IS STOICISM A RELIGION?

Christian A. Bauer
B.A., California State University, Sacramento, 1997
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Abstract

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by

Christian A. Bauer

The academic community considers Stoicism to be a philosophical school that reached its peak in Rome during the first few centuries of the Common Era. Often overlooked are Stoicism's religious over tones. Beyond its philosophical dimension, Roman Stoicism should be categorized as a religion. How do modern scholars define religion? This is not a simple task. This thesis uses the expertise of Edward Arnold and Gilbert Murray to make a direct case for Stoicism as being a religion. The thesis employs the dimensional approach from Ninian Smart as a broad analysis of religion and some of its basic elements. In order to bring home the point that Stoicism is a religion, the thesis analyzes three distinct definitions of religion. Clifford Geertz, Melford Spiro, and Bruce Lincoln each approach their definitions in different ways. To this end, the thesis capitalizes on these diverse definitions to argue that Stoicism conforms to them. The thesis employs these particular definitions because they are highly influential and respected approaches to the study of religion. When put together they can form an authoritative consensus on what constitutes a religion. The textual support comes from the works of the Roman Stoics themselves, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. Taken as a whole, through these definitions and the works of the Roman Stoics, the thesis concludes that Stoicism is a religion by current standards in the field of religious studies.

_____, Committee Chair
Professor Jeffrey Brodd

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Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Stoicism was the predominant philosophy in Rome from roughly the first through the third centuries of the Common Era. Its popularity was supported by the writings of Seneca (4 BCE- 65 CE), Epictetus (55-135 CE), and the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE). From their writings, scholars can study Stoic thought and attitudes that manifest over a period of two hundred years in Rome. In addition, non-Stoic authors like Cicero (106-43 BCE) and Diogenes Laërtius (c. 3rd century CE), provide insight into the practices and beliefs of the Stoics through their accounts of Stoicism. From these primary sources, the thesis will present evidence and make an argument that Roman Stoicism ought to be considered a religion. This thesis will attempt to connect Roman Stoicism to a valid modern conception of religion. Gilbert Murray and Edward Arnold will serve to support the claim that Roman Stoicism ought to a religion. The purpose of these arguments will be to demonstrate that Stoicism in the context of Greco-Roman religions displayed religious elements that modern scholars could recognize today. The thesis will provide various definitions and a guideline examining the basic categories of religion starting with a broad classification of worldviews from Ninian Smart's dimensional scheme. Furthermore, the thesis will examine specific definitions of religion from the works of Clifford Geertz, Melford Spiro, and Bruce

Lincoln.[1] The definitions analyzed within this thesis will serve as a means for proposing that these diverse approaches to defining religion can reveal some common elements important to a modern conception of religion. Geertz, Spiro, and Lincoln do not completely agree on their definitions of religion, but each approach will serve as a valuable source for the understanding of what constitutes a religion. These three academic sources represent a well-balanced perspective on the study of religion. In sum, the thesis will use these scholars as guides for determining the fundamental characteristics of religion and demonstrate that Roman Stoicism meets the criteria established by these interdisciplinary approaches by citing the direct works of the aforementioned Roman Stoics, along with other primary Roman sources and supporting evidence from modern scholars of Stoicism.

[1] The scholarly definitions I plan to investigate are from Clifford Geertz, Melford Spiro, and Bruce Lincoln. Each definition will be cited in full at the beginning of their respective chapters.

Chapter 2

STOICISM AS A RELIGION

What does it mean to be "religious" in ancient Rome and more importantly for this thesis, how did Stoicism conform to Roman religion? Because of Rome's diverse history and eclectic religious practices and beliefs, it is difficult to provide a straightforward answer to such a question. Stoicism enters Rome roughly in the second century before the Common Era during a time when Rome was transitioning from a Republic to an Empire. Stoics who came to Rome, like Panaetius (c.185-109 BCE), found a culture rich in religious traditions. The more common practices included celebrations dedicated to the gods of the state. Sacrifice or yearly festivals are common examples of such activities. Many Romans, especially those in the upper class, would identify the religious boundary using two terms: *religio* and *superstitio*.[2] The former is a self-describing term while the latter typically a pejorative term against others; but neither

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[2] Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 215.

term easily defines the changing nature of politics and society.[3] Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes that Cicero defined *religio* as an "attitude - one that men felt in the presence of an uncanny and dreadful power of the unknown, yet a quality of men's lives, something within their heart."[4] The connotation here is that *religio* has an association with the feeling one gets when in the presence of the divine (*numen*). This can occur during a sacrifice or in the presence of a sacred place. The feeling of awe arises as a sign of respect for the power of the gods. In an internal context, *religio* could be associated with certain virtues or motivations within humankind. On the other hand, *superstitio* was believed to consist of inappropriate (selfish) or excessive religious motivation that could threaten the stability of the state.[5] In an essay to Emperor Nero, Seneca attempts to relate *religio* to the specific virtue of mercy, thereby providing his own example of his understanding of the terms:

> Just as *religio* does honor to the gods, while *superstitio* wrongs them, so good men will all display mercy and gentleness, but pity they will avoid; for it is the failing of a weak nature that succumbs to the sight of others' ills.[6]

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[3] Ibid. Beard, North, and Price caution replacing the modern term "religion" with *religio*. Religion in its modern application can be quite different from the Roman *religio*. The same applies for superstition and *superstitio*.

[4] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Indianapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 23. Smith adds that religio is a highly charged emotional and subjective reference associated with the transcendent reality in which whose name ritual observes. The Roman religious experience was to feel the 'mana' (same as *numina*) that dwells within the sacred (20-1).

[5] Beard, North, and Price 217.

[6] Seneca, *Moral Epistles,* vol. 1 Translated by Richard Gummere (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), *On Mercy* II.5.1.

In this passage, Seneca stipulates a very general understanding of *religio* and *superstitio* to Nero, in an attempt to elicit a certain response from the Emperor. Seneca is making an analogy that *religio* is an important virtue while *superstitio* a vice, just as mercy is a virtue and pity is to be avoided. The Roman Stoics understand and respect the proper religious boundaries of their contemporary Roman culture. Marcus Aurelius opens his *Meditations* with a debt to his mother for her "reverence for the divine" and to Diognetus (Marcus' painting teacher) for "not being taken in by conjurors and hoodoo artists with their talk about incantations and exorcism and all the rest of it."[7] These passages act as lessons of what might be acceptable and unacceptable religious behavior.

The external element of *religio* manifests in those actions that inspire the internal feeling of awe and respect for the unknown. Romans venerate the gods in both private and public ways. Regular prayer and sacrifice uphold the contractual relationship between humans and the gods.[8] The relationship manifests in public and private sacrifice. These activities done in their proper manner through complex rituals benefit both the individual participant and the state. This reflects the relationship between one's internal sense of awe when in the presence of the divine and the external manifestation of worship.

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[7] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations.* Translated by Gregory Hays (New York: Modern Library, 2002), I.3 and I.6.

[8] Valerie Warrior, *Roman Religion: A Sourcebook* (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2002), 4.

Edward Arnold summarizes Roman "religion" in the following way: "a theory of the existence and character of the gods; practice of ceremonies in their honor and of prayers in their favor; and the theory and practice of divination."[9] According to Arnold, the worldview of Stoicism satisfies this definition. Stoics participate in the typical "religious" functions in Rome. They participate in sacrifices, consult diviners (as Epictetus writes, "Do not, therefore, bring to the diviner desire or aversion"[10]), and Seneca marvels at the *numina* present in certain natural locations.[11] From their own writings and from non-Stoic authors, Roman Stoicism fits right in with the common Roman religious practices of its time.

In order to separate philosophical from religious discourse Arnold mentions that Stoicism distinguishes philosophical questions from religious ones depending on the nature of the question. Arnold imagines the Romans in the last century of the Republic and the first century of the Empire pursued questions like: "What is truth?" "What and who are the gods?" "Are the gods concerned with human affairs?" When one examines these questions from a theoretical perspective, one could say they belong to philosophy, but when one examines them from a practical perspective one can say that they becomes religious.[12] Stoicism fits both of these criteria. It is clearly a philosophical system, and it

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[9] Edward Arnold, *Roman Stoicism* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), 216.

[10] Epictetus, *Enchiridion,* Translated by Thomas Higginson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), 32.

[11] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 41.3. *Numen* (pl. *Numina)* is a term referring to the power or influence inherent in the divine. It refers to a specific power in a deity or a place.

[12] Arnold 2.

wins the respect of leading philosophers of its time, but as soon as the general populace accepts Stoicism, it becomes a religion. According to Arnold, Stoicism has all the components: a higher transcendent power, an orderly universe that man can explain the causes of events, a practical ethic concerned with social and personal issues. The definitions of religion this thesis covers will address these elements in detail.

In his *Roman Stoicism*, Arnold lays out his specific argument that Stoicism is a religion by focusing on three areas: self-examination, divinity (and its proof thereof), and religious duty. Under the self-examination area, Arnold talks about prayer. He defines prayer as "the daily examination of [one's] soul, to know whether it is in tune with the purpose of the universe."[13] The most famous Stoic prayer comes from one of Stoicism's early adherents, Cleanthes. His *Hymn to Zeus* is well known to the Roman Stoics: "Lead me, O Zeus, and lead me, Destiny, / What way so e'ver ye have appointed me! / I follow unafraid: yea, though the will / Turn recreant, I needs must follow still."[14] This prayer is evidence of the Stoic predisposition to revere the divine (God). On Arnold's second point about prayer, the Stoics consistently examine their lives on a daily basis, much in the same way the great hero Socrates does. The whole purpose of the Stoic life is to live in accord with Nature, so that one's soul is in proper alignment with the *λόγος*. *Λόγος* has many different meanings, but the Stoics understand the term to mean Reason, which on a

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[13] Ibid 236.

[14] Diogenes Laërtius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. vol. 2 Translated by R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), VII.147. What appears in the quote above is only a portion of the hymn. Seneca and Epictetus both quote the poem in their works, Epictetus in the *Enchiridion* 53 and Seneca in his *Moral Epistles* CVII.11.

cosmic scale often represents a Universal Mind, God or sometimes Divine Providence.[15] The *λόγος* can manifest itself internally as one's reason or externally as the order of the universe. However, regardless of its usage by the Stoics, it has the basic connotation of Reason.

Another aspect of Stoicism that Arnold considers religious is its assessment of the divine and the proofs it offers regarding the divine in the form of theological dogma. From Zeno (the founder of Stoicism) to Marcus Aurelius upholding a strict reverence to the gods is vital. Stoicism does not have atheistic tendencies; however, the tone of some Stoics suggests different interpretations of the divine. It is apparent in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* that he tends to have pantheistic leanings, while Epictetus and Seneca appear to emphasize monotheism. Different interpretations of the divine would not hurt Stoicism's case for being a religion. In fact, they probably enhance it. Religions often debate and disagree over subtle and obvious points of their doctrines and practices. Christians have a lengthy history of disagreeing with one another about doctrinal issues. While differences may arise in certain parts of Christianity or Buddhism or Stoicism, the core values typically remain. A core value of Stoicism is its belief in the divine. The Stoics would often debate the Epicureans another Hellenistic group on the topic of the divine. As Everett Ferguson points out Epicurus did believe in the gods but that they "never interfere in nature or the affairs of humans" furthermore, that "there is no place for

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[15] Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 74.

prayer or answer to prayer in his system."[16] Cicero (neither Stoic nor Epicurean but influenced by Stoicism) writes about the debate between the Stoics and the Epicureans in his *De Natura Deorum*. Cicero questions the Epicurean dismissal of the gods saying, "If they are right who deny the gods have any interest in human affairs, where is there room for *pietas*, for *sanctitas*, and for *religio*?"[17] Epictetus echoes this sentiment: "Why, if we had sense, ought we to be doing anything else, publicly and privately, than hymning and praising the Deity, and rehearsing His benefit?"[18] Cicero paints the Stoics as a contrast to the Epicureans: "There are other philosophers, and those, too, very great and illustrious men, who conceive the whole world to be directed and governed by the will and wisdom of the Gods; nor do they stop here, but conceive likewise that the Deities consult and provide for the preservation of humanity."[19] Here Cicero is referencing the Stoics. He continues in Book Two with a more precise analysis of the theological debate between these two groups. The defender of Stoicism is Lucilius Balbus and Aurelius Cotta a member of the Academics covers the polemic side. At the end of the dialogue, Cicero

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[16] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 373. Ferguson does mention that Epicurus counseled his followers to participate in sacrifices to the gods but only for "aesthetic pleasure." This might beg the question but if an Epicurean only gives "lip service" to prayer and sacrifice toward the gods, then the Roman notion of *pietas* (piety) appears to be superficial and meaningless. The Stoics would not agree with such an attitude.

