

Al-Kindī and Nietzsche on the Stoic Art of Banishing Sorrow

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The world is deep, deeper than the day knows. Deep is its sorrow; joy—deeper still than grief can be. Sorrow implores: Go! But all joy wants eternity—wants deep, deep eternity!

—Nietzsche, Z III, “The Other Dancing Song” 3.¹

Now just give me the worst throw of your dice, fate. Today I am turning everything into gold.

—Nietzsche, *KSA* 10:5[1] #130

The “Philosopher of the Arabs” and the “good European”: two unlikely figures, perhaps, for a comparative engagement.² What could serve as the basis of a dialogue between Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Iṣḥāq al-Kindī, the first major figure in the Islamicate philosophical tradition,³ and Friedrich Nietzsche, the figure in whom the Western philosophical tradition arguably culminates and overcomes itself? Al-Kindī lived and wrote in ninth-century Baghdad, the heart of the cosmopolitan ‘Abbāsid caliphate. His home was a world shaped by Islam, whose newly emergent culture was still just beginning to feel and exercise its own profound creative-intellectual powers. By most accounts he was a pious man, but also a learned polymath, dedicated to demonstrating the harmony of Greek philosophy and the divine truths of the Qur’ān.⁴ Nietzsche inhabited a different world altogether: the twilight of late European modernity. It is a time indelibly marked by the “death of God”—an event that Nietzsche will diagnose, interpret with great sensitivity and insight, and, ultimately, celebrate. Two thinkers; two radically different worlds. What could al-Kindī and Nietzsche possibly have to say to each other, separated as they are by such an enormous cultural, historical, and philosophical chasm?

As it turns out, they have quite a lot to say to each other. For each thinker in his own way was committed to the recovery of classical Greek and Hellenistic thought, in order to put its resources to work in a new, unprecedented historical moment. Thus, in spite of their many disparities, al-Kindī and Nietzsche draw from a common philosophical heritage and share some of its most fundamental concerns. In this essay, I shall focus specifically on their appropriation of the Stoic tradition. I hope to show that by provisionally situating al-Kindī and

Nietzsche within the lineage of Stoicism, we can recognize the ironic affinities of their thinking, while at the same time see the distinctiveness and peculiarity of their philosophical projects.

By characterizing al-Kindī and Nietzsche as “Stoics,” I mean several things. First, they both conceive of philosophy not simply as the theoretical project of knowing the real (to the extent possible for a human being), but also, more importantly, as offering a practical “way of life” or an “art of living.”⁵ That is to say, they recognize the intimate connection between physics, epistemology, and ethics: the fact that knowledge is not an end in itself, and that what we take to be most real can have a profound effect upon what kind of lives we choose to live and what kind of people we become. This leads to the second point: their similar approach to physics gives rise to a remarkable structural similarity in their practical philosophy. For both are concerned with the sadness and resentment that they see as the common—albeit not inevitable—product of generation, destruction, and contingency in nature. In short, al-Kindī and Nietzsche are committed to the task of banishing or overcoming sorrow, and I shall make the case that they appropriate many of the Stoics’ therapeutic techniques toward this end.

Finally, in pursuing this project, they take up two interrelated themes that are central to the Stoic tradition in particular. The first is that of “fatalism,” by which I mean that (a) there are a whole host of facts that appear to condition our lives in potentially painful and frustrating ways, (b) these things are not ultimately up to us, and (c) the best human life will be one in which we joyfully affirm them rather than regret or deny them.⁶ The second Stoic theme is that of self-cultivation, by which I mean the use of ascetic practices or spiritual exercises to transfigure and perfect ourselves, and in doing so, to help us to overcome sorrow and live the life suitable to a human being. Al-Kindī and Nietzsche inherit these ideas but reinterpret them in radically different ways, driven by almost antithetical philosophical impulses. Their idiosyncratic appropriations of Stoicism, I suggest, confront us with a choice about how we might ultimately envision our own philosophical ways of life. But in order to have a more concrete sense of what exactly al-Kindī and Nietzsche are taking up, we must begin by looking at the Stoic tradition itself.

The Stoics’ “Art of Healing the Soul”

Assuredly there is an art of healing the soul—I mean philosophy, whose aid must be sought not, as in bodily diseases, outside ourselves, and we must use our utmost endeavor, with all our resources and strength, to have the power to be ourselves our own physicians.

—Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, III.6⁷

One of the central insights of Stoicism is the idea that all human grief is ultimately traceable to the *pathē*—the emotions or passions—impulses [*hormai*] that are excessive, violent, irrational, and in some sense even contrary to nature, or in a popular metaphor, illnesses that have to be cured.⁸ Rejecting Aristotle's program of moderating the passions so that they are experienced in the proper measure, the Stoics famously insisted that they must be extirpated or eliminated altogether. Hence their ideal of *apatheia*: the calm, unshakable equanimity that comes from the absence of violent and irrational emotions. It should be noted that, on the Stoics account, the passions—the most basic of which are delight (*hēdonē/laetitia*), sorrow (*lupē/aegritudo*), appetite (*epithymia/libido*), and fear (*phobos/metus*)—are not simply upheavals of some blind, unconscious animal instinct, but rather have an irreducibly cognitive element. That is, as ways of interpreting and evaluating the world, they all involve beliefs—albeit mistaken, incoherent, or inadequately rational beliefs—about the worth of things, about what is really good and really bad.⁹ So the way to extirpate the passions—and thus sorrow—is systematically to disabuse oneself of these mistaken beliefs and acquire an increasingly coherent and rational understanding of what really matters and what does not.

Simply put, for the Stoics, the only thing that is good is virtue and the only thing that is bad is vice. This is because they are the only things that are really “up to us” [*eph' hēmin*] that is, a function of our free rational choice. Everything else is simply “indifferent” [*adiaphoron*]: for example, our parents, friends, children (or lack thereof), honor, political status, whether we are rich or poor, beautiful or plain, strong or weak, healthy or sick, even whether we live or die. These things are not ultimately within our control; they are what the Stoics call “external things.” If we predicate our happiness on them, we are inevitably setting ourselves up for sorrow, a passion that goes against the very grain of our nature, and that stands in opposition to the proper function and aim of human life: happiness. All external things are a function of fate, or, put differently, the design of nature, conceived of as thoroughly rational, necessitarian, providential, and divine.¹⁰ From the perspective of the part (i.e., the individual human being in the grip of misleading, violent, irrational passions, desperately trying to acquire and hold onto contingent, perishable things while avoiding inevitable misfortunes), it may seem that these occurrences are genuine evils. But from the perspective of the whole (i.e., the perspective of divine, providential nature), everything is as it should be and as it must be. The cosmopolitan ideal of Stoicism is to attain this universal standpoint and to affirm all existence as it is, rather than how we think it should be from the limited perspective of the individual human being.

It may seem strange to speak of something as energetic as affirmation when the Stoic ideal is *apatheia*: we typically envision the Stoic sage as beyond delight, sorrow, desire, and fear. But the absence of violent passions does not

entail the absence of all emotion. When the *pathē* are uprooted, certain affective responses still remain—what the Stoics call *eupatheiai*, or ‘good emotions’—most notably, joy [*chara*].¹¹ Stoicism, like all other Greek and Hellenistic schools, is ultimately a kind of Eudaimonism: that is, it aims at human happiness as the highest good for human beings. It is simply the most severe and demanding form of Eudaimonism, inasmuch as virtue alone becomes the necessary and sufficient condition of happiness.¹²

Clearly, the Stoic good life is something of a tall order. The extirpation of the passions—and, consequently, the joyous affirmation of the entirety of existence—cannot be achieved simply through the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Stoic doctrines need to be internalized so that they produce a stable, reliable disposition in the soul—to see clearly, to judge rightly, and to act accordingly. In other words, the dramatic transformation of vision called for by the Stoics depends for its possibility upon an equally radical transfiguration of the self. As a means for this therapeutic transformation, the Stoic school developed a body of ascetic practices, that is, “spiritual exercises” or “technologies of the self.” According to Pierre Hadot, these spiritual exercises were “practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation, but which were all intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practiced them.”¹³

Here let me just mention a few such techniques.¹⁴ The most fundamental exercise is rooted in the Delphic-Socratic injunction to self-knowledge. The Stoic undertakes a rigorous and ongoing self-examination [*prosoche*] in which he observes and evaluates his motives and actions (as well as the contours of his present experience), plumbing the depths of who and what he really is.¹⁵ We might think of this as a kind of psychic spelunking in which one explores and familiarizes oneself with the hidden spaces of one’s soul.¹⁶ In addition to this, one finds a whole host of “meditations” or imaginative thought experiments, through which the Stoic internalizes and incorporates theoretical teachings (on logic, physics, and ethics) by repeatedly applying them to his experience of the world.

One such technique is to contemplate something that would typically provoke a passionate response, and try to bracket all conventional and prejudiced ways of looking at it, seeing it simply as a physical object. Marcus Aurelius offers an example of this when he observes in his *Meditations*:

When meat and other dainties are before you, you reflect: This is dead fish, or fowl, or pig; or: This Falernian is some of the juice from a bunch of grapes; my purple robe is sheep’s wool stained with a little gore from a shellfish; copulation is friction of the members and an ejaculatory discharge. Reflections of this kind go to the bottom of things, penetrating into them and exposing their real nature. The same process should be applied to the whole of life.¹⁷

The Stoic thus practices seeing the world from a naturalistic perspective, stripped of all subjective and conventionally anthropocentric value judgments.¹⁸

Another technique is constantly to keep in mind the fundamental distinction between what is ultimately “up to you” and what is not. Building upon this insight, Epictetus points out the ways in which ostensibly “bad” external things can always be reinterpreted and revalued. Good can come even from difficult, painful situations and abusive people:

Is it possible, then, to derive advantage from these things?—Yes, from everything.—Even from the man who reviles me?—And what good does his wrestling-companion do the athlete? The very greatest. So also my reviler becomes one who prepares me for my contest; he exercises my patience, my dispassionateness, my gentleness. . . . If a man trains me to be dispassionate, does he do me no good? . . . Is your neighbor bad? Yes, for himself; but for me he is good; he exercises my good disposition, my fair-mindedness. Is your father bad? Yes, for himself; for me he is good. This is the magic wand of Hermes. “Touch what you will,” the saying goes, “and it will turn into gold.” Nay, but bring whatever you will and I will turn it into a good. Bring disease, bring death, bring poverty, reviling, peril of life in court; all these things will become helpful at a touch from the magic wand of Hermes. “What will you make of death?” Why, what else but make it your glory, or an opportunity for you to show in deed thereby what sort of person a man is who follows the will of nature. “What will you make of disease?” I will show its character, I will shine in it, I will be firm, I will be serene, I will not fawn upon my physician, I will not pray for death. What else do you still seek? Everything that you give I will turn into something blessed, productive of happiness, august, enviable.¹⁹

The “wand of Hermes”—which Epictetus figures as the Stoics’ therapeutic recognition of what is up to us and what is not—turns everything into gold, insofar as every occasion becomes an opportunity to exercise virtue.²⁰

A third strategy is to practice seeing everything as on loan, as not really belonging to oneself and thus as subject to revocation at any time. Epictetus counsels:

Never say about anything, “I have lost it,” but instead, “I have given it back.” Did your child die? It was given back. Did your wife die? She was given back. “My land was taken.” So this too was given back. “But the person who took it was bad!” How does the way the giver asked for it back concern you? As long as he gives it, take care of it as something that is not your own, just as travelers treat an inn.²¹

Through this exercise the Stoic cultivates a sense of gratefulness for whatever he has (all things are a gift), while at the same time not becoming unnaturally and irrationally attached to it.

