essence of grace. — And yet, wisdom seems to be rare; the infirmities of the mind frequently negate our clarity of mind and intelligent passage through life. The consequences involve frequent mistakes and misdeeds, adding to our suffering, making a human life more difficult than it needs to be. In Cicero's own words, "What nature has in fact given us are only the tiniest sparks of understanding, which we, corrupted as we are by our wrongful habits and beliefs, quickly put out again" (Cicero 3). — Given the state of affairs, it might not be such a surprise to notice a human struggle for wisdom cross-culturally, both on account of its value and its rarity.

We find similar struggles between wisdom and its absence, for example, in Indian Philosophy. In particular, the *Bhagavad Gita* is a work that discusses the struggle between *good* and *evil*; its protagonist, Arjuna, must go to war, but his depression makes him unable to fulfill his duty. It is here that Krishna, a deity serving as his symbolic conscience and illumined reason, imparts an ideal of wisdom centred around a sage which has an even mind, without affection on either side, using reason rather than emotion, self-controlled and content in itself. — An ideal with striking similarities to the Stoic sage.

## 1.5 The Battlefield of *The Bhagavad Gita*

The *Bhagavad Gita* is part of the *Mahābhārata*, an epic poem written during the Epic period in India (1000-600 BCE). “By and large, the epic can be regarded as addressing the problem of social justice from an idealistic standpoint. A central theme of the work is the struggle between good and evil” (Murty 77-78). The *Bhagavadgīta*, moreover, translates literally to “The song of God” [*Bhagavān* (“God”), and *Gīta* (“Song”)] (78). The context of the struggle between good and evil, then, enables a higher ideal of wisdom to emerge. The background events that precede the *Gita* are valuable to understand how the struggle comes to be.

The clan of the Kurus, led by the blind king Dritarāshtra, ruled over Kuruksetra (literally meaning land of the Kurus), which was a region near present-day Delhi, in northern India. As the king was about to step down, he decided to hand over the throne to Dharmarāja, who was well known for his virtue and wisdom, instead of to his own son, Duryodhana. Indeed, the name Dharmarāja literally means “king of social justice.” Dritarāshtra’s decision irritated Duryodhana, who felt that the throne should be rightfully his. Clearly, the king would very much have liked to have had his own son on the throne, but to be fair and just he selected Dharmarāja since it was a choice the people would also accept (78).

This set a conflict between two clans, that of the Kurus (of which Duryodhana was part) against the Pandavas (a clan consisting of Dharmarāja and his four brothers). Arjuna, a member of the Pandava clan and a great warrior, defended the King’s decision. Duryodhana attempted to assassinate the brothers, but all of the attempts failed. — Finally, Duryodhana invited the brothers to a meeting under the pretext of reconciliation. “He invited Dharmarāja for a game of dice, and thinking that Duryodhana had finally come around to walk the path of virtue, Dharmarāja accepted” (78). However, Dharmarāja lost repeatedly through Duryodhana’s deceptive manoeuvres, and in the confusion of the game, Dharmarāja “forfeited his right to the throne and agreed to banishment from the kingdom for him and his brothers for a period of 13



years” (78-79). — After this period was completed, the Pandavas returned, but Duryodhana refused to cede the throne. Duryodhana thus declared war, dividing the nation (79).

During their banishment, the Pandavas befriended the philosopher-king Krishna. Krishna was a sage who not only knew about the ancient teachings of the Upanishads (i.e. documented teachings of illumined sages), but also embodied their ideal, and even appeared to go beyond it. He is presented as a god-like figure in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and in each chapter, he shares his wisdom with Arjuna, serving as wise counsel in preparation for battle (Murty, *Introduction* 79). Vivekananda writes the following in praise of Krishna’s personality.

He is the most rounded man I know of, wonderfully developed equally in brain and heart and hand. Every moment of his is alive with activity, either as a gentleman, warrior, minister or something else. Great as a gentleman, as a scholar, as a poet. [...] My regard for him is for his perfect sanity. No cobwebs in that brain. [...] Krishna preached in the midst of the battlefield “He who in the midst of intense activity finds himself in the greatest calmness, and in the greatest peace finds intense activity, that is the greatest Yogi as well as the wisest man.” It means nothing to this man—the flying of missiles about him. Calm and sedate he goes on discussing the problems of life and death (Vivekananda, qtd. in Murty, *Introduction* 97).

It is precisely this wise ideal, which seems to be strongly in alignment with the emotionlessness and tranquility of mind of the Stoic sage, that Krishna hopes Arjuna is able to embody in his battle for justice.

There is certainly a large gulf between the level of enlightenment of Krishna and Arjuna. — In the first chapter of the *Gita*, Arjuna is hesitant to go into battle. The problem is not his ability; he has won greater battles against stronger opponents in the past. But he must go to war against his former allies — friends, teachers, people he grew up with:

45. Alas, what a great sin have we resolved to commit in striving to slay our own people through our greed for the pleasures of the kingdom!

46. Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dritarāshtra, with weapons in hand, should slay me in battle, while I remain unresisting and unarmed.
47. Having spoken thus on the field of battle, Arjuna sank down on the seat of his chariot, casting away his bow and arrow, his spirit overwhelmed by sorrow (Radhakrishnan and Moore 105).

What makes Arjuna's distress so difficult to swallow is that his dilemma at first glance seems to point him reasonably in the direction of non-violence; it would seem, at least, that it is not out of cowardice that Arjuna is reluctant to fight, but rather out of love for those with whom he has deep ties. Non-violence, Arjuna is suggesting, is the highest virtue (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 39). — But what if Arjuna is mistaken? — After all, Cicero noted that although we are all born with seeds of the virtues, we are often led to hold wrongheaded beliefs, forming false ideals which are “a perverted caricature of the beauty that belongs to true distinction” (Cicero 4).

Though Arjuna's reluctance to fight seems noble on the surface, Krishna is not impressed.

2. Whence has come to thee this stain (this dejection) of spirit in this hour of crisis? It is unknown to men of noble mind [...]; it does not lead to heaven; on earth it causes disgrace, O Arjuna.
3. [...] Cast off this petty faintheartedness and arise, O Oppressor of the foes (Radhakrishnan and Moore 106).

Moreover, smiling at the depressed Arjuna, Krishna says:

11. Thou grievest for those whom thou shouldst not grieve for, and yet thou speakest words about wisdom. Wise men do not grieve for the dead or for the living.
12. Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we shall cease to be. [...]
16. Of the non-existent there is no coming to be; of the existent there is no ceasing to be. The conclusion about these two has been perceived by the seers of truth.
17. Know thou that that by which all this is pervaded is indestructible. Of this immutable being, no one can bring about the destruction.
18. It is said that these bodies of the eternal embodied soul, which is indestructible and incomprehensible, come to an end. [...]
20. He [the soul] is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having once come to be does he again cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain (107-108).

This passage draws inspiration specifically from the Sāmkhya system of philosophy. “The Sanskrit word *sāmkhya* means “enumeration” and its basic starting point is to analyze perception and resolve it into its component parts. It begins with the axiom that there are two universal and indestructible principles whose inter-relation is the cause of the universe. These principles are called *Purusha* and *Prakriti* and can be approximately translated as Pure Awareness (inactive) and Creative Energy (active)” (Murty, *Introduction* 82). — Krishna’s explanation to Arjuna that he should not grieve must be understood with this in mind. That is, he explains that the soul (which is more aptly translated as the *Purusha*) within each being is indestructible and immutable. Thus, the changes and destruction of the mind/body make no difference to it. — The *Purusha*, moreover, is one’s true/actual Self. We notice that the body over a lifetime goes through drastic changes, and so does one’s personality. These are the changes of nature/matter/*Prakriti*. But the *Purusha*, as posited here, does not change. Thus, if we grieve from someone’s death, it is merely because we are making a judgement based on a false belief about someone’s true nature. This occurs naturally, however, because “according to Sāmkhya, the *Purusha* has become identified with *Prakriti* through the “ego-sense” or *ahamkāra*” (83). — In other words, one takes identification with their mind/body rather than with *pure awareness* (alternately: *pure consciousness*). “According to Sāmkhya yoga, the goal of every individual is to realize the *ātman* [i.e. *Purusha*]. Consciously, or unconsciously, we are all moving towards this goal” (83). This is to say, then, that our default condition is one of bondage between the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti*, but we work towards freedom, liberation, which is found in the state of higher consciousness where one no longer identifies with elements of the *Prakriti*, but rather instead with the *Purusha*.

This is something to be understood/experienced beyond the intellect and mere words; it is a truth to be realized existentially/spiritually. “Be free from the dualities [the pairs of opposites]; be firmly fixed in purity, not caring for acquisition and preservation; and be possessed of the Self” (Radhakrishnan and Moore 110).

With this understanding in mind, Krishna explains that non-attached work is the means for one’s liberation.

47. To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruit; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.

48. Fixed in *yoga*, do thy work, O winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called *yoga*.

49. Far inferior indeed is mere action to the discipline of intelligence, O winner of wealth (Arjuna); seek refuge in intelligence. Pitiful are those who seek for the fruits of their action.

50. One who has yoked his intelligence [with the Divine] (or is established in his intelligence) casts away even here both good and evil. Therefore strive for *yoga*; *yoga* is skill in action.

51. The wise who have united their intelligence [with the Divine], renouncing the fruits which their action yields and freed from the bonds of birth, reach the sorrowless state (Radhakrishnan and Moore 110).

