

Why Beliefs Are Never True: A Reconstruction of Stoic Epistemology¹

[This paper is a companion paper to “Can Beliefs Be True? A Socratic Reading of Plato’s Theaetetus,” presented at HU Berlin, Spring 2010. Both papers are part of my book project “Belief and Truth: A Skeptic Reading of Plato.”]

Today, most epistemologists hold that knowledge entails belief.² If someone knows that p , she also believes that p . “To believe that p ” is understood as referring to the attitude of holding p to be true. We have a unified notion of holding-to-be-true: every case of unqualified holding-to-be-true counts as the same *kind* of propositional attitude, namely belief. When we characterize an attitude as a belief, we do not mean to express a value judgment. We assume that everyone has beliefs. Further, we consider it obvious that there are true and false beliefs.

These assumptions seem natural to us, and it is hard to appreciate how deeply an epistemological theory differs from contemporary views if it does not share these or similar ideas. In particular, it is hard to see how one might hold the following claims:

- (1) In aiming for knowledge, we should aim to have no beliefs.
- (2) Beliefs are a kind of ignorance, and therefore bad.
- (3) Beliefs are not bearers of truth-values.

¹ I presented this paper at an ancient philosophy workshop at the University of Notre Dame, and at the Chicago Area Conference in Greek and Roman Ancient Philosophy, Fall 2010. I greatly benefited from discussion at both occasions.

² Of course, not everyone shares this premise. For example, an externalist about knowledge can argue that there are things S knows, but does not believe. However, as far as I can see, the externalist way of divorcing knowledge from belief is motivated in a way that is quite foreign to all major ancient theories.

These claims are central to Stoic epistemology, and they are up to now largely unappreciated. Indeed, though (3) is particularly striking, it has up to now not even been noticed.³ The plan for this paper is to explain these claims, and to show that, in spite of their initial strangeness, they have much speaking in their favor.

I. Beliefs as Weak Assents

The Stoics define beliefs – *doxai* – as weak and changeable assents. Before I turn to the details of the Stoic conception of belief, a brief note on the relevant Greek term, *doxa*. It is a difficult decision whether one wants to translate *doxa* as belief or as opinion. In discussing Stoic texts, scholars often choose “opinion,” which has the obvious advantage that the derogative sense of “*doxa*” that is central to Stoic philosophy is well-captured. However, this translation also has a serious disadvantage. It hides the fact that *doxa*, and not just a sub-class of *doxai*, is seen in a negative light. There could be a theory according to which all instances of holding-to-be-true are beliefs, while some of them are merely opinions. In such a theory, opinions could be badly supported beliefs, beliefs that, for example, involve prejudice, intellectual laziness, or a shallow engagement with the issues. This is not how the Stoics think of *doxai*. The full force of the Stoic theory only comes out when we draw attention to the fact that, for the Stoics, *doxa* is generally, and

³ Cf. for example Michael Frede’s chapter “Stoic Epistemology” in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. Algra, Barnes, Mansfeld and Schofield (Cambridge 2005), 295-322. Frede writes “Now a belief will be true or false, depending on whether the impression it is an assent to is true or false” (301); however, there are no true beliefs for the Stoics.

not only under particular conditions, a bad mode of holding something to be true. For this reason, I shall speak of belief, not of opinion.

Core characteristics of the Stoic notion of belief can be gathered from the following three texts (I am inserting numbers at the points in the text that I address below in my comments):

1. “The Stoics say there are three things that are linked together, knowledge (*epistêmê*), belief (*doxa*) and cognition (*katalêpsis*) stationed between them (*1a*). Knowledge is cognition that is secure and firm and unchangeable by reason. Belief is weak (*asthenê*) (*1b*) and false assent (*1c*). Cognition in between these is assent belonging to a cognitive impression (*1a*); and a cognitive impression, so they claim, is one which is true and of such a kind that it could not turn out false.” (Sextus Empiricus, M 7.151-2; LS 41C, part; tr. LS with changes).

2. They [the Stoics] say that, due to his not forming beliefs (*doxazein*) and his being ignorant of nothing (*2a*), the wise man never supposes (*hupolambanein*) anything false (*2b*), and that he does not assent at all to anything non-cognitive. For ignorance is changeable and weak (*asthenê*) assent (*2a*). But the wise man supposes nothing weakly (*hupolambanein asthenôs*), but rather, securely and firmly; and so he does not hold beliefs (*doxazein*) either (*2b*).⁴ For beliefs are of two kinds, assent to the non-cognitive, and weak supposition (*hupolêpsis asthenê*) (*2c*), and these are alien to the wise man’s disposition. So precipitancy and assent in advance of cognition are attributes of the precipitate and inferior man (*2d*), whereas they do not befall the man who is well-natured and perfect and virtuous. (Stobaeus 2.111,18-112,8; LS 41G; SVF 3.548, part; tr. LS with changes)

3. [...] We say that the wise man’s absence of belief (*mê doxazein*) is accompanied by such characteristics as, first of all, nothing seeming to him so-and-so (*to mê dokein autô mêden*); for such ‘seeming’ (*dokêsis*) is non-cognitive belief (*doxa*) (*3a*). [...] (Anonymous Stoic treatise (Herculaneum papyrus 1020) col. 4, col. 1

⁴ “*Doxazein*” means *both* to form a belief and to hold a belief; I aim to capture both aspects by translating first in terms of belief-formation, and then in terms of holding beliefs.

= SVF 2.131, part; tr. LS with changes).