[17] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, Translated by H. Rackman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923) I.ii.1.

[18] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses*, Translated by Elizabeth Carter (London: J.M. Dent, 1910), I.16.15.

[19] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* I.ii.3.

indicates in his religious views that he has more sympathy for Stoicism than for the skeptical views of Cotta.[20]

The crux of Balbus's argument hinges on four basic Stoic truths about the divine: First, that there is proof that the gods exist; second, they (the gods) explain their own nature; third, the gods govern the world; and fourth, the gods care for the fortunes of humans.

The consensus of humanity defends the first point. The majority of humans believe in a higher power, therefore, it must exist. However, Cicero uses an *a priori* argument from Chrysippus:

> 'If,' says he, 'there is anything in the universe which no human reason, ability, or power can make, the being who produced it must certainly be preferable to man. Now, celestial bodies, and all those things which proceed in any eternal order, cannot be made by man; the being who made them is therefore preferable to man. What, then, is that being but a God? If there be no such thing as a Deity, what is there better than man, since he only is possessed of reason, the most excellent of all things? But it is a foolish piece of vanity in man to think there is nothing preferable to him. There is, therefore, something preferable; consequently, there is certainly a God.'[21]

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[20] Ursula Heibges, "Cicero, a Hypocrite in Religion?" *American Journal of Philology*, vol. 90 no.3 (7/1969): 305.

[21] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II.vi.1.

The empirical example of the existence of the gods comes by way of the relationship between cause and effect. Cicero invokes the famous example of Publius Claudius Pulcher. During the First Punic War, Claudius attempts to read the auspices by releasing chickens to feed, but when they would not eat, Claudius mocks the gods by throwing the chickens into the water so they may drink instead. Claudius's impiety cost the Romans many lives through the loss of subsequent battles.[22] The empirical and rational evidence establishes the existence of the gods to the satisfaction of Cicero and his understanding of Stoic theology. A similar cause and effect relationship is also manifest in Seneca's writing: "Cause, which is to day reason, shapes matter and turns it where it will, to produce various objects."[23] The Stoic theological position creates new ethical possibilities of conceiving the divine to the educated classes of Rome, and according to Warde Fowler, this new conception would transcend the traditional Roman *numina*.[24]

The names of the gods themselves prove the second point. Each god represents its own sphere of influence. For instance, the name Jupiter means "the helping father," and Ceres similar to *gĕro* means to bear.[25] Ceres, a fertility goddess bears the yearly crops. The names of the gods themselves indicate their specific natural realm. These

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[22] Ibid II.iii.7.

[23] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 65. Humans share this ability with the divine. As an artist creates a sculpture, so too can the God cause objects to arise.

[24] Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1911), 362

[25] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II.xxviii.71.

designations help explain their nature. They are the personification of the substances that they pervade.

The third point argues that if one believes the gods exist, then they must be active. Governance is the primary activity of the gods. Thus, the conclusion is that the gods govern the world through their wisdom.[26] Cicero points to the wonders of the world as proof that the gods govern the world. How else could seeds become plants, and how else could one describe the structure of the universe and of one's body with all of its parts working together in a harmonious way? The order of the universe suggests Divine Providence.

Finally, the last point of Stoic theology is the belief that the gods care for humanity. Cicero, through the words of Balbus, examines the past for evidence. The gods cherish great men of history: Scipio, Cato, and Gaius Gracchus to name a few.[27] These men accomplish great deeds because of their piety. Seneca, while visiting Scipio's villa, is in awe: "His soul, I am convinced, has returned to the heavens whence it came, not because he commanded great armies…but because of his singular moderation and piety."[28] Perhaps a more convincing argument would be that the gods create the world for the benefit of humanity. Food and water are abundant and humans can train animals

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[26] Ibid II.xxx.76. This argument is clear in contrast to the Epicureans who believe that the gods exist but that they were unconcerned with human affairs. Cicero could not accept such a possibility, why believe in the gods at all, if they do not do anything? The Stoic belief in governance traces back to their use of the word *λόγος* and divine providence (*Meditations* II.3).

[27] Ibid II.lxii.166.

[28] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 86.1.

to perform various tasks. More specifically, there is the use of augury and sacrifices that reveal knowledge of what the gods want from humanity. The immortal gods bestow this power upon humans alone for the ascertainment of future events.[29] All these activities and objects exist for humankind's benefit. These four points lay out the Stoic theology in such a way that they integrate Roman religion. The common Roman citizen participating in sacrifices and religious festivals would understand that the gods are active in their lives. This conception of the relationship between humanity and the gods plays into the Stoic vision of Providence. Stoicism as a whole enjoys good relations with the state and with the gods of the state. On the other hand, Epicureans seem antagonistic towards religion. In fact, in the Epicurean scheme, religion is a superstition.[30] Ferguson makes a similar point about Epicurean physics, "this physical theory was the fall of religion." [31] Epicurean physics leaves no room for Divine Providence. The two groups share a common belief about the basic makeup of the universe; namely that its fundamental nature is materialistic, however, the Stoic interpretation includes a far more significant relationship between humanity and the gods. The deism of Epicurus stands in stark contrast to Stoic theology. The Stoic universe is full of Divine Providence while according to Epicurus, the gods are distant and generally uncaring of human endeavors.

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[29] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II.lxv.163.

[30] Warrior 151. She uses Lucretius's Epicurean poem *On the Nature of Things* 1.62-79 to suggest that the teachings of Epicurus would free man's mind from the "weight of Superstition (*religio*)." In this passage, it is clear that Epicureanism held a rather skeptical view of Roman religious activities.

[31] Ferguson 373.

Stoic theology conforms much more easily to the general Roman attitude about the divine. It has the support of the Roman elites, who typically identify proper and improper religious activities.[32] Stoicism's logical, physical (theological), and ethical doctrines are not antagonistic toward traditional Roman practices.

When considering the religious aspects of Roman Stoicism, it is important to include what Arnold calls "religious duty."[33] The Stoics color their world in terms of the divine. All aspects of life are divine. The performance of sacred and profane duties is essentially divine for the Stoics. All is god. Arnold quotes one of Seneca's *Epistles* (95.47): "Believe in the gods, their greatness and benevolence. Our service to them is to make ourselves like them; he who would win their favor must be a good person."[34] The two points this quote makes is that, first, one must recognize the divine and its power and goodness, that there is no evil in the divine. It is imperative that one attempt to mimic the gods. This could be an attempt by the Stoics to separate themselves from skeptics and Epicureans who pay little to no attention to the divine. The second point is that by paying attention to the divine, one will also pay attention to the community. The service to the gods is also a service to humanity. The good person in the community is a pious to the gods.

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[32] Beard, North, and Price 211.

[33] Arnold 236.

[34] Ibid 237.

In addition to Arnold's argument, Gilbert Murray makes a similar case in his lecture entitled *The Stoic Philosophy*. Like Arnold, Murray believes Stoicism can be either a philosophy or a religion depending upon which aspect is investigated: "It is a religion with its exalted passion…it represents a way of looking inward at the world and the practical problems of life which possesses still a permanent interest in the human race, and a permanent power of inspiration."[35] Murray, like Arnold, examines the three stages of Stoic history and how at each stage Stoicism questions the skeptical schools of thought and attempts to absorb itself into the normal traditions of Greco-Roman religion. Murray puts Stoicism in the context of the Roman culture of its time. As he indicates, "the old religion fell apart because people had progressed, and the old religion could not keep up."[36] Murray acknowledges the important role Stoicism plays through its moral emphasis and new perception of the divine. The Roman religion of old had neither a strict ethical doctrine nor advocated close relationships with the gods. Fowler shares a similar sentiment when he mentions Stoicism's emergence into Rome during the second century before the Common Era. He quotes Professor Lecky's book *History of European Morals*,

> Stoicism, taught by Panaetius of Rhodes, and soon after by the Syrian Posidonius, became the true religion of the educated classes. It furnished the principles of

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[35] Gilbert Murray, *The Stoic Philosophy* (New York: Putnam, 1915), 15.

[36] Ibid 21.

> virtue, coloured the noblest literature of the time, and guided all the developments of moral enthusiasm.[37]

Here Fowler indicates the relationships Panaetius develops when he comes to Rome, especially with that of Scipio Aemilianus. Fowler expresses that the Roman religion is justified through tradition and self-interest, especially the interest of the family and the state. There was no idea of transcending the *numina* until Stoicism illuminates humankind's place in the universe. As Fowler puts it,

> He [the Roman] may learn from Stoicism that there is a Power above and beyond all his *numina*, yet involving and embracing them all, to which, and by the help of which, as a man endowed with reason, he must conform his life.[38]

Roman religion had to adapt to the changes it was experiencing during this transitory period from Republic to Empire. It preserved some of its traditions, but it also eventually embraced Stoic doctrines and practices.

In sum, Murray argues that Stoicism gives the believer "armor when the world is predominately evil, and it encourages him forward when the world is predominately good."[39] Regardless of the situation in society, the Stoic could look to Stoic doctrines for guidance in all areas of life. It moves men like Marcus Aurelius to strive for good

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[37] Fowler 362. Fowler adds to this quote by saying, "To this I only need to add that it woke in the mind an entirely new idea of Deity, far transcending that of Roman *numina* and of Greek polytheism, and yet not incapable of being reconciled with these; so that it might be taken as an in pouring of sudden light upon old conceptions of the Power, glorifying and transfiguring them, rather than, like the Epicurean faith, a bitter and contemptuous negation of man's inherited religious instincts."

[38] Ibid 365

[39] Murray 56.

government and Seneca and Epictetus to advocate proper morality. The Stoic sage is the epitome of the harmony between the internal peace within and the external striving for goodness and justice. As a manifestation of this relationship, Murray includes in his argument Stoicism's concern for the community. Historically, Stoic public service starts with Zeno (the founder of Stoicism) in Athens. Devotion to the city produced a religion of public service.[40] The Stoic would be a good example to the city by living according to nature (*φῦσις*). Murray describes this action to mean "living according to the spirit which makes the world grow and progress."[41] This spirit reflects the harmonious state of the inward soul. When man realizes that all things have a natural order, he will understand the true nature of his self and the external world. The connection between the inner life of man and the external world leads the Stoic to perhaps one of his most fundamental beliefs: God. Murray identifies Stoic theology as pantheistic. The divine is within all. All things work for a single cause. On this point, the Stoics fiercely debate skeptics. Murray imagines a skeptic asking a Stoic what purpose an earthworm might have in the grand scheme of things and the Stoic replying, "Cannot an earthworm serve God?"[42] Everything has a specific function (*τέλος*), and when it does so, it performs its God given duty. Because of man's misuse of reason, he can slip away from performing his function and thus evil can result. The Stoic must be careful to guard his reason well. Therefore,

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[40] Ibid 20.

[41] Ibid 39.

[42] Ibid 42.

the sage must be wise and virtuous, reflecting the internal and external harmony. The final goal of Stoicism completes the purpose of creation, as Murray puts it: "perfection… the world will have been wrought up to the level of the divine soul…a fiery union of God."[43]

While both Arnold and Murray give sound arguments for the inclusion of Stoicism as a religion, one could argue that their definitions are biased or too narrow. Arnold gives a general definition of religion but places it strictly within the context of Greco-Roman culture; Murray never gives a specific definition of religion, but rather discusses the areas where Stoicism and specific elements of religion meet. The next task is to identify some broad dimensions of religion that might be applicable to any worldview in any culture. Using Smart's dimensional scheme, this thesis will provide support to demonstrate that Roman Stoicism exhibits traits similar to other traditions. Smart's scheme will establish a baseline for constructing a modern understanding of what constitutes a religion.

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[43] Ibid 56-57.

Chapter 3

SMART'S DIMENSIONAL WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

Phenomenologist of religion Ninian Smart set out to construct a simple matrix for identifying certain elements common to many worldviews. In his classification, Smart identifies seven basic categories. The seven dimensions are (in no specific order): ritual, experiential, narrative, ethical, social, doctrinal and material. The dimensional scheme will be useful for giving a rounded and realistic picture of religion. It is important to note that Smart uses the term "worldview" as a broad classification of groups with common

characteristics. Smart indicates that the term "worldview" refers to both religions and ideologies.[44] In the modern study of religion, Smart believes it is important to describe and understand human worldviews, not just simply listing attributes, but seeing how worldviews work through symbols and practices. Smart's dimensional analysis will provide frameworks for determining whether a worldview is also a religion.