When we work with attachment to the fruits of our labour, there is a sense of expectation associated with our action. — This is precisely what brings us emotional turmoil; we become afraid of failure, or eager for success, or angry when obstructed, and so on. It is Arjuna’s attachment to the outcomes of his work, then, that clouds his mind with respect to his duty, and Krishna is the force of illumined reason which shows him a better path, beyond his state of emotional distress/turmoil. The key, then, is to follow one’s duty, to do the best work one can, while abandoning the sense of expectation (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 41). — What is attained from this perspective of non-attachment, is evenness of mind. All of our emotional states are generated by the *Prakriti*. Our default condition of bondage takes us away from evenness of

mind; it is when we have realized the *Ātman/Purusha/Self*, that we are beyond the fluctuations of the creative principle, the *Prakriti*. Thus, work without attachment allows us to preserve identification with the *Purusha*, and what follows is an evenness of mind in whatever condition we find ourselves. With the search for evenness of mind comes a reliance upon reason, rather than emotion. “The secret is to attach the mind to intelligence (*buddhi*) and work” (42).

## **1.6 Same Sages of East and West?**

What follows is a delineation of the shared traits of sages from both East and West, based on the sage-ideals that Krishna and Cicero present.

### **1.6.1 Evenness of Mind, Establishment in Intelligence**

The first noteworthy parallel between the sage-ideals involves the quality of an even, tranquil mind, which uses reason without becoming absorbed in the narrow-mindedness of strong emotion. Evenness of mind, then, is associated with the absence of strong emotional fluctuation (i.e. of strong shifts between positive and negative emotions such as excessive gladness and anger). Thus, an even mind is beyond the dualities of feeling, beyond being moved by pleasure or pain.

Krishna describes the sage-ideal of the *Gita* as the sage of settled intelligence. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s ideal involves having an evenness of mind in all situations, “treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat” (Radhakrishnan and Moore 109), and being established in intelligence (110). We can see strong parallels with Cicero's description of the sage: “Nothing in human life is so difficult for him to bear that he must be downcast, nothing so

excessively delightful that he must be carried away by it” (Cicero 52). The quality being pointed to is evenness of mind, beyond the fluctuations between the dualities of feeling. Thus we find the following prescription from Cicero: “Just as when people believe their circumstances to be evil, we have to convince them that they are in fact endurable, so also when people believe their circumstances are cause for great gladness, we must convince them that they merit a calmer response” (63). We might also note that equating establishment in intelligence with evenness of mind resonates strongly with Zeno’s definition of emotion as “a movement of mind contrary to nature and turned away from right reason” (43). This is to say that emotions can be regarded as large fluctuations of feeling which take one away from reason’s effective use. Cicero’s description of the Stoic sage, then, seems almost a mirror image of the concept of the evenness of mind of the sage of settled intelligence: “A consistent and harmonious condition of mind, one which makes its possessors worthy of praise and which is worthy of praise on its own account, even without considering its utility” (51).

### **1.6.2 Absence of “Emotion”**

The absence of emotion in Zeno’s sense is tied to the concept of evenness of mind; what follows is a more specific demonstration of how the sage of settled intelligence has much in common with the absence of emotion in Zeno’s sense. — Krishna tells Arjuna,

56. He whose mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrows and is free from eager desire amid pleasures, he from whom passion, fear, and rage have passed away — he is called a sage of settled intelligence (Radhakrishnan and Moore 111).

Here we notice important commonalities with the Stoic sage outlined by Cicero. Both sages do not feel the emotions of desire or excessive gladness (absence of eager desire amid pleasures),

and fear or distress (one is untroubled in the midst of sorrows). The following description further cements the independence of the sage of settled intelligence from emotions associated with the presence (in contrast to expected future) of perceived goods or evils:

57. He who is without affection on either side, who does not rejoice or loathe as he obtains good or evil—his intelligence is firmly set [in wisdom] (111).

Particularly noteworthy is Krishna's description of the pernicious effects of anger, to be avoided by the sage at all costs.

62. When a man dwells in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire, and from desire comes anger.

63. From anger comes bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory, and from loss of memory the destruction of intelligence; and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes (Radhakrishnan and Moore 111).

Cicero makes similar warnings against the effects of the emotion.

As for anger: while this emotion lasts, there can be no doubt that it is insane. [...] Anger will go to any length, just as madness will. Thus we are right when we say that angry persons have gone "out of control" [...]. When angry persons try to attack people, we must get the victims away from them until they collect themselves (Cicero 68).

The lack of control, the insanity and madness that anger bring about, bring to mind the bewilderment and loss of intelligence that Krishna describes anger as causing. Though deeply embedded into the human condition, we indulge in the emotion at our peril. The warrior seems to be no exception to the rule.

Cicero provides a description of the nature of courage similar to Krishna's counsel to Arjuna. They both speak of being untroubled by the notion of death, of seeing beyond pain, which is to say, beyond the immediate feelings of the present moment in favour of a higher ideal.

Scorn human affairs, think nothing of death; remember that pain and labor can be endured." Once these beliefs are established as one's considered judgement, then and only then does real, sturdy, unwavering courage take hold (Cicero 57).

One's alignment with reason, not with emotion, permits these beliefs to be rooted in one's personality/character. Cicero provides various definitions of courage to further cement the distinction between courage and anger. He cites Chrysippus, for example, who stated that courage "is knowledge as concerns things to be endured," or "a condition of mind which is obedient without fear to the highest law with respect to suffering and endurance" (58). These definitions, Cicero argues, demonstrate that the warrior, the general, and the orator, for instance, can all act courageously without becoming enraged (58). Anger, then, seems to be more damaging than instrumental, taking away from the evenness of mind which gives rise to higher intelligence.

One's fixation upon a higher ideal, means that one must learn to see beyond the immediate feelings of the present moment, whether they involve pleasure or pain. This carries some of the meaning of Cicero's utterance "scorn human affairs." The latter are often fixated upon immediate feelings of pleasure and pain, guided by mistaken assessments of value. — We notice a similar prescription in M. Ram Murty's explanation of the *Gita*.

When the world is dazzled by the glitter of sense objects, the sage is focussed on understanding reality and on touching the very substance under life's phenomena. Thus the mind of the sage is asleep to what the world is awake to. Conversely, the world is asleep to what the sage is awake to (Murty, *Introduction* 90).

### **1.6.3 Self-Control and Self-Contentment**

The sage of settled intelligence and the Stoic sage both share the qualities of self-control and self-contentment. Krishna describes the sage as follows.

55. When a man puts away all the desires of his mind, O Pārtha (Arjuna), and when his spirit is content in itself, then he is called stable in intelligence. [...]



61. Having brought all the senses under control, he should remain firm in yoga, intent on Me; for he, whose senses are under control, his intelligence is firmly set. [...]  
64. But a man of disciplined mind, who moves among the objects of sense, with the senses under control and free from attachment and aversion—he attains purity of spirit.  
65. And in that purity of spirit, there is produced for him an end of all sorrow; the intelligence of such a man of pure spirit is soon established [in the peace of the Self] (Radhakrishnan and Moore 111).

When one has attained evenness of mind, stability in intelligence, the condition is maintained through self-control. This involves dissolving one's desires and controlling one's senses. M. Ram Murty explains the practice of *pratyahāra*, withdrawal of the sense organs, as follows.

[...] perception is a three-fold process. The external sensory organ only transmits the neural impulses to the corresponding nerve center in the brain and for perception to be complete, the mind has to join itself to this center. When we practice this process of objectification of thoughts and feelings, we acquire a level of consciousness in which we rise above these oscillations. We are able to achieve a level of abstraction and not join ourselves to the nerve centers. This is what we have already called reflective consciousness. The mantra is “Don't react. Reflect!” (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 28).

The mantra is helpful to consider how the mode of response of the sage of settled intelligence differs from a default, overly-emotional/sentimental manner of being; in fact, the contrast is established especially well when looking at the *zeitgeist* of today. — We are bombarded with stimulation, with the possibility of instant gratification of the senses through the various objects of pleasure afforded to us in an age of abundance. — If we do not teach ourselves the art of restraint, of self-control, our consciousness is reactive; it is not able to detach from the short-term gratification of the present moment (i.e. the mind is joined to the nerve centres in the brain responsible for immediate reward-seeking/sense-gratification). Such conditions of reactivity, then, are a direct impediment to the possibility of exhibiting evenness of mind, and higher intelligence. Alas, they make us emptier each time we choose to indulge.

66. For the uncontrolled, there is no intelligence; nor for the uncontrolled is there the power of concentration; and for him without concentration, there is no peace; and for the unpeaceful, how can there be happiness?

67. When the mind runs after the roving senses, it carries away the understanding, even as a wind carries away a ship on the waters (Radhakrishnan and Moore 111).

One of the greatest challenges of our time, then, appears to be the development of reflective consciousness, that consciousness which detaches from the present moment, appealing to one's function of higher reason/intelligence within. In contrast, it is not infrequent for people to recognize themselves doing the things they know they shouldn't do.

With self-control (control over the senses and desire), there emerges a distinct capacity along with evenness of mind and higher intelligence: contentment in oneself. In detaching from immediate gratification, one may come to realize that the sphere of the things that are required to lead a good life shrinks. That is, one's dependence on external things to find happiness diminishes. And so, a condition of internal contentment opens itself up to us. — The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that the sage finds *contentment in himself, purity of spirit, the peace of the Self* (Radhakrishnan and Moore 111). The state of self-contentment that follows from evenness of mind and self-control, is also the ideal state of the Stoic sage which Cicero describes.

That person, then, whoever it may be, whose mind is quiet through consistency and self-control, who finds contentment in himself, and neither breaks down under adversity nor crumbles with fright nor burns with any thirsty need nor dissolves into wild and futile excitement, that person is the wise one we are seeking, and that person is happy (Cicero 52).

In contrast to this ideal, Cicero explains that it is “shameful to feel a wild and exuberant gladness upon gaining possession of [...those things which people ordinarily take to be good], just as a loud guffaw might be objectionable even at some times when a laugh would not be inappropriate” (63). It is the temperate feeling of joy that is characteristic of the sage (64). — To

expand upon the relationship between self-control and self-contentment, we can look at Patanjali's Yoga aphorism that "Attachment is that which dwells on pleasure" (Vivekananda, *Concentration* 648). — Not only might a moment's indulgence be unsightly: the more we indulge in sense-pleasures, the more we develop attachment to external things. This increases our dependence on externals for feelings of satisfaction, diminishing the possibility for inner contentment.