(1b) Weak assent

Belief is characterized by the kind of assent by which a subject accepts an impression (*phantasia*) when she forms a belief. Her assent is *weak*, which reflects the overall state of mind of the subject. The Stoics envisage a subject who holds a whole body of beliefs, rather than a body of knowledge. Her beliefs do not stand in the logical relationships that pieces of knowledge stand in, relationships that ‘root’ individual pieces of knowledge, making them firm and stable. Beliefs lack this kind of anchoring. They are issued from a weak state of mind, and become part of this weak state of mind. Note that the person who forms a belief fully accepts an impression. Her assent is not weak in the sense of being tentative, or provisional, or anything of that sort.⁵ It is weak in ways that reflect the state of mind of the subject. Importantly, this means that beliefs are changeable or lacking in the kind of stability that comes with the logical relations characteristic of a body of knowledge. They are likely to be altered, re-interpreted, rearranged with respect to how they relate to other truth-claims of the subject, and so on.

(1a) Knowledge-cognition and belief-cognition

Next, consider how belief relates to cognition (*katalêpsis*). Cognitions are assents to

⁵ That is, belief is changeable whether or not the subject is seeking to revise her beliefs. A believer might be like Euthyphro in Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro*. When pressed to defend her beliefs, she makes *ad hoc* adjustments. Once it appears that she is left with an incoherent position, she might run away from the conversation, or break it off by starting a fight. Soon enough, she may lapse back into well-loved beliefs. Overall, there is a disposition for quite a few back-and-forth alterations, even if there is no willingness to revise one’s beliefs in the light of new thoughts.

cognitive impressions. Recall that, for the Stoics, human impressions (*phantasiai*) are *rational* impressions, and that is, they are thoughts. The term ‘impression’ thus should not mislead us: the Stoics do not think of perception, or some other limited realm in which things ‘strike’ or ‘impress’ us. Their talk about impressions is best understood as talk about thoughts. Accordingly, there are cognitive impressions in the sensory realm (for example, *this is my computer screen*) as well as in the non-sensory realm (for example, *water is H₂O*).⁶

Cognitive impressions are ‘imprinted in the soul’ precisely and in every detail in accordance with what is. Non-cognitive impressions are not thus imprinted (for example, blurry visions, not-fully-understood arguments, and so on) (DL 7.46). The Stoic claim relevant to present purposes is that cognition is ‘*stationed*’ in between knowledge and belief. Importantly, this does not mean that there are three kinds of doxastic attitude, belief the lowest, cognition improving upon it, and knowledge the best. Instead, it means that cognition figures in both domains: the knower assents to cognitive impressions, and so does the person who holds beliefs (though she does not do so consistently). The person who does not possess a systematic body of knowledge, and that is, the non-sage or non-

⁶ Early research on Stoic philosophy tends to misrepresent this feature of the theory. Half a century ago, scholars often assumed that Plato and Aristotle dismiss perception as lowly and bad; when these scholars approached Stoic texts, they were struck by what appeared to be a greater appreciation of perception. In part as a consequence of this perceived contrast, and partly because there are a number of examples from the perceptual realm, they emphasized perception when reconstructing Stoic philosophy, sometimes losing sight of the fact that both thoughts and perceptions can be cognitive. Cf. Frede (1999). Baron Reed (“The Stoics’ Account of the Cognitive Impression,” *OSAP* 23 (2002), 147-79, 148), says he shall assume that cognitive impressions are primarily sensory, because such cases are particularly prominent in the Stoic-skeptical debates. This seems right; however, it is only one strand of Stoic discussions.

knower, is likely to assent to many cognitive impressions.

Consider an example of what we might call belief-cognition – a case of cognition that does not qualify as knowledge, and thus is a belief. Suppose that today I have a cognitive impression of a complicated argument: I fully understand it. This counts as cognition. Insofar as I do not possess the systematic body of knowledge that the Stoics think knowledge is, it counts as the acquisition of belief. The argument does not ‘fall into place’; it does not become integrated with a theoretical framework where it would be firmly rooted. Asked to explain the argument tomorrow, I am at a loss, and I realize that I no longer understand it. Even though I assented to a cognitive impression, I only acquired belief, not knowledge.⁷

However, not all cognitions of the non-wise subject are weak in quite this way. Other cognitions might be beliefs, and weak, insofar as they lack integration into a systematic body of truth-claims (I shall consider an example of that kind below). But what about perceptual particulars? Suppose I assent to the cognitive impression that *this* (what I’m looking at while typing) is my computer screen. I am not likely to ever alter this perceptual judgment. I assented to a cognitive impression (assuming that I have full and unimpeded vision of the screen). Why then should my cognition bear any sign of weakness? The brief answer is, again, that weakness attaches to the overall *state of mind*

⁷ My example reiterates the point I made above: the distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive impressions cuts across the distinction between sensory and non-sensory impressions (DL 7.51). Cognitive impressions can be sensory and non-sensory.

of the non-sage assenter. All assents of the non-wise person are issued from that state of mind. For a more detailed answer, we must turn to the Stoic notion of precipitancy.