The first task is to determine whether Stoicism fits into Smart's dimensional scheme. One dimension is what Smart calls ritual (practice). Smart defines ritual or practice as a daily, weekly, or yearly event the religious observe. An example of this might be the Jewish Sabbath meal on Friday nights. Smart describes ritual as an expression of itself through worship, prayers, and offerings.[45] Ritual is typically directed toward harmonizing the inner (self) and outer life. For example, a prayer might calm the mind of the worshipper and please the deity (the object of the prayer). In terms of the Roman Stoics, each major figure draws upon prayer and worship of a higher power. Marcus Aurelius explains the simplicity of prayer:

> Either the gods have power or they don't. If they don't, why pray?

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[44] Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000), 4.

[45] Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 6.

> If they do, then why not pray for something else instead of for things to happen or not to happen? Pray not to feel fear, or desire, or grief. If the gods can do anything, they can surely do that for us.[46]

Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics took a no nonsense approach to prayer. The act of prayer is an efficient manner of strengthening the bond between man and divine. Prayer, either for supplication or for selfish desires, is superfluous. The intended relationship between man and the divine is similar to parent and child.[47] As parents mentor children, so too do gods mentor men. A special relationship forms, as Seneca puts it: "between good men and the gods there subsists a friendship, with virtue as its bond."[48] The relationship fosters through prayer. However, the relationship appears to be a one-way street. The gods receive worship not because they need attention, but because man needs to remind himself of the existence of the divine.[49]

The Stoics also developed other practices toward the divine; in particular, they would intentionally attempt to align their free will to that of God. For the Stoics, piety represents the discipline of desire, which makes man consent freely to the divine will.[50]

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[46] Aurelius IX.40. Ironically, in another passage in the *Meditations,* Marcus Aurelius does recite a prayer asking for something to happen: "Prayer of the Athenians: 'Zeus rain down, rain down on the land and fields of Athens.' Either no prayers at al l or one as straightforward as that." (V.7).

[47] Seneca, *Essays and Letters*, Translated by Moses Hadas (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1958), *On Providence*. II.1: "God's attitude to good men is a father's; his love for them is a manly love."

[48] Ibid *On Providence* I.1.

[49] Ludwig Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 80.

[50] Hadot 134. The Stoics do believe in free will when it comes to thoughts, actions, and desires. These are things within man's control, but external factors are things outside man's control. Stoicism appears to accept a soft determinist position of free will.

The Stoic takes on this endeavor with his whole heart. Marcus Aurelius affirms the Stoic assent to a higher power:

> To welcome with affection what is sent by fate. Not to stain or disturb the spirit within him with a mess of false beliefs. Instead, to preserve it faithfully, by calmly obeying God - saying nothing untrue, doing nothing unjust.[51]

The desire to please the divine and to let its will take shape ultimately leads to the key Stoic attitude of composure (*αταραξία*). With a mind that is calm, the soul can accept all hardships with equanimity. Acceptance of the divine will marks the Stoic faith in the divine, much the same way a child will accept the will of her father. Epictetus echoes this sentiment in his *Enchiridion* (literally "guidebook"):

> Remember that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the Playwright; if He wishes the play to be short, it is short…if He wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to act even this role adroitly…for this is your business, to play admirably the role assigned to you, but selection of that role is Another's.[52]

The Stoics, through prayers, meditations, and daily affirmations, made a ritual of celebrating the divine. Other examples of Stoic practices include virtue (living an ethical

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[51] Aurelius III.16. Similar theme in VI.44. Marcus Aurelius even refers to "hand yourself over to Clothō (youngest of the three fates) voluntarily…" (IV.34). Stoics often use other names like fate, logos, Zeus, gods, or nature to describe this relationship with the divine and the free will consent to its powers. The importance of Marcus Aurelius mentioning Clothō is that the Stoics freely used mythological characters extending all the way back to Homer. The mythic is also one of the seven dimensions in Smart's scheme.

[52] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 17.

life on a daily basis) and philosophy (the daily ritual of enquiring about one's self and the external world). The important part of ritual is that it puts the worshipper in the proper frame of mind (inner state) and the outer self properly harmonizes with the cosmos. When a Stoic has attained a certain level of enlightenment, they reach the goal of the wise man (*σοφός*). He alone is the manifestation of the proper union of inner and outer harmony.

Another dimension is the mythic.[53] This dimension typically includes stories about the divine and significant historical events. The main purpose of the stories is to inspire and explain. The biblical account of creation in the book of Genesis would fit this description. The Roman Stoics occasionally refer to certain stories and descriptions they feel are allegorical to their own understanding. Zeus seems to be the focal point of their myths, for instance, Epictetus depicts Zeus as saying: "Unhappy that I am who have neither Hera, nor Athena, nor Apollo, nor brother, nor son, nor descendent, nor kinsman."[54] Seneca describes the connection of Zeus with the other powers of the universe:

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[53] Smart includes narrative in this dimension as well. Both mythic and narrative relate to the idea that religions often have stories usually from the past with the intention to teach core values or give an account of axial events important to the group.

[54] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* III.13.4.

> All names are appropriate to him [Zeus-Jupiter]. Do you want to call him Destiny? You won't be wrong…Providence? You will speak rightly…Nature? You will not be in error…The World? You will not be wrong.[55]

The Stoic use of mythic figures, whether they are of the gods or epic heroes, is to explain certain important points about their beliefs. When it comes to mentioning the gods by name, the Stoics proposed to make the myths symbols of scientific truths.[56] The gods appear as personifications of actions, places, and things. For instance, Zeus is worshiped because he pervades all life; Athena rules the aether, Hera the air, Hephaestus the fire, Poseidon the sea and Demeter the earth.[57] While often using different terms, the Stoics maintained a basic form of pantheism, and in it they could find room for the deities of the city-state of Rome and illuminate them with new meanings by unifying them into a single source: "God in all."[58] Essentially, the Stoics took the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon and equated them with their specific physical dimension.

The Stoics also refer to some important writers of myth. The Stoics extol the poetry of Homer. Marcus Aurelius sprinkles some quotes from Homer in the final

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[55] Seneca, *Natural Questions* II.45.1.

[56] Arnold 231. Not only did Vulcan represent fire and Neptune water, but the other gods personified actions or feelings, like Cupid and Venus.

[57] Diogenes Laërtius VII.147. As Ferguson points out in *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, that by simply rearranging the letters of Hera one can spell *era* (air), Demeter or *Ge Meter* can spell mother earth. (357) The gods literally and physically represented their specific attributes.

[58] Fowler 367.

eighteen verses in chapter eleven of his *Meditations*.[59] Seneca also uses Homer as an historical reference. In his *On Tranquility,* Seneca uses Achilles as an example of a heroic figure who experiences certain pleasures and pains: "Achilles…lying now on his face and now on his back, trying to settle in various postures, able to stand no position long, as sick men can't, using changes as a remedy."[60] The Stoics use specific historical events and characters as examples for their own way of life. Stoics elicit both Greek and Roman characters. Actual men, like Homer, Virgil, Socrates, and Cato the Younger, are some of the common sources Stoics look to for guidance. According to Arnold, mythic and historical figures like Heracles and Odysseus, Stoics used as symbolic models for heroic qualities like strength and endurance.[61] Cicero in his theological book *On the Nature of the Gods* mentions Chrysippus, an early Stoic, endeavors to accommodate fables of Orpheus, Hesiod, and Homer.[62] For the Stoics, these stories of mythic heroes like Heracles, who labor for the benefit of humanity and in the end become a god are metaphorical teachings.[63] These allegories remind Stoics of the spirit of humanity. Despite all the hardships of life, the human spirit can endure and prosper.

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[59] Hadot 272. Not only does Marcus include quotes from Homer in chapter eleven of his *Meditations*, but also Socrates and fellow Stoic Epictetus.

[60] Seneca, *On Tranquility* II.7. Seneca also consistently quotes Virgil's *Aeneid*. In Letter 12 Seneca writes: "I have lived; I have finished the course Fortune set me." (*Aeneid* 4.653) Letters 28, 41, 76 also contain quotations.

[61] Arnold 296.

[62] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* I.xv.224.

[63] Murray 47.

Within the narrative dimension Smart incorporates the great founding fathers, includes Buddha, Jesus, and other figures associated with the formation of a tradition.[64] In terms of Stoicism, this would include the technical founder of Stoicism, Zeno; however, the principle mythic figure is the enigmatic Socrates. It appears that all Stoics praise Socrates for his ethical convictions.

Another dimension in Smart's scheme is the doctrinal. Smart explains that this dimension "gives clarity and intellectual power to what is revealed through myths and symbols."[65] Religion typically includes specific doctrines that support beliefs, such as sin, afterlife, and even the divine. This dimension contains philosophy. Stoic doctrines typically remain within the limits of reason. Stoics divide their doctrines into three main disciplines (philosophical concerns): ethics, logic, and physics. Stoic doctrines originate with Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, but trace back to the Pre-Socratics and were still elaborated and debated even among the Roman Stoics. The Stoics hold all three disciplines equally, as all parts conform to the Reason (*λόγος*) in such a way that nature (physics), individual reason (logic), and the human community (ethics) are all rational.[66] The basic doctrine of Stoic physics is materialism. The Stoics adopt the atomic theory as the construct of the physical universe in which all things inhabit. Atoms are the basic building blocks of the cosmos. As Ferguson points out even the divine

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[64] Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

[65] Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. 8. Religious symbols can include tangible objects but also intangible concepts marking a particular belief.

[66] Hadot 78.

constitute matter.[67] However, matter can consist of very fine, virtually undetectable material. For instance, within the individual, the Stoics believe the soul (*ψυχή*) to be at least partially material. Stoic scholar Pierre Hadot theorizes:

> The word for "soul" could have two meanings for the Stoics. In the first place it was a reality made of air (*πνεῦμα*) which animates our body and receives the impressions, or *phantasiai*, from external objects…however, when he [Marcus Aurelius] speaks about "us" and about the soul, he is thinking of that superior or guiding part of the soul which the Stoics called the *ἡγεμώνικον* (guiding principle).[68]

This is the rational element found in humanity. In other words, it is the will. In the second discipline of logic, Diogenes Laërtius describes Stoic dialectic as the "science of discoursing correctly or arguing in question and answer form; hence they also define it as the science of things true and false and neither true nor false."[69] Logic is the tool of the rational faculty. As an official philosophical school, it is not difficult to conclude that Stoicism consists of specific doctrines that explain the origin, nature, and conclusion of the universe.

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[67]Ferguson. 356. Ferguson quotes a Stoic source regarding the divine as "perfectly good and wise gas" and "intelligent, fiery breath." (357) In Arnold's *Roman Stoicism* "God" is defined from the Stoic point of view as "a rational and fiery spirit, having no shape, but changing to what it wills and made like to all things." (222) This definition appears to include both the physical/material and the invisible. The Stoics appeal to both the immanence and transcendence of the divine.

[68] Hadot 106.

[69] Diogenes Laërtius VII.42.

Religions typically construct a code of conduct for both the individual and the community of believers. This is the key concept of Smart's ethical dimension. The Ten Commandments are an example of a religious code of ethics. Religions typically build ethics into the daily life through control of thought and behavior. Roman Stoicism is most noteworthy for its emphasis on ethics. The ethical doctrine of the Stoics places a fundamental concern on the virtuous life, which is living in accordance with reason. When one's actions are in tune with the universe, then the person is truly happy. The attainment of composure (*αταραξία*) is the proper frame of mind of an individual living a life in accordance with Nature. Stoic ethics trace its origins all the way back to Socrates. Socrates is the epitome of the wise man (*σοφός*), the figure in whom virtue and wisdom manifest through a good ethical life. He represents how individuals ought to behave in their daily life. While the Stoics seek the ethical title of sage or wise man (*σοφός)*, they also agree with Aristotle's ethical goal of happiness (*εύδαιμονία*) in that it relates to one's purpose (*τέλος*). All things have a function in the world, and one's proper function is to apply reason correctly. By doing so, the wise person will attain a level of composure that will allow for clarity of thought to make the correct judgments about things; ergo becoming the wise man (*σοφός*). Life according to nature entails for the Stoic an attunement between his own attitudes and actions and the rational course of events.[70] The

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[70] A.A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 101. All three doctrines (elements of Stoic study) come together in the manifestation of the wise man. Through his proper use of reason (logic), he lives a virtuous (rational) life that is beneficial for himself and the community (ethics), and through his thoughts and actions, he lives a life in tune with nature (physics/God).

happy life is the outward demonstration of the Stoic pursuit of logic and ethics, and the manifestation of the belief in the divine. Seneca concludes this in Letter 92 on *The Happy Life*:

> What is the happy life? Self-sufficiency and abiding tranquility. This is the gift of greatness of soul, the gift of constancy which perseveres in a course judged right.[71]

Marcus Aurelius makes a similar judgment in his *Meditations*:

> You don't need much to live happily. And just because you've abandoned your hopes of becoming a great thinker or scientist, don't give up on attaining freedom, achieving humility, serving others, and obeying God.[72]

The Roman Stoics advocate a simple plan to achieve the ethical goal: Live a rational life. In most ethical doctrines, there are typically virtues, vices, morally right acts, and morally wrong acts. The Stoics appear to be mindful of the importance of right action and beliefs. Marcus Aurelius states:

> Two kinds of readiness are constantly needed: (i) to do only what the λόγος of authority and law directs, with the good of human beings in mind; (ii) to reconsider your position, when someone can set you straight or convert you to his.