Yet another technique involves learning to see things as being in a state of constant (if sometimes barely perceivable) flux, to see the sovereignty of generation and destruction over all natural phenomena. “Make a habit of regularly observing the universal process of change”; Marcus Aurelius advises, “be assiduous in your attention to it, and school yourself thoroughly in this branch of study; there is nothing more elevating to the mind.”²² Later in the same chapter he puts a finer point on it: “Realize the nature of all things material, observing how each of them

is even now undergoing dissolution and change, and is already in a process of decay, or dispersion, or whatever other natural fate may be in store for it.²³ Not surprisingly, one of the more famous Stoic exercises is the *praemeditatio malorum*, in which one prepares on a regular basis for encountering future difficulties: reversals of fortune, loss of loved ones, suffering, death, etc. The purpose of this technique is not to cause oneself sorrow, but to rob even the most painful blows of fate of their force by calculating them in advance, and to realize that they are not real evils because they are not really up to us.²⁴ What's more, the premeditation of death makes us aware of the incalculable value of each instant, forcing us to live as though every moment were our last.²⁵ These are just a few spiritual exercises the Stoics employed. There are a whole host of others, which involve training in real (if artificially constructed) situations: for example, sexual abstinence, physical privation, various rituals of purification, and so forth.²⁶

Looking at this brief list of exercises, one cannot help but see a residue of the traditional notion of *askesis* as physical training or exercise: just as the athlete imposes a new form and acquires new bodily strength and self-control through the repetition of physical exercises, the Stoic philosopher as spiritual athlete reshapes himself, toning and strengthening his soul as one might tone and strengthen a muscle, rehearsing and readying himself for the challenges and duties that will test his fitness as a human being.²⁷ The analogy of body-shaping is appropriate as well: the Stoics envisioned this cultivation of the self as a kind of self-formation, a "sculpting of one's own statue" as it were, turning oneself into a work of art.²⁸ For the Stoics, this sculpting process is ultimately a matter of stripping away all the superfluous and unnatural accretions that prevent us from realizing our true nature as rational, autonomous beings. Michel Foucault speaks of this as a "remembering" of the secret self.²⁹ Pierre Hadot speaks in similar terms, characterizing the Stoic project of self-cultivation as a "return to self, in which the self is liberated from the state of alienation into which it has been plunged by worries, passions and desires. The 'self' liberated in this way is no longer merely our egoistic, passionate individuality: it is our *moral* person, open to universality and objectivity, and participating in universal nature or thought."³⁰ This is what it means to "live according to nature," in the words of the famous Stoic maxim. However, the language of "returning" can be somewhat deceptive, since the cultivation and perfection of the self, while indeed a realization of our true nature, is something *achieved* by an individual's own efforts rather than a *fait accompli* of nature. In fact, it is accomplished precisely through self-mastery—through struggling against, and overcoming, that which initially appears to be quite natural: our passions.

In this way, Stoic philosophy offers us an exemplary model of philosophy as a "way of life"—a *biou technē* or "art of living"—which Martha Nussbaum has aptly described as an "immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery."³¹ As I shall try to show in the remainder of this essay, both al-Kindī and

Nietzsche take up this project, offering us compelling ways of life that provide therapies for perennial human sorrows.³²

I turn to al-Kindī first.

Al-Kindī's "Device for Dispelling Sorrows"

The Prophet said, "There is no disease that God has created, except that He also has created its remedy."

—*Bukhārī*, *Tibb*, 582³³

The piece by al-Kindī that I will examine is entitled "Epistle on the Device for Dispelling Sorrows" [*Risāla fi al-ḥīla li-daf' al-aḥzān*].³⁴ As one of his more popular texts, it is intended to provide beginners with therapeutic arguments against common, unexamined views and ultimately exhort them to the philosophical life.³⁵ Stylistically, it lies somewhere between the "consolation" genre and the "spiritual medicine" genre, which typically portrays passions as "diseases of the soul that are badly in need of eradication."³⁶ It is written in the form of an epistle, as a formal response to a friend's request for clarification: al-Kindī has been asked to "record some sayings to counter sorrow, to alert [him] to the vulnerabilities it engenders and fortify [him] against the injuries wrought by falling prey to it" (I, 122).

He begins by clarifying what sorrow [*ḥuzn*] is and what brings it about, since there can be no remedy for an illness without understanding its causes. Sorrow, according to al-Kindī, is "a pain of the soul [*alam naḥsānī*] that occurs when something loved is lost or something desired eludes us" (I, 122).³⁷ The question is whether it is possible to be free of these causes. At this early stage in the letter, al-Kindī hedges his bets. Certainly, it is not possible to attain everything we desire or to be safe from losing all the things we love, because "there is no permanence or persistence in the world of generation and decay, in which we live" (ibid.). However, the world of the intellect [*al-'ālam al-'aqlī*] offers us stable, unchanging objects of desire (ibid.). Thus, if we do not want to lose things, we ought to focus our attentions on the intelligible world and derive what we love from it. To wish that what is corruptible be *incorruptible* is to seek from nature what is not in nature. "One who wants what does not exist will never get what he desires," al-Kindī argues, "and those who do not attain their desires are unhappy. So those who want permanence and who expect the things they own to be enduring will be unhappy. For only those whose desires are fulfilled are happy [*sa'īd*]" (I, 123). In good Stoic fashion, al-Kindī admonishes us to be consistent in the way we think about the world. We should not expect things to be as we would like them to be; rather, we should accept things as they are and adjust our desires accordingly.³⁸

In this introductory portion of the letter, which is still primarily theoretical or diagnostic in its approach, al-Kindī emphasizes two main points that set the stage for his subsequent therapeutic suggestions. First, reflecting on the diversity—and arguably, the perversity—of human desires, al-Kindī concludes that what we love and hate is not a function of immutable human nature, but is rather a matter of convention, voluntarily acquired through habituation. Joy [*surūr*] and sorrow are in some important sense a matter of habit.³⁹ He therefore encourages his readers to train themselves to cultivate habits that will actually make them joyous, rather than trapping them in a perpetual state of sorrow. “What we ought to do, then” he counsels, “is to train ourselves in the right habits until they become second nature, that is, until they become our character, if they are not ours by nature already (that is, if we have not the right habits to start with), so that we may live a good life all our days” (III, 124).⁴⁰

At first glance, al-Kindī’s remarks in this passage may seem somewhat generic. However, if we attend to his actual language, we find a curious intersection of divergent philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions. For instance, when he urges us to “train” (or “guide” or “direct”) ourselves—the word here is *tarbiya*—he is very likely gesturing toward the Arabic notion of *adab*, which emphasizes self-cultivation, knowledge of appropriate conduct, and ultimately, a certain refinement or nobility of character.⁴¹ We might think of this as bringing the character traits in line with what is appropriate and beautiful. Further, the expression he uses when he speaks of right habits becoming second nature is *takhalluq khulq*, which means “to rectify [one’s] character [traits].” The root metaphor here is that of being pruned, trimmed, cleansed, polished—or more generally of being measured, proportioned, formed, or molded in accordance with a model.⁴² The expression comes to have a specific connotation within the Islamic tradition: to rectify one’s character traits means to bring one’s character traits into accord with the character traits of God [*al-takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh*], that is, to assume or manifest the divine attributes.⁴³ And indeed one finds a comparable idea in a number of al-Kindī’s other writings, where he appropriates the classical Greek conception of philosophy as “the imitation of God so far as it is possible for a human being.”⁴⁴ Al-Kindī typically associates this practice with a kind of ethical perfectionism, which requires among other things the suppression of the passions (God’s oneness being without multiplicity or motion, and thus without any such disturbances or inadequacies).⁴⁵

The second major point draws upon the classical medical analogy between the body and the soul, of which the Stoics, and Socrates before them, were so fond. Reflecting on the body and its various illnesses, he observes the numerous painful and unpleasant procedures we put up with in order to be cured: foul-tasting medicines, cauterization, amputation, bandaging, dieting, and so forth. Similarly, sorrow is a pain or illness of the soul, which is nobler and incomparably more important than the body because it is eternal and the locus of our true

self (IV:124). But happily, healing the soul is much less repugnant, and considerably easier, than healing the body (IV:125). What is required of us is just “steadfastness” [*al-‘azm*]:⁴⁶ “One must only demand of the soul to accustom itself to some small but praiseworthy act. This will be easy, but one rises from there to something bigger; and once this is a matter of habit one rises to something greater still, step by step continually rising, until the greatest of duties have become a matter of habit just like the least” (ibid.).

Here the letter takes a more practical turn: al-Kindī begins enumerating various devices for driving away sorrow and cultivating joy, prefaced by a strikingly Stoic distinction between those things that are up to us and those that are not.⁴⁷ Only a few need be mentioned here. One “charming device,” as he calls it, is to remember things that once saddened you, but for which you and others have since been consoled, and then compare them to your present situation. On a related note, we can remember that everyone has suffered some great loss or tragedy—no one is exempt.⁴⁸ His point here is twofold. On the one hand, it gives us solace to situate ourselves within a universal human community of sufferers. On the other hand, al-Kindī is quick to point out that not everyone responds to loss in the same way, reiterating his previous point about sorrow being a matter of convention and habit rather than nature.

Another of his therapeutic arguments picks up a recurrent idea in Stoic theodicy:

If we want never to suffer a loss, what we must recognize is that what we want in effect is never to have been at all. For losses occur only through the perishing of the perishable. And without perishing there is no coming to be [*kā’in*]. So if we want there to be no losses, by the same token we want there to be no coming to be or passing away in nature. (VI, 127)⁴⁹

Al-Kindī thus teases out the implicit nihilism in our habitual response to what is necessary. But there is a mood of fatalism that permeates this strategy; he is in effect gesturing toward a justification of apparent evils that will be taken up, expanded, and radicalized by Ibn Sīnā and others: that is, individual loss is a necessary and integral part of a good order, and since it is necessary we might as well accept it with equanimity.⁵⁰

This in turn leads into a sustained reflection on the nature of ownership. The things we inevitably lose were originally common goods anyway. It is foolish and base and ignoble to resent losing what was not really yours in the first place. Following Epictetus, al-Kindī maintains that all possessions are ultimately on loan from the Creator, who can reclaim the loan whenever—and however—he wants. As he puts it, “there is no need for the emissary in this collection to be to our liking in form or character, or that the time be what we might prefer” (VIII, 128).⁵¹ In other words, there’s no shame in having one’s provisional possessions taken back by God and transferred to an enemy. “The only shame or wrong . . . is if we grieve at returning what we’ve borrowed. That would show poor character, a grasping nature, and a lack of discernment” (ibid.). Rather, we should be grateful for

what we have, however long we have it, and return it cheerfully when the time comes. Finally, al-Kindī points out, sometimes God reclaims a little of the loan, sometimes He reclaims a great deal, but He always leaves us the “best and greatest of our borrowings . . . those which no other hand touches and no one shares with us,” that is, the soul and its virtues—the only things necessary for true happiness—and for this “we should be delighted with the greatest joy” (ibid.).⁵²

He concludes his discussion here by counseling that we “return to ourselves” [*narja‘u ilā anfusinā*], advice that points up the general theme underlying his discussion so far (VIII, 128).⁵³ In raising the question of what we can really be said to possess, al-Kindī directs our attention to our soul and its virtues. Of course, the soul is itself a divine gift—God gives us our very reality, and the acquired character traits mentioned earlier are in fact ontologically rooted in God’s own nature. But the soul is that which is most properly our own. When al-Kindī urges us to return to ourselves, he is telling us to turn away from external things and contemplate our souls.

Here again, it seems to me, we find an interesting convergence of Greek and Islamic ideas. On the one hand, al-Kindī’s expression evokes the Socratic-Stoic project of self-examination and knowledge, of plumbing the depths of who and what one really is (which, as I have suggested, is a necessary condition for the transfiguration of the self). On the other hand, it recalls the Islamic practice of *muhāsaba*, or “self-accounting”—already well established by al-Kindī’s time—a continual calling into account of one’s thoughts and actions, an examination of conscience that draws upon an imposing battery of psychological strategies for exposing and rooting out the various forms of human egoism.⁵⁴ Of course, for al-Kindī, this kind of self-examination is but one device for cultivating habits that will result in joy rather than sorrow.

The letter continues with an enumeration of additional devices, punctuated by a number of wonderful allegories and anecdotes, most notably his elaborate adaptation of Epictetus’s famous sea-voyage analogy.⁵⁵ Our passage through this ephemeral world, al-Kindī suggests, is like a journey across the sea to one’s homeland. He describes in exquisite detail the varied behaviors of the passengers as they pause temporarily at a landing place along the way to meet their needs. Some go about their business and collect only what they need, returning quickly to the ship and securing comfortable seats for the voyage home. Others, mesmerized by the sensible beauty of the new locale, linger a while to take in the exotic sights. Al-Kindī describes one such passenger:

[He] stands gazing at the meadows filled with flowers of all colors and kinds, smelling their fragrant blossoms, wandering in those flower-filled fields, losing himself in the lovely woods, so full of strange new fruits, listening to the calls of unseen birds, remarking the soil of the land, with its varied and brilliantly colored rocks, so delightful to see, and its enchanting sea shells with their strange forms and wonderful designs. (XI, 131)

These passengers too eventually return to the ship, but manage to secure only second-class accommodations, due to their sight-seeing.