(2d) Belief as precipitate assent

Assent to non-cognitive impressions is precipitate. It is premature or rash: before the agent has carefully considered whether she has a cognitive impression, she has already accepted the impression. However, *all* belief, not just belief in which non-cognitive impressions are accepted, is precipitate. This is reflected in the fact that the non-wise person is described as a precipitate person. Only the wise person is fully in control of her judgments: she never accepts anything as true that she should not accept, *and* she accepts what she should accept with the right kind of deliberative care. Cognitive impressions, the Stoics say, “*almost* pull us by the hair” toward assent (SE M 7.257; my emphasis). Importantly, though they exert a strong pull, there is still room for activity on the part of the cognizer. The wise person will make the most of this room: she is a considerate assenter, even where assent is fully warranted. Though wise and non-wise person may assent to the same cognitive impression, there is thus a difference that can be cashed out in terms of precipitancy. In carefully considering the impression, the wise person assents in a considered fashion. The non-wise person is likely to just buy into cognitive impressions, thus being rash. This is one reason why even assents like “this is my computer screen” count as beliefs. Not being wise, I am likely to immediately accept this impression. In a sense, I have accepted it before I even considered it.

(2c) Two kinds of beliefs

The distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive impressions is crucial to Stoic philosophy. Some beliefs are assents to non-cognitive impressions. Such acceptances are inherently flawed; they are in violation of the Stoic norm that one should accept only cognitive impressions (cf. DL 7.177). These beliefs are through-and-through deficient: assent is weak, *and* the object of assent is such that no assent should be given. Other beliefs are acceptances of cognitive impressions. The cognizer does something right here. She assents to a cognitive impression. Still, she assents from the overall weak state of her mind. In this condition, one's truth-claims are changeable, unstable, and precipitate. Though the subject assents to a cognitive impression, her assent is (and generates) a belief.⁸

(1c) False assent

The claim that beliefs are weak assents (*1b*), discussed above, is tied to the claim that they are false assents (*1c*). What does this mean? It cannot mean that beliefs are generally assents to *false* impressions. For example, one might believe that water is H₂O, thereby accepting a true impression. The fact that one does not know that water is H₂O is reflected in a lack of integration of this claim with one's other truth-claims. For those of us untrained in chemistry, the claim that water is H₂O does not stand in sufficiently clear logical relations with other truth-claims to count as knowledge; for example, we might accept another impression that is in conflict with it, because we are unaware of the

⁸ Cf. Constance Meinwald (*), and Vogt (2009), Chapter 3.

conflict. How, then, should we interpret the claim that beliefs are weak *and false* assents?

I suggest that we read the “and” in “weak and false assents” as introducing an explicatory predicate. Beliefs, *qua* weak assents, are assents *falsely given*, or deficient assents: beliefs are weak-and-thereby-deficient assents.⁹

(2a) *Belief as ignorance*

Ignorance is defined as weak and changeable assent. Ignorance is thus identified with belief. Ignorance is *not* conceived of as a lack of any doxastic attitude to a given content. Consider someone who barely knows the word ‘biomathematics.’ This person is ignorant of biomathematics in the sense of having no doxastic attitudes at all to any of the subject-matter of that discipline. Such a person does not have any beliefs on the issue. This kind of ignorance is the *absence* of any doxastic attitude to a given content. According to this notion of ignorance, belief is already ‘more’ than ignorance.¹⁰ Belief engages with some

⁹ The skeptics, or at least some skeptics, take the Stoics to imply that one *should never form a belief* (cf. the Stoic-Skeptic debates as depicted in Cicero’s *Academica*). That is, they interpret the Stoic proposals on how to move from belief to knowledge as involving epistemic norms to the effect that one should only assent if the assent generates knowledge, and should suspend if one’s assent generated belief. However, the Stoics do not formulate the norm “never form beliefs.” The Stoics say that the wise person has no beliefs. Doing so, they describe an *ideal*, but the ideal does not immediately translate into an epistemic norm. If pressed, the Stoics might argue along the lines of “ought implies can”: there is no point to a norm that, as they see it, cannot be adopted. Prior to being wise, one cannot live without forming beliefs. Accordingly, it is not a viable strategy to try to attain knowledge by not forming beliefs (though arguably this is a skeptic strategy). The crucial Stoic norm is “never assent to non-cognitive impressions.” Beliefs can be assents to cognitive impressions. Though deficient *qua* beliefs, such assents are a step forward *qua* being cognitions.

¹⁰ This kind of position might be thought of in terms of *Rp. V*: Socrates argues that ignorance is not directed at anything (‘set over nothing’), while belief engages with something (something that participates in what is and in what is not). Accordingly, *doxa* is darker than knowledge, but brighter than ignorance. This is what the Stoics dismiss: that belief sheds any more light on things than ignorance; the opiner (‘believer’) is genuinely ignorant.

content, while ignorance does not.

The Stoics are not interested in this kind of ignorance. In claiming that the wise person is not ignorant of anything, they claim that the wise person never assents weakly. The wise person might very well have no doxastic attitude to some content, say, not holding any view on what next Fall's fashion collections might bring. Ignorance, for the Stoics, is a doxastic attitude; it is weak assent to impressions. It is the same kind of assent that belief is: weak and changeable assent. The claims that the wise person has no beliefs and that she is not ignorant about anything are equivalent.

(2b) Supposition

The Stoics thus do not use 'belief' as a term that covers all truth-claims. Only truth-claims that involve weak assents are beliefs. Do they have any term that covers all truth-claims? Though this does not seem to be a central aspect of their technical terminology, it appears that 'supposition' (*hupolêpsis*) might be such a term. Apparently, one can suppose something weakly, thus forming a belief, or firmly, thus acquiring a piece of knowledge. The wise person supposes nothing weakly, and therefore has no beliefs; instead, she supposes everything firmly and securely, thus acquiring knowledge with every assent she gives. How important is the notion of 'supposition' for the Stoics? My impression is that the Stoics do not push it. Their claim is not that there is a general category, suppositions, with two sub-categories, beliefs and knowledge. On the contrary, it appears that the term 'supposition' is used as a kind of circumlocution, at places where

it is inevitable that one looks for a term that *under*-describes what precisely is going on.