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[71] Seneca, *The Happy Life* 92.3.

[72] Aurelius VII.67.

> But your conversion should always rest on a conviction that it's right, or benefits others – nothing else. Not because it's more appealing or more popular.[73]

The Stoic ethical system values good over evil and virtue above vice. The key part of the Stoic ethical system is the ability to make right judgments. This becomes the intersection of Stoic logic and ethics. As Seneca mentions, "But the presiding judge is, of course, reason; reason holds jurisdiction over good and evil just as it does over virtue and honor."[74] The Stoics connect being ethical with being rational. The correct and rational life is one that is in harmony with Nature. Quite simply, Marcus Aurelius sums up the Stoic ethical concern by stating, "Stop talking about what the good man is like, and just be one."[75]

Smart's system includes a social dimension. This includes organizations and institutions with communal control. Smart states, "the social dimension indicates the way in which men's lives are in fact shaped by the way religious institutions operate."[76] The social is an expression of the other dimensions (ethical, doctrinal, mythic, etc.) by making religious claims about the nature of the invisible world and how it ought to shape men's lives.[77] Stoicism contains a social feature. It had an extensive influence in Rome during the first few centuries before the Common Era and then for another couple hundred years

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[73] Ibid IV.12.

[74] Seneca, *Epistle* 124.3.

[75] Aurelius X.16.

[76] Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* 10.

[77] Ibid 10.

thereafter. Powerful senators like Cicero admired Stoicism and accepted some of its doctrines. Seneca tutored the Emperor Nero. Even a freed slave like Epictetus became a Stoic teacher and garnered a following of students who wished to learn from him. Stoicism was built upon a tradition of philosophers debating and lecturing on the *Stoa Poikilê* (painted porch) of their buildings (hence the name Stoicism). The strongest case for the social in Stoicism is the Stoic attitude of universal brotherhood. The Stoics were by no means anti-social mendicants who lived outside the city gates. The Stoics advocated working together with their community to create strong social bonds. Marcus Aurelius reminds himself as Emperor that he has a duty to others: "When you have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, remember your defining characteristic - what defines a human being - is to work with others."[78] The social bond is a rational one. It benefits all. Seneca echoes Marcus Aurelius's sentiments:

> The best course…is to be employed in some active career, in political activity and civic functions…For when a man's declared object is to make himself useful to his fellow citizens and to all mankind, he will exercise and improve his abilities by participating fully in demanding activities, serving both public and private interests as best he can.[79]

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[78] Aurelius VIII.12. When the League of Nations formed after World War One, Marcus Aurelius was recognized as being one of the first rulers to advocate a universal citizenship. In VI.38 Marcus Aurelius reminds us of how everything is interconnected and related to one another: "Things push and pull on each other, and breathe together, and are one." In III.4, he says, "to care for all human beings is part of being human."

[79] Seneca, *On Tranquility* III.1.

Both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius place great emphasis on social participation working together with their fellow man for betterment of oneself and the community. The Stoic connection links not only the community of rational creatures together but also the entire rational universe. Interestingly, Stoicism appears to disconnect itself from any type of social hierarchy common in Rome. For instance, Marcus Aurelius reminds himself not to play the game many emperors have before him,

> That I had someone [his father] as a ruler and father who could keep me from being arrogant and make me realize that even at court you can live without a troop of bodyguards, and gorgeous clothes, lamps, sculpture – the whole charade.[80]

Stoicism, with its emphasis on universal unity, does not create any type of social hierarchy. In some circumstances, there is the bond between a student and a teacher or largely there is the relationship between humanity the divine but otherwise all are equal, from the emperor (Marcus Aurelius) to the slave (Epictetus). The point is that Stoicism does not recognize many of the unwarranted inequalities of the Roman social system.

The experiential is another of Smart's worldview dimensions. Humans can hope for interaction with the divine but direct experience creates a personal feeling of connection with the invisible.[81] The experience and emotion of communion with the divine is a fundamental tenet of Stoicism. Smart mentions that in Roman religion, the

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[80] Aurelius I.17.

[81] Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* 11.

predominant experience was humanity's encounter with the *numina*.[82] In their writings, Roman Stoics often attempt to translate their profound experiences of the transcendent. From Epictetus we get a question: "Could God become so disinterested in his masterpieces, his servants, and his witnesses: those he places as examples before people without any moral training?"[83] Epictetus is asking his reader to understand the mind of God and to recognize what the divine does to aid humanity. Marcus Aurelius offers his spiritual exercises in the *Meditations*, in which he often communes with the divine: "But they [gods] do exist, they do care what happens to us, and everything a person needs to avoid real harm they [gods] have placed within him."[84] Marcus Aurelius emphasizes the compassion of the gods. Seneca too addresses the experiential: "God is near you, he is with you, and he is within you."[85] All three major Roman Stoics attempt to relate personal experiences with the divine, especially a feeling of interconnectedness to all things through the sharing of the *λόγος*. The experience of the divine confirms the Stoic discipline of ethics and physics. Since all things are interconnected via the *λόγος*, so too are the threefold Stoic disciplines.

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[82] Smart, *The World's Religions* 14.

[83] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* II.26.28. Of course, this is a rhetorical question. Epictetus believed in an active deity with a concern for man's activities. In I.14, he says, "That the Deity oversees all men." Also in II.16.42 he says, "Use me henceforth for whatever Thou wilt; I am of one mind with Thee; I am Thine."

[84] Aurelius II.12. He makes similar gestures in V.27 "to live with the gods" and V.33 "honor and revere the gods." Interestingly, Marcus Aurelius tends to speak to the divine in pantheistic terms, where the gods pervade all things, but Epictetus often uses the term god in a singular voice (monotheism). The differences here are minor because all these references relate to the one universal source: *λόγος*. Whether in the form of the many gods of the pantheon or just one entity, the ultimate reality is that the *λόγος* (reason) governs the whole.

[85] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 41.1.

Smart's worldview analysis includes a material dimension. The material typically includes some type of physical manifestation associated with the religion, like a work of art or a building.[86] The evidence is scant since Roman Stoicism existed about two thousand years ago, but a few tantalizing features remain. The most obvious examples may be the sculptures of Marcus Aurelius (like the *Equestrian Statue* on the Capitoline Hill), but these works of art are probably more political than they are religious. Other works of art bearing Stoic images, like the sculptures of Zeno and Chrysippus (and even Socrates), indicate a certain level of respect for these iconic founders of Stoicism. The Greeks and Romans produced busts, sculptures and other depictions of many reverential figures including philosophers, politicians, and emperors, along with the gods. It is quite possible that the construction of these material forms arise to honor the founding fathers of Stoicism for their special contributions. Diogenes Laërtius recounts, the Athenians honored Zeno with the keys to the city, a golden crown, and a bronze statue.[87] Material forms symbolize the power inherent in the thing itself. There is a certain transcendent quality to those people, places, and things that display excellence. One feels the power of the divine through various experiences. Seneca speaks of a sense of overwhelming religious awe that arises when in the physical presence of certain objects and places:

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[86] Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* 21. A cross, or a statue, or buildings, some other tangible artifact of religious significance are examples of the material. Material can also include music and therefore one can conclude certain sounds with specific sacredness and meaning.

[87] Diogenes Laërtius VII.7.

> If you have ever come upon a grove that is thick with ancient trees which rise far above their usual height and block the view of the sky with their cover of intertwining branches…if a cave made by deep erosion of rocks supports a mountain with its arch…We venerate the sources of mighty rivers, we build an altar where a great stream suddenly bursts forth from a hidden source, we worship hot springs, and we deem lakes sacred because of their darkness or immeasurable depth.[88]

Smart suggests that the material could also include a specific natural place, for instance, the Bodhi tree under which Siddhartha Gautama attained his enlightenment holds special significance to Buddhists.[89] It appears that Seneca's description above matches Smart's conception of the purpose of the material in his religious dimension scheme.

Stoics not only worshipped specific natural places as indicated by Seneca, but also congregated in urban areas. The Stoics take the name from the painted porches *(Stoa Poikilê)* from which the faithful preached. Perhaps the buildings themselves were material symbols of Stoicism. In terms of religious activities in Rome, material objects and places are common in worship. For instance, the Romans built countless altars, for ritual sacrifices. They built many temples to house the gods of the state. The Latin word

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[88] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 41.3. The *numina* appears to be both an experience of the transcendent or power of the divine that the believer experiences (hence it can belong to Smart's experiential dimension), but the experience manifests when in the presence of a physical location usually inhabited by this divine power, thus its connection also in Smart's material dimension.

[89] Smart, *The World's Religions* 22.

templum had a very specific meaning, relating to specific religious activities.[90] A simple examination of ancient Roman culture and the artifacts that remain from that era show the importance of the material upon religious practices and beliefs. Roman Stoicism is part of Roman culture. The Stoics appear to be willing participants in common Roman religious activities. For example, the relief panel on Marcus Aurelius' triumphal arch depicts him attending a sacrifice. Similarly, Seneca's letter describing the sense of awe in the presence of religious places indicates Stoic belief is not antagonistic toward common Roman dispositions.

Based on Smart's seven dimensions, it is clear that Stoicism contains basic elements similar to other worldviews. However, Smart's dimensional scheme applies to many different worldviews, some of which like Marxism or Secular Humanism may not be recognized or accepted as religious institutions. Smart acknowledges that no one dimension is any more crucial than any other.[91] What Smart's dimensional plan provides is a set of characteristics to hold up for inspection. By examining each dimension, the thesis demonstrates how closely Stoicism conforms to that dimension. The dimensions taken as a whole can provide a baseline for determining the types of characteristics that might appear in the next section with specific definitions of religion.

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[90] Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price. *Religions of Rome*. vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86. More specifically, *templum* refers to an area of the sky within which signs from the gods are observed, a place where the auspices are taken. A place held a special relationship between man and the gods.

[91] Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* 6.

Chapter 4

GEERTZ'S DEFINITION

In this section, this thesis will examine three different scholarly approaches to the definition of religion. The purpose for the inclusion of Geertz, Spiro, and Lincoln is to analyze each of their definitions and demonstrate how Stoicism meets their respective criteria. The thesis purposefully utilizes these specific definitions because they focus on specific elements of religion that can translate well to Stoicism. In sum, they can strengthen the case for the argument that Stoicism fits the modern approach to understanding religion.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz uses what he calls the "cultural dimension of religious analysis."[92] His approach is to examine an ethos (character), of a group in response to the world around them. The ethos of a group can shape the quality of life, morality and vision of a group's worldview. Geertz's definition of religion consists of five specific parts: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such

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[92] Clifford Geertz. "Religion as a Cultural System," In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (Frederich A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 3.

an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[93] Geertz's symbolic system of religion acknowledges internal and external elements of religion. Lincoln finds it difficult to include internal symbolic characteristics in defining religion. Nonetheless, this thesis will proceed through each part in order. The analysis of this definition will "provide a useful orientation, or reorientation, of thought, such that an extended unpacking of them can be an effective way of developing and controlling a novel line of inquiry."[94] The explicit terms will provide a platform for argumentation.

Religious symbols can be difficult to define, but a common example is the cross, which represents Christ's sacrifice on behalf of all humanity. However, symbols do not necessarily need to be tangible objects of worship. Subtler symbols can be particular concepts that can model human thought. For instance, in Hinduism, *dharma* is a social, philosophical, and religious concept that models Indian thought. Certainly, there are many aspects of religion that are internally and externally symbolic, concepts and material objects help model behavior and beliefs. Geertz's entire definition of religion begins with symbols. However, Geertz uses symbols in a general way. Symbols can refer to any object, quality, or act that serves as a conception. He recognizes a dual aspect to symbols; they act as "models of" and "models for" the human mind.[95] Symbols are alternative models for the human mind to understand deeper truths.

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[93] Ibid 4.

[94] Ibid 4.

[95] Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 94. Geertz describes the function of these models as the "essence of human thought" (94).