### 1.7 The Wise Warrior

M. Ram Murty explains that the *Bhagavad Gita* can be regarded as a manual for psycho-spiritual evolution (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 38). That is, "the setting of the *Bhagavadgīta* is symbolic of the battlefield of life but perhaps more importantly, it is symbolic of the battlefield within all of us. [...] Arjuna's despondency is our own despondency. Arjuna's questions are our own questions. As we read the *Gita*, it is as if we are in direct communion with the great sage embodied in the personality of Krishna" (Murty, *Introduction* 86). The *Gita* addresses the problems central to human existence, and as such it applies to all. "The central thesis of the *Gita* is that it is not your vocation that determines your path to *moksa* (liberation) but rather your attitude. In this way, it throws open the path to enlightenment for all and not just the recluse (*sanyāsi*)" (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 38). We find, then, the concept of *jivanmukti*, freedom while living, in principle attainable by all (38), by accepting and following one's inner voice of wisdom, and devoting oneself to good work, without becoming attached.

The concept of liberation through work brings us to an important concept: "it is not that we must extinguish our passions, but rather the passions must be given a higher direction"

(Murty, *Introduction* 88). Each person, then, can be said to possess/represent an *energy field*, and the goal is to give this field a higher direction (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 37). “Real action is the process by which we refine wisdom from the crude ore of experience” (Murty, *Introduction* 92). This marks a distinct challenge, then, for any aspirant of a higher ideal; a human life is bound to limitation, there seems to always be room for improvement. Unless one’s devotion to a higher ideal is a sustained and conscious task, one will inevitably regress onto lower planes of existence. There is a call, then, to any and all willing to open their eyes: and this is the call to strive towards what is higher, in the face of the natural pull that all feel towards what is lower. If we do not fight, we will lose by default. But if we find the courage, we will find our wisdom ripen with time. — Or so we would hope.

## Part 2:

### Bridging the Gap Between Precept and Practice

#### 2.1 Warring With Grief

There are many different attitudes that can be taken in response to grief, one of which is that it is a biological phenomenon, not restricted to the human race, which we witness in other species such as elephants (Pierce)<sup>1</sup> and dogs (Uccheddu, et al.). — It is the mere consequence, the after-effect, of profound attachment ruptured. — Given that it can be interpreted as a signal of profound love, which we all dearly crave, many look upon the emotion with a distinct fondness despite its painful exposure of our vulnerability, where the will seems to be debilitated by forces which by all means overpower its own.

To this, however, some choose to resent, scoff, or look at the emotion with an empty gaze; “grief,” they say, “is no emotion for the sage.” — But this attitude seems to put us at odds with our own biology, and marks an interesting rift between those who accept and those who condemn grief as an emotion. It is with this in mind, then, that we can return to *Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations* as a case study of a man seeking to overcome his own impulses. In her introduction of Cicero’s work, Margaret Graver reports Cicero’s confrontation with grief.

In mid-February of 45, with his public position more than ever precarious, Cicero suffered a devastating bereavement at home. His only daughter, Tullia, the member of his small family whom he loved most tenderly and unreservedly, died a month after giving birth to his first grandchild. [...] He writes several times of his experience with

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, a professor of Bioethics at the University of Colorado Denver, explained the following in her article: “Elephants [...] are known to take a great interest in the bones of their deceased and to mourn for dead relatives. One of these vivid ritual explorations of bones was caught on video in 2016 by a doctoral student studying elephants in Africa. Members of three different elephant families came to visit the body of a deceased matriarch, smelling and touching and repeatedly passing by the corpse” (Pierce).

grief: of his desire to be alone, of long walks in the woods, of uncontrollable fits of weeping. [...] He speaks also of efforts to find consolation in books [...] “Reading and writing do not comfort me,” he tells Atticus, “but they do distract me [...] I try in every way I can to repair my countenance—though not my heart. I think sometimes that I am wrong to do so, at other times that I will be wrong not to” (Graver, *Emotions* xiii).

In March of 45, Cicero was looking to conceal himself in order to protect his reputation (xiii). He wrote prolifically as a method of self-overcoming and distraction (xiv), and between July and mid-August, 5-6 months after the tragedy, the bulk of his *Tusculan Disputations* was composed (xv). The work confronts “the reality of death, pain, and emotional disturbance, and argue[s] for the superiority of the human spirit to all these” (xiv), using inspiration from the Stoic position.

In *Book 3* of his *Tusculans*, Cicero presents arguments in the Stoic manner, which explain why the wise person would be free from distress. Graver notes in her commentary that although he does not name their source, “he is unlikely to have devised these syllogisms himself.” (*Emotions* 85). — Grief, to Cicero, is a manifestation of the more broadly applicable term ‘distress’. There are two noteworthy syllogisms which propose why the wise person would be free from distress.

- [C1] The troubled mind is not fit to perform its function.
- [C2] And the function of the mind is to make good use of its reasoning power.
- [C3] But the mind of the wise person is always in a fit condition to make the best possible use of reason.
- [C4] Hence, the wise person’s mind is never disturbed.
- [C5] But distress is a disturbance of the mind.
- [C6] Therefore, the wise person will always be free of it (Cicero 9).

Here we return to the notion that the sage has a tranquil mind, governed by reason, and not emotion. The following syllogism expands upon what the tranquil mind is like.

- [D1] Anyone who is frugal (or, if you prefer, self-controlled and temperate) must also be consistent.
- [D2] But the person who is consistent is also calm.

[D3] And the one who is calm is free from all emotional disturbance.

[D4] And therefore from distress also.

[D5] And the aforementioned qualities are characteristic of the wise person.

[D6] Therefore, the wise person will be free of distress (10).

Although all virtues inter-entail (the wise person has all the virtues once he is wise, according to the Stoics), Cicero takes “frugality” to carry a function beyond the virtues of courage, justice, and prudence. He says, “for as we see, the defining characteristic of this virtue is that it regulates and placates one’s impulses to act, and so preserves that well-regulated consistency which on every occasion is opposed to desire. [...] I believe that the word *frugalitas* is derived from *frux*, “fruit,” the best thing that comes from the earth” (10).

Following this section, Cicero explains that distress is, of all the emotions, most akin to bodily illness. His task is to explain the source of this pain, the causes in the mind that give rise to it. He proposes, “now the cause of distress, as of all the emotions, is to be found entirely in belief” (Cicero 13). It is the consequence of a mind’s disobedience with reason. Thus, distress involves “a belief that a serious evil is present. Specifically, it is a fresh belief, and the evil is of such a nature that it seems right to be pained by it” (13). — Interestingly, Cicero sees its effects as being the most pernicious out of all of the emotions.

For every emotion is a misery, but distress is a very torture-chamber. Desire scalds us; wild delight makes us giddy; fear degrades us; but the effects of distress are worse: gauntness, pain, depression, disfigurement. It eats away at the mind and, in a word, destroys it. This we must shed; this we must cast away, or else we remain in misery (Cicero 14).

The poor Cicero was perhaps most strongly hoping for a cure to his own suffering; was it a wish, or a desire? — Given that distress is based on a “fresh” belief that an evil is present, we can compare it, at least for present purposes, to a wound of the flesh, of a magnitude that lessens with

time. And yet, we find that blistered hands grow calloused over time — this appears to be Cicero’s approach to hardening the soul, making it less vulnerable to developing a fresh wound. Only, calloused hands differ from a callous character; here I caution the reader against the ambition for a cure.

Cicero presents us with the Cyrenaic expedient. He explains, “The Cyrenaics, for their part, claim that distress is not produced by every misfortune, but only by a misfortune which was not foreseen and anticipated” (Cicero 15). For this reason, Cicero speaks in praise of their notion of the pre-rehearsal of future evils: “One looks far ahead to misfortunes that are to come, and this makes their arrival easier to bear” (15). Thus he quotes the speech of Theseus in Euripides:

I learned this from a wise man: over time  
I pondered in my heart the miseries  
To come: a death untimely, or the sad  
Escape of exile, or some other weight  
Of ill, rehearsing, so that if by chance  
Some one of them should happen, I’d not be  
Unready, not torn suddenly with pain (15).

The highest wisdom, Cicero proposes, involves being unsurprised by anything that happens. — When we are blessed by fortune, we should also remind ourselves how soon it can be taken away (16). — And yet, in addition Cicero contends that along with the daily prescription of pre-rehearsal, “the problem [of distress] is one of belief, and not a matter of nature. For if the event itself were the problem, why would anticipating our troubles make them easier to bear?” (16).

In favour of his position that it is the freshness of an event in one’s mind that causes grief, Cicero explains that grief diminishes over time. “So great is this effect that in many cases time not only relieves our distress but actually removes it altogether, even though circumstances remain unchanged” (Cicero 24). As support, Cicero provides the example of the many people of



Carthage and of the many Macedonians who became slaves in Rome. “Any of these people could have uttered that same lament from *Andromache*:

Before my eyes did all these things take flame...” (24).

And yet, Cicero claims that “their faces, their speech, their very gait and posture were such that, for all anyone could see, they might have been born in Argos or Sicyon” (24). He takes this as evidence that they had thought of the event for long enough that “their minds had become hardened with war” (25). In the end, “experience teaches us the lesson reason ought to have taught, that what seemed so serious is not in reality very significant” (25). Pre-rehearsal, then, plays the same role as the passing of time: in making us accustomed to the nature of things, it frees us from the possibility of distress (26). “What is generally thought to be the worst of evils is by no means serious enough to demolish that life which is properly called happy” (26).