(3a) *Seemings*

The third text adds a puzzling idea, one that is even less attended to by interpreters than the ideas mentioned in texts 1 and 2. The fact that the wise person has no beliefs, it is said, reflects among other things that nothing seems to her (*to mê dokein autô mêden*). This is an utterly strange claim. Would it not appear that things seem to be one way or another to everyone? The wise person certainly has non-cognitive impressions. It is part of her wisdom that she never assents to them. In this sense, something seems to her in a certain way, but she does not accept this impression.

‘Seeming’ (*dokêsis*) is explained as non-cognitive belief; that is, it is explained as the kind of belief in which a non-cognitive impression is accepted. The implication is that a ‘seeming’ or *dokêsis* actually involves acceptance, and more precisely, the acceptance of something that, non-cognitively, seems to the subject to be so-and-so. For example, it seems that the tower at a distance is round. A ‘seeming’ is something that involves a judgment: the person thinks that the seemingly round tower is round. Apparently, the Stoics thus use a cognate of *doxa*, namely *dokêsis*, for a certain kind of appearance, namely one in which what appears non-cognitively is accepted.

This point may reflect complicated discussions with skeptics. The skeptics wonder whether there is a notion of appearances that does not involve any kind of judgment

component. The difficult question at issue here can be considered with the help of an example. Suppose the moon seems small to you, but you do not judge it to be small, because, in another sense, it seems large to you, because you have a vague notion of it being rather far away. The appearance of it being large might count as a *dokêsis*: you have a non-cognitive impression of the moon being large, and you take it to be large. The appearance of it being small might not count as a *dokêsis*: though in a sense the moon looks small, it is not thought to be small.¹¹

II. Knowledge as Firm Assent

Accordingly, to believe that *p*, and to know that *p*, are two modes of making a truth-claim. Knowledge does not entail belief. The Stoics define knowledge as follows:

4. [The Stoics say...] Knowledge (*epistêmê*) is a cognition (*katalêpsis*) which is secure and unchangeable by reason (*hupo logou*) (4a). It is secondly a system (*sustêma*) of such pieces of knowledge (*epistêmai*), like the one that exists in the virtuous man with respect to that which makes up the field of logic (4b). It is thirdly a system of expert (*technikôs*) pieces of knowledge, that has by itself stability (*to bebaion*), as the virtues have (4b). Fourthly, it is a tenor for the reception of impressions that is unchangeable by reason, and consisting, they say, in tension and power (4c). (Stobaeus 2.73,16-74,3 = SVF 3.112, part = LS 41H, tr. LS with changes.)

(4a) Pieces of knowledge

¹¹ Cf. Rachel Barney, 1992, "Impressions and Appearances," *Phronesis*, 37 (3): 283–313, who argues that appearances always involve a judgment component.

As we saw, the wise person has no beliefs.¹² She never assents precipitately, and she never assents to non-cognitive impressions. Every assent given by the wise person generates a piece of knowledge. Every assent given by a non-wise person generates a belief. Knowledge is firm assent in the sense that it is not changeable ‘by reason.’ That is, a subject may change her mind if given some hallucinatory drug, or if some other external force works on her.¹³ But she shall not change her mind because some new thought occurs to her. Insofar as the wise person accepts particular impressions, there are particular ‘bits’ of knowledge, or pieces of knowledge. This is an important point: though the Stoics also conceive of knowledge as a systematic body of knowledge, they hold that any particular assent – even assent to a quite mundane impression, say, “this is an apple” – can count as knowledge. This position differs significantly from other ancient views, according to which knowledge is, for example, tied to a certain kind of object (say, the Forms), or to some level of generality.

(4b) Knowledge as a systematic body of knowledge

Many pieces of knowledge constitute a systematic body of knowledge. Though individual pieces of knowledge count as knowledge, it is impossible to have just one or two such

¹² Commentators tend to gloss this position in a way that hides its starkness. Cf., for example, a relatively old but well-known account, formulated by Michael Frede (1979, 14): “They, thus, expect us to rid ourselves of all the beliefs we have acquired in ordinary ways, if these should fail to meet the rigorous criteria of reason.” This is not the Stoic claim: the Stoics expect us to rid ourselves of all beliefs.

¹³ Presumably, even a wise person might do so. The Stoics do not address this point. I assume they would argue that a wise person, like Socrates, does not get drunk, or, more generally, does not bring herself into states where external forces affect her cognitive powers. But if others were to drug her, then her faculties would be affected.

pieces of knowledge. A logician, for example, only knows the particular bits of her field if she understands her field as a whole. A system of knowledge is characterized by stability. It is stable ‘on its own’: the individual pieces of knowledge are stabilized through the logical relations they stand in with each other and the relations they stand in with the perceptual world (in assenting to cognitive perceptual impressions, the subject accepts impressions that are ‘imprinted’ in her rational soul precisely as things are).¹⁴

(4c) Knowledge as a state of mind

In order to assent as a knower, one must already have knowledge. Like in the case of the virtues, the Stoics think that the transition from being a person with beliefs to being a knower is instantaneous. After much study and hard work (and in that sense, after a long time of progression), one has gathered sufficiently many cognitions to make up a complete systematic body of knowledge. All truth-claims that formerly were beliefs come to be pieces of knowledge. That is, one already held most of the relevant views, but since there were still some false ones, or still some unclear logical relations between particular views, one’s complete body of truth-claims was a body of beliefs. Once one has weeded out all falsehoods and acceptances of non-cognitive impressions, all one’s truth-claims come to have the stability of knowledge. Now one shall no longer change one’s mind