Then there are those for whom surveying the beauties of the new land is not enough. They want to collect and possess what they see, and so finally make their way back to the ship burdened with stones, shells, fruits, and flowers. Because of their dawdling, they are by necessity relegated to the least desirable spaces on the ship, now made even more cramped and uncomfortable by their possessions, which, al-Kindī suggests, have in effect become their masters. And it is not long before the curios betray the impermanence of their charms: “soon their flowers fade, their stones lose their luster, deprived of the moisture that made them gleam and sparkle. The seashells alter as they sleep, and now stink horribly. Their surroundings are noxious to them, and their loads are a burden which they do not know how to get rid of . . .” (XI, 132). Eventually, these acquisitions must be thrown into the sea anyway, but not before exacting a further price: many of their owners die before they arrive, while others arrive sick and weak.

But the worst fate of all belongs to those passengers who wander off and lose their way, forgetting about the boat and their homeland. Not hearing the captain’s call, they soon encounter the natural dangers that lay waiting for heedless wanderers:

Some are carried off by wild beasts. Others fall into a pit or crevasse or sink into quicksand. Some are crushed by snakes. Their desolate and decaying bodies, limbs scattered, mangled and hideous, are an object of pity to strangers but a lesson to all who knew them, who see them exiled from the homeland they had set out for. (XI, 132)

Al-Kindī’s implicit rank-ordering of the different types of passengers suggests that those who try to locate their happiness in the colorful objects of this ephemeral world will inevitably find sorrow, while those who renounce such external things can ultimately attain a more stable and noble joy.

In his explanation, al-Kindī likens the sea voyage to our passage through this world into the “world of truth” [*‘ālam al-ḥaqq*]: our “true abode” [*mahall al-ḥaqq*] or “homeland” [*watan*], that is, the place where our souls properly belong (XI, 132–33). In our voyage through the realm of generation and destruction, we have to understand what is important and what is not:

How disgraceful it is of us to be deceived by the little stones of the earth and the shells of the sea, the flowers of the trees and the fragility of the plants, which readily become a burden to us; there is no escape from the discomfort of these things except to make them disappear into the ground, the depths of the sea or a blaze of fire. We hold our noses at their putrid smells, and avert our eyes from their repugnant form, seeking as much distance as possible from a grotesqueness we cannot stand to be near. These are the things that bring sorrow and grief to this abode of ours. But if sorrow we must, what we should grieve for is our separation from our true home, for being embarked on seas whence no ship can carry us to our true homeland. For in that land there are no tragic losses, no privations

or lacks, no regrets, since nothing there is unreal and nothing is desired that is not a worthy object of desire. (XI, 133)⁵⁶

The moral that emerges from al-Kindī's story—and it seems to me a thoroughly Stoic point—is that we ought not to hate what is not evil (XII, 133).⁵⁷ The loss of external things due to events that are not up to us is not really an evil thing. Death itself is not evil. Vice is the only thing that is truly evil.⁵⁸ Similarly, the acquisition and continued possession of common, impermanent, external goods is an incoherent and self-defeating conception of the good that ultimately robs us of our autonomy. Al-Kindī sums up this point nicely in his conclusion: “He who does not own what is out of his hands has mastered the things that enslave kings, I mean anger and desire [*shahwa*, i.e., passion or appetite], the roots of all vices and pains” (XIII, 134).⁵⁹ Genuine goodness has to do with the cultivated health of the soul—that is, virtue—which can be attained so long as we remember who and what we are, and where we truly belong.⁶⁰

To summarize, al-Kindī's Stoicism teaches us to understand the necessity of loss in this world, but, at the same time, the optionality of sorrow. Put differently, sorrow has its proper objects, and it is unnecessary, irrational, and self-destructive to sorrow over the loss of that which one will *by necessity* lose. As mentioned earlier, al-Kindī's epistle calls us to philosophy as a way of life, and the Kindian philosopher is the person who not only understands the nature of things but also has achieved wisdom about what is his and what is not. As a result, he has overcome the turbulent passions and cultivated the Stoic *eupathiea* of joy, which for al-Kindī is manifest as a serene contentment with whatever happens.⁶¹

However, in spite of his emphasis on spiritual exercises and self-cultivation, and his joyous affirmation of providential necessity, al-Kindī ultimately offers us a tempered form of Stoicism. One sees this most clearly in the Platonic-Neoplatonic inflection he gives to traditionally Stoic doctrines. While he appropriates the Stoics' providential conception of nature, for instance, he repeatedly disparages “this ephemeral world”—the natural, material realm of generation and destruction that the Stoics seem content to remain within. What begins in the epistle as a nagging doubt about the capacity of impermanent external things to make us happy gradually evolves into an outright rejection and condemnation of “the little stones of the earth and the shells of the sea, the flowers of the trees and the fragility of the plants,” all of which he will ultimately describe as repugnant because they inevitably sadden us (XI, 132). Given al-Kindī's low estimation of *physis*, it is hardly surprising that he reinscribes the Platonic two-world schema, valorizing a transcendent “world of the intellect” or “world of truth” as our “true abode” because it offers us genuinely universal, stable and eternal goods. Nor is it surprising that, in eschewing the Stoics' one-world materialistic physics, he conceives of the soul as ontologically distinct, separable

from the body and immortal (thus opening up the prospect of eternal life).⁶² The overall effect is that his advice takes on a decidedly otherworldly cast, despite his intermittent expressions of appreciation for the goodness and beauty of creation. As we shall see, Nietzsche will take up many of the Stoic themes that al-Kindī takes up, but he will push them in precisely the opposite direction.

Nietzsche's "Art of This-worldly Comfort"

Health of the soul.—The popular medical formulation of morality that goes back to Ariston of Chios,⁶³ "virtue is the health of the soul," would have to be changed to become useful, at least to read: "*your* virtue is the health of *your* soul." For there is no health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures. Even the determination of what is healthy for your *body* depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors, and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul. Thus there are innumerable healths of the body. . . . [T]he time [will] come to reflect on the health and illness of the *soul*, and to find the peculiar virtue of each human being in the health of his soul. In one person, of course, this health could look like its opposite in another person.

Finally, the great question would still remain whether we can really dispense with illness—even for the sake of our virtue—and whether our thirst for knowledge and self-knowledge in particular does not require the sick soul as much as the healthy, and whether, in brief, the will to health alone is not a prejudice, cowardice, and perhaps a bit of subtle barbarism and backwardness. (*GS* 120)

At last we turn to Nietzsche, to look at the ways in which he takes up these Stoic ideas and puts them to work in his own thought.⁶⁴ Nietzsche's place in the Stoic lineage is a complicated one, and his attitude toward his forebears is accordingly ambivalent. For instance, he sees something healthy, powerful, and noble in their self-discipline and admires their naturalistic approach to morality as a kind of ascetic hygiene aimed at self-mastery.⁶⁵ Yet he also frequently delights in embellishing the excesses of their spiritual athleticism. In a gloss on Hellenistic schools of philosophy he writes,

The Stoic trains himself to swallow stones and worms, slivers of glass and scorpions without nausea; he wants his stomach to become ultimately indifferent to whatever the accidents of existence might pour into it: he reminds one of that Arabian sect of the Assaua whom one encounters in Algiers: like these insensitive people, he, too, enjoys having an audience when he shows off his insensitivity. . . . For those with whom fate attempts improvisations—those who live in violent ages and depend on sudden and mercurial peoples—Stoicism may indeed be advisable. (*GS* 306)⁶⁶

Nietzsche's remarks here have a gloved, clinical feel to them. But as someone "with whom fate attempt[ed] improvisations"—*The Gay Science* was, after all, written in the convalescent aftermath of a time of great sickness and suffering—

his distanced observations raise the question whether he himself ever found Stoicism “advisable.”

This is not to suggest that Nietzsche has no substantial philosophical disagreements with the Stoics. He rejects, for example, their doctrine of self-preservation as the fundamental impulse of all living things, substituting for it his own hypothesis of the will to power.⁶⁷ Similarly, he problematizes the Stoics’ imperative to “live according to nature,” replacing their picture of divine, rational, and providential nature with his image of nature the blind squanderer, bereft of any overarching rational, moral, or aesthetic order, utterly indifferent to the needs and conceits of human beings. In one of the most frequently cited sections of *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes:

“According to nature” you want to *live*? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power—how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living—is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is not living—estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different? And supposing your imperative “live according to nature” meant “live according to life”—how could you *not* do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?” (BGE 9)

Those familiar with this passage know that Nietzsche goes on to interpret Stoic philosophy in accordance with a new model of nature as will to power, and then, reflexively, uses it to make sense of his own philosophical activity.⁶⁸ I set aside the questions of whether Nietzsche’s critique of the Stoics here is fair, and whether he himself may be vulnerable to a similar charge.⁶⁹ Indeed, if Nietzsche can ultimately be characterized, like the Stoics, as espousing some form of ethical naturalism,⁷⁰ then the project of conforming oneself to the normative paradigm of nature becomes even more problematic. For at least the Stoic can insist upon its rational and providential character. But if Nietzsche is correct about the aimless, wasteful, and indifferent expenditure of nature, then it would seem as though *physis* could not possibly serve as a guide for *nomos*.⁷¹

But let us bracket this problem for the time being in order to better understand Nietzsche’s awkward kinship with the Stoics. Even as a fellow ethical naturalist, Nietzsche takes pains to distance himself from their cardinal doctrines. He takes issue, for instance, with their radical insistence on the extirpation of the passions, offering in its stead what he thinks is a more physiologically informed strategy: cultivating and sublimating the drives.⁷² Indeed, he is dubious about the Stoics’ claim that the amelioration of suffering requires such a radical cure. We have already seen that Nietzsche pluralizes the Socratic-Stoic formulation of virtue as the health of the soul: there are many types of souls, and just as many healths and therapies (GS 120). In a related aphorism entitled

“*The physicians of the soul and pain*,” Nietzsche interrogates those who teach that all happiness begins only after the annihilation of the passions and who “try to con people into believing that they are in a very bad way and need some ultimate, hard, radical cure” (GS 326). Their hyperbolic rhetoric belies the many well-known “ruses and subtle tricks to vanquish what is disagreeable and to pull the fangs of pain and misfortune.”

Bear in mind that this passage was written in the period of Nietzsche’s convalescence, during which he was particularly concerned with the phenomena of illness and suffering (presumably because his own experiences were still fresh in his mind):

It seems to me that people always *exaggerate* when they speak of pain [*Schmerz*] and misfortune [*Unglücke*], as if it were a requirement of good manners to exaggerate here, while one keeps studiously quite about the fact that there are innumerable palliatives against pain, such as anesthesia or the feverish haste of thoughts, or a quiet posture, or good or bad memories, purposes, hopes, and many kinds of pride and sympathy that have almost the same effect as anesthetics—and at the highest degrees of pain one automatically loses consciousness. We know quite well how to drip sweetness upon our bitterness, especially the bitterness of the soul; we find remedies in our courage and sublimity as well as in the nobler deliria of submission and resignation. A loss is a loss for barely one hour; somehow it also brings us some gift from heaven—new strength, for example, or at least the opportunity for new strength. (GS 326)⁷³

Nietzsche goes on to reflect on the lies and “deadly silence” with which the advocates of extirpation have tried to hide the “over-rich happiness” [*überreiche Glück*] of passionate people, and concludes: “Is our life really painful and burdensome enough to make it advantageous to exchange it for a Stoic way of life and petrification? We are *not so badly off* that we have to be as badly off as Stoics” (GS 326).