And so, it should become increasingly evident that according to Cicero, we grieve only because of the beliefs that an evil is present, and that it is appropriate to do so (Cicero 28).

Moreover, the belief of the appropriateness of one’s grieving, Cicero proposes,

gives rise to all those despicable forms of mourning such as smearing oneself with dirt, scratching at one’s cheeks like a woman, and striking oneself on the chest, head, and thighs. It is this that makes Agamemnon, both in Homer and Accius,

for grief tear often at his unkempt hair.

You know the witticism of Bion about this line: “How stupid it was for the king to tear at his hair in his grief! As if baldness were a cure for sorrow!” (28).

It is the belief of the appropriateness of one’s acts and suffering that propagates the condition of distress. Thus, Cicero proposes: “Now this: once grief has ebbed away, and we realize that mourning does no good, don’t facts themselves make it plain that the emotion was altogether

voluntary?” (29). — As support for this claim, Cicero mentions that for the soldiers in Homer, “the sheer number of killings each day causes their sorrow to abate, as one of them says:

We see men fall in numbers every day;  
One would not ever cease to mourn the dead.  
With firm minds, rather, should we lay the dead  
To rest, and end our grief with this day’s tears.

This shows that it is in your power to cast away grief whenever you choose, in obedience to the occasion. But given that it is in our power, shouldn’t we give obedience to any and all occasions, and thus lay aside all our care and distress?” (28-29).

Cicero notes that his opponents might counter-argue that grief could not be voluntary, that it is something that comes by nature, as expressed by Oileus in Sophocles’ play:

No more than this is one man’s share of wisdom.  
He tries with words to ease another’s trouble,  
yet, when the blow of fortune shifts to him,  
he still may buckle at that sudden stroke.  
Then all his words and precepts are forgotten (Cicero 31).

Perhaps we can give Cicero some credit for going so far as contending with the notion of hypocrisy. But such hypocrisy, Cicero contends, is the mere consequence of a faulty character. It is not *nature* that we must blame, but shortcomings of character. “That is just how foolish people behave: they observe the faults of others and forget their own” (32). (If, in the end, Cicero is guilty of this fault, who can say that they are themselves so clean to be entirely free from it? — “He who has not sinned shall cast the first stone,” or so the saying goes).

Nevertheless, it does appear that given the freshness of the belief that an evil is present, Cicero admits that it does take time for the pangs of the perceived evil to fade. He soon proceeds to say, “the disappearance of grief over time is not solely a matter of duration; rather, it comes

from thinking for a long time about what has happened” (Cicero 32-33). — At this point, we begin to notice a culmination point of the conflict between precept and practice. Cicero had earlier stated that grief is “altogether voluntary” (29), that “it is in your power to cast away grief whenever you choose” (29) — and yet, here he admits that thinking about what has happened over time is responsible for the emotion fading away. Thus, we have an intimation of a more problematic entailment to come.

## **2.2 Fighting a Fresh Belief**

Cicero entertains the Peripatetic argument of “moderate amounts” applied to emotion, which suggests that a moderate amount of distress would represent a virtuous/acceptable mean. But he counter-argues, “these moderate amounts must be determined either by nature or by opinion. If by nature, then nature itself will limit our grieving—and in that case, why do we need consolations at all? But if it is by opinion, then let us get rid of the opinion in its entirety” (Cicero 33).

### **2.2.1 A Stoic Defence: Why Nature Would Limit our Grieving**

To better understand why nature would limit our grieving, we can look to Graver’s exposition of the Stoic concept of nature.

In Stoic thought, the universe itself, if viewed from a wide enough perspective, would be revealed as a perfectly orderly and coherent structure. This central postulate is expressed in Stoic texts in many different ways: by talk of a material continuum and of an unbroken causal nexus, by descriptions of the universe as an “animal” or as “god,” and also by mention of an all-pervasive “active principle” or “designing fire” or “seed.” But while the system as a whole is orderly, not every smaller portion of it will exhibit the same degree of orderliness within itself (*Emotions* xx).

This explanation, even Graver notes, might appear strange, and yet she adds that Zeno and his followers are “interested in patterning and complexity, both of structure and function” (xx).

There is an interesting parallel between this conception and a modern means of looking at the world. — We can hold the belief, on the one hand, that every event that occurs is a manifestation in accordance with the laws of physics that govern the universe as a whole; these are taken to be immutable, and impose a strict and uncompromising order, which is observed in universal constants such as the speed of light. In this sense, there is as a whole a “perfectly orderly and coherent structure” to the universe. And yet, we can also make sense of the fact that sub-systems within the large-scale, perfect order of the universe, contain internal contradictions; Socrates was especially proficient at revealing these in his contemporaries. Thus, not all sub-systems maintain the same degree of orderliness as the universal system. In a sense, it can be argued that the essence of this Stoic argument (i.e. of disordered structures being possible within a perfectly ordered universe) many of us still believe today. “Chaos” and “Entropy” are still manifestations of an underlying Universal/Natural Order.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, our faculty of reason presents us with the following possibility, according to the Stoics.

If all our actions imply beliefs, and if all our beliefs take the form of propositions, then there can be patterns of logical coherence among our beliefs and actions, and we as rational beings can become aware of these. [...] In theory, it should be possible—though perhaps only rarely—for some particularly reflective human to bring *all* of her beliefs into line with each other and with the larger natural order. [...] Her thoughts and actions would be fully consonant with universal reason and would also resemble universal reason in working together as a perfectly orderly system (Graver, *Emotions* xxi).

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to state a fact, but rather a commonly held belief that some hold that the scientific paradigm affirms and uncovers. It is, however, interesting to consider this belief in contrast to the concept of “true randomness” operating in conjunction with the Natural Order.

If one meets this condition, one is considered “virtuous” and “wise” according to the Stoics (xxi). Moreover, as distress is considered to be “a contraction of mind contrary to reason” (Cicero 44) serving no useful purpose to the sufferer, the alignment of one’s beliefs with nature means that one would not hold beliefs which lead to its occurrence. Thus we have an explanation for why “nature itself will limit our grieving” if distress is a question of “moderate amounts.”

### **2.2.2 A Stoic Defence: We Must Rid Ourselves of the Opinion**

On the other hand, Cicero notes that if distress is not determined by nature, but rather a matter of opinion, “then let us get rid of the opinion in its entirety” (Cicero 33). — How difficult should it be to rid ourselves of an opinion? — If we look at the question rationally, it seems that our ability to change opinions is rather effortless once we have detected a falsehood; in the morning I believe that it will not rain today, but in the evening I am proven wrong by the approach of strong winds and storm-clouds unforeseen; thus, I change my immediate opinion, and perhaps even the opinions that underlie its assessment. — We find ourselves changing our opinions based on whether there is sufficient evidence to support them. Such corrections are immediate and lasting. But could it be that some opinions linger, and are not so easy to change as an operation of “reasoning through them in one’s mind” would suggest? — This seems counter-intuitive, but Cicero explains that the Stoics believe this to be possible, even frequent.

To the definition that “distress is an opinion that some evil is present, involving also the belief that distress is appropriate in those circumstances” (Cicero 33), Cicero adds that “Zeno rightly adds a claim that the belief that an evil must be present is “fresh.” The Stoics interpret this

word as follows: a belief is “fresh” not only while the supposed misfortune is of recent occurrence, but for as long as it retains some force, some liveliness or, as it were, greenness” (33). — This is to say, then, that a belief is “fresh” so long as one is not able to change it; a fresh belief can cause prolonged pain when it is associated with the feeling of pain. To illustrate, Cicero presents the example of “Artemisia, the wife of Mausolus, king of Caria” (33): after the death of her husband, she spent the remainder of her life in grief; the opinion that it was an evil never lost its freshness (33). This is further evidence for Cicero’s proposal that grief’s disappearance “is not solely a matter of duration; rather, it comes from thinking for a long time about what has happened” (33). Thus, it appears that some beliefs, in contrast to others, have a strength and persistence that cannot be instantly changed. This seems to be especially the case for beliefs relating to emotion. — This can make it difficult to see how the concept of distress being an entirely voluntary belief/condition, squares with the proposal that we must, over time, reflect over our own distress to dissolve the freshness of the belief that an evil is present. For if distress is entirely voluntary, it should be (at least it seems) that we can rid ourselves of it in an instant. This is the conclusion that Cicero made from the example of the soldiers in Homer: “it is in your power to cast away grief whenever you choose” (29).

In the last subsection of *Book 3*, we notice this tension reaching a culmination point; the mind is torn between contradictory beliefs. Cicero states,

Distress of any kind is far removed from the wise person, because it is an empty thing; because it serves no purpose; because it has its origin not in nature, but in judgement and opinion and in a kind of invitation that is issued when we decide that grief is appropriate. Once this entirely voluntary belief is removed, distress will be eliminated (Cicero 36).

Yet immediately following, Cicero admits,

But the mind will still feel a bite, still be contracted a little from time to time. This last they may call “natural” provided they do not use the name “distress.” For that is a grim and deadly name, which cannot by any means coexist or, as it were, dwell together with wisdom.

Yet how numerous the roots of distress, and how bitter they are! The trunk itself may have been cast down, and still they must be pulled out, every one, by single disputations if need be. I have more than enough free time to do so—if “free time” it can be called (36).

It is this last sentence which seems to be most indicative of Cicero’s continued struggle against distress, despite the admission of its uselessness and absence of origin in nature, for he explains that he *has* — not that he *had* — enough time to pull out the roots of distress. The admission of this difficulty at the end of *Book 3* suggests that Cicero was still confronting his feelings of grief/distress 5-6 months following the death of his daughter. — As it turns out, the freshness of a belief can be surprisingly strong and uncompromising in its hold, even following consistent and devoted reflection.