¹⁴ I agree with Reed (2002) that the Stoics propose a kind of direct realism (in today’s terms). I take this to be the traditional interpretation of Stoic epistemology, or very close to it, based primarily on Aetius 4.12.1-5 (= LS 39B), though of course scholars of the past did not use today’s terminology (or, for that matter, were able to refer to today’s theories). Reed’s analysis is very helpful in comparing Stoic epistemology to contemporary theories (my sole disagreement on the point of direct realism being that the talk about ‘reports through branches of the soul’ that Reed discusses on p. 170 is, in my view, not part of a materialist theory, but of a corporeal theory – but that is a matter about Stoic physics that does not pertain to the present issues (cf. Vogt, “Sons of the Earth: Are the Stoics Metaphysical Brutes?” *Phronesis* 2009).

about them; they are firmly rooted.¹⁵ From now on, this is the state of mind that issues one's future assents. Accordingly, all future assents shall generate further pieces of knowledge.

These ideas have relevant ancestors in Plato. Plato's dialogues are comparatively better known, and thus it is useful to refer to them; they help characterize the kind of position that the Stoics have in mind (though, of course, the Stoics differ in many details from any given proposal found in Plato).

In the *Meno*, Plato formulates the idea that knowledge is belief that is 'tied down by an account.' A similar idea figures in the *Theaetetus*: knowledge is belief 'with an account' (*meta logou*). These proposals are famous, not least because it seems that these are the first formulations of a conception of knowledge that is discussed until today: that knowledge is justified true belief (JTB). There are two ways of reading Plato's proposals. First, we may think that Plato proposes that to know something is to hold a belief *plus* something else, for example, to believe that *p* and to have a justification for this belief.¹⁶ This line of interpretation is in agreement with contemporary intuitions and with the JTB Account of Knowledge. Second, we may think that Plato proposes something quite

¹⁵ For detailed discussion of the wise person's body of knowledge, see Chapter 4 of my book *Law, Reason, and the Cosmic City* (OUP, 2008).

¹⁶ For Plato, though not for contemporary philosophers discussing these ideas, a justified truth-claim is true. The contemporary notion of justification that allows a belief to be justified, though not true, is alien to the relevant ancient discussions.

different: when we come to know that p our earlier belief that p gradually becomes a piece of knowledge. It is key to this process that we integrate our ‘holding-that- p ’ into a larger picture – a *logos* (theory, account). Though I shall not argue for an interpretation of the *Meno* or *Theaetetus* here, I take it to be important that Plato thinks of knowledge along the lines of this second interpretation.¹⁷ In acquiring knowledge, beliefs get stabilized and thus undergo change: they become pieces of knowledge.

In the *Meno*, Plato says that understanding a matter once does not yet suffice. As beginners in a given field, we need to think through things a couple of times, otherwise our insight will be elusive. Figuratively speaking, belief does not settle down in the soul. However, when we think through a problem several times, our ideas become stable, and thereby become knowledge (85c-d).¹⁸ At the end the *Meno*, Plato proposes a related idea: beliefs ‘fly around’ in the soul until they are tied down by an account (97d-98a). Beliefs

¹⁷ I discuss some of these issues in “Belief and Investigation in Plato’s *Republic*” (*Plato* 9, 2009).

¹⁸ Consider some of the details of the well-known geometrical example. Socrates initially asks the slave-boy whether he knows what kind of figure a triangle is (82b). After the slave-boy’s first round of responses, Socrates says to Meno that the slave-boy thinks he knows the things he says, but he does not know them (82e). Socrates then asks the slave-boy what seems (*dokei*) to him to be the case (83a), and the slave-boy responds that, what he is saying at least seems (*dokei*) to him to be the case (83d). Now, the slave-boy no longer thinks of himself as someone who has knowledge, but sees that he doesn’t know the answer (84a-b). Now he wants to search what he doesn’t know (84b-c). When Socrates interprets the example for Meno, he asks whether the slave-boy has come up with any belief (*doxa*) which wasn’t his own. These beliefs (*doxai*) were in him (85c). Right now, these beliefs are like in a dream, flying around. But if the slave-boy is questioned repeatedly, he will come to know these things—without being taught, he will come up with this knowledge out of himself. This is recollection (85d). The slave-boy learnt these beliefs prior to this life. While he is a human being, he always has these beliefs in him, and they can grow into knowledge (through questioning) (85e-86a).

need to be rooted in a set of views. Otherwise we lose our grip on them.¹⁹ It is this set of ideas which becomes central to Stoic epistemology.²⁰ While a person gains knowledge, her beliefs are *replaced* by knowledge.²¹ Accordingly, knowledge does not entail belief.

The predicates that attach to beliefs are thus, mostly, predicates that attach to all belief: “weak,” “changeable,” and “precipitate.” The only differentiation between beliefs lies in whether the impression that is accepted is cognitive or non-cognitive. This distinction has real significance for the Stoics. In aiming to progress toward knowledge, it is the one distinction that matters: one ought to assent only to cognitive impressions. The distinction between the cognitive and the non-cognitive, however, does not map on to the distinction between the true and the false. Though all cognitive impressions, which show things precisely as they are, are true, many non-cognitive impressions, which show things in less precise ways, are also true (say, a blurry vision of my friend may be true: the approaching person really is my friend; but the impression is not cognitive).

That is, the Stoics do not envisage a differentiation between two groups of beliefs, true

¹⁹ The imagery of beliefs that fly around in the soul is developed further in the bird-cage metaphor of the *Theaetetus*.