But Nietzsche is merely scratching the surface here, for the more fundamental question is whether suffering is something that necessarily *ought* to be ameliorated. In an earlier aphorism from the same book, Nietzsche ostensibly accepts the Stoics’ doctrine of the inextricable bond between pleasure and pain, while at the same time drawing a radically different conclusion:

[W]hat if pleasure [*Lust*] and displeasure [*Unlust*] were so tied together that whoever *wanted* to have as much as possible of one *must* also have as much as possible of the other—that whoever wanted to learn to “jubilate up to the heavens” would also have to be prepared for “depression unto death”? And that is how things may well be. At least the Stoics believed that this was how things were, and they were consistent when they also desired as little pleasure as possible, in order to get as little displeasure as possible out of life. . . . To this day you have a choice: either *as little displeasure as possible*, painlessness in brief . . . or *as much displeasure as possible* as the price for the growth of an abundance of subtle pleasures [*Lüsten*] and joys [*Freuden*] that have rarely been relished yet. If you decide for the former and desire to diminish and lower the level of human

pain [*Schmerzhaftigkeit*], you also have to diminish and lower the level of their capacity for joy. (*GS* 12)

Nietzsche concludes this aphorism with a rumination on the power of science to promote either goal: it can make us “colder, more like a statue, more Stoic,” but it also has the “immense capacity for making new galaxies of joy flare up” (*GS* 12). To some extent, the Stoics function in this passage as a foil for Nietzsche’s imperative to experiment—or “live dangerously,” as he famously puts it (*GS* 283)—and one is reminded of Nietzsche’s reflections on the health of the soul, where he poses the troubling question of the potential value of illness (*GS* 120). However, in spite of this we can already begin to see a more fundamental agreement between Nietzsche and the Stoics that underlies their internecine dispute and indeed makes it possible in the first place.

Nietzsche’s claim that “much displeasure” is a prerequisite for our capacity to experience great joy recalls his claim that suffering is a condition for the possibility of human greatness.⁷⁴ Yet this assertion is not necessarily at odds with Stoic ethics, for whenever Nietzsche extols the virtues of suffering (insofar as it makes us profound and contributes to the growth and intensification of power), his primary target is the morality of pity. And Nietzsche and the Stoics are actually in accordance in their low estimation of the value of pity [*Mitleid*] (*D* 139).⁷⁵ Thus in order to understand Nietzsche’s Stoicism, it is crucial to distinguish between eliminating suffering and banishing sorrow. Nietzsche explicitly rejects the former program, inasmuch as it makes us small, mediocre, and ignoble. However, while Nietzsche valorizes suffering, he by no means advocates sorrow. The essential Nietzschean orientation toward the world is not one of recoiling, sadness, or regret, but rather one of affirmation, gaiety, cheerfulness, and joy.⁷⁶

In order to make sense of this apparent tension in his thought, we might provisionally think of suffering as a brute, inescapable fact of embodied existence, and sorrow as one optional interpretation of that experience. In other words, sorrow and joy both have to do with one’s interpretation and evaluation of the meaning and value of suffering.⁷⁷ The Stoic can no more eliminate suffering than he can eliminate loss. As became clear in al-Kindī’s epistle, loss is necessary and inevitable, but sorrow is not. In a similar way, the Nietzschean “ideal” is to become strong and healthy enough joyfully to affirm the entirety of existence—even its “accursed and loathsome aspects,” including suffering (*KSA* 13.16[32], cf. *EH* P3). To attain this standpoint, I suggest, is to banish sorrow.

But what means does he offer us to accomplish this? Here it is illuminating to read Nietzsche as a kind of late modern neo-Stoic, providing us with a veritable banquet of spiritual exercises aimed at the cultivation of the self and the affirmation of fate. Some of these exercises are simply meditations or thought experiments, not unlike the sort of therapeutic arguments and observations one might find in Roman Stoics like Seneca or Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius. Take,

for instance, this modernized version of the *praemeditatio malorum* from his *Nachlaß*:⁷⁸ “We can defend ourselves only slightly in great matters,” he says: “a comet could at any moment smash the sun, or an electrical field arise that could all at once melt the solar system. What do ‘statistics’ mean in such matters! We have for the earth and sun perhaps a few more million years in which such a thing will not happen: that proves nothing. To the naturalizing [*Vernatürlichung*] of the human belongs readiness for the absolutely unexpected and thwarting” (*KSA* 9:11[228]). The passage concludes with a meditation on the ubiquity of generation and destruction, which reads like vintage Stoicism without the redemptive *pronoia*: the sudden and unexpected is constantly at work, he says, even in those things that seem most permanent, regular, and well ordered, and the permanent is that in which we do not see changes, because they are too gradual and fine for us to see” (*KSA* 9:11[228]).

Nietzsche’s texts are full of observations like these, dehumanized and deified snapshots of the world that show us not only the tenuous contingency and transitoriness of the human, but also the ways in which we are conditioned and determined by the amoral and the inhuman.⁷⁹ In such texts, it seems to me, Nietzsche is not simply concerned with providing a theoretical description of nature without God. Rather, the point is to internalize or incorporate this new physics—to bring himself and his readers into contact with this reality again and again, to have it inform our experience of the world, to live it and understand what it means.

Other exercises are more like practical bits of advice for grappling with suffering without trying to foist some transcendent moral significance onto it.⁸⁰ For instance, in a strikingly Stoic, semiautobiographical reflection on living through pain and sadness, he says,

“for once be your own accuser and executioner, for once take your suffering [*Leiden*] as the punishment inflicted by yourself upon yourself! Enjoy your superiority as judge; more, enjoy your willful pleasure, your tyrannical arbitrariness! Raise yourself above your life as above your suffering, look down, into the deep and the unfathomable depths!” Our pride towers up as never before: it discovers an incomparable stimulus in opposing such a tyrant as pain is, and in answer to all the insinuations it makes to us, that we should bear witness against life in becoming precisely the advocate of life in the face of this tyrant. In this condition one defends oneself desperately against all pessimism, that it may not appear to be a *consequence* of our condition and humiliate us in defeat. (*D* 114, cf. *D* 113)

In this passage one catches a glimpse of the peculiar “cheerfulness” that Nietzsche elsewhere ascribes to the Stoic: the cheerfulness of dominating not others, but oneself (*D* 251). It is clear from this passage—as well as from his numerous explicit pronouncements on the matter—that Nietzsche has no interest in eliminating suffering. What he wants is to show the *optionality* of our seemingly automatic and “natural” experiences of suffering. He thus holds out

the possibility of a radical reinterpretation that twists free of sorrow and moves us toward a joyful affirmation of the real.

Finally, shifting to a larger, more ambitious perspective, Nietzsche offers us all sorts of suggestions about how to take the ill-begotten fragments that nature gives us, and through self-cultivation make something remarkable out of them—that is, transfigure and perfect our nature to whatever extent possible. In a pivotal speech from the Second Part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche’s mouthpiece surveys humanity and sees it as a field of fragments and accidents, strewn with botched and half-baked human beings (Z II, “On Redemption,” cf. SE 6).⁸¹ The speech is in part about what Richard Rorty has called the “contingency of selfhood”: the fact that who and what we are is conditioned to a large extent by chance accidents beyond our control—vices and weaknesses and inadequacies that we did not and could not and probably would not choose, but which nonetheless cause us all kinds of suffering.⁸² This is the raw material we have to work with; our fate, as it were, the portion or allotment given to us by that blind, incompetent demiurge, nature. The challenge is to sculpt it into a work of art.⁸³

As Zarathustra points out, creation is “the great redemption from suffering” (Z II, “Blessed Isles”). Elsewhere, Nietzsche frames this pivotal idea accordingly: “As an aesthetic phenomenon, existence is still bearable for us, and through art we are given the eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to make such a phenomenon out of ourselves” (GS 107, cf. BT 5). In this way, instead of rejecting nature, life, and history altogether in favor of another, ostensibly more real and more just world (what Nietzsche calls “the art of metaphysical comfort”), he teaches us “the art of this-worldly comfort” [*die Kunst des diesseitigen Trostes*]: a way of banishing sorrow and cultivating cheerfulness and joy through the creative cultivation of the self (BT P7).

Nietzsche offers us different programs for the aesthetic justification of one’s own existence, depending on one’s needs.⁸⁴ The writings of the early 1880s are a veritable goldmine of such suggestions. In *The Gay Science*, for example, he ironically observes that

[t]here is admittedly no ploy by which we can turn a meager virtue into a rich, full-flowing one: what we can do is to nicely reconstrue its inadequacy as a necessity [*Notwendigkeit*], so that the sight of it no longer pains [*wehe*] us and we no longer look reproachfully at fate on its account. This is what the wise gardener does when he directs a paltry flow of water through the arms of a spring-nymph, to provide a motivation for its inadequacy—and who among us would not find himself similarly in need of nymphs! (GS 17)⁸⁵

Or elsewhere: “One can deal with one’s drives [*Trieben*] as a gardener and—though few people know this—cultivate [*ziehen*] the seeds of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as fruitfully and productively as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis . . . [whether] in the French or Dutch or Chinese manner” (D 560). In a passage that nicely sums up this general project of self-cultivation, he writes,

To “give style” to one’s character—a great and rare art! This art is practiced by one who surveys everything his nature offers in the way of weaknesses and strengths, and then fits it into an artistic plan until each element appears as artistic and reasonable and even the weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large amount of second nature has been added, there a piece of original nature removed—in both cases as a result of long practice and daily work at it. Here something ugly that could not be removed has been concealed, there it is has been reconstrued as sublime. Finally, when the work is finished, it becomes clear that the constraint of the same taste has governed and formed everything large and small. For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continuously ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight. For the sight of what is ugly makes one bad and gloomy (*GS* 290).

Uncultivated human beings—products of nature’s “step-motherly” lack of concern (*SE* 1)—are on this account typically incapable of affirmation. Ugly, dissatisfied with themselves, harboring a deep resentment toward chance-necessity, they bear witness against the world of nature, life, and history. The link between the gloomy, rancorous human being and its need to exact revenge by punishing others is well documented and analyzed in Nietzsche’s subsequent writings (indeed, it is the root of what he calls “hangman metaphysics”).⁸⁶ What is interesting here is that human beings who have redeemed their existence through aesthetic self-cultivation are not only more capable of joyful affirmation, but they also serve as exemplary persons who indirectly help to banish the sorrow—albeit not necessarily the suffering—of others. A year earlier, in an aphorism from *Daybreak* that brings together the various themes of pity, suffering, self-cultivation, and redemptive exemplarity, Nietzsche gestures toward this possibility:

[T]he question itself remains unanswered whether one is of *more use* to another by immediately leaping to his side and helping him—which help can in any case be only superficial where it does not become a tyrannical seizing and transforming—or by *creating* something out of oneself that the other can behold with pleasure: a beautiful, restful, self-enclosed garden perhaps, with high walls against storms and the dust of the roadway but also a hospitable gate. (*D* 174)

Nietzsche’s casual aside about “tyrannical seizing and transforming” anticipates the markedly political dimension of self-formation that will emerge in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and his post-Zarathustran writings. There the philosopher as “commander and legislator” will take on the task of great politics, sculpting a new type of being out of the ugly stone of humanity.⁸⁷ But here, as in most of his pre-Zarathustran writings, Nietzsche’s notion of experimental self-cultivation assumes the essentially antipolitical stance of Hellenistic philosophy: his advice is directed toward the individual reader’s private project of self-creation rather than toward the more ambitious task of remaking the human being. Indeed, the fortress he evokes

at the end of this passage recalls the Stoic image of the inner citadel—albeit with a pleasant garden and guests.