At the same time, one might be inclined to criticize Cicero’s method (i.e. with respect to his distinct interpretation of our volitional capacity) instead of the Stoic school altogether, since he states rather humbly in *Book 4*, when he discusses the importance of learning to endure one’s mental pain, “I did what Chrysippus says one should not do: applied a remedy to the mind’s swelling while it was still fresh. I brought the force of nature to bear upon it, so that my great pain would give way to the greatness of the medicine” (Cicero 62). — What follows is an explanation of how the Stoic school more generally could account for the voluntary nature of a persistent, fresh belief such as distress, and its removal. Graver notes in her commentary that we can attribute the “biting” and “contraction” of an emotion to an involuntary cause. The wise person can have well-reasoned affects or “consistencies” which are short-lived.

Before I can come to believe that something I consider good or bad is present or in prospect, it must first cross my mind that this is so; and even this impression will manifest itself in some kind of feeling. Such phenomena as startling, tears, sexual arousal, or changes in complexion may for this reason be observed even in the absence of assent. Moreover, since these “pre-emotions” (*propatheiai*) or slight versions of the effects may occur as well with impressions which are about to be rejected as with those which are about to be endorsed, there is no reason why the wise person should not experience them even in response to present evils (*Emotions* 125-126).

If we take this to be true, then we can at least point to one component of our reactions to events as being beyond one’s volition/willful control. And yet, if one has a “fresh belief” that an evil is present, the feeling associated with the pre-emotion has become “rooted” within us; it is because we assented to the *impression* of “X is an evil for me” that the belief is acquired and becomes fresh, playing a causal role in the ensuing emotion of distress.

What distinguishes the wise from the non-wise, then? How is it that a fresh belief can become so firmly rooted? And if we voluntarily assent to beliefs that make us suffer needlessly, how is it that we could be so foolish? — The answer to these questions comes through the understanding of the notion of the faculty of reason espoused by the Stoics, the faculty that is responsible for our voluntary assent to propositions which turn them into beliefs. For the Stoics,

to use language [...] is to be aware of the meanings of sentences, what Stoics call *lekta* (“things said”) or propositions. It is characteristic of us as rational beings that when we take in and process information about the world, we do so by means of stated or unstated *lekta*. Even our actions can be described propositionally. For just as my believing that something is the case involves a mental commitment or “assent” to the truth of some proposition, so also do my conscious actions imply a commitment to propositions of which I myself am the subject (Graver, *Emotions* xx).

This would be true, then, for all of our movements with the exception of a relatively finite number of involuntary motions of the body such as blinking (xx). Moreover, for beings without



language, this possibility is not present, but the actions of rational beings are necessarily constrained to function in this manner, as opposed to those of animals or children.

There is an additional subtlety to Graver's description which is worthy of noting, in order to regard the Stoic scheme as more palatable; if we intake information through both stated and unstated *lekta*, we can consider that one's assent to the truth of a proposition need not be verbalized; our thinking can take a non-verbal and even vague manifestation at times; we can be aware of what we are doing, we can make (or: *be aware of our own*) effective predictions without verbalization. However, it is our capacity to describe our actions propositionally (to make explicit/stated these *lekta*) that is the indicator of that distinct reasoning power which makes our actions *volitional* — which consequently makes us *responsible* for them.

In our quest to understand how distress is voluntary, we are brought to Graver's breakdown of the complex belief responsible for feelings of grief/distress.

COMPONENT #1: "The death of my child is an evil for me."

COMPONENT #2: "When something which is an evil for me has just occurred, it is appropriate for me to feel mental pain."

OCCURRENT BELIEF: "My child has just died."

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CONCLUSION: "It is now appropriate for me to feel mental pain" (*Emotions* 91).<sup>3</sup>

Graver explains that one must be antecedently committed to the beliefs of COMPONENT #1 and #2 for the occurrent belief to result in distress (91). — This brings up an interesting consideration: antecedent beliefs play a causal role in an action/emotion's arising. Thus, one

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<sup>3</sup> In contrast this diagnosis of distress, M. Ram Murty explains that the *Bhagavad Gita* would say that "me" or "attachment" is the source of the problem. Millions of children around the world die every day, but I feel distress when it is "my" child. The Gita does not give a "Stoic" solution of insensitive detachment, but rather proposes that life is like the weather. We cannot control it but when storms come, we brace ourselves until it passes. It prescribes a more global view of the problem and not a local view. Brooding only prolongs the problem. The Gita says to move on and take a larger view.

must bring to light the chains of beliefs associated with them in order to be fully conscious of the causes behind one's actions/emotions, and so that they can be modified and brought into one's control. This explains Cicero's effort to pull out the roots of his own distress (Cicero 37); it also explains how arduous the cultivation of self-knowledge can be. The adherence to the first three premises of the argument, moreover, are necessary "for accepting the conclusion and will also be sufficient for it, unless other beliefs are present which seem to me more salient" (Graver, *Emotions* 92). We can understand the conclusion, then, as taking "the form of an "impulsory" impression, one which indicates which action it is appropriate for me to take at this very moment" (91). Assent to the impulsory impression leads to the impulse of feeling mental pain (91). — In thinking of the applicability of this syllogism to normal experience, we can imagine COMPONENTS #1 and #2 as having been assented to at a prior time. Thus, the acceptance of the conclusion, which might be the only belief which is consciously assented to following the occurrent belief, is based on the prior momentum of the beliefs following from one's assent in one's history.

If this syllogism is responsible for the feeling-response of distress, and even the wise-person can feel a "bite" at an unfortunate occurrence (in the form of a pre-emotion), then the "bite" is representable as the impression of the proposition "X (e.g. the death of my child) is an evil for me," which is triggered at the time of the occurrent belief "my child has just died." To the wise person, moreover, it could not even be given the status of a "fresh" belief, as the impression would not become a belief. — To better understand why this would be the case, we can look closer at the Stoic conception of virtue, which provides an explanation for our

evaluative judgements of goodness/badness, determining ultimately whether a belief is taken to be either 'true' or 'false'.

Given our capacity for rationality, it has been mentioned that we have the possibility of removing the internal contradictions of our own system so that it mirrors the perfect order of the universe. For the Stoics, then,

Goodness is defined not by what appeals to some individual, but with reference to the internal coherence of some system. Just as in the universe it is good that everything fits into a providential order, so in a human life, given that humans are capable of their own comprehensive order, what is good ought to be that which fits into some pattern which is orderly and complete relative to that person (Graver, *Emotions* xxi).

Graver proceeds to explain that given that this is the standard of what determines the "good" for a person; objects such as health, wealth, or status-related rewards such as winning an election, are classified as "indifferents," in that they make no difference to the fact of a person's attainment of the human good. — It is not that these things do not matter at all, only, they are not necessary for a person to be wise, virtuous, and good (xxii). Moreover, only the things which are within one's own control can, according to the Stoics, be considered as good or bad. Thus, a belief such as COMPONENT #1 could only be false according to the Stoics; circumstances such as "bereavements or the loss of property, status, or reputation" are perhaps not preferable to us and reasonably avoided, but it would nevertheless be false to consider these things "evils" (92). The only evils are those that involve our own moral failings (93). This provides further explanation as to why emotions can never be rational; for they involve feeling-reactions associated with beliefs that could only be false according to the Stoic scheme.

And yet, as it so often occurs, we find ourselves with what seems to be a wise and straightforward teaching on one hand, and a persisting condition that is firmly entrenched in vice

on the other; “it is not so easy to align one’s beliefs with the natural order,” we sigh. Graver explains how the Stoics are able to account for how one can act against their better judgement, while still acting voluntarily. The Stoic causal analysis of how beliefs result in impulse can explain this, according to Chrysippus.

An excessive (or vigorous) impulse [...] is one which overrides subsequent impulses to the contrary, as when an impulse to run, by creating forward momentum, overrides a subsequent impulse to stop. No cause other than the vigorousness of the first impulse need be invoked to explain the failure of the body to obey the second. Similarly, we often cannot prevent ourselves from feeling and acting upon some emotion, even when we consciously judge that it would be better not to do so: this “disobedience,” however, does not show that the emotion is any less rational and voluntary than the impulse which seeks to prevent it: the emotion-impulse simply precedes the “stopping” impulse in time and, being a vigorous impulse, overrides it (Graver, *Emotions* 142).

This perspective says, then, that there are certain beliefs, currently, that are rooted deeply within us and have been reinforced over time; they are operating on a sort of “momentum” which makes them entrenched, which for example fuels and maintains the freshness of a belief that an evil is present, when it occurs. — Thus, if one of our loved ones passes away, and we feel persistently distressed, even if we are in our best efforts seeking to convince ourselves that the occurrence is not in fact an evil, that grieving does no good to us, it is still out of our own volition that we are suffering from grief, as we are “acting”/emoting upon/from the prior momentum of beliefs that we assented to using our faculty of reason in the past; the momentum is predicated on a prior exercise of our volition. We are thus still responsible for our past error, and suffer voluntarily, despite what seems to be our present inability to escape our entrenched condition. We have no better option than to use our faculty of reason over time to gradually remove the opinion, although perhaps neither too early nor eagerly.

### 2.2.3 Where a Stoic Went Wrong?

We can put the concept of volition of Chrysippus into question, as it might run against some important intuitions. — After Cicero presents the example of the soldiers in Homer who had to end their grief with the day’s tears, he states, “this shows that it is in your power to cast away grief whenever you choose, in obedience to the occasion” (Cicero 29). Cicero sought to demonstrate that distress is “altogether voluntary,” although the concept of volition which Cicero uses here seems to be more strict with respect to the power one has over oneself; if one’s condition is entirely voluntary, then one has the ability to change it at will. — There is a meaning of *voluntary*, then, that holds that an action or emotion is within one’s *complete* control. I can voluntarily, for example, raise my hand or set it down; when something is volitional in this sense, the start/stop impulse is accessible at any moment, and we do not need to struggle against its momentum at all — let alone for months on end.