²⁰ It is uncontroversial that the Stoics were close readers of the *Theaetetus*. It is harder to know whether the same is true for the *Meno*. However, it is clear—from a variety of sources—that the key ideas from the *Meno* were discussed extensively in the Academy, and probably also among philosophers outside of Plato’s school. It seems most likely that the Stoics are well aware of the relevant ideas, whether they read them in the *Meno* or picked them up in discussion.

²¹ With a view to the *Theaetetus*, we might even think that Plato suggests that our belief is replaced with an *account* (*logos*)—i.e., that there is something confused about the proposal that we need a belief plus an account, because what we have when we know that *p* is an account of *p*.

and false beliefs. Contrary to what reformulations of the Stoic position in scholarly literature suggest, the Stoics are rather consistent in never attaching the predicates “true” or “false” to beliefs.

However, one might still wonder whether this can be the whole story. In particular, one might wonder whether, though there are no true beliefs, there could be false beliefs. Suppose that to ascribe the property “true” to something is to evaluate it positively, and suppose that this counts as a reason against describing any beliefs as true. If this was the only relevant consideration (and we saw that it is not even the dominant consideration), then it might seem that acceptances of falsehoods could be false beliefs. But a simple objection derives from bivalence: entities that can be evaluated as false must also be evaluable as true. Thus, there can be no false beliefs if there are no true beliefs.²²

III. Statements as bearers of truth-values

If beliefs are not evaluated as “true” and “false,” what is? For the Stoics, acceptance, rejection, and suspension of judgment engage with *impressions* (*phantasiai*). Human thought is described primarily on that level: we engage with impressions, accepting or

²² The principle that, if something can be evaluated as true it must also be evaluable as false was violated by the Epicureans, who claim that all sense-perceptions are true. The Stoics go to great length in defending bivalence as a core principle of their logic. To them, the Epicurean claim is deeply confused: how could something be true, if it is not the kind of entity that can also be false?

rejecting them, or suspending judgment on them.²³ The truth-predicates are employed in characterizing impressions: a true impression is an impression of which a true predication (*katêgoria*) can be made (SE, *M* 7.242-6 = LS 39G). Unfortunately, this passage – though it contains vital information about impressions, namely that they are only derivatively true and false – is phrased imprecisely in another respect: ‘predication’ is not the Stoics’ technical term for the bearers of truth-values.

Consider, then, what precisely it is, according to the Stoics, that should be evaluated as true and false. Human impressions have a linguistic counterpart, so-called *lekta*, literally ‘sayables’ (SE, *PH* 2.80-84, Huelser 322). *Lekta* are things that can be said (to be distinguished from the corporeal utterance, *phônê*). When I see the table, I have a rational impression; rational impressions are thoughts (*noêseis*) (DL 7.51). This means that these impressions have a linguistic counterpart, and are conceptual. I see *a table*, and I can make a statement of this impression: “this is a table.” *Lekta* can be complete or

²³ This is perhaps clearest in contexts that explain the fundamentals of Stoic philosophy of mind. For example, consider the claim that, according to the Stoics, there are “three movements of the rational soul”: impression, impulse, and assent (Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1122a-f = LS 69A). Reed (2002, 168) argues, *contra* Frede and the standard view in the literature, that assent is to (in his terms) ‘propositions,’ not to impressions. Reed refers to Stobaeus 2.88,2-6 (= LS 33I). However, this passage uses a short-cut that figures in some contexts (that is, the source speaks directly of *lekta* rather than of the relevant impressions). This kind of imprecise usage occurs when the focus is elsewhere. In this particular case, it is on a rather complex issue, namely, how to characterize assent that figures in impulse to action. The Stoics hold a view of rational motivation that differs from the more widespread ancient view that motivation involves judging something (the action or its outcome) to be good. Against this view (often referred to as the Guise of the Good), the Stoics think that, in impulse to action, we assent to an impression that something is *to be done*. The relevant *lekton* is in a certain sense incomplete (in their words, a “predicate”). The agent does not assent to the impression that it is good for her to go for a walk now; rather, she assents to the impression that she should go for a walk now. This is an under-explored and complicated matter. It is one of the topics I discuss in my book project “Desiring the Good.”

incomplete.²⁴ For example, “table” is an incomplete *lekton*.

The truth-predicates attach to *axiomata*, literally, ‘that which is assertible.’²⁵ *Axiomata* are one kind of complete sayable; other complete sayables include questions, hypotheses, and imperatival (DL 7.65-68). *Axiomata* are the kind of complete sayable that is true or false (DL 7.65).²⁶ Note that, for the Stoics, a kind of bivalence is a mark of that which ‘earns’ being characterized by the truth predicates: that which is truth-evaluable has precisely one of the truth-values; it is true or false.²⁷

One way to explain why impressions, though there are true and false impressions in a derivative sense, are not truth-evaluable in the strict sense is the following. Impressions

²⁴ SE M 8.70; DL 7.63. Cf. Huelser 696, 699.

²⁵ DL 7.70.

²⁶ Among scholars writing on Stoic logic, it has been noted that the truth-predicates apply, for the Stoics, only to *axiomata*—but this observation was made, for example, with respect to the truth-predicates not applying to arguments. Cf. M. Frede on true and false arguments (1974, 42); for a recent discussion of bivalence in Stoic logic, cf. J. Barnes (2007). Though Frede explains that the truth-predicates only apply to *axiomata* when he discusses Stoic logic, he still says that epistemic norms in Stoic philosophy are meant to steer us away from false belief (“The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assents,” 1984, 137).