Symbols shape the character of a group. The Stoics used symbols as examples to model behavior and beliefs. Mentally, the Stoics looked to their heroes of the past for inspiration. The life, mission, and martyrdom of Socrates represent the proper (ideal) mode of living. Because of Geertz's sweeping application of symbols, Socrates could be an example for the Stoics as a "model for" the ideal life. The name "Socrates" held specific symbolic meaning and sacredness to the Stoics. His defiance toward the Athenian jurymen who condemned him to death represented a key symbol for the Stoic attitude toward death and injustice. All three major Roman Stoics mention Socrates by name. Seneca mentions Socrates throughout his moral essays. In one called *On Suicide,* Seneca cites Socrates' method of death (drinking hemlock) as a noble way to die.[96] Marcus Aurelius sporadically sprinkles Socrates throughout his *Meditations* as a symbol for the nobility of the soul:

> Whether he was satisfied to treat men with injustice and the gods with reverence and didn't lose his temper unpredictably at evil done by others, didn't make himself the slave of other people's ignorance, didn't treat anything that nature did as abnormal, or put up with it as an unbearable imposition, didn't put his mind in his body's keeping.[97]

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[96] Seneca, *On Suicide* I.4. Seneca uses Socrates as a symbol for "understanding that in a commonwealth under oppression there is opportunity for a wise man to assert himself." (*On Tranquility* V.1).

[97] Aurelius VII.66.

The Stoics admired Socrates for his character and his integrity at his trial standing up for truth in the face of death. Epictetus symbolizes Socrates liberally throughout his works, for example in verse five of *The Enchiridion* it reads, "Death is nothing dreadful, or else Socrates too would have thought so."[98] In his *Moral Discourses*, reported by his student Arrian, Epictetus mentions Socrates with great admiration:

> Whereas it was the principal and most peculiar characteristic of Socrates never to be provoked in a dispute, nor to throw out any reviling or injurious expressions, but to bear patiently with those who reviled him, and to put an end to controversy.[99]

The life of Socrates could be seen in a similar light as Muhammad to Muslims and as saints are to Catholics. These characters are given the highest respect and are often quoted and continually on the minds of the believers. Epictetus asks, "When you are about to meet somebody, in particular when it is one of those men who are held in very high esteem, propose to yourself the question, 'What would Socrates or Zeno have done under these circumstances?'"[100] Socrates was indeed a powerful material symbol to the Stoics. Socrates really means something to the Stoics. He is the epitome of the

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[98] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 5. The Stoic attitude toward death comes from Socrates. The Stoics did not fear what was natural, and death happens to all things. All three major Roman Stoics remind themselves constantly that death is nothing to fear, and in fact can even be a glorious thing because it is the release of the soul from its physical prison.

[99] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* II.XII.2.

[100] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 33. Here Zeno refers to the founder of Stoicism. This saying appears similar to the now famous Christian bracelets asking, "What would Jesus do?"

philosopher, a figure the Stoics quote more regularly and with more detail than any other non-Stoic.[101]

Symbolically, the Stoics idealize Socrates as a model for the wise man (*σοφός*). The goal of Stoicism is to exhibit composure (*αταραξία*). The wise man consistently keeps his composure regardless of the surroundings. Socrates is the quintessential example of this Stoic ideal. The modern comprehension of "stoic" reflects this idea. One might say that the coach remains "stoic" despite his team's crushing defeat. To the Roman Stoics, Socrates' philosophical mission and subsequent martyrdom represents an ideal life for the wise man who demonstrates composure in the face of danger.

Beyond Socrates, there are other personalities, like Cato the Younger, who dies standing up for the Roman Republic. Marcus Aurelius recognizes the debt he owes his brother (Severus) because "through him I encountered Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion, and Brutus, and conceived of a society of equal laws."[102] The Stoics hold these heroes in high regard as symbols of their system of beliefs. As a whole, one can summarize the Stoic tradition as a fusion of these three earlier doctrines: the Socratic ethical tradition, the Heraclitean physical model, and the dialectical tradition of Aristotle.[103] These

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[101] Long 12.

[102] Aurelius I.14. Marcus Cato (Cato the Younger) was a senator who sided with Caesar's rival Pompey in defense of the Republic. When Caesar's victory was imminent, he killed himself and became a heroic symbol of Stoic resistance to tyranny. The names mentioned in this passage are various Roman Stoic heroes. Thrasea stood up to Nero and died as a result. Helvidius, Thrasea's son-in-law met with an equal fate under Vespasian.

[103] Hadot 73. Heraclitus was known for his materialist view of the universe, Aristotle for his logic, and Socrates for his ethics. The Stoics adopted each of these philosophical viewpoints. To the Roman Stoics, in particular, the Socratic ethical life features most prominently.

philosophers shape the thought of the Stoic tradition. As a result, each philosopher symbolizes his specific contribution to Stoic doctrine.

The fundamental external symbol of Stoicism is the emphasis placed on order, especially order found in nature. The Stoics typically used the word *κόσμος* to denote a world filled with order controlled by God.[104] One can easily discern order within nature. One could simply examine how the natural world consists of repetitive patterns (day/ night, hot/cold, and birth/death) and recognize that the macro-world is quite structured. The change that occurs in the natural world is not random but, in fact, has a specific purpose. Diogenes Laërtius breaks down the Stoic usage of the term *κόσμος* into three senses: (1) God himself, (2) artificer of this orderly arrangement (3) whole of which these two (1 and 2) are parts.[105] The principle preserver of the *κόσμος* is the *λόγος,* the universal Reason (God). The *λόγος* is the model of the universe itself. Reason guides all things. The Stoics trace these terms back to one of their heroes; Heraclitus and his materialistic physics. Heraclitus writes, "men should try to comprehend the underlying coherence of things: it is expressed in the *λόγος*, the formula or element of arrangement common to all things."[106] Order as an external symbol represents the easily discernible

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[104] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* viii. Pre-Socratics like Heraclitus and Anaxagoras heavily influenced the Stoic cosmology. They developed a physical model of the universe that included an orderly mingling of the basic elements. They were some of the first philosophers documented to include terms like cosmos, logos, and mind (νους).

[105] Diogenes Laërtius VII.138.

[106] G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Fragment 194. According to Heraclitus, the *κόσμος* has a *λόγος* to which all men ought to attune. Heraclitus also asserted that the soul consisted of fire (fragment 217).

patterns of the natural world and the human world. There is reason in human discourse, society, and the universe itself.[107] Marcus Aurelius consistently reminds himself of this symbol of order:

> An ordered world or mishmash. But still an order. Can there be order within you and not in everything else? In things so different, so dispersed, so intertwined?[108]

Marcus Aurelius recognizes the external order and concludes that while we might identify things differently or things might have different substances; we still connect them through the roles they play in the grand scheme of things. Marcus Aurelius also makes a connection between this external order one experiences in nature to an internal order of logic and reason. The *λόγος* permeates both the external universe and the internal workings of humanity. It symbolizes the connection between the two worlds.

Geertz establishes the mentality of symbols as "powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men." Geertz adds that the symbols shape the worshipper to a certain set of dispositions, a chronic character that increases the probability of a particular set of skills, habits, and actions.[109] The moods and motivations established by their ethical symbol (Socrates) provide the Stoics with what they believe to be a proper attitude toward life. As the wise man, Socrates is the symbol of

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[107] Ibid 82.

[108] Aurelius IV.27. For similar themes, see also IV.2, IV.12, IV.14, and VI.36a. The *λόγος* is not only an external component of the cosmos, but it also dwells within each individual. Reason is not only a part of the universal system but also of human constructs.

[109] Geertz. "Religion as a Cultural System" 9.

composure. It is from him that motivates Stoics to build the proper character. Symbols can be didactic, as Seneca writes to his student, the Emperor Nero, "The true fruit of right deeds is, to be sure, in the doing, and no reward outside themselves is worthy of the virtues."[110] The Stoic pursuit of virtue for its own sake traces it roots back to Socrates himself. At his trial, Socrates advocates a life of philosophy when he tells the jurymen: "the greatest good for a man is to discuss virtue every day."[111] In the case of Seneca, he advises Nero to show clemency because it is the right thing to do and for no other reason. The Roman Stoics' motivation appears to have its source with the divine, and its great saint, Socrates, but practicing virtue is a fundamental aspect of being human, and at least for the Roman Stoics the most important part of life. The difficulty of maintaining a high moral standard is foremost on the Stoic minds, as is most readily apparent in the writings of Marcus Aurelius, probably due to his political position. Here are a few of his thoughts on this topic:

> Don't ever forget these things: The nature of the world. My nature. How I relate to the world. What proportion of it I make up. That you are part of nature, and no one can prevent you from speaking and acting in harmony with it, always.[112]

In another passage, he echoes similar sentiments: "Don't waste the rest of your time here worrying about other people- unless it affects the common good…He [servant of the

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[110] Seneca, *Moral Essays*, Translated by John Basore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), *On Mercy* I.1.

[111] Plato, *Apology*, Translated by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000), 38a.

[112] Aurelius II.9.

gods] keeps in mind that all rational things are related, and that to care for all human beings is part of being human."[113] This motivation to be good and help others might appear to be pleasant and upbeat, however, the stereotype of Stoicism is its gloomy and melancholy moods on the overall status of human life and the universe as a whole. Geertz acknowledges that moods come and go with varying degrees of intensity, but that the source determines the mood.[114] Philosophers like Heraclitus or Socrates (who are popular with Stoic writers), could provide different moods. From Heraclitus, the physical message the Stoics receive is rather grim. In the Heraclitean model, a great conflagration occurs at the end of time. However, Stoics dispute over whether souls survive this process. The consensus among Stoics is that personal immortality appears unlikely.[115] The "I" cannot survive bodily death and the fate of the soul meets with indifference.[116] One interpretation of this conclusion is that the universe is determined and fate is fixed. It might lend itself to nihilism or fatalism, but the Stoics do not surrender to such

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[113] Ibid. III.4. Also in V.22, and VI.38 there are similar themes of working together with others and doing good for the benefit of the community as opposed to one's selfish interests. Again, these sayings echo the Socratic mantra of virtue is its own reward and one should look to virtue first instead of one's private interests.

[114] Geertz. "Religion as a Cultural System" 12.

[115] Ferguson 358. Chrysippus was the leading proponent that the soul does survive but most other Stoics disagreed. By the time of the Roman Stoics, there was a belief in a limited survival; the souls of the wise men absorb into the World Soul. See Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* IV.14 and VI.24.

[116] Arnold 127. The concept of "indifference" or "detachment" is an extremely interesting topic. There does not appear to be negative connotations to such terms when applied to the Stoics. The Stoic mood may appear to be indifferent to external events and things outside the individual's control, such as the fate of the soul, but it is a different mood from that which we can control, namely the will. To believe that the Stoics were always indifferent to all things is an oversimplification. The Stoics experienced joy and happiness from living a good life. Marcus Aurelius reminds himself that "'Enjoyment' means doing as much of what your nature requires as you can. And you can do that anywhere." (X.33).

judgments. The Stoics do believe in freedom of the will, especially when it comes to three disciplines: assent, desire, and action. Everything else is outside of our control. The Stoics appear to take a positive approach to that which we can control. Marcus Aurelius writes, "Your present inner disposition is enough for you, as long as it finds its joy within the present conjuncture of events."[117] Seneca writes, "At each present moment, we can say, with God, 'Everything belongs to me.'"[118] In the *Discourses of Epictetus,* he is quoted as saying, "And then you blame the gods! For what else can be the consequences of so ignoble a spirit but sheer impiety? And yet God has not merely given us these faculties, to bear all that happens without being degraded and crushed thereby."[119] The Roman Stoics have a clear doctrine that humanity can exercise free will, especially those things within our control, and that all else we should accept as part of our destiny. Through the proper use of the will the wise man can attain *αταραξία.* The ability to wake up each day and live well is good enough to keep one's spirits high. Marcus Aurelius contemplates:

> But I have seen the beauty of good, and the ugliness of evil, and have recognized that the wrongdoer has a nature related to my own…No one can implicate me in

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[117] Aurelius IX.6.

[118] Seneca, *Moral Essays On Benefits* VII.3.

[119] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* I:14:12-13.