I read these aphorisms as offering us an aestheticized neo-Stoic art of living. Nietzschean self-sculpture is not so much a “recovery” of or “return” to our true nature, but rather an ascension to an as yet undetermined nature (*TI* “Skirmishes,” 48, cf. *SE* 1). Unconstrained by any predetermined *telos*, exemplary human beings expand the horizons of human perfectibility, creating in the process a “new and improved *physis*” (*HL* 10). But we do not create ourselves *ex nihilo*, and the human being is not infinitely malleable. We are always to some extent hemmed in by our given nature, by all those chance accidents and contingencies that under the aspect of time have hardened into necessities. “We . . . want to become those we are,” Nietzsche says, “human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves.” But then he qualifies this in a way that points toward the Stoic fatalism that lies at the heart of his thought:

To that end we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary [*Notwendigen*] in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to be able to be *creators* in this sense—while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on *ignorance* of physics or were constructed so as to *contradict* it. Therefore: long live physics! And even more so that which *compels* us to turn to physics—our honesty! (*GS* 335)

Put differently, we need to recognize that within us which is, for all intents and purposes, immutable—what Nietzsche calls our “granite of spiritual fate” [*Granit von geistigem Fatum*], or on a larger scale, the “terrible . . . eternal, basic text of *homo natura*” [*schreckliche . . . ewigen Grundtext homo natura*] (*BGE* 231, 230).⁸⁸

It is fitting that the virtue he mentions at the end of this passage—honesty or probity [*Redlichkeit*], the pursuit of truth, even when it is potentially ugly or destructive—is the virtue he associates with the Stoics.⁸⁹ But Nietzsche also claims it as his own virtue, the virtue from which he cannot get away, the only one left to him, and in doing so he shows his true colors: “let us remain hard,” he says, “we last Stoics!” (*BGE* 227).⁹⁰ Ultimately the pursuit of truth (and in particular, self-knowledge) is itself a kind of asceticism or spiritual exercise, insofar as the former is potentially inimical to life—or at least a certain kind of life.⁹¹ Of course, Nietzschean fatalism is not just a matter of epistemological probity—one could pursue the truth even when it is ugly and dangerous, but do so with a pervasive sense of sadness or sorrow. Nietzsche’s ideal, on the other hand, is to accept necessity, even to affirm it and celebrate it: “My formula for greatness in a human being,” he writes in his autobiography, “is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it . . . but *love* it” (*EH* “Clever,” 10). Or as he puts it in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*: “Everything that is

necessary, when seen from above and from the perspective of the vast economy of the whole, is in itself equally useful. We must not only put up with it, but love it . . . *Amor fati*: that is my innermost nature” (NCW, Epilogue 1).⁹² And what is Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal recurrence but love of fate in its completely undiluted form?⁹³ “Sorrow [*Weh*] implores: Go!” Zarathustra sings, “But all joy [*Lust*] wants eternity” (Z III, “The Other Dancing Song” 3). The joyful affirmation of all generation and destruction, for its own sake, willed over and over again, eternally—what could be more Stoic than that?⁹⁴

Conclusion: Antipodal Stoics

Throughout the course of this essay, I have been teasing out a certain dimension of al-Kindī’s and Nietzsche’s writings, trying to show the ways in which Stoic themes remain at work in their thought. As I have argued, both conceive of philosophy as a way of life, and both provide us with numerous Stoic spiritual exercises. These exercises, diverse as they may be, are all ultimately directed toward the therapeutic cultivation of a self untouched by sorrow and capable of joyfully affirming everything that occurs. However, al-Kindī and Nietzsche take Stoicism in strikingly different directions. We might think of this parting of the ways as a bifurcation of the Stoics’ notion of divine, providential nature. Al-Kindī focuses on the divinity and providence, isolating and relocating them in a transcendent creator God. Nietzsche, on the other hand, retains the Stoics’ necessitarian physics of generation and destruction, stripping it of any residual trace of divinity or *pronoia*. Al-Kindī tempers his Stoicism with elements of Islamic theology and (Neo)Platonic metaphysics, imparting a marked other-worldliness to its joyous equanimity. Nietzsche, on the other hand, radicalizes the Stoics’ this-worldliness by rooting out all vestiges of stability, rationality, and design in nature, leaving us with the considerably more demanding task of loving a blind, wasteful, often seemingly cruel squanderer, along with everything it churns out. Al-Kindī, following the Stoics in spirit (if not in letter), conceives of self-cultivation as a recovery of some stable, preexisting model of the human creature, ultimately rooted in God’s paradigmatic being: his project is one of stripping away conventional, irrational accretions that obscure our true nature, thus “returning to the self.” Nietzsche eliminates the possibility of any such normative model, leaving us with the prospect of an open-ended, nonteleological, experimental ascent to some as yet unknown, undetermined nature. Kindīan joy requires steadfastness in suppression of the passions, which in turn makes it possible for one to attain a serene contentment with the will of God. Nietzschean joy requires a training and intensification of the drives, resulting in a willingness to expose oneself to the cruelty of the real and the capacity to bless it. Al-Kindī and Nietzsche are idiosyncratic Stoics, to be sure, but they are more

than that. They are virtually *antipodal* thinkers: they articulate antithetical ways of life, rooted in mutually exclusive accounts of the nature of things.⁹⁵

How then do we choose between them? Do we do so by determining which of their overall world hypotheses seems truer or more compelling? As Hadot himself has pointed out, “The same spiritual exercise can, in fact, be justified by extremely diverse philosophical discourses. These latter are nothing but clumsy attempts, coming after the fact, to describe and justify inner experiences whose existential density is not, in the last analysis, susceptible of any attempt at theoretization or systemization.”⁹⁶ Do we then make our decision based on the way their philosophies “cash out” in terms of our lived experience of the world? Or do we base it on the kind of individuals al-Kindī and Nietzsche were, as so many students of the Stoics did? Does the life of either man provide us with an exemplary model of joyous affirmation? Did either ultimately succeed in practicing the philosophical life he advocated?⁹⁷ And if it turns out they did not, what is their value to us? Can they help others overcome sorrow if they themselves failed? “There is a false saying,” Nietzsche writes in his posthumously published notebooks: “‘How can someone who can’t save himself save others?’ Supposing I have the key to your chains, why should your lock and my lock be the same?” (KSA 10:4[4]).

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1954.
- BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1966.
- BT *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.
- CW *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.
- D *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- EH *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.
- GS *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- GM *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.
- HH *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- KSA *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* (15 volumes), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988.

- PGA *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan. Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1962.
- SE *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- TI *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1954.
- WP *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1968.
- Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1954.

NOTES

1. All references to Nietzsche's works henceforth cited in the text by abbreviation of the English title. With the exception of occasional emendations in favor of greater literalness, I rely chiefly on Walter Kaufmann's translations for Penguin/Vintage and R. J. Hollingdale's translations for Cambridge University Press. Unpublished notes and fragments from the *Nachlaß* are cited as KSA—i.e., Colli and Montinari's *Kritische Studienausgabe*—followed by appropriate volume, notebook, and note numbers. Translations of *Nachlaß* passages are mine unless collected in *The Will to Power*, or otherwise noted. The above-quoted passage is part of Zarathustra's song, and so is in verse in the German. I have rendered it in prose for reasons of economy and style.

2. On Nietzsche's expression, "good Europeans," see *HH* 475, *BGE* P, 241, 243, and 254. On the title the "Philosopher of the Arabs" (traditionally applied to al-Kindī), see *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif (1962; reprint, New Delhi: LP Publications, 1999), 423–24.

3. I opt for Marshall Hodgson's term "Islamicate" here (rather than "Islamic") to designate any and all philosophical thought that emerges from within the context of a culture predominantly informed by Islam, whether or not its presuppositions and conclusions are necessarily Muslim. For a discussion of the usefulness of the term, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson's magisterial *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974), esp. 1:56–60. For a discussion of problems surrounding the delineation of the rubric "Islamic philosophy," see Oliver Leaman's Introduction in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–10.

4. For a useful introduction to al-Kindī's thought and his place in the Islamic philosophical tradition, see George Atiyeh, *Al-Kindī: The Philosopher of the Arabs* (1966; reprint, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), and more recently, Felix Klein-Franke, "Al-Kindī," in Nasr and Leaman, eds., 165–77. For a clear statement of al-Kindī's view of the relation between philosophy and revealed religion, see *Al-Kindī's Metaphysics: A Translation of Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī's Treatise "On First Philosophy"*, translation with introduction and commentary by Alfred L. Ivry (Albany: SUNY, 1974), 55–60 (chap. 1).

5. For several recent studies of Hellenistic thought (especially Stoicism) that interpret philosophy as a "way of life," or an "art of living," see Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1986), and *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. and intro. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), and *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Alexander Nehamas's *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

6. By fatalism I do not mean the attitude that our own actions and choices make no difference. For a contemporary defense of the relevance of a more traditional conception of fate, see Robert C. Solomon, "On Fate and Fatalism," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4 (October 2003): 435–54.

7. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945), 231.

8. The following discussion in this section offers a brief synopsis of recurrent psychological-ethical ideas in the Stoic tradition that one finds from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius. Here I will be concerned only with common and relatively uncontroversial ideas traditionally associated with the school, rather than the specific, innovative, and divergent formulations offered by individuals. For two useful historical overviews of the Stoa, see David Sedley, “The School, From Zeno to Arius Didymus,” and Christopher Gill, “The School in the Roman Period,” both in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7–32 and 33–58, respectively. For a discussion of the medical analogy in Stoicism, see Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 54–58, and Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 316–58.

9. On the cognitive and evaluative dimensions of the passions, see Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 366–89, as well as Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

10. The Stoics typically speak either of *heimarmenē/fatum* or *pronoia/providentia*. Note, however, that while we are supposed to accept the decrees of fate, we are also expected to oppose actions or events that are morally insupportable. Stoic moral resoluteness thus cuts across the internal/external distinction. Further, on the Stoics’ account, one’s character falls within one’s own absolute control and thus ought not to be passively accepted.

11. The main difference between *pathē* and *eupatheiai* is this: *pathē* are false or inadequately rational beliefs about indifferent things, i.e., things that are not ultimately up to us. *Eupatheia*, on the other hand, are “episodes of knowledge” that have to do with virtue and vice. Accordingly, instead of delight or pleasure [*hēdonē*], we have joy [*chara*]; instead of appetite or desire [*epithymia*], we have willing or volition [*boulēsis*]; instead of fear [*phobos*], we have caution [*eulabia*], i.e., the skillful avoidance of future vice. Note that there is no fourth *eupatheia* that corresponds to pain or sorrow [*lupē*], because the Stoic sage has no vice (at least in the present). For a discussion, see Tad Brennan, “Stoic Moral Philosophy,” in Inwood, ed., 270.

12. One finds anticipations of this idea in Socrates; see, e.g., Plato, *Apology* 30 c–d and *Republic* 387 d–e.

13. Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 6.

14. For a more comprehensive treatment of Stoic spiritual exercises, see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 84–87; idem, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 135–39; Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 58–68; and idem, *Technologies of the Self*, 23–39. Those looking for concrete examples of such techniques would do well to consult Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales*, or Epictetus’s *Handbook* or *Discourses*, or Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations*, all of which are goldmines of Stoic spiritual exercises. I will draw from a few of these sources in the following discussion.

15. Throughout this essay, I avoid the use of gendered pronouns whenever possible. Occasionally, when such avoidance would simply be too awkward, I opt for the masculine pronoun rather than the feminine, for no other reason than to avoid unnecessary anachronisms.

16. See, e.g., Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 41.3–4; for a good discussion, see Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 340.

17. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Penguin, 1964), VI.13. Cf. *Meditations*, III.11, and Epictetus, *Handbook of Epictetus*, trans. Nicholas White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), sec. 3.

18. There seems to be a residual element of Cynic candor in this strategy. But in spite of the apparent reductive naturalism evident in this passage, the Stoic standpoint is not only theocentric, but it retains a strong anthropocentric and teleological orientation: all things are for the sake of human beings—to test our mettle, or to benefit us.

19. Epictetus, *Discourses, Books III–IV*, trans. W. A. Oldfather (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), III.20 (pp. 119–21).

20. Epictetus's use of the wand of Hermes (which is winged and entwined with a pair of serpents) may seem a particularly fitting image for his Stoic therapy. Unfortunately, this impression is somewhat anachronistic: although the caduceus has indeed been taken up as a symbol of the medical industry, the traditional symbol of physicians is actually the wand of Asclepius (which is wingless and has only one snake coiled around it).

21. Epictetus, *Handbook*, 11. See also *Discourses*, I.1, 14, 24, 32.

22. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, X.11.

23. *Ibid.*, X.18.

24. Philo of Alexandria sums up the efficacy of this meditative strategy nicely when he points out that those who practice it "do not flinch beneath the blows of fate, because they have calculated its attacks in advance; for those things which happen against our will, even the most painful are lessened by foresight, when our thought no longer encounters anything unexpected in events but dulls the perception of them, as if they were old, worn out things" (*On the Special Laws*, II, 46, cited in Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 137). As Foucault observes, "The point is not to experience inarticulate sufferings, but to convince oneself that they are not real ills" (*Technologies of the Self*, 36). Cf. Hadot: "We are to think of them often, in order to tell ourselves, above all, that future evils are not evils, because they do not depend on us, and do not pertain to morality" (*What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 137).

25. Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 137. One might argue, however, that this perpetual focus on death is simply morbid. Cf. that great modern neo-Stoic Spinoza, who observes that "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not death" (*Ethics* IV, P67). A *Spinoza Reader: The "Ethics" and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 235.

26. See Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 36.

27. On this analogy, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 153; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 102; Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 36; and Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 317–18.

28. For one of the classical statements of this idea, see Plotinus's *Enneads*, I.6 (Sixth Tractate). For a discussion of the effect of this ideal on the Renaissance and early modernity, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), esp. 1–10, and Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, esp. 143–58, respectively. Foucault's three-volume study *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1978–88) has done much to renew interest in this project; for an example of recent creative work in this area, see Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 299–313.

29. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 35.

30. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 103. Hadot elsewhere takes issue with Foucault's interpretation of Stoic spiritual exercises on the grounds that he is inadequately cognizant of the Stoics' essentialism and univocalism. On Hadot's account, Foucault offers an all-too-modern picture of the Stoic project that looks suspiciously like "a new form of dandyism, late twentieth-century style" (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 211). This point applies even more so to Nehamas's *The Art of Living*, which, while offering a fascinating meditation on Socrates and his modern progeny, presents in my view an overly aestheticized and anachronistic account of the tradition of the "art of living" (see esp. 1–15).

31. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 3. For a discussion of different factors in the transformation—and one might argue, diminution—of philosophy in the modern period from a practical "way of life" to a primarily theoretical enterprise, see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 269–72. Nehamas offers an illuminating discussion of a similar distinction between two conceptions of philosophy; see *The Art of Living*, 3.

32. In claiming that al-Kindī and Nietzsche both “take up” the Stoic project of philosophy as a way of life that aims to remedy human sorrow, I leave aside the thorny question of the specific routes by which this influence was transmitted. This is less of a problem for Nietzsche than it is for al-Kindī, insofar as Nietzsche was a classically trained philologist with access to, and knowledge of, most of the key extant Stoic writings. On Nietzsche’s scholarly familiarity with the Stoic tradition, see Martha Nussbaum, “Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche’s Stoicism,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s “Genealogy of Morals,”* ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), 149. Al-Kindī in some ways offers us an interesting parallel: he was a notable figure in the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate’s ambitious and historically momentous project of translating Greek philosophical, medical, scientific, and mathematical texts into Arabic (see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society* [London: Routledge, 1998]). On the face of it, it might seem as though al-Kindī had direct access to the riches of the Greek philosophical heritage. However, while several scholars have acknowledged al-Kindī’s familiarity with Stoic ideas and their profound influence upon his ethical thought, there is little hard evidence to support the assumption that he had any firsthand familiarity with original Stoic texts. For examples of scholarship that focus on the Stoic themes in al-Kindī’s ethical writings, see Simone Van Riet, “Joie et bonheur dans le traité d’al-Kindī sur l’art de combattre la tristesse,” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 61 (1963): 13–23; Fehmi Jadaane, *L’influence du stoïcisme sur la pensée musulmane* (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1968), 195–214; Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 67–70; and Thérèse-Anne Druart, “Al-Kindī’s Ethics,” *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (December 1993): 329–57, as well as “Philosophical Consolation in Christianity and Islam: Boethius and al-Kindī,” *Topoi* 19 (2000): 25–34. For an extremely illuminating discussion of the methodological problems involved in positing Stoic influences on classical Islamic philosophy and theology, see Dimitri Gutas, “Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic (Other Than Platonism and Aristotelianism): A Review of the Sources,” in *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 4939–73. As Gutas points out, “[The study of Stoicism in Islam] is marked more by enthusiasm and impressionistic claims than by documented investigation and demonstrable influences. The problem, briefly put, is that though there appears to be an overwhelming amount of attestations of Stoic doctrines in Arabic philosophical and theological writings, the question of how they got there remains today as unresolved as ever” (4959). At most, it seems as though the transmission must have been indirect, via the gnomologia and doxographies available in Alexandria during the fifth to seventh centuries. The attempt to trace numerous Islamic philosophical and theological ideas to Stoicism without hard evidence of direct transmission is, Gutas argues, indicative of “a scholarly attitude of reductionism that denies any worth to the recipient culture, however adept its representatives may be pictured as having been in presenting a new synthesis. At the same time this attitude by implication denies the possibility of cultural polygenesis and deflects from investigation into the conditions that independently may have given rise to intellectual developments that were similar, or at least receptive, to Stoic, Skeptic, and other ideas” (4948). The point as I understand it is not to deny the productive influence of Greek thought on Islamicate philosophy, but rather to understand why thinkers like al-Kindī found the Greek legacy so powerful and appealing—to see the ways in which their own indigenous insights, commitments, questions, and concerns made them particularly receptive to Greek philosophy and conditioned the way in which they took it up, interpreted it, and put it to use. For one illuminating discussion of why monotheistic thinkers were so sympathetic to pagan philosophers, see Michael Frede, “Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy in Later Antiquity,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41–67.

33. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English, 9 vols.), ed. and trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1993), Kitab al-Tibb (71), bab 1,

vol. 7, p. 395, #582. The *Salūh al-Bukhārī* is one of the two most important collections of *ḥadīth*, i.e., “tradition,” or report of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions.

34. The Arabic manuscript of al-Kindī’s epistle can be found in Aya Sofya in Istanbul (ms 4832, fols. 23a–26b), and was first edited and published, along with an introduction and an Italian translation, by Helmut Ritter and Richard Walzer in *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Anno CCCXXV, Memorie della Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, series 6, vol. 8 (1938), 5–63. For a detailed discussion of the ways it has and can be divided and organized, as well as a careful analysis of the text, see Charles E. Butterworth, “Al-Kindī and Islamic Political Philosophy,” in Charles E. Butterworth, ed. *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 11–60. The text has been translated into English by Lenn E. Goodman as “Essay on How to Banish Sorrow,” in *The Islamic Philosophy Reader* (London: Routledge, forthcoming), and by Ghada Jayyusi-Lehn as “The Epistle of Ya’qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī on the Device for Dispelling Sorrows,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 2 (2002):121–35. Subsequent references to this piece will be cited in the text by chapter (according to the Ritter and Walzer edition), followed by the page number of the Jayyusi-Lehn translation. I employ Goodman’s translation, however, unless otherwise noted (copyright by L. E. Goodman, used by permission). The following discussion of al-Kindī’s epistle will be selective; for more detailed accounts of the text as a whole, see Atiyeh, *Al-Kindī*, 114–18; Van Riet, “Joie et bonheur,” 13–23; Jadaane, *L’influence du stoïcisme*, 200–214; Abdurrahman Badawi, *Histoire de la philosophie en Islam*, vol. 2, *Les philosophes purs* (Paris: Vrin, 1972), 456–69 (more of a paraphrase than an exegesis); Butterworth, “Al-Kindī and Islamic Political Philosophy,” 32–52, and Druart, “Al-Kindī’s Ethics,” 347–56.

35. Insofar as the epistle is less technical, more elegantly written, and focuses on practical advice, it is typically viewed as a popular rather than a strictly philosophical work. Hence it is not included in the critical edition of al-Kindī’s philosophical texts edited by M. Abu Rida, *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-‘Arabi, 1950). For a good overview of this classification, see Druart, “Al-Kindī’s Ethics,” 347–48; cf. 356. While it is clear that the epistle functions first and foremost as an exhortation to the philosophical life, my own feeling is that the popular/technical distinction may reflect an inadequately historical understanding of what constitutes philosophy proper: for al-Kindī as for the Stoics, philosophy is more than just systematic reflection on what we can know and what is real; it is also a response to the quest for human happiness and model of the good life. In his treatise *On First Philosophy*, al-Kindī himself defines philosophy as follows: “Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things insofar as it is possible for human beings. The aim of the philosopher is, as regards knowledge, to attain the truth, and as regards his action, to act in accordance with truth . . .” The former part includes “knowledge of Divinity, oneness, and excellence, and a complete knowledge of everything useful, and of the way to it.” Ivry (trans.), *Al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, 55, italics mine. This suggests the extent to which he conceives of philosophy as a practical activity as much as a theoretical endeavor. For an illuminating discussion of the various conceptions or definitions of philosophy in the Islamicate tradition that draws attention to this practical dimension, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam,” in Nasr and Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 21–26.

36. Druart, “Al-Kindī’s Ethics,” 328. For a fascinating treatment of the ways in which al-Kindī’s epistle was taken up by Christian writers living within the Islamicate context, see S. H. Griffen, “The Muslim Philosopher Al-Kindī and His Christian Readers: Three Arab Christian Texts on ‘The Dissipation of Sorrows,’” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, no. 3 (1996): 111–27. As Griffen points out, al-Kindī’s Christian beneficiaries theologize his advice, seeking consolation not in philosophy but in divine revelation. The

distinction is a noteworthy one: as a number of commentators have pointed out, al-Kindī's arguments do not in any way rest on revelation. See Butterworth, "Al-Kindī and Islamic Political Philosophy," 39, and Druart, "Al-Kindī's Ethics," 350.

37. Goodman renders this as "psychological suffering"; Jayyusi-Lehn as "psychological pain."

38. Cf. Epictetus, *Handbook*, VIII: "Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well." See also Butterworth, 40–41.

39. For a detailed discussion, see Van Riet, "Joie et bonheur" esp. 15–16.

40. We actually have a "duty," al-Kindī says, to dispel sorrow from our souls, and those who don't are "ignorant, miserable, crude, and cruel" (V:126).

41. For a useful overview of *adab*, see F. Gabrieli, "Adab," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 175b–76a. It should be noted that some of the vocabulary I draw attention to in this discussion (*adab*, *tarbiya*, *takhalluq*, *muḥāsaba*) came to be used as technical terms in Ṣūfism. This is not to suggest that al-Kindī was an early Ṣūfī, but rather that he lived and wrote in a period in which *falsafa* and *taṣawwuf* had not yet reified into mutually exclusive traditions. That is, insofar as he is writing during such an early, formative period, these notions should not be seen as the exclusive property of Ṣūfism. As Dmitri Gutas reminds us, key terms and ideas assumed to be reducible to a Greek source may also have independent Islamic origins ("Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic," 4939–73). Gutas's point about the possibility of cultural polygenesis interestingly recalls al-Ghazālī's remarks in his autobiographical *Munqidh min al-ḡalāl*: "They alleged that those remarks [that al-Ghazālī had made about the religious sciences] were taken from things said by the early philosophers. As a matter of fact, some of them were my own original ideas—and it is not far-fetched that ideas should coincide, just as a horse's hoof may fall on the print left by another; and some are found in the scriptures; and the sense of most is found in the writings of the Sufis." Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance From Error*, trans. and annotated by R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1980), sec. 55, p. 69. Indeed, in recounting his own intellectual and spiritual history, al-Ghazālī (who, it might be argued, seals the split between gnosis/revelation and philosophy that later thinkers and practitioners will take for granted) emphasizes the influence of Ṣūfī ideas and practices upon Islamic ethics (sec. 50, p. 67). For this reason, it is worth consulting scholarship on early Ṣūfism to get a sense of how such terms were used in like contexts. For two highly informative discussions of *tarbiya* and *adab* in the context of early Ṣūfism (third/ninth century; i.e., al-Kindī's time), see Fritz Meier, "Khurāsān and the End of Classical Sufism," in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 189–219, and Laury Silvers-Alario, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the *shaykh al-tarbiya* and the *shaykh al-ta'lim*," *The Muslim World* 93 (January 2003): 69–99.

42. Note the etymological connection between *takhalluq* (rectification) and *khuluq* (character), as well as *akhlāq* (ethics, the plural of *khuluq*) and *khalq* (creation), all of which share the same trilateral root. See the entries for KH-L-Q in Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93), 1:799–803, and Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 3d ed. (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1976), 258–59. For a useful general overview, see Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1994), 305.

43. For an illuminating discussion of this idea, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 21–22.

44. See *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya* (Abu Rida, ed.) vol. 1, *Fī ḥudūd al-ashyā' wa rusūmihā* ("On Definitions and Descriptions of Things," p. 172: "inna al-falsafa hiya al-tashabuh bi af 'ālī allāhi ta'ālā, bi qadr ṭāqati al-insān" (cf. 174–75). The *locus classicus* of this idea of becoming like God so far as it is possible [*homoiosis theōi kata to dunaton*] is Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b–c; cf. *Symposium* 207e–209e, and *Timaeus* 90 a–d. For an illuminating examination of this pivotal idea

in Plato and Aristotle, see David Sedley, "'Becoming Like God' in the *Timaeus* and Aristotle," in *Interpreting the Timaeus-Critias*, ed. Tomás Calvo and Luc Brisson (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1997), 327–39.