²⁷ Cf. Barnes (2007, 1-2). Bobzien (2003, 87) writes: “Thus truth and falsehood are properties of assertibles, and being true or false – in a nonderivative sense – is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for something’s being an assertible. [...] Assertibles resemble Fregean propositions in various respects. There are however, important differences. The most far-reaching one is that truth and falsehood are temporal properties of assertibles.”

can be true *and* false, as well as *neither true nor* false.²⁸ Though we need not fully clarify this idea for present purposes (it involves complex questions about the relationship between rational impressions and *lekta*), a brief look at the Stoic examples is helpful.²⁹ The impression Orestes had in his madness of Electra as a fury is said to be true and false. It is true insofar as Electra is present; it is false insofar as she is not a fury. Arguably, the impression is true and false insofar as one could make a true *and* a false assertion: “there is Electra” (true) and “Electra is a fury” (false). That is, the impression is true *and* false, but there is no single assertion that is true *and* false (whatever Orestes would state, it is true *or* false).

A certain kind of generic impression is said to be neither true nor false. “Human beings are Greeks,” for example, is such a generic impression. Only a compressed version of the Stoic argument survives, and it is hard to interpret. Roughly, the thought seems to be as follows. Some human beings are Greeks, some are Barbarians (it is assumed that the

²⁸ SE, *M* 7.242-6, LS 39G. Christopher Shields begins discussion of the truth-evaluability of impressions with a shortened version of 7.242-6, as if the Stoics said that impressions can be true or false. If we report all four options (true, false, neither true nor false, true and false), we immediately see that impressions are not truth-evaluable in any standard sense. “The Truth Evaluability of Stoic *Phantasiai*: Adversus Mathematicos 7.242-46,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 31, No. 3, July, 1993, pp. 325-47

²⁹ If impressions are true and false derivatively, it might seem that they can only be true-and-false and neither-true-nor-false in the same derivative fashion. But that is impossible; there are no true-and-false or neither-true-nor-false *axiomata*. As Frede argues, not all aspects of an impression are captured in a corresponding *axioma*. Non-cognitive impressions might be rather vague; in such cases, no particular *axioma* might correspond to them. Michael Frede, “The Stoic doctrine of the affections of the soul,” in M. Schofield and G. Striker (eds.), *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics* (Cambridge 1986): 93–110, pp. 103–107. For Frede, this is one of the reasons why it is important to note that we assent to an impression, not to a *lekton*. In accepting an impression, we do something different from stating a particular *axioma*.

disjunction “Greek or Barbarian” is complete and exclusive). “Greek” and “Barbarian” are species of the genus “human being.” The particulars falling under “human being” are either Greek or Barbarian; but neither “Greek” nor “Barbarian” is a property of human beings qua human beings. The impression that human beings are Greeks, then, is neither true nor false, because it is a mistake to ascribe this kind of property – one that only applies to particular human beings, but not to the genus – to human beings. Accordingly, there is no assertion “human beings are Greeks.” “Human beings are Greeks” is an incorrectly formed predication, and thus not an assertion. The utterance “human beings are Greeks” is not truth-evaluable, because it is not a correctly formed assertoric sentence.

Axiomata are the only kind of thing that is true or false. That they are true or false is their definition: they are the kind of thing that is true or false (DL 7.65). An alternative or additional definition says that an *axioma* is a complete *lekton* that can be stated as far as itself is concerned.³⁰ The clause ‘as far as itself is concerned’ indicates that, for a *lekton* to be stated, two conditions must be met: it must be the kind of *lekton* that can be stated, and someone must have the relevant impression. An *axioma* is the kind of *lekton* that is statable as far as itself is concerned (an incomplete *lekton* like “table” is not statable, only

³⁰ SE PH 2.104; Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* XVI 8,4; DL 7.85 says “*pragma*” instead of “*lekton*” (that is, a complete matter that can be stated, as far as itself is concerned). Cf. Huelser 874, 877, 878. I agree with Susanne Bobzien’s reading of the passage; cf. Bobzien, “Logic,” in B. Inwood (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, 85–123, esp. 85–89. Bobzien here modifies her own earlier view in *Die stoische Modallogik*, 12 and 20. Both of her proposals reject Michael Frede’s view: that statements persist in spite of what the Stoics have to say about the changes of truth-values (1974, 33–37). Note that we might distinguish between ‘being truth-evaluable’ and ‘having a determinate truth-value.’

sayable), but for it to be actually storable there must also be a cognizer with the relevant impression.

“True” and “false” are temporal properties of *axiomata*. Consider a Stoic example: “It is day” (SE *M* 8.103). The *axioma* “it is day” is true during day-time, but false during night-time. It belongs to the class of so-called *metapiptonta*: assertibles that switch their truth-value due to the passage of time (literally, *metapiptonta* are things that ‘turn around’).³¹ As long as it is day, the statement “it is day” is true. At night, the statement “it is day” is false. The assertible “it is day,” thus, is true or false, depending on whether it is stated during day-time *or* not. *Axiomata* have truth-values whether they are stated or not: at every given point, an assertible is either true or false, many of them having a stable truth-value (e.g., “human beings are living beings”), others switching back and forth (e.g., “it is day”).³² The Stoics do not take a diachronic perspective, according to which *metapiptonta* would be true *and* false (other than in the sense of, at one time being true and at another time being false). The claim that every *axioma* is either true *or* false views *axiomata* as stated at particular times. In this sense, the Stoics say that “*axiomata* are those things saying which we either speak true or speak false” (SE, *M* 8.73).³³

³¹ On the point that *metapiptonta* always involve relative time-markers like “day,” “night,” and so on (as compared to specific dates like “09.16.2010”), cf. Michael Frede, *Die stoische Logik*, 44 and Bobzien, *Stoische Modallogik*, 21.