The concept of volition that Chrysippus is proposing follows from the Stoic conception of the mind’s “directive faculty.” Graver states, “Rather than distinguishing the reasoning function (or part) of the mind from its motivating and emotional function, they give all our functions simply to the mind itself, that is, to a single “directive faculty” (*hēgemonikon*)” (*Emotions* xxiii). The latter is responsible, at each moment of acting, for assenting to the “impulsory impression” that the action being performed is the right/appropriate one (xx). — But how much credit can really be ascribed to a person’s volition for the beliefs that they possess?

In her chapter *The Stoics’ Ethical Psychology* in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*, Graver explains the following about the Stoic notion of how our innate preferences (which turn into beliefs about the goodness/badness of things) are formed in development.

Infants are born without any innate stock of concepts at first and behave pre-rationally, like animals. However, they do have certain innate tendencies to prefer those objects that accord with our nature, broadly understood: a healthy bodily constitution, human contact, proper functioning of the sense organs and of the faculty of reason. Tending to choose these, they begin to develop certain regularities in conduct, which they themselves eventually come to recognize. At this point, the mind starts to favor what is beginning to be a systematic pattern of conduct, even above the objects towards which its individual actions are directed. There is a transfer of allegiance, from the preferred indifferents to the good proper to a human being — for the completion of the pattern is, once again, the perfected rational activity of virtue and wisdom (Graver, “The Stoics’ Ethical Psychology” 207).

Graver proceeds to explain that this transfer of allegiance will involve mistakes along the way, but this is the process of moral development towards virtue, for the Stoics. Our innate preferences are akin to “seeds” of the virtues, preliminary guides towards actual goods (207).

Is the transfer of allegiance an all-or-nothing process? — Perhaps only for those who are devout adherents of the Stoic scheme. — This is because, if we are not adherents of the scheme, then although we find ourselves capable of making voluntary, reasoned decisions when we reach adulthood, our assumptions about what is “good” involve many so-called “falsehoods.” — For example, those who believe that goods involve material possessions, might also believe that it is appropriate to feel anger for their loss; thus they can believe that emotions are not vices. — But in such a person, then, the switch of allegiance seems at best only to be partial, since although they possess the faculty of reason, which makes them capable of examining the truth-value of certain beliefs and assent to “impulsory impressions” in order to initiate their actions, many of their actions and impulses are still predicated upon beliefs they take to be true, but are actually false, developed during a pre-rational phase of development. Graver expands upon this concept when she states in the introduction to Cicero’s work:

A being whose mental processes were not propositional could not act on the basis of assent and thus is not properly said to *act* at all. A rational being, however, cannot act in any other way. One thing this means is that all the actions of adult humans are attributable to their agents, in a way that the behaviors of animals and young children are not” (*Emotions* xxi).

But to what extent can an adult be blamed without having adequate understanding? Socrates the trickster himself suggested a distinction between *Understanding* and *understanding*; elsewhere it has been suggested that we should “forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

If we look at the switch of allegiance of those who have completely devoted themselves to the Stoic doctrine, the change seems to be a continued effort. It seems that there is a transition-phase of sorts, which means that one acts partially upon the momentum of their pre-rational selves/beliefs, which is examined and rectified over time using one’s faculty of reason. In which case, more questions arise: is it possible to reach the ideal of perfect internal consistency between one’s beliefs, to match the perfection of the natural order? And if so, how long would it take?

In attempting to answer these questions, we can take a closer look at the process of switching allegiances. If the preferences that we hold for certain things, such as familial love and bodily health, are based on innate preferences and the shaping of our rearing, then they can be said to be contained in our character — ingrained in it, by the time we rationally assent to making the switch. Through the use of reason, we can analyze these preferences as beliefs, which is to say we can make them articulate. We can say things such as “friendship is a human good,” “the death of a loved one is an evil for me.” Thus, we seem to have in this case beliefs that are deeply entrenched/ingrained within us, based on biology and rearing, which are not the consequence of voluntary/reasoned assent, since they were acquired pre-rationally. And so, we can find that during our switch of allegiance, much of our character is the consequence of pre-

rational rearing, which we must work through consciously, likely arduously, and consistently, in the effort of aligning our belief-system with the natural order. (As an aside, we find in this an alignment with the notion which was popularized by Freud that our emotional conflicts/neuroses are the consequence of childhood damage and trauma, etc.) How much of an adult's identity is the consequence, then, of rationally assenting to propositions, rather than the consequence/momentum of how we were "shaped" when we were young? Perhaps it remains an open question, and it is not so contentious to say that some have offered a much stronger devotion to their own faculty of reason than others, and many might even fail in spite of their best efforts to make the transfer of allegiance successful.

It is not so contentious to propose, then, that a large number of our current beliefs about what is good/bad were acquired pre-rationally and are still deeply ingrained within us — for how many adults can sincerely claim to be perfectly rational? (I have yet to meet a single one). — If we return to Cicero's case, we can interpret his belief that his daughter's passing is an evil, as being rooted in the more fundamental beliefs that 'family is a good', that 'love is a valuable thing', that 'the death of a loved one is an evil', and so on. There are certain beliefs, then, that seem to be embedded within us, that are fundamental to our functioning, and which determine the value-ascriptions that are attributed to novel particulars that we encounter in our lived world. But if these fundamental beliefs were acquired in childhood, we are operating upon their momentum as adults. Thus, they determine the feelings that we encounter in our later life, with respect to novel events/people/things, even when our faculty of reason has been developed. And since their momentum is so strong, the amount of volitional control that we have over them through our faculty of reason is questionable. — Thus, as adults, to what extent can distress be



said to be an altogether voluntary thing? For its foundation, its momentum, is pre-volitional, pre-rational, and deeply rooted through causes attributable to an early phase of development. — This explains, then, why it takes so much time for a belief to lose its freshness, why one must sometimes dwell over it for a long time for it to lose its hold, and why some such as the example of Artemisia that Cicero presented, never manage to overcome the pangs of a belief's freshness.

Even Cicero, near the end of *Book 3*, cites Prometheus who warns about the limitations of the healing power of reason alone. “Thus when a character in Aeschylus’ play remarks,

And yet, Prometheus, I think you know  
That reason may be doctor to your wrath,

Prometheus replies,

Yes, if it chooses well the time for treatment,  
And does not probe the wound that is inflamed” (Cicero 34).

Our reason seems to contend against the momentum of a deeply embedded constitution/character acquired and operative beyond its control. — Some might argue, then, that the transfer of allegiance to believing that the only human good is “the perfected rational activity of virtue and wisdom” (Graver, “The Stoics’ Ethical Psychology” 207) is not perfectible, though useful for self-improvement. But looking at the issue through a more pragmatic lens, understanding the limitations of reason in consolation, we can now better understand why Cicero states that it is hard to convince someone that, in cases of distress, he is “grieving by his own judgement and because he thinks he ought to do so” (Cicero 35). Thus Cicero offers alternate consolations such as the medicine of reminding a person “you are not the only one to have this happen” (35).

It is clear, then, what we must do. Just as in our legal cases we do not always employ the same *status* (that being our term for the various argumentative strategies) but rather adapt our speeches to the needs of the moment, the nature of the case, and the persons

involved, so also in soothing distress we must consider what sort of cure each hearer is able to accept (35).

And so, the fact that so much of our momentum is attributable to pre-rational development, might lead us to put into question the following Stoic notion:

Rather than distinguishing the reasoning function (or part) of the mind from its motivating and emotional function, they give all our functions simply to the mind itself, that is, to a single “directive faculty” (*hēgemonikon*) (Graver, *Emotions* xxiii).

For, although we do have the capacity to *use* the faculty of reason frequently, we also find ourselves with patterns of behaviour and emotional responding which were not acquired by the faculty; that is, much of our life operates upon *momentum* involuntarily acquired.<sup>4</sup> In other words: if the momentum that compels us beyond our best efforts to the contrary was acquired in a pre-volitional phase of development, it would be a contradiction to suggest that the action/emotion that the momentum entails is voluntary. We can, furthermore, put into doubt the Stoic notion that rational beings can only act on the basis of assent (xxi), since much of what we do is beyond conscious prediction/control, beyond volition in acquisition, capacity, and understanding. Much, if not most, of our self-knowledge is retrospective.

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<sup>4</sup> This brings to mind a sentiment shared in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the concept of being able to, like a witness, become able to observe what seems to be the intelligent behaviour flowing out of oneself automatically:

16. What is action? What is inaction? — as to this even the wise are bewildered. [...]
18. He who in action sees inaction and action in inaction—he is wise among men, he is a *yogin*, and he has accomplished all his work. [...]
20. Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of works, ever content, without any kind of dependence, he does nothing though he is ever engaged in work (Radhakrishnan and Moore 117).

At this point, we might be inclined to re-introduce the division between emotion and reason, head and heart, that the Stoics sought to (it seems) collapse.<sup>5</sup> — If we struggle against the hold of a persistent, fresh belief, it might often serve us well to look beyond our faculty of reason for treatment. What we are seeking is a notion of integrated functioning (*union/yoga*) of separable faculties, not the collapse of all faculties into one.

### 2.3 Reaching Beyond Reason

The Stoic method of analyzing the underlying beliefs which cause one’s emotional responses, is undoubtedly helpful for developing self-awareness and encroaching upon the embodiment of virtue and self-control. But at the same time, we seem to have found limits of the faculty of reason: the human animal is a structure whose function is better understood through more than one angle. In his discussion of the *Bhagavad Gita*, M. Ram Murty explains:

The human mind has four faculties: thinking, feeling, willing, and restraining. Just as thinking can be taken to a higher state as illumined reason, so also feeling, willing, and restraining can be taken to higher levels. The method for raising each faculty to a higher state is called *yoga* and the four *yogas*, *jnāna*, *bhakti*, *karma*, *rāja*, correspond to the four faculties of thinking, feeling, willing and restraining. [...] The human brain should not be developed in a one-sided fashion but must be exercised in this four-fold way giving a higher expression to each of its four faculties.