45. For a discussion of the various ways in which this definition of philosophy has been interpreted within the Islamic philosophical tradition, see Lawrence V. Berman, "The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God," *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961): 53–61. Berman distinguishes three types of interpretations: (1) the natural scientific interpretation, in which the philosopher imitates the creator of the universe (the "Demiurge") by acquiring the science of generation and ultimately learning how to produce minerals, plants, animals, and even an artificial human being; (2) the moral-intellectual interpretation, in which the philosopher imitates God by knowing the truth and doing good; and (3) the political interpretation, in which the philosopher (a) acquires a theoretical knowledge of God and the world, (b) constructs an ideal state as the counterpart of the universe, and (c) imitates the actions of God inasmuch as he tries "to found such a state in space and time with the practical ability to work within the conditions and circumstances prevailing at that time" (60–61). Al-Kindī seems to be offering us a version of the moral-intellectual interpretation. For a detailed examination of what such an imitation [*tashabuh*] of God would entail, and how an Islamic thinker like al-Kindī might avoid the apparent danger of *shirk* ("associating" or "sharing;" i.e., attributing divinity to things other than God), see Druart, "Al-Kindī's Ethics," 336–44. Cf. the problem of *tashbīh* ("making similar;" i.e., anthropomorphizing in a way that fails to recognize God's transcendence), with which the Mū'tazilite school of *kalām* (speculative theology) was particularly concerned. This raises a number of interrelated questions, since Al-Kindī is often—perhaps somewhat hastily—associated with them. The vexed question of al-Kindī's precise relation to the *Mu'tazila* has generated a considerable body of scholarship; see, e.g., Richard Walzer, "New Studies on al-Kindī," *Greek Into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 175–205; Kevin Staley, "Al-Kindī on Creation: Aristotle's Challenge to Islam," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 3 (July–September 1989): 355–70; and Peter Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Mu'tazila: Divine Attributes, Creation and Freedom," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (March 2003).

46. Goodman renders this as "firm determination." As Jayyusi-Lehn points out, al-Kindī defines this in his treatise "On Definitions and Descriptions of Things," as "the steadfastness of the thought to act," or as Druart renders it, "persistence of opinion in action" (Druart, "Al-Kindī's Ethics," 332).

47. Cf. similar language later on in the epistle, where al-Kindī speaks of things that are "out of our hands," or, more literally, "external to us" [*khārija 'annā*] (IX:129–30). Cf. Epictetus, *Handbook*, I. Some of the devices al-Kindī enumerates in this section of the letter are therapeutic arguments; others are practical strategies of action. It is not clear how many devices al-Kindī takes himself to offering: some seem to be extensions of previous devices; others seem like asides or digressions. For a careful, detailed discussion, see Butterworth, 32–52. I will not attempt to draw hard-and-fast distinctions between the various devices and anecdotes al-Kindī recounts; I am mainly concerned with the general thrust of his practical advice.

48. As an illustration, al-Kindī relates a popular story in which a dying Alexander the Great edifies his grieving mother with a posthumous lesson about the ubiquity of sorrow. S. H. Griffen aptly describes this story as "an instance, along with the philosophical tradition itself, of a pre-Islamic cultural item helping to crystallize an expression of Islamic culture in which both Muslims and Christians cheerfully participated" (Griffen, "The Muslim Philosopher al-Kindī and His Christian Readers," 127). This seems to me an excellent illustration of Gutas's point about cultural polygenesis, inasmuch as Alexander is traditionally understood to be a Qur'ānic character (Qur'ān, 18:83–98).

49. Cf. a similar point al-Kindī makes about human nature as such and the necessity of death toward the end of the epistle (XII, 133). Interestingly, although al-Kindī reflects on the

inevitability of generation and destruction (and thus, death), he offers no meditative device that focuses on this in particular. The Stoics by no means had the market cornered on such strategies; al-Kindī's contemporary al-Muḥāsibī, for instance, describes various spiritual exercises involving the contemplation of death and the final judgment, and some early renunciants in Islam even practiced seeing things from a naturalistic perspective, e.g., the “meat as rotting flesh” gambit (although this came under severe criticism by the majority as an immature stage on the path, because it required one to hate what God has created).

50. See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'* (*The Healing*), Metaphysics, Ninth Treatise (On Theodicy and Providence), and *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanīhāt* (*Remarks and Admonitions*), chap. 22, trans. Shams Inati, in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr with Mehdi Aminrazavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1: 226–41. Of course, the Stoics did not have a monopoly on fatalism. The Islamic tradition produced its own indigenous versions of fatalism and determinism, rooted in the Qur'ān itself (see, e.g., 3:145, 8:17, 9:51, 37:96, 44:4, and 76:30), for instance, positions held by the early *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* movement and ultimately institutionalized through the Ash'arite school of *kalām*, but also developed in different ways by some of the *falāsifa*—most notably, Ibn Sīnā.

51. Cf. Epictetus, *Handbook*, XI and *Discourses*, VI.1.107.

52. Jayyusi-Lehn's translation.

53. Jayyusi-Lehn reads this as a Neoplatonic injunction, found in the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (the translation of which al-Kindī encouraged and corrected), as well as Proclus, *Fi mahd al-khayr* (*Liber de causis*). The idea is that “we must return and contemplate our soul, making our soul the object of our *noesis*” (128 n. 22). However, as suggested earlier, this idea is rooted in the classical emphasis on self-examination and self-knowledge that one already finds in Socrates and the Stoics.

54. For a clear overview of *muḥāsaba* in theory and practice, see the excerpt from al-Muḥāsibī (“the Accounter,” an influential contemporary of al-Kindī's who, like him, lived most of his life in Baghdad) in *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael A. Sells (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 171–95.

55. Cf. Epictetus, *Handbook*, VII. Numerous commentators have drawn attention to this similarity; see, e.g., Jadaane, *L'influence du stoïcisme*, 209–10, and Druart, “Al-Kindī's Ethics,” 354.

56. Translation from both Jayyusi-Lehn and Goodman.

57. The term al-Kindī uses here when he speaks of something being evil is *rada'* (and variants thereof, see esp. XII, 133; Jayyusi-Lehn translates it as “bad”). Cf. earlier in the epistle, where he uses the term *sharr* (see, e.g., V, 125 and VII, 128. In the Qur'ān, *sharr* typically signifies evil with respect to *relative* benefit and loss. Sorrow caused by inappropriate objects is an evil because it is relative to individual human notions of loss and gain, not anything that is real. See Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'ān* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 1148–49; and Mustansir Mir, *Dictionary of Qur'anic Terms and Concepts* (New York: Garland, 1987), 66–67. Murata and Chittick provide a useful discussion as well (*The Vision of Islam*, 108–10). On the other hand, *rada'*/*radiya'* is derived from the root of a word used in the Qur'ān (R-D-Y) meaning “to perish” or “to be destroyed,” (i.e., to go to hell) as a result of one's own actions and choices (indicating some causal relationship between one's bad actions and one's destruction). See Kassis, *Concordance*, 994. This distinction is reflected in al-Kindī's use of the terms: in the earlier parts of the epistle (particularly VII, 128), *sharr* refers to relative, human conceptions of loss, while the shift to the language of *rada'*/*radiya'* toward the end of the epistle (after the sea-voyage, i.e., XII, 133) refers us to an ostensibly objective conception of what is bad, rooted in wrong-headed human judgments and actions.

58. Cf. Epictetus, *Handbook*, V.

59. Interestingly, this claim makes explicit a shift that is already under way in the text: al-Kindī initially holds up the figure of the noble king as exemplary of the Stoic ideal he is espousing (see,

e.g., II, 123 and VI, 126). However, by the end of the epistle, a new ideal quietly replaces that of the king: the philosopher (see esp. IX, 129 and XIII, 134). This no doubt parallels the shift from what Druart calls the “easy” remedies to the “difficult” remedies (“Al-Kindī’s Ethics,” 352–54); i.e., al-Kindī’s later devices have a more radical, ascetic feel to them, and he ultimately (although again, quietly), abandons his provisional definition of sorrow as conceptually incoherent (cf. I, 122 and IX, 129).

60. Throughout the sea-voyage allegory, al-Kindī speaks of “remembering [one’s] homeland” [*dhikr al-waṭan*], as well as those who “forget [. . .] their boat and the place where they had intended to go in their homeland” (XI, 131). For a discussion of the significance of *dhikr* (remembrance) as the saving virtue of human beings (as opposed to heedlessness [*ghafla*] and its Qur’ānic synonym, forgetfulness [*nisyan*], which signify the basic human shortcoming), see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, 144–49.

61. For an illuminating discussion of al-Kindī’s conception of joy, see Van Riet, “Joie et bonheur.”

62. On this point, see X, 130. Although the specifically religious dimension of this epistle is generally muted, it seems clear that al-Kindī’s Stoic ethics are grafted onto elements of Islamic theology as well as Neoplatonic metaphysics. On the latter point, see Druart, “Philosophical Consolation in Christianity and Islam,” 31. On the Stoics’ materialistic physics and their conception of the soul as corporeal and thus subject to generation and destruction, see *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, ed. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45 C-D & W, 53 G, and Long and Sedley’s commentary on pp. 319–20.

63. Ariston of Chios was a pupil of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. As Walter Kaufmann points out in a note to his translation, Plato famously anticipated this formulation by well over a hundred years (*Republic*, 444), and it seems odd that Nietzsche would overlook this.

64. There is a surprising paucity of secondary literature on Nietzsche’s relation to Stoicism. While the Stoics are occasionally mentioned in passing (typically in the context of discussions of the eternal recurrence), to my knowledge the only commentators who adequately acknowledge Nietzsche’s substantial kinship and debt to them are Nussbaum, “Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche’s Stoicism,” 139–67; Paul J. M. van Tongeren, *Reinterpreting Modern Culture: An Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophy* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999), 220–28; and Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1998), 143–47. Each of these examinations focuses on a different aspect of Nietzsche’s Stoicism, all of which are significant: his critique of pity and advocacy of mercy rooted in self-mastery (Nussbaum), the imperative to live according to nature, self-tyranny, tyranny of and by nature (van Tongeren), and *amor fati*/eternal recurrence (Hadot). I shall not emphasize these elements as much in my discussion, since they have been treated in some detail elsewhere. However, all of these accounts (including my own) should be seen as complementary. For an excellent treatment of the ascetic dimension of Nietzsche’s philosophy (which also reads it as a way of life), see Tyler T. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); see esp. 77–102 and 164–214.

65. For some passages that bring out this aspect of Nietzsche’s evaluation of the Stoics, see *HL* 5, *D* 131, 139, 251, and 546, *BGE* 44, *KSA* 9:4[204], *KSA* 9:1212[141], *KSA* 11:25[351]/*WP* 940, *KSA* 11:44[6]/*WP* 268, *KSA* 12:9[93], *KSA* 12:9[145], and *KSA* 13:11[292]/*WP* 342.

66. Nietzsche’s comparison of the Stoic to an “Arab” in this passage is surely not accidental. In his *Nachlaß*, Nietzsche repeatedly characterizes Stoicism as Semitic, perhaps because the founder of the school, Zeno, was from Citium in Cyprus, or perhaps because of the school’s fatalism, or its emphasis on moral obligation and an absolute, universal morality. See, e.g., *KSA* 13:11[294]/*WP* 195, 13:11[294], 9:1[130], and *WP* 427. (Cf. Nietzsche’s somewhat fanciful likening of the Stoic to a “fakir”: *KSA* 12:6[7] and 12:7[61].) However, as A. A. Long points out, “[T]he old theory that Stoicism incorporates Semitic ideas cannot be defended, as it has been,

merely on the provenance of its three great authorities. And there seems to be nothing in Stoicism which requires the hypothesis of Semitic influences." A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 113.

67. Nietzsche's critique of the Stoic doctrine of the primacy of self-preservation is often indirect, focusing instead on Spinoza's *conatus*, Schopenhauer's "will to live," or Darwin's "struggle for existence"; see, e.g., *GS* 349, Z II, "On Self-Overcoming," and *BGE* 13. However, these notions are ultimately rooted in the classical Stoic notion of *hormē* (impulse) and *oikeiōsis* (belonging, identifying with, appropriation, attachment) as the most fundamental impulse, which begins with what we need for self-preservation. For a discussion of *oikeiōsis*, see Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 122–33. Certainly, though, some of the Stoic aspects of Nietzsche's thought are mediated through Spinoza. For two discussions of Nietzsche's relation to Spinoza, see Yirmayahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1989), 104–35, and Richard Schacht, *Making Sense of Nietzsche: Reflections Timely and Untimely* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995), 167–86.