> ugliness. Nor can I feel angry at my relative, or hate him…To feel anger at someone, to turn your back on him: these are obstructions.[120]

One interesting point about Stoic moods stems from their interpretation of death and its implication on life. The inevitability of death provides a proper motivation for the Stoic to exercise virtue. Roman Stoics lived during a harsh time. Nero exiles Seneca and later orders Seneca to commit suicide. While a slave, Epictetus endures horrific mistreatment by his master. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius must deal with Rome's burdens of a fading empire. The lives of the Roman Stoics appear to be worthy of tragic heroes, but again the symbol for suffering comes from their great ethical source: Socrates. Socrates' martyrdom paved the way for Stoics to live philosophy as a way of life. In Plato's *Phaedo* Socrates keeps a calm and positive outlook on the state of his soul. Socrates has been tried and convicted and he will soon die. Surrounded by some of his friends, in the last moments of his life, he convinces his friends:

> That is the reason why a man should be of good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has ignored the pleasures of the body and its ornamentation as of no concern to him and doing him more harm than good, but has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning, and adorned his soul not with alien but

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[120] Aurelius II.1. Seneca makes a similar point: "If the efficacy of virtue keeps a man from being wretched, it is certainly capable of making him very happy." *Moral Epistles* 92 "The Happy Life."

> with its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom, and truth, and in that state awaits his journey into the underworld.[121]

The Stoics adopt this Socratic concern for the care of the soul through virtue. They admire Socrates for his bravery in the face of death and for his conviction that virtue is the true goal of humanity; however, the Stoics do not share the same hope that Socrates has with regard to the afterlife. The Stoics appear to resign themselves to the belief that the soul somehow does not continue in an individual afterlife, yet the Stoics still hold to such a high standard of virtue for its own sake.

The stereotype of Stoicism and its melancholy mood has its connections to the meaning of the common usage of the word "stoic." However, Geertz does not specify which moods a religion might elicit from its practitioners. Typically, the experience of awe or reverence in the presence of the divine might be a satisfactory example of creating a religious mood. Stoicism certainly contains such awe, especially when contemplating the divine. Marcus Aurelius says:

> People ask, 'Have you ever seen the gods you worship? How can you be sure they exist?' Answers: (I) Just look around you (II) I've never seen my soul either and yet I revere it. That's how I know the gods exist and why I revere them - from having felt their power, over and over.[122]

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[121] Plato, *Phaedo* 114d-e.

[122] Aurelius XII.28.

The Stoics find their most powerful moods, joy and happiness, in completing their purpose, which is acting in accordance with nature. Marcus Aurelius writes:

> To do what is just with all one's soul, and to tell the truth. What remains for you to do but enjoy life, linking each good thing to the next.[123]

The good Stoic will take care of the soul through the proper exercise of virtue. The virtuous life is also the happy life. Man's greatest gift is the intellect, and through proper cultivation, the Stoic can use the power of the intellect for good instead of evil, and by doing so live a happy and virtuous life.

The third part of Geertz's definition is "…by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence…" Essentially, Geertz's meaning here is that religious symbols create certain moods in people, and they convey some transcendent truth about the universe, namely that the cosmos can be explained by some power that orders it. For example, the popular Greek myth sometimes called the Rape of Persephone. To summarize, Persephone is the daughter of Demeter the goddess of grain. Persephone is taken against her will by Hades (god of the underworld) to be his bride in the land of the dead. Demeter, distraught over the result of losing her daughter angrily destroys the grain. In an attempt to rectify the situation, Zeus (king of the gods) determines that Persephone should spend some of the time in the underworld as the bride of Hades but then in the springtime she returns to her mother. This myth explains the cyclical pattern of nature

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[123] Ibid XII.29. See also VI.7, V.9, and X.33 for similar themes. Seneca echoes a similar sentiment: The effect of wisdom is a continuous joy…and only the strong, the just, and the temperate can possess this joy. (*Letters to Lucilius* 59.16-17).

and specifically the seasonal life and death of the crops. The events of the myth symbolize what humans experience on earth and it explains phenomena that could not be explained scientifically yet. All oddities and unexplained events must be accounted by reference to some higher purpose or power. The explanations often appear in the form of a theodicy. Two fundamental questions religion deals with in order to confirm order in the universe is the problem of suffering and of evil. Why do humans suffer? Why is there evil in the world? Often, these two questions connect, especially when it comes to a religion's theodicy. Stoicism tackles both of these basic religious questions. To the first, the Stoics relate all suffering back to the divine, and more specifically to the plan of the divine. The *λόγος* provides man with all he'll ever need to endure the hardships of life. Marcus Aurelius writes, "Nothing happens to anyone that he can't endure. The same thing happens to other people, and they weather it unharmed."[124] Seneca reflects the same thought: "The best men are conscripts of toil."[125] The Universal Nature equips man with the proper faculties to endure pain. When man exercises this faculty, he is in contact with reason and becomes a better man. The Stoics believe that the divine tests man, so that he can use what is good about his nature. Without being tested, man becomes weak. Socrates advocates living such a life, in his famous line in the *Apology*: "If I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day…for the unexamined life is not

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[124] Ibid V.18.

[125] Seneca, *On Providence* V.2.

worth living for men."[126] The Stoics share these sentiments that man ought to test himself daily to improve the state of his soul, and that through this duty he can come closer to the divine. Seneca extols the virtues of tranquility:

> We must learn to strengthen self-restraint, curb luxury, temper ambition, moderate anger, view poverty calmly, cultivate frugality, use readily available remedies for natural desires, keep restive aspirations and a mind intent upon the future under lock and key, and make it our business to get our riches from ourselves rather than from Fortune.[127]

Seneca here is advocating a resistance to certain pleasures that can weaken the soul. The process of suffering is one way in which the divine tests us, so that we may become spiritually stronger. Epictetus reminds us, "You are nothing but a little soul carrying a cadaver."[128] The body may suffer many painful experiences (as Epictetus experienced directly as a slave), but the soul has the power to overcome this because the soul is the more important part of us, and if properly attuned, the soul can use suffering to come closer to the divine. Seneca sums it up: "He [God] does not treat the good man like a toy, but tries him, hardens him, and readies him for himself."[129]

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[126] Plato, *Apology* 38a.

[127] Seneca, *On Tranquility* I.9.

[128] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* II.19.27.

[129] Seneca, *On Providence* I.4. At the end of his essay, he writes, "I have given your minds armor to withstand them; [evil] bear them with fortitude." (VI.3).

Where does evil manifest? According to the Stoics, evil exists in the world, but only through the will of man. One's reason is neither good nor bad, like impulses and desires; it only becomes good or bad, whether it emits true or false judgments.[130] The freedom of the will allows one to make judgments, but through those judgments, it can produce good and evil. The Stoics concern themselves with the proper use of reason. Epictetus says in the opening verse of his *Enchiridion*:

> Remember that if what is naturally slavish you think to be free, and what is not your own to be your own, you will be hampered, will grieve, will be in turmoil, and will blame both gods and men; while if you think only what is your own to be your own, and what is not your own to be, not your own, then no one will ever be able to exert compulsion upon you, no one will hinder you…no one will harm you, for neither is there any harm that can touch you.[131]

Evil can only occur when the individual allows it to enter their life through improper reason and deficient knowledge. Stoics like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus both follow Plato's edict that no one is evil voluntarily but only through their own mistaken value judgments.[132] The Stoic avoids evil when he takes care of the guiding part his soul, the *ἡγεμώνικον*. Epictetus points this out again in the *Enchiridion*:

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[130] Hadot 88-89.

[131] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 1.

[132] Hadot 126. Epictetus alludes to Plato in his *Moral Discourses* I.28.4-9.

> Just as you are careful, in walking about, not to step on a nail or to sprain your ankle, so be careful also not to hurt your governing principle.[133]

The Stoics embraced a clear theodicy rooted in their belief about free will. As Marcus Aurelius says, "That nothing is good except what leads to fairness, and self-control, and courage, and free will. And nothing bad except what does the opposite."[134] There are certain things within our control, such as his will, and those outside our control are part of destiny. These evils are not actually evils since they fall outside the realm of morality.[135] Evil does not have its source in the divine, but in the will of humans who do not properly train themselves. However, when good people suffer, they have the power to endure it because the gods do not neglect their affairs.

The fourth aspect of Geertz's definition is "…and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that…" Here Geertz is referring to belief. He writes, "We justify a religious belief as a whole by referring to authority."[136] What Geertz means by this is that man accepts what authority defines as worthy of worship. Simply stated the religious perspective requires a certain conviction. This conviction creates for the believer an "aura of factuality" as Geertz's quote suggests. This truth manifests in rituals and ceremonies. As Geertz explains, "any religious ritual…involves this symbolic fusion

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[133] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 38.

[134] Aurelius VIII.1.

[135] Hadot 207.

[136] Geertz. "Religion as a Cultural System" 25.

of ethos and worldview."[137] Stoic rituals, specifically the daily practice of philosophy and prayer, reflect the Stoic worldview and character. Prayers are examples of indicators of truth of the divine. If the gods do not exist, then why pray? The basic Stoic assumption is that prayer can be an efficient form of communication with the divine. As indicated in Smart's ritual dimension, all three of the major Roman Stoics advocated the importance of prayer. So too, do they advocate the importance of virtue, the ethical life as a manifestation of one's proper reasoning capabilities. Again, the three Stoic disciplines of physics (nature), logic, and ethics create the Stoic worldview but also play a role in their daily rituals of living and believing in the truth.

The last point Geertz makes is "that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Religious people do not live in the world of religious symbols all the time, thus the moods and motivations religious rituals induce have their most important impact outside the religious perspective as it colors the believer's view of the common sense world.[138] Religious experiences shape the common sense world in which the worshipper lives. Geertz believes this is what makes religion so powerful socially, "in such a way that the moods and motivations induced by religious practice seem themselves supremely practical, the only sensible ones to adopt given the way things 'really' are."[139] The Stoics also use their religious experiences to shape and mold their daily perspective. In fact, the

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[137] Ibid 28.

[138] Ibid 35.

[139] Ibid 38.

purpose of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* is to guide one's everyday life. It is practical living advice for the Stoic. Here is an example:

> When you see someone weeping in sorrow…beware that you be not carried away by the impression that the man is in the midst of external ills, but straightway keep before you this thought: "It is not what has happened that distresses this man, but his judgment about it." Do not hesitate to sympathize with him so far as words go, and if occasion offers, even to groan with him; but be careful not to groan also in the center of your being.[140]

Marcus Aurelius used his *Meditations* as a spiritual guide in his daily life. It contains a list of dogmas or rules for life he believes are important for constructing the good man. As Stoic scholar, Pierre Hadot points out:

> Dogmas are not mathematical rules…rather they must become achievements of awareness, intuitions, emotions, and moral experiences which have the intensity of a mystical experience…The goal is to reactualize, rekindle, and ceaselessly reawaken an inner state which is in constant danger of being numbed or extinguished.[141]

Everyday, Stoics would turn to these "dogmas" to fine tune their inner life and in turn influence their worldview. The manifestation occurs when he reacts to the people he

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[140] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 16.

[141] Hadot 51.

comes across each day. There appears to be a crossover for the Roman Stoics between the "religious" perspective and the common sense perspective.

Geertz concludes that "religious concepts spread beyond their specifically metaphysical contexts to provide a framework of general ideas in terms of which a wide range of experience – intellectual, emotional, moral – can be given meaningful form."[142] According to this assessment by Geertz, one could envision how the Roman Stoics would mold their intellect by their discipline of assent. Stoics philosophize about proper logic and endeavor to know true from false as well as many other intellectual pursuits. Their moral experiences color their beliefs in the divine and their duty they believe every human ought to undertake. Geertz also mentions the emotional. Stoicism (as mentioned earlier) is famous for its emotional detachment. However, the Stoics did pursue happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*) and felt a sense of joy and passion as they lived their lives in the most powerful empire of the ancient world. Epictetus reminds himself in the *Enchiridion*: "When you are in harmony with nature in the use of external impressions, and then be elated; for then it will be some good of your own at which you will be elated."[143]

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[142] Geertz. "Religion as a Cultural System" 40.

[143] Epictetus *Enchiridion* 6.

Chapter 5

SPIRO'S DEFINITION

Spiro's approach is quite different from that of Geertz, even though both of their articles appear in the same book. To understand religion, Spiro believes that both the

sociological and psychological explanations are required.[144] Spiro defines "a 'religion' as 'an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings.'"[145] The sociological part of his definition appears right in the beginning. By "institution," Spiro means a social group with normative beliefs, its rituals collective, and its values prescriptive.[146] As this applies to Roman Stoicism, there is evidence of a collection of rituals (especially on a daily level), standard beliefs (e.g. the *λόγος*) and prescribed ethics (for becoming wise). As for the psychological element, Spiro defines "interaction" as "activities which are believed to carry out, embody, or to be consistent with the will or desire of superhuman beings or powers. These activities reflect the putative value system of these superhuman beings."[147] Marcus Aurelius reminds himself constantly that he needs to "do only what the logos of authority and law directs, with the good of human beings in mind."[148] Seneca too echoes the importance of following the will of the divine: "No man is good without God."[149] Epictetus compares the roles of God to that of a father. As children ought to obey the command of their fathers, humanity ought to obey God's will. For both are compassionate and wise. In the

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[144] Max Gluckman and Fred Eggan. "Introduction," In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion,* ed. Michael Banton (New York: Frederich A. Praeger, 1966), xxiii.