So Krishna says, “Resigning all your works to Me (*bhakti*), with your consciousness fixed in the Self (*jnāna*), being free from desire and egoism, fight (*karma*), delivered from mental fever (*rāja*)” (Murty, *Introduction* 96).

With this in mind, the *Bhagavad Gita* can be regarded as a synthesis of many preceding streams of thought — of “the entire Upanishadic thought and three systems of philosophy, namely,

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<sup>5</sup> This distinction between *reason* and *emotion* is different from that which was mentioned on p.2 of this essay. The present definition of emotion refers to the motivating function/faculty of the mind; the former distinction represents all of those feelings that are not aligned with reason. — It is possible to have a separate faculty from reason which functions in accordance with what reason sees fit.

Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta” (83). The work consists of eighteen chapters, each referring to a distinct “yoga” (the *four yogas* are a compression of these). — The goal is integration; ‘yoga’ is a term “derived from the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which means “to yoke.” From the Upanishadic standpoint, any method that enables us to become aware of the *ātman* [or *Purusha*] or *Brahman* is referred to as a “yoga” in that it unites us with the infinite dimension within” (83).

The concept of the *four yogas* was further developed in the work of Swami Vivekananda, a much more modern figure born in 1863 (Murty, *How the Mind Works* 70). M. Ram Murty explains that Vivekananda argued that the four

yogas are not independent, but rather interdependent. In his view, the exclusive practice of any one of these yogas leads to a slanted development of the mind. Thus, all four are to be practiced in combination. For Vivekananda, the word *yoga* means integration of the personality. We think in one way, we feel in another, we act in a third, and we never practice any form of restraint. The problem of the mind is that it is not integrated (63).

We notice this issue precisely in the mind of Cicero plagued by distress. His thinking is not integrated with his feeling; he tried arduously, perhaps even to the point of martyrdom, to use his reason to solve a problem of the heart. The use of Stoicism as the exclusive remedy to one’s suffering, then, is perhaps akin to the exclusive use of *jnāna yoga*. Perhaps it is even an attempt that fails at the moment of conception due to the narrowness of the approach. — It is the task of the aspirant, then, to learn how to integrate the various forces/functions within. And so, it might be of no surprise that the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is titled *The Yoga of Depression*. This is to say “that every occasion in life can be used as a means to attain higher understanding provided we reflect” (40). Even depression can be seen as a phase along one’s spiritual path, as the spark of one’s spiritual journey. Although its manifestation is perhaps not one found in the

wise/spiritually-actualized person (yet perhaps even this is a matter of debate), it can be regarded as a step along the path to wisdom, and as such can be accepted, rather than shunned.

## 2.4 The Heart, our Healer

Uncovering the limits of one's reasoning power might entail collapsing into the realization that an overactive head leads to a heavy heart. — It might be of use, then, at this point to look at the problem of suffering, of problematic emotion, through the angle of Bhakti-Yoga, which is to say, by looking at the frame of mind and methods of the devotee fixated upon the liberation of the human heart, devoted to the cultivation of the highest form of love. The Buddhists warned us long ago, that so long as we are attached, we suffer; our well-being is enslaved, bound, to whatever person, circumstance, or thing, that fulfills our expectation for reward. — And so, we can see our attachment, our search of reward to negate our suffering, as the very thing which accentuates our suffering; our expectations are numerous and often unmet, and the mismatches between them and reality, remind us constantly of the limitation of our human condition. — In seeking to overcome the limits we meet, we can greatly benefit from the following words of Vivekananda.

We know that the character is of the noblest type in which all these three—knowledge and love and rāja-yoga—are harmoniously fused. Three things are necessary for a bird to fly: the two wings, and the tail as a rudder for steering. Jnāna is the one wing, bhakti is the other, and rāja-yoga is the tail that maintains the balance (“Definition of Bhakti” 406).

With the explanation of the Samkhya system of philosophy, by understanding the distinction between the *Purusha* (pure awareness, inactive principle) and the *Prakriti* (matter, active/creative principle), we were given a glimpse of Jnāna-Yoga in Indian Philosophy. The

Stoic goal of aligning us with the natural order, and looking at the root causes that predicate our beliefs, can be regarded as an addendum to this Yoga, as it comprises finding unity through one's faculty of knowledge. — When looking at the other wing, balancing the weight of our knowledge with the development of the heart, Vivekananda explains, “Bhakti-Yoga is the science of higher love. It shows us how to direct it; it shows us how to control it, how to manage it, how to use it, how to give it a new aim, as it were, and from it obtain the highest and most glorious results, that is, how to make it lead us to spiritual blessedness” (“The Bhakta's Renunciation” 434). — To return to Patanjali's Yoga aphorism that “Attachment is that which dwells on pleasure” (*Concentration* 648), we can regard the force of love, and the force of pleasure, really to represent the same thing — love is pleasant, after all, and can be regarded as the most powerful manifestation of pleasure there is. — The most essential part, however, is that love's extraordinary motive power gives rise to an extraordinary range of possibilities, whether good or ill. Vivekananda notes,

It is this same emotion that gives us the pure and holy conjugal love between husband and wife as well as the sort of love which goes to satisfy the lowest forms of animal passion. The emotion is the same, but its manifestation is different in different cases. It is the same feeling of love, well or ill directed, that impels one man to do good and to give all he has to the poor, while it makes another man cut the throats of his brethren and take away all their possessions (“The Bhakta's Renunciation” 434).

Bhakti-Yoga tells us that our love must be given a higher direction, if we hope to find liberation. “In Bhakti-Yoga the central secret is [...] to know that the various passions and feelings and emotions in the human heart are not wrong in themselves; only they have to be carefully controlled and given a higher and higher direction, until they attain the very highest condition of excellence” (“The Naturalness of Bhakti-Yoga” 438).

The bhakta (the aspirant) has a strong desire to transcend lower attachments. He develops an attachment to the highest ideal through profound love, the energy behind his devotion.

One of the names of the Lord in Sanskrit is Hari, and this means “He who attracts all things to Himself” [...] The Bhakti-Yogi [...] knows the meaning of life's struggles; he understands it. He has passed through a long series of these struggles and knows what they mean and earnestly desires to be free from the friction thereof; he wants to avoid the clash and go direct to the centre of all attraction, the great Hari. This is the renunciation of the Bhakta (Vivekananda, “The Bhakta’s Renunciation” 435).

And yet, the beauty of Bhakti-Yoga lies in its naturalness, in its frictionless process. “Bhakti-Yoga does not say, “Give up”; it only says, “Love; love the Highest!” — and everything low naturally falls off from him, the object of whose love is the Highest” (434). One might argue that it is not through repression that one can find freedom; repressed energies manifest themselves in unpredictable ways, which undermine the aspirant, however ambitious. Repression leads to suffering, as one finds oneself at war with oneself through its expression. The way to freedom is not found through chastisement, anger, condemnation or banishment, by clinging to the negative as an instrument; it is, rather, found through love. — We can, in contrast, notice a tendency towards negation and even repression of emotion in Cicero’s battle against distress: “Distress of any kind is far removed from the wise person, because it is an empty thing; because it serves no purpose” (Cicero 36). The sentiment seems to reach its peak when he says the following about the roots (i.e. the beliefs which are the roots) of distress: “The trunk itself may have been cast down, and still they must be pulled out, every one, by single disputations if need be” (36).

The problem of the seeker of knowledge, of the jñāni, is that he may recognize the world as filled with illusion, but he may lack the motive power to transcend these delusions in himself; that is, he may lapse back into his prior state without consistent devotion to a higher ideal. This

might be why Vivekananda notes that “the jnānis [i.e. those more inclined toward knowledge than bhakti] hold bhakti to be an instrument of liberation” (Vivekananda, “Definition of Bhakti” 406). The essence of the process can be understood through the devotion to the highest of symbols. “Who is Ísvara? “From whom are the birth, continuation and dissolution of the universe”—He is Ísvara, “the Eternal, the Pure, the Ever Free, the Almighty, the All-knowing, the All-merciful, the Teacher of all teachers.” And above all, He is the Lord, whose nature is inexpressible Love.” (“The Philosophy of Ísvara” 408). Thus, the bhakta can be seen as devoting himself to Ísvara, the symbolic representation of that force in oneself which guides one towards the transcendence of one’s current self, toward a higher manifestation of energy. This is the representation of God which becomes the object of one’s devotion, of one’s love. And yet, Vivekananda explains there to be a distinction between the means of identification with God of the jnāni, who seeks through abstractions to conceive of representations of God, versus that of the bhakta.

All is Brahman, the One without a second; only Brahman, as Unity or the Absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped. So the Bhakta chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is Ísvara, the Supreme Ruler. To use a metaphor: Brahman is the clay or substance out of which an infinite variety of articles are fashioned. As clay, they are all one; but form or manifestation differentiates one from another (408).