68. For three excellent discussions of this section, see Daniel W. Conway, "Returning to Nature: Nietzsche *Götterdämmerung*," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, ed. Peter Sedgwick (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 31–52; Paul J. M. van Tongeren, *Reinterpreting Modern Culture: An Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche's Philosophy* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2000), 220–28; and Laurence Lampert's magisterial *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 35–37.

69. The main thrust of his criticism seems to be that the Stoics employ the concept of nature in both a prescriptive and a descriptive way. For an earlier and more explicit formulation of this critique, see *KSA* 7:7[155]. For a similar point, see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 207–8.

70. On Nietzsche's putative ethical naturalism, see Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 1983), chaps. 5–7, and *Making Sense of Nietzsche*, chaps. 11–13, as well as George Stack, "Emerson, Nietzsche, and Naturalistic Ethics," *Humanist* 50, no. 6 (November–December 1990): 21–25; Hans Seigfried, "Nietzsche's Natural Morality," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 26 (1992): 423–31; Lee F. Kerckhove, "Re-thinking Ethical Naturalism: Nietzsche's 'Open Question' Argument," in *Man and World* 27 (1994): 149–59; Theodore R. Schatzki, "Ancient and Naturalistic Themes in Nietzsche's Ethics," *Nietzsche-Studien* 23 (1994): 146–67; van Tongeren, *Reinterpreting Modern Culture*, 174–249; and Peter S. Groff, "Who Is Zarathustra's Ape?" in *A Nietzschean Bestiary*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph Acampora (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 17–31. For discussions of Nietzsche as an overall philosophical naturalist, see Schacht's two books, as well as Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), part 3 (particularly chap. 11), and Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

71. That is, life operates according to a different, more delicate and restricted economy. Cf. *SE* 1, *GS* 109 and 277 for comparable aleatory models of nature stripped of providence and rationality. As Daniel Conway observes, "Nature may serve either as a standard for nomothetic legislations or as an indifferent, amoral agency, but it cannot serve in both capacities simultaneously" ("Returning to Nature," 42).

72. For Nietzsche's critique of extirpation (or, as he sometimes calls it, "castratism"), see, e.g., *D* 109, Z I, "On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions," *TI*, "Morality," 1–3 and "Improvers," *passim*, *A* 45, and *WP* 382–88. For two illuminating discussions, see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 211–56, and Eric Blondel, "La patience de Nietzsche," *Nietzsche Studien* 18 (1989): 432–39.

73. Cf. *D* 52 and *GM* III *passim*.

74. On the importance of suffering, see *D* 133–34 and 144, *GS* 338, *Z* II, “On the Blessed Isles,” and “On the Pitying,” *BGE* 62, 202, 225, 229, 270, and 293, as well as *GM* P6, II.6, II.7, and III.9, 11, 14, 27, and 28.

75. Cf. *GM* P5, where Nietzsche speaks approvingly of philosophers’ traditionally low estimation of pity. Although he singles out Plato, Spinoza, La Rochefoucauld, and Kant for approbation in particular, clearly the Stoics belong in this camp. On Nietzsche and the Stoics’ critique of pity, see Nussbaum, “Pity and Mercy,” esp. 150–56. Nietzsche’s attack on the morality of pity is multifaceted, as Nussbaum points out. She identifies six distinct reasons for his rejection of pity: (1) it is an acknowledgment of weakness and insufficiency in the pitied, (2) it is an acknowledgment of weakness and insufficiency in the pitier, (3) it purports to be altruistic but is ultimately reducible to a kind of egoism, (4) it is ineffectual (i.e., it paradoxically increases the amount of suffering), (5) it involves mistaken beliefs about what is really good and bad for people (i.e., pity results in the diminishment of humanity, since suffering is a necessary condition for growth and the attainment of greatness), and (6) the sentiment of pity is subtly but inextricably bound up with the desire for revenge and even cruelty (which Nietzsche and the Stoics both condemn, in favor of a mercy based upon self-mastery).

76. On this orientation toward the world, see esp. *GS* P4, 1, 107, 276–78, 324, 338, 343, 383, *GM* P7 and *TI* P. The best discussion of joy in Nietzsche’s thought of which I am aware is Clément Rosset, *Joyful Cruelty: Toward a Philosophy of the Real*, trans. David F. Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), see esp. 25–32, 49–54, and 61–69 (pp. 3–21 offers Rosset’s own Nietzschean statement on the nature of joy). Describing joy (or beatitude) as “an unconditional allegiance to the simple and unadorned experience of the real,” i.e., the meaninglessness and cruelty of the world (25), Rosset explains, “there is in joy a mechanism of approval which tends to overshoot the particular object that first caused it and to affect all objects indifferently, resulting ultimately in an affirmation of the jubilant character of existence in general. Joy thus appears to be a sort of open check granted to anything and everything, like an unconditional approbation of every form of existence, past, present, or future” (3).

77. This distinction is at best a provisional one, because suffering is arguably always already occurring within an interpretive framework. In order adequately to address this question, one would have to make sense of the seemingly irreducible tension in Nietzsche’s texts between his intermittent insistence on the interpretive character of all events and his equally prominent philosophical distinctions between interpretation and text (particularly in the post-Zarathustran works; see, e.g., *BGE* 230, *GM* III.13, and *A* 52). Such a project is beyond the scope of this essay; I am simply attempting to do justice to (1) Nietzsche’s valorization of suffering and (2) his advocacy of an affirmative orientation toward life.

78. Considering recent scholarly disputes regarding the legitimate usage of the *Nachlaß*, it may seem odd to begin an account of Nietzsche as neo-Stoic with an unpublished note. However, if I am right in claiming that Nietzsche appropriates the Classical-Hellenistic conception of philosophy as a way of life, then a case can be made for reading his *Nachlaß* as part of that therapeutic project, perhaps, e.g., as a sprawling, less compact modern relative of Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations* (the Greek title of which was, after all, *Ta eis heauton*, or “writings to himself”).

79. See, e.g., *TL* 1, *D* 49, *GS* 109. One might say that Nietzsche’s naturalistic portrait of the world cultivates in us the virtue of modesty, which he defines as “the recognition that we are not the work of ourselves” (*HH* 588).

80. On this temptation, see *GM* III.28 and *TI*, “Maxims,” 12.

81. Cf. the first few sections of *Schopenhauer as Educator* for similar imagery.

82. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23–43.

83. For Nietzsche's formative views on fate, see George Stack, "Nietzsche's Earliest Essays: Translation of and Commentary on 'Fate and History' and 'Freedom of Will and Fate,'" *Philosophy Today* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 153–69. In Nietzsche's juvenilia, one can already see the influence of Emerson, and the way in which Nietzsche's understanding of certain Stoic themes may have been mediated through Emerson's *Essays*. For a discussion of Nietzsche's more mature views, see David Owen and Aaron Ridley, "On Fate," *International Studies in Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (2003): 63–78. On the relation between fate and chance in Nietzsche's thought, see Joan Stambough, "Zufall," *Philosophy Today* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 95–99.

84. The following discussion of aesthetic self-cultivation is indebted to Graham Parkes's rich and rewarding study, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 157–69.

85. I opt for Graham Parkes's translation of this passage, which for my purposes captures the relevant idea more effectively than Kaufmann's.

86. See, e.g., *PTG* 4, *D* 13, *Z* II, "Tarantulas," *GM* II passim, and *TI* "Errors," 7.

87. On the idea that genuine philosophers are "commanders and legislators," see *BGE* 203 and 211. For some discussions of this dimension of Nietzsche's political philosophy, see Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), esp. 210–17; Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1998); Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*; and Peter S. Groff, "Wisdom and Violence: The Legacy of Platonic Political Philosophy in al-Fārābī and Nietzsche," in *Comparative Philosophy in Times of Terror*, ed. Douglas Allen (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, forthcoming). On the sculpting image, see *BT* 1, *Z* II, "On the Blessed Isles," *BGE* 61 and 225, and *KSA* 9:7[213].

88. Cf. Zarathustra's image of the immovable stone (*Z* II, "On Redemption"). For some heavily fatalistic passages in the works of 1888, see, e.g., *TI* "Errors," 8, and "Morality," 6.

89. On the virtue of probity, see *D* 456, 556, *GS* 319, 335, *BGE* 227; cf. his discussion of the intellectual conscience in *GS* 2, 357 and *GM* III.27.

90. As Nussbaum points out, Nietzsche's imagery of hardness and softness is drawn from the Stoic tradition, which associates the latter with "vulnerability to external conditions" and the former with "the dignified absence of such vulnerability" (Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy," 146). On Nietzsche's obsession with hardness, see, e.g., *D* 541 and *Z* III, "On Old and New Tablets," 2; cf. *TI*, "The Hammer Speaks," as well as *BGE* 44 and 227.

91. On the pursuit of truth as a kind of asceticism, see *GM* III passim; cf. *A* 50, 57. On the idea of dangerous truth, see *GS* P4, 110, 344, *BGE* P, 4, 39, *EH* P3, *KSA* 12:9[93], 13:16[32]/*WP* 1041.

92. Cf. *GS* 276, *TI* "Morality," 6, *EH* CW 4, *EH* Appendix (d) and *KSA* 13:16[32]. As Hadot points out, although the expression *amor fati* powerfully and succinctly captures the Stoic ideal, it is Nietzsche's own formulation and seems not to be traceable to any Latin writer in antiquity. For a discussion of some differences between the traditional Stoic and Nietzschean conceptions of love of fate, see Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, 143–47.

93. Perhaps the most illuminating passage in Nietzsche for explicitly tying together the closely related doctrines of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence is a *Nachlaß* note from late 1886—spring 1887: "The first question is by no means whether we are content with ourselves, but whether we are content with anything at all. If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things; and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event—and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed" (*KSA* 12:7[38]/*WP* 1032).

94. On the eternal recurrence, see *GS* 109, 341, *Z* II, "On Redemption," III, "On the Vision and the Riddle," "The Convalescent," and "The Seven Seals," IV, "The Drunken Song," 10, *BGE*

56, *TI* "Ancients," 4 and 5, and *EH* "Wise," 10 and *EHZ* 1 and 6. The secondary literature on this doctrine is enormous, and commentators have diverged widely as to its significance. For an admirably concise overview of the numerous interpretations, see Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 160. It would seem as though the doctrine is borrowed directly from the Stoics. However, as Hadot points out, there is no link between the Stoics' "loving consent to the events which happen to us and the Stoic doctrine of the Eternal Return" (Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, 144). Nietzsche's model of nature does indeed appropriate various aspects of the pre-Christian, Greek pagan conception of nature, particularly as articulated by Heraclitus (on this point, see Karl Löwith, "Nietzsche's Revival of the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence," in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, ed. Daniel W. Conway with Peter S. Groff [London: Routledge, 1997], 2:175–83). But although some of these aspects were present in the Stoics' materialistic conception of nature (particularly the model of the cyclical cosmos), Nietzsche believed that they reinterpreted the doctrines in a superficial way (*PTA* 7, end; cf. *EH* BT 3). On Heraclitus's influence on the Stoa, see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 145.

95. It should be added that neither al-Kindī nor Nietzsche provides us with a clear criterion for determining what is ultimately "up to us" and what is not (although for Nietzsche, one might argue that this can only be disclosed *a posteriori*, through self-experimentation). More fundamentally, there is a conceptual tension between fatalism and the relative freedom or autonomy that the project of self-cultivation seems to presuppose. I shall not attempt to address this problem here. For a discussion of this issue in Stoicism, see A. A. Long, "Freedom and Determinism in the Stoic Theory of Action," in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A. A. Long (London: Athlone Press, 1971), 173–99, and Dorothea Frede, "Stoic Determinism," in Inwood, ed., 179–205. On the problem as it emerges in al-Kindī, see Atiyeh, *Al-Kindī*, 79–82, and Druart, "Al-Kindī's Ethics," 344–47. For the problem as it emerges in Nietzsche, see Brian Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Robert C. Solomon, "Nietzsche as Existentialist and Fatalist: The Practical Paradoxes of Self-Making," *International Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2002); and Peter S. Groff, "Amor Fati and Züchtung: The Paradox of Nietzsche's Nomothetic Naturalism," *International Studies in Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 29–52.

96. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 212. But cf. Nussbaum's insistence (*pace* Foucault) that we not lose sight of the fact that these are *philosophical* ways of life, and as such are committed to some standard of comprehensivity and truthfulness. Her critique of Foucault, it seems to me, applies equally to Hadot. See Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 5 and 353–54.

97. These are questions Nehamas raises about Socrates, who in turn was an exemplary figure for the Stoics (*The Art of Living*, 8).