[145] Melford Spiro. "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion,* ed. Michael Banton (New York: Frederich A. Praeger, 1966), 96.

[146] Ibid 97.

[147] Ibid 97.

[148] Aurelius IV.12.

[149] Seneca, *Moral Epistle* 41.1.

case of God, Epictetus concludes: "We are all sprung from God in an especial manner, and that god is the father of both men and gods."[150] According to Spiro, the activity that most satisfies the criterion is ritual. Spiro defines religious rituals as "culturally patterned; i.e. both the activities and their meaning are shared by the members of a social group by virtue of their acquisition from a shared cultural heritage."[151] For Roman Stoicism, the ritual of practicing philosophy fits Spiro's definitions. The Stoics differentiated themselves from other philosophical groups through their specific beliefs and actions. The Hellenistic schools, including Stoicism, provide a worldview and practical guidance for life that religions do today.[152] Philosophy was literally a way of life for the Stoics. All three major Roman Stoics speak of philosophy as a daily exercise. The power of philosophy can influence a man in his daily life. Marcus Aurelius asks:

> What then can guide us? Only philosophy. Which means making sure that the power within stays safe and free from assault, superior to pleasure and pain, doing nothing randomly or dishonestly and with imposture, not dependent on anyone else's doing something or not doing it.[153]

For Marcus Aurelius the result of philosophy is an inner citadel of goodness. Seneca recognizes the larger implication of philosophy and its broader impact upon life:

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[150] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* I.3.1.

[151] Spiro 97.

[152] Ferguson 320-321. Ferguson points out that each philosophical school offered its own moral and spiritual guidance. Stoicism developed specific beliefs and practices similar to modern religions.

[153] Aurelius II.17.

"Philosophy's first promise is a sense of participation, of belonging to mankind, being a member of society."[154] From Epictetus comes a stern warning about the perception of philosophy by others:

> If you yearn for philosophy, prepare at once to be met with ridicule, to have many people jeer at you…but do not put on a high brow, and hold fast to the things which to you seem best, as a man who has been assigned by God to this post; and remember that if you abide by the same principles, those who formerly used to laugh at you will later come to admire you.[155]

While Epictetus cautions the philosopher, he also points to philosophy's moral high ground as it represents a gift from the God. Philosophy appears to be a culturally patterned ritual the Stoics developed to address issues found in both private and public life. This pattern began in Greece, the birthplace of Western philosophy and was then adopted by the Roman Stoics as an essential part of one's life.

Finally, the most distinctive part of Spiro's definition is his inclusion of the "superhuman beings." In fact, Spiro's definition appears in Smith's *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*:

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[154] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 5.2.

[155] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 22.

> One may clarify the term religion by definition it is a system of beliefs and practices that are relative to superhuman beings.[156]

This suggests the relevance of Spiro's work and its acceptability by experts in the field of religious studies. Spiro's superhuman beings refer to "any being believed to possess power greater than man, who can work good and/or evil on man, and whose relationships with man can, to some degree, be influenced by the two types of activity described in the previous section."[157] The Stoics prided themselves on their relationship with the divine. Epictetus says in his *Enchiridion*:

> In piety towards the gods, I would have you know, the chief element is this, to have right opinions about them - as existing and as administering the universe well and justly - and to have set yourself to obey them…but it is always appropriate to make libations, and sacrifices, and to give of the first fruits after the manner of our fathers and to do all this with purity.[158]

Not only do Stoics believe the gods exist but also that they are active in the universe, and that humanity ought to give selflessly to them. The idea Epictetus conveys regarding

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[156] Jonathan Smith, ed. *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 893. Smith uses this definition because he believes that it emphasizes religion as a system or structure of specific beliefs and practices, while at the same time the superhuman beings excludes certain secular and national worldviews like Nazism or Marxism (894).

[157] Spiro 98. The two activities Spiro mentions in the previous section are activities that reflect a value system and activities believed to influence superhuman beings to satisfy the needs of the actors. Spiro's definition here can clearly include gods Stoics worshipped like Zeus. The fact that Spiro uses the term superhuman, does not necessarily mean that this being is conceived as being human-like. As Spiro says, the entity must possess powers greater than humans and there must be a relationship between the god and humanity. The Stoic conception of the divine would fit this mold.

[158] Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 31.

offerings to the gods is a reference to the common "religious" practices found in Rome. Marcus Aurelius puts it simply: "The freedoms to do only what God wants, and accept whatever god sends us."[159]

The Stoic belief in the divine would not have been so unusual in Roman culture, given the importance Romans attached to sacrifice and temple construction. However, when scholars compare Stoicism to another Roman group, the Epicureans, an interesting contrast appears in their respective worldviews. Stoicism and Epicureanism belong to the same category of Hellenistic philosophical schools. However, upon closer examination some key differences will reveal stark contrasts in beliefs and practices that might provide support for Stoicism as a religion. One of the most noteworthy is that there is no providence in Epicureanism; consequently, there is "no place for prayer or answer to prayer in his [Epicurus] system."[160] Epicurus (the founder of Epicureanism) is not an atheist; however, his cosmology reveals that the gods are distant and inactive toward humanity. Thus, he concludes that any type of attempt to communicate with the divine is essentially superfluous. In a culture that is as diverse as Rome's in the second century of the Common Era, there are bound to be disagreements over particular issues, but when it comes to the divine, the Stoic attitude reflects the common Roman attitude more clearly

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[159] Aurelius XII.11.

[160] Ferguson 373. That this thesis is not trying to argue whether or not Epicureanism ought to be considered a religion. The similarity of Epicureanism and Stoicism arise from their materialistic universe and absence of individual afterlife. The key difference is on the issue of the nature and role of the divine and man's duty to his community. Spiro's definition adds to this thesis the claim that a belief in an active transcendent reality is a necessary condition for a religion.

than the Epicurean does. Throughout their history, Romans typically conceive of the gods as being active.

For Spiro, interaction with the divine is the dividing line between secular organizations and religions. According to Spiro, it is not necessary to have superhuman beings as the ultimate concern, but a religion must interact with a superhuman beings.[161] Roman Stoicism's main concern is ethics but there is also a deep respect for the superhuman power they call the *λόγος, Δίἄ, Ζεύς,* and even sometimes *θεῖον*.[162] Regardless of the name, the Stoics revere and honor their superhuman being in a consistent way. With regard to Roman culture during the last century before the Common Era and the first few centuries afterward, Stoicism appears to conform to the acceptable parameters of Roman religion through their worship of the divine.

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[161] Spiro 94-95. This is what separates baseball and communism from a religion. They are social groups and they contain rituals that are culturally inherited, but religion (including Stoicism) has references to superhuman beings.

[162] It does not matter that the Stoics debated the subtle attributes of the divine and that some, like Marcus Aurelius tended to favor a pantheistic view, while Epictetus spoke of a more strict monotheism. Because Stoicism places greater emphasis on discourse and intellectual understanding, there are naturally going to be disagreements about the exact nature of the divine, instead of having a hard-line stance, which everyone must accept. The use of multiple names for the divine also does not make any difference. In Islam there are said to be ninety-nine names for God, but yet only one entity. Different Christian denominations often debate over subtle disagreements of doctrine. For the Stoics each term had a specific connotation, much like Christians who might speak of the Trinity: God the Father, Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. The Stoics use *λόγος* to connote the intellectual and rational aspect of the universe. Nothing happens randomly because of the *λόγος*. *Δίἄ, Ζεύς* are often used interchangeably. *Ζεύς* is clearly the familiar name of the king of the gods in the Greek pantheon. It is interesting to see the Roman Stoics use this name while living in a Latin speaking culture. This phenomenon could be a product of the original Greek the founding Stoics used. *Θεῖον* is the plural "gods" and it reflects the typical cultural belief during the Classical and Hellenistic periods of the pantheon of gods, which can include Zeus, Hera, and Apollo among many others.

Chapter 6

LINCOLN'S DEFINITION

Historian of religion Bruce Lincoln recently formulated a definition of religion that includes four necessary domains. In his book *Holy Terrors*, Lincoln attacks Geertz's definition for its "interiority."[163] Lincoln believes Geertz focuses too much on the internal states of the worshipper, and fails to include in his definition an adequate concern for practices and community. The second criticism Lincoln points to is from Talal Asad's critique that Geertz "unwittingly normalized features of his own (necessarily parochial)

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[163] Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

cultural/religious background."[164] This flaw would limit Geertz's definition of religion because it might stigmatize other traditions by focusing on such a limited dimension. While Lincoln agrees with Asad's assessment of Geertz's definition, he disagrees with Asad's conviction that attempting a universal definition of religion is a futile endeavor. Lincoln believes a proper definition must be flexible. To this end, it can improve upon previous attempts and placate the criticisms of other scholars like Asad. The four domains of Lincoln's definition are "(1) a discourse whose concern transcends the human, temporal, and contingent, and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status. (2) A set of practices whose purpose is to produce a proper world or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected. (3) A community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practice. (4) An institution that regulates religious discourse, practices, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value."[165]

The first domain concerns itself with transcendence of the mundane world. In this regard, any institution that focuses solely on earthly affairs is not a religion, but if the group's interests go beyond the human or temporal world then it would fit this part of Lincoln's definition. Lincoln provides the example of astrophysicists who do not use

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[164] Ibid 1.

[165] Ibid 5-7.

religious terms like "god" when discussing their cosmology.[166] The fact that astrophysicists do not seek a transcendent reality suggests they do not practice religion (at least not in this regard). As mentioned earlier, Stoic physics describes a materialistic universe, and the ethical imperative that focuses on humanity, but despite having an emphasis on the temporal world of experience, the Roman Stoics have a subtle regard for the transcendent. The Stoics pay attention to the objective value of the intention of the will. As Pierre Hadot writes:

> Intentions bear within themselves a value which infinitely transcends all the objects and "matters" to which they are applied…In sum, there is only one will, profound, constant, and unshakable, and it manifests itself in the most diverse actions, on the most diverse occasions and objects, all the while remaining free and transcendent with regard to the subject matters upon which it is exercised.[167]

When Stoics act from the will, they recognize the transcendent source of the object upon which they are acting. In other words, all things find their source in a higher unity. When referencing the individual (the soul), the Stoics use the term *hypexairesis* (lifting up), which implies the transcendence of intention with regard to its objects (a "reserve clause").[168] The intentions of a Stoic are pure and derived from the Rational source (God) but the Stoic sage can only act from his will, this does not include things outside

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[166] Ibid 5.

[167] Hadot 193.

[168] Ibid 193. Hadot remarks that the reserve clause "reminds us that, for the Stoics, act and intention to act are fused into an inner discourse which enunciates, as it were, the plans of the agent."

his control, namely the will of others. The Stoic will say to himself that he intends to do such and such, but only if nothing else prevents him from doing so. Stoics attempt to perform their function and use things for their appropriate goal (*τέλος*), but sometimes results differ from intentions. Therefore, while the will of the sage is to do as Nature intends, it is also clear that results of actions are outside one's will. The will of the Stoic then transcends the mundane world of cause and effect. Their resolve remains firm and clear despite what result may occur from an action. In this regard, the Stoic unifies with the transcendent Nature. Marcus Aurelius explains it like this: "Our inward power, when it obeys nature, reacts to events by accommodating itself to what it faces - to what is possible. It needs no specific material."[169] Seneca also mentions the reserve clause: "Every exertion must have some rationale and some objective."[170] This notion has also implicit in it the concept of Destiny. Destiny is a transcendent concept upon which the Stoics placed great faith. It is often associated with Divine Providence since there appears to be a singular source, namely the *λόγος*. The sage acts upon pure intentions, focusing only on the goodness of the action stemming from a pure will based in reason. However, the consequences of actions are not always within one's control. This leads to the Stoic idea that whatever comes that is not within our control is the result of Destiny. It is a force often congruent with Divine Providence. The Stoic attempts to align his will

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[169] Aurelius IV.1. Marcus also quotes Epictetus directly on this topic in XI.37.