This is to say, then, that the bhakta is seeking to experience the unity with God/Brahman/the-Universe. — The attempt at union has in the past been repeatedly caricatured under many a nose through idealized visions of totalitarian order, or narrow-minded, dogmatic, overly-reductionistic thinking. And yet, we can regard the notion of an underlying unity behind all manifested differentiations/particulars, as being sensible. — After all, as aforementioned, the



Stoics believed in the perfectly orderly and coherent structure of the universe, also making mention “of an all-pervasive “active principle” or “designing fire” or “seed.”” (Graver, *Emotions* xx). — Not only are there universal constants such as the speed of light discoverable through the enterprise of physics; it also seems that the closer we look at the constituent parts behind the various forms of differentiation, the smaller the set of “building blocks” becomes; objects are comprised of atoms, and all atoms are comprised of merely three subatomic particles (protons, electrons, neutrons).<sup>6</sup> — There is, then, an intelligence/order to the universe, to the various forms that we perceive and their progression over time, which seems to consist of the underlying rules/laws that all things obey/follow. — The Bhakta, then, seeks to go beyond the frame of mind of finite identification; he seeks to go beyond his identification with the ego, which is but another finite and ever-changing form generated by the universe. — Moreover, he hopes to appeal to that universal principle of intelligence within himself, that voice of higher reason which is creative and heightening, and this voice is precisely that of following one’s heart, devoting it to the highest principle of intelligence in oneself. It is, then, self-transcending in the sense that it transcends the ego. For there is an intelligence in one’s functioning far beyond conscious control; most of how humans function is based on this. For example, our cells’ and our body’s growth, digestion, information-assimilation and healing processes, are largely regulated by our unconscious functioning. — *Īśvara*, then, is under one interpretation the symbolic representation of the all-pervasive natural order, that principle of higher intelligence which is forever beyond one’s current ego. The bhakta is seeking union with this natural order, to overcome the self-sense of the finite identifications of consciousness. But the goal of the bhakta is not to understand the

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<sup>6</sup> *String theory* is one example of the attempt to reduce all particulars to a single substance, among other claims such as “all is energy” (supported, it seems, by equations such as  $E=Mc^2$ ).

natural order rationally/scientifically; it is taken as a given, and *Íśvara* is sufficient as a means for the establishment of the union with God, self-transcendence. Moreover, although men of knowledge might be seeking eternal, all-pervasive principles which point to an underlying unity behind all differentiation, we can sympathize with Vivekananda when he says, “what Advaita says is that God is more than knowable” (“The Absolute and Manifestation” 246); we are at best inferring the unity through disparate glimpses of strict regularity. Thus, the mind/body of the bhakta become the conduit of *Íśvara*; the ego is the mere witness of forces far beyond its power.

The primary goal of the bhakta, then, is liberation; the means is love, from which devotion naturally follows to the highest ideal, to *Íśvara*. One attaches oneself, then, to the highest ideal to free oneself from attachment altogether. Thus, the perspective of Bhakti-Yoga dictates that it is not reason, but feeling that is the guide. The intellect is but an instrument. The bhakta “no more reasons and believes; he almost perceives. He no more argues; he senses” (Vivekananda, “The Philosophy of *Íśvara*” 408). — It is interesting to consider this in contrast to the endeavour of the Stoics: their primary means of self-heightening is the use of reason to ensure that one’s belief-set is perfectly rational and true. — The devotion to *Íśvara* provides a voice of wisdom which is often of a form beyond reason’s capacity for comprehension, this voice is what the bhakta follows. And yet, Vivekananda notes that *Íśvara* is not the only symbol that can be used.

When [...] any gods or other beings are worshipped in and for themselves, such worship is only a ritualistic Karma; and as a vidyā, a science, it gives us only the fruit belonging to that particular vidyā. But when the Devas or any other beings are looked upon as Brahman and worshipped, the result obtained is the same as that obtained by the worshipping of *Íśvara* (408).

The devotion is most fruitful when it is complete and uncompromising. “Eka-Nishtā, or devotion to one ideal, is absolutely necessary for the beginner in the practice of religious devotion” (“The Chosen Ideal” 427). In contrast to the fickle religious man who jumps from one idea to another, Vivekananda quotes Ramakrishna’s description of the devotee cut from a different cloth.

There is another sort of man [...] who is like the pearl-oyster of the story. The pearl-oyster leaves its bed at the bottom of the sea, and comes up to the surface to catch the rain-water when the star Svāti is in the ascendant. It floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open, until it has succeeded in catching a drop of the rain-water, and then it dives deep down to its sea-bed, and there rests until it has succeeded in fashioning a beautiful pearl out of that raindrop (427).

There are certain preliminary steps to follow at the beginning of one’s devotional journey. Among the first steps, the exposure to pure food will aid with purifying one’s internal organs and improving one’s memory. One can also understand the exposure to pure food, as applying to all of one’s sensory inputs (“How to Cultivate Bhakti” 428) — many forms of music, for example, are best avoided. It is from the control of the gross that we can become aware of finer perceptions. One must also learn to control the passions, restraint. Then we can move onto the cultivation of internal cleanliness. Here we find certain virtues espoused by Ramajuna, such as truthfulness, sincerity, doing good to others without any gain to oneself, and non-injury of others in thought, word, or deed (ahimsā) (429). Of special mention, Vivekananda stresses that “the test of ahimsā is absence of jealousy” (430). The aspirant should also not engage in fault-finding<sup>7</sup> (“The Chosen Ideal” 426). All these practices, moreover, matter only insofar as they help develop internal purity; “The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy—that man is a bhakta, he is a

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<sup>7</sup> There is an interesting discussion that can emerge regarding this step. — We all have developed a capacity to see and learn from the mistakes of others, but this does not need to be considered fault-finding, as this awareness can be paired with compassion, and an absence of condemnation.

yogi, he is the guru of all, even though he lives every day of his life on the flesh of swine” (“How to Cultivate Bhakti” 430). Strength, both physical and mental, is also critical for the bhakta, and cheerfulness of mind while avoiding excessive mirth, is what leads to perseverance. The Bhakta must remember that equilibrium is what facilitates religious realization (430-431).

With these preparatory steps complete, we come to striving for parā-bhakti, the stage of supreme devotion (Vivekananda, “Preparatory Renunciation” 432).

What is really required of us in this yoga is that our thirst after the beautiful should be directed to God. What is the beauty in the human face, in the sky, in the stars, and in the moon? It is only the partial manifestation of the real, all-embracing Divine Beauty. “He shining, everything shines. It is through His light that all things shine.” Take this high position of Bhakti, which makes you forget at once all your little personalities. Take yourself away from all the world’s little selfish clings. [...] Stand as a witness, and observe and study the phenomena of nature. Have the feeling of non-attachment with regard to man, and see how this mighty feeling of love is working itself out in the world (“The Bhakta’s Renunciation” 434).

In each manifestation of love, is the play of a universal tendency, which we witness when we cultivate non-attachment with respect to particulars. This non-attachment progresses when we devote ourselves to Ívara or some other symbol directed at Brahman. This devotion then cultivates a universal love, beyond attachment to any particular. “The bhakta’s renunciation is that of vairāgya, or non-attachment for all things that are not God, which results from anurāga, or great attachment to God” (435).

If this stage is practiced with success, we enter the supreme stage, or parā-bhakti. Here one has progressed beyond all symbols, they are no longer needed. “He sees no distinctions; the mighty Ocean of Love has entered into him, and he sees not man in man, but beholds his beloved Hari. [...] Though bitten by a serpent, they only say that a messenger came to them from their Beloved. Such men alone have the right to talk of universal brotherhood. They feel no

resentment; their minds never react in the form of hatred or jealousy” (Vivekananda, “The Bhakta’s Renunciation” 436). — The state of mind of the Realized bhakta is as follows. “He will give no room to thoughts other than those of God; his soul will be unconquerably pure and will break all the bonds of mind and matter and become serenely free (“Oneness of Higher Knowledge and Love” 444). — The non-attachment that the universal love of the bhakta creates leads to freedom from the need for pleasure derived from any particular source. Thus, the approach serves as a starting point when looking at remedies for Cicero’s problem; his feelings of grief were over the loss of a particular person.

## Conclusion

Vivekananda noted that one must develop their character harmoniously, using the yogas of jñāna, bhakti, and rāja — the two wings, and the rudder of a bird, free in its flight. — We have only been able to consider, in a preliminary fashion the balance of those opposed poles which are the wings. — Evidently, a comprehensive guide of the process of personality development, of the development of a sage of settled intelligence, is far beyond the scope of this essay, although its aim has been to outline the limitations of reason as the strict means of reaching the wisdom of the sage, a common aim of Eastern and Western philosophy. Let it be, then, an opening to methods of healing and self-improvement that diverge from reason alone.

But we must be cautious about shifting too strongly to the other pole. — And so, we stumble upon the following description of the aspirant solely fixated the development of Bhakti.

No bhakta cares for anything except love [...] The world calls him mad. I know one whom the world used to call mad, and this was his answer: “My friends, the whole world is a lunatic asylum. Some are mad after worldly love, some after name, some after fame, some after money, some after salvation and going to heaven. In this big lunatic asylum I am also mad—I am mad after God. You are mad; so am I. I think my madness is after all the best.” The true bhakta’s love is this burning madness, before which everything else vanishes for him (Vivekananda, “Conclusion” 454).

There might be much poetic inspiration emanating from such a character, many insights and healing practices targeted towards the wounds of a human heart. And yet, although we might tip our hats to divine madmen, we might, in contrast, also feel a proclivity towards the balanced and harmonious development of our characters. This proclivity is the directing impulse towards the sage-ideal that Krishna represents — the impulse towards integration.

A concern lingers; what happens when the battle is won? — In the words of Raychand Bai, Gandhi’s spiritual teacher, “Spiritual equanimity was the essence of self-realization. Anger,

conceit, deceit and greed were its adversaries” (Guha, *Gandhi before India*, qtd. in Murty, *Ahimsa, Jainism and the Covid Pandemic* 9). — It might be that so long as we live, we must fight, and these adversaries will always be present in the battlefield of one’s own mind. To be completely settled in perfect equanimity is arguably to no longer have any impulse to move or improve. After all, dissonance is needed for harmony to shine.

48. One should not give up the work suited to one’s own nature, O Son of Kuntī (Arjuna), though it may be defective, for all enterprises are clouded by defects as fire by smoke (Radhakrishnan and Moore 161).

Let us, then, with level heads and hardened hearts, sword in hand, and feet firmly planted, fight for the betterment of ourselves, to infuse this betterment into our world.

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