[170] Seneca, *On Tranquility* XII.3. In section XIII Seneca says, "Nothing happens to the sage contrary to his wish, but according to what he has thought. What he thinks above all is that something can always oppose his plans." From this passage, the relationship between the will of the sage and the results of actions is clear.

with that of God. The unique intention of the sage comes to identify itself with this divine intention.[171] Epictetus asks us to "follow the gods,"[172] which means to accept and follow their will, which is identical with the will of Universal Nature. If the results of actions do not meet the intention of the divine, then Stoics call upon Fate or Destiny to explain phenomena outside their control. Marcus Aurelius tends to identify Divine Providence with the structure of the cosmos: "Start from this: if not atoms, then Nature - directing everything."[173] Transcendence occurs in Stoicism in two places, the first in its morality with the intention of the will or soul and the second in its physics through its belief in the divine. In fact, the two areas unite within the mind of the Stoic sage. The wise man (*σοφός*) does not desire anything that is not in accord with Nature. The implicit understanding is that the sage attains composure of the mind by letting Fate control that which he himself cannot control, thus nothing evil can result from such a relationship.

Lincoln's second domain includes a set of practices to produce proper human subjects defined by religious discourse. Lincoln asserts that religious discourse moves from the realm of speech and consciousness to material action.[174] What is a proper human subject? Each religion attempts to produce a particular type of person through its

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[171] Hadot 200.

[172] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* I.12.8.

[173] Aurelius XI.18. Divine Providence can refer to God, Universal Nature, Destiny or Fate. All these terms have a similar connotation: control, order, not randomness. Marcus Aurelius is not the only Stoic to use these terms interchangeably, Seneca and Epictetus also frequently use these terms.

[174] Lincoln 6.

teachings. For Stoics this would manifest in the wise man (*σοφός*). Each Stoic attempts to emulate the qualities of the sage. For instance, Marcus Aurelius reminds himself:

> So by keeping in mind the whole I form a part of, I'll accept whatever happens. And because of my relationship to other parts, I will do nothing selfish, but aim instead to join them, to direct my every action toward what benefits us all and to avoid what doesn't.[175]

Marcus Aurelius lists some of the essential qualities one needs to become the proper human being. The Stoics realize that the sage is "a transcendent norm, which can be realized in rare and exceptional cases."[176] One can wish to attain this status through proper philosophical training and by following the beliefs and dogmas of Stoicism. This process is a difficult one, but one that gives life direction. Human excellences are not innate, but develop over time. The sage possesses four cardinal virtues, which are wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. Wisdom (*φρόνησις*) subdivides into science (*ἐπιστήμη*) and philosophical speculation (*σοφία*).[177] This division separates practical knowledge from deeper theoretical understanding. Wisdom is the foundation for virtue because it applies to the rest. Reason is man's connection to the divine. Those who act rationally in accordance with the divine are wise. This is the point where Stoic morality connects to its theology. Stoic scholar A.A. Long writes: "The wise man's possession of

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[175] Aurelius X.6.

[176] Hadot 76.

[177] Arnold 306.

right reason (*orthos logos*) relates him to the active principle of the cosmos which is identical with god."[178] As a result, the divine protects those who are wise: "The immortal gods do not only cherish the human race, but also particular people…who could not have been what they were without divine assistance."[179] According to Arnold, courage (*ἀνδρεία*) to the Stoics, houses the greatness of the soul because courage is all that is independent of fortune.[180] The proper amount of courage can supply man with what he needs to act virtuously. Moderation (*σωφροσύνη*) regulates natural appetites. It allows for the healthy state of the soul and body. Moderation maintains the proper relationship between body and soul. The virtue justice (*δικαιοσύνη*) manifests as respect for the rights that all things have in common by nature.[181] It implies a civic and social duty. Marcus Aurelius remarks, "Because to me the present is a chance for the exercise if rational virtue - civic virtue - in short, the art that men share with the gods."[182] Stoic altruism widens virtue to a universal brotherhood. All things inter-are with God and all humanity mix through Reason, which is a part of the divine. His care for others and for himself makes the sage a social figure. The Stoics (unlike many Epicureans) do not retreat from social duties. The Stoic attitude of indifference only arises toward things that are

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[178] Long 101.

[179] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II.66.165-166. Cicero may not have officially been a Stoic; he certainly admired the Stoics for their piety and high moral standards.

[180] Arnold 308.

[181] Ibid 307.

[182] Aurelius VII.67.

between virtue and vice.[183] As mentioned earlier, what is outside of one's control becomes Fate. With possession of the four cardinal virtues, the wise man stands as the proper human being internally, through his thoughts and externally, as it manifests in his actions.

Lincoln's third domain focuses on the community of members who construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices. Lincoln states, "Those who revere the same texts, adhere to the same precepts, and engage in the same sort of practices have a great deal in common."[184] The Stoics admire the same texts, whether officially Stoic (Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus) or pre-Stoic (from Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle). Their precepts remain consistent: The central doctrine of the *λόγος* remains consistent over the three movements (early, middle, and late Stoicism). Their practices are similar in that emotional composure and proper use of the will leads to the goal of the wise man (sage). This remains as the fundamental ethical concern. The Stoics also always approve of participation in public life. Stoics find their community through the construction of some of their basic beliefs (see Smart's doctrinal dimension) stemming from the three basic disciplines of logic, physics, and ethics. The basic doctrines within Stoicism separate them philosophically from other groups like the Epicureans. From Zeno to Marcus Aurelius, Stoicism undergoes some changes, but the fundamental identity and message is not lost. Even though their interpretations

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[183] William Davidson, *Stoic Creed* (Edinburgh :T & T Clark, 1907), 150.

[184] Lincoln 6.

sometimes differ from one another, it is their acceptance of common sources that allow them to engage in religious discourse. Early Stoics like Zeno enthusiastically embrace Cynicism, but Panaetius (from the following stage of Stoicism) does not embrace it.[185] Other early Stoics like Cleanthes and Chrysippus focus more on logic and physics taking a holistic approach to knowledge, while the later Stoics of Rome focus more on ethics. Despite these differences in opinion and emphasis, the basic Stoic structure remains intact, so that their basic identity is not lost. Diogenes remarks: "The Stoics approve also of honoring parents and brothers in the second place next after the gods."[186] Furthermore, Musanius Rufus, a Stoic teacher, placed high value on marriage and family life. He also teaches that women are equally capable of virtue, which he traces back to the fundamental Stoic idea that all humans have reason.[187] The evolution of Stoic doctrines from the early to the late periods suit the changing needs of the respective cultures that entrench it, whether Athens or Rome or elsewhere, Stoicism maintains a clear identity, which consists of fundamental ethical precepts, theology, and logic.

Lincoln's last domain consists of the continuity of beliefs over time whereby officials and experts assume responsibility for preservation and interpretation of the group's discourse.[188] Stoicism would fit Lincoln's domain in this case through its three

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[185] Ferguson 354.

[186] Diogenes Laërtius VII.120.

[187] Brad Inwood, *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46.

[188] Lincoln 7.

phases. The history of Stoicism as an institution lasts over four centuries. Starting with Zeno, Stoicism establishes a lineage of philosophers who would preserve and interpret the original beliefs and even relate them to their local communities. The early Stoics teach in Athens, the city where Socrates himself lived and philosophized. Their teachings were public and many Stoic teachers took students. Stoicism then migrates into Rome and becomes the predominant philosophical school especially among patricians. The emphasis of Stoicism shifts to ethics as we see in the writings of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. This ethical concern is a result of Stoicism becoming increasingly popular with the upper-class Romans seeking a political career. This is the case in pre-Imperial Rome, according to Cicero's *De Officiis*. Cicero, borrowing from Panaetius, breaks down ethical duty into two parts: The first is the Supreme Good and second the practical rules that regulate daily life. For the former (*κατορθόμα*) it is the absolute duty to do what is right, while the latter is ordinary duty (*κατήκοντα*) of which adequate reason renders.[189] The community of Stoicism flourishes under the Empire. The Julio-Claudian line establishes the practice of hiring Stoic advisers and philosophers. Augustus himself maintains a Stoic moral adviser (Athenodorus of Tarsus) and a philosophical scholar (Arius Didymus).[190] Of course, Nero has Seneca as a tutor. These practices continue into the Flavian line and culminate with Marcus Aurelius. Arnold believes that by the second

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[189] Cicero, *De Officiis*, Translated by Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), I.iii.8.

[190] Inwood 34.

century it is common for fathers to hand down Stoic doctrines and beliefs to their sons.[191] Enlightened sages write on a variety of topics interpreting key ideas within logic, physics, and ethics. Throughout the period of classical Greek and Roman culture, the institution of Stoicism maintains a favorable rapport with its immediate community through the works of its teachers and adherents.

Lincoln asserts that the four domains of discourse, practice, community, and institution are necessary for a religion. However, the degree of interest in each of these may vary from tradition to tradition. The Stoics participate in all four of these categories with varying degrees of interest. As philosophers, the Stoics encourage discourse with one another and the Romans especially turn their philosophy into the practice of morality. The wise man will take part in the life of the community; he will marry and bring up children.[192] Stoicism flourishes in two major cities of the classical world: Athens and Rome. Finally, the preservation of the institution of Stoicism holds through the authority of its erudite teachers over the course of four centuries and three periods.

One further key point to make about Lincoln's definition regards his concern of the transcendent. This domain is important to distinguish Stoicism from secular worldviews, like Marxism or Humanism. Neither worldview affirms the existence of a transcendent reality. The concerns of such institutions are only of this world. The belief and recognition of a transcendent reality strengthens the case for Stoicism's inclusion into

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[191] Arnold 99.

[192] Ibid 284.

Lincoln's definition of religion. The Stoics focus much of their attention on the transcendent, especially the divine. Seneca shares his thoughts in his 95th Letter: "The first way to worship the gods is to believe in gods…would you win over the gods? Then be a good man. Whoever imitates them, is worshipping them sufficiently."[193] Epictetus places even greater emphasis on the sacred:

> Why may not he, then, who understands the administration of the world; and has learned that the greatest and most principal and comprehensive of all things is this system, composed of men and God, and that from him the seeds of being are descended, not only to my father or grandfather, but to all things that are produced an born on earth; and especially to rational natures, as they alone are qualified to partake of a communication with the deity, being connected with him by reason: why may not such a one call himself a citizen of the world? Why not a son of God? [194]

Based on Lincoln's definition, Stoicism's expressions of transcendent truths and its consequent doctrines addressing their belief in the divine would help separate it from other worldviews with purely earthly concerns. Furthermore, Stoicism's institutional organization and active participation in religious discourse aids its qualification as a religion based on Lincoln's four domains.

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[193] Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 95.50.

[194] Epictetus, *Moral Discourses* I.9.4.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Scholars discuss and define religion in the context of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines. Jonathan Z. Smith, in his article "Religion, Religions, Religious" notes that the late twentieth century has seen two definitions that have gained widespread attention, a theological and an anthropological definition. He quotes Paul Tillich's "religion is concern for the ultimate."[195] However, the problem with this theological definition is that it narrowly defines religious experience into a specific

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[195] Jonathan Smith. "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 280.

category. Smart goes in a very similar direction with his worldview analysis, because if we remove the theological criterion from Tillich's definition, then it is no different from any other worldview. As for the anthropological definition, Smith says that Spiro's definition has "gained widespread assent among scholars of religion, who share and reject its functionalist frame."[196] Spiro places "culturally patterned" activities as the highlight of his definition and the recognition of "superhuman beings" becomes the more specific religious element. Smith concludes his article by debunking the notion that defining religion is a hopeless task. He looks to James Leuba's *Psychological Study of Religion,* in which he lists more than fifty definitions of religion and concludes that,

> It [religion] can be defined, with greater or lesser success, more than fifty ways… "Religion" is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order; generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics or "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.[197]

This quote summarizes what this thesis attempts to do. In examination of the sources of data encompassed herein, this thesis argues that from a modern scholarly understanding, Roman Stoicism conforms to the definitions of religion. This thesis examines popular

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[196] Ibid 281. Smith remarks that subsequent definitions of religion have either removed or substituted Spiro's terms.

[197] Ibid 281-282.

definitions and conceptions of religion and puts Stoicism to the test. Whichever stipulation we put on "religion," Stoicism meets the criteria. If there is a theological or metaphysical element, Stoicism fits because of its background in philosophy and belief in a transcendent power. Stoicism asks "religious" questions, such as: Is there a higher power? What can we known about this higher power? Is there a soul? What is the nature of the soul? How ought I to act in a manner that reflects the group's values and beliefs? If religion requires some sort of explanation for the structure and nature of the universe, then Stoicism fits this domain too. If an institution requires rituals to explain one's place in the world, then Stoicism fits this part of religion as well. The Roman Stoics ask religious questions and as a group formulate a coherent worldview around some basic shared beliefs and doctrines.

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