³² On timeless truths, cf. Barnes (2007), 14-19.

³³ Barnes reformulates this point as follows: “Whenever it can be asserted that so-and-so, either it is true at that time that so-and-so or else it is false at that time that so-and-so” (2007, 19).

In a sense, it suffices for present purposes to note that *axiomata* are the only bearers of truth-values. Even impressions, to which the Stoics do apply the truth-predicates, are merely derivatively true or false, depending on the statements that can be made of them. However, there are reasons to sketch some of the details of the Stoic theory. It helps emphasize the point that the Stoics take seriously the question of what *precisely* it is that is evaluated as true or false. They do not operate with a vague intuition, according to which one might think that, quite obviously, beliefs are the kinds of things that are true or false, simply because there is an everyday way of speaking along these lines. Rather, the Stoic conception of the bearers of truth-values is a technical one, and it involves the crucial claim that *axiomata* (and nothing else!) are true or false.³⁴ Where the Stoics envisage a derivative usage of the truth-predicates, namely with respect to impressions, they point this out, and they explain why the usage is merely derivative. Accordingly, it is implausible to suggest that they might recognize a derivative use of the truth-predicates for beliefs. If they were willing to do so, the sources should tell an analogous story to the one we have about impressions: the derivative usage should be mentioned and elucidated – but it is not.

IV. Truth and the True

The Stoic position, then, may appear to involve a strange separation between speech and mental states. A person may hold a belief, which, qua belief, is not characterized as true,

³⁴ Barnes cites Cicero, according to whom “Chrysippus strains every sinew in order to persuade us that every assertible is either true or false” (*de fat* x.21). Barnes emphasizes that, for the Stoics, this was not an obvious or self-evident claim. Rather, it was a claim that needed to be explored and defended (2007, 1-4).

and when uttering the belief, she makes a true statement. This seems thoroughly odd. Further, one might think that, in not characterizing beliefs as true and false, the Stoics have to make an unwelcome concession. If only *axiomata* are true, then pieces of knowledge can not be characterized as true. Is not this a counterintuitive implication of the Stoic position, as I described it? The Stoics address these issues by drawing a distinction between truth and the true:

5. The true (*to alêthes*) is said [by the Stoics] to differ from truth (*alêtheia*) in three ways, in what it is (*ousia*), in its composition (*sustasis*), and in its capacity (*dunamis*). With respect to what it is, since what is true is incorporeal, for it is an *axioma* and a *lekton*; but truth is a body (for it is knowledge capable of stating everything true, and knowledge is the commanding-faculty in a certain state, just as a fist is the hand disposed in a certain way; and the commanding-faculty is a body, being a breath in their view). In composition, since what is true is something simple, e.g., “I am conversing,” but truth consists of the knowledge of many truths. In its capacity, for truth belongs to knowledge, while the true does not do so at all. Hence they say that truth is only in a virtuous man, but the true is also in an inferior man; for the inferior man can say something true. (SE, PH 2.81-3 = LS 33P, tr. LS with changes)

The person without knowledge can utter a true statement. But her state of mind (or: the condition of her rational soul) is not that of the knower. The fact that her statement is true is thus, as it were, a coincidence: many of the subject’s truth-claims are actually not true, though she thinks they are. In uttering any of her beliefs, she utters something that she takes to be true. Whether her statement is true or not does not, then, reflect an advantage that one state of mind would have over another state of mind. The speaker’s state of mind is, in each case (whether the statement is true or false) that of a deficient truth-claim, a truth-claim in which the person takes something to be true that she does not know to be

true. True statements are not the *possession* of truth. In order to ‘possess’ truth, one must know that what one takes to be true actually is true (and that is, any piece of knowledge must be part of a consistent body of knowledge, and in this sense firm and stable). Accordingly, only the knower possesses truth. Truth in this sense, then, simply is a description of her state of mind: it is a description of the systematic body of knowledge that structures her mind.

Again, it is helpful to think about the Stoic position by drawing on Plato. It reflects the kind of position that figures in Plato’s *Hippias Minor*. There, Socrates argues that only the knower can lie. Those who hold mere beliefs, and thus are strictly speaking ignorant, cannot lie. To lie, on this account, is to utter a falsehood knowing that it is a falsehood.³⁵ In order to do this, one must know the truth. The upshot of this position is that only the knower can utter truths and falsehoods in an ambitious sense: for something to qualify as a truth in this sense, it must be recognized as a truth; for it to qualify as a falsehood in this sense, it must be recognized as a falsehood. Otherwise, the speaker, whether she intends to speak the truth or not, is in muddy waters: she might just as well speak the truth when she tries to lie. The Stoics aim to account for the relevant ambitious sense of truth by distinguishing between ‘truths’ (true assertions) on the one hand, and ‘truth’ on the other. Only a knower possesses truth. Someone who holds a belief, whether her corresponding statement happens to be true or not, does not possess any truth that belongs to the body of

³⁵ Barnes (2007, 7-8) mentions that the relevant verbs, *alêtheuein* and *pseudesthai*, literally mean ‘to true-say’ and ‘to false-say.’

knowledge that is the truth.

The trouble with beliefs is that they are, as it were, blind. This is a Platonic expression. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that beliefs without knowledge are blind.³⁶ One way to understand this claim is that beliefs are not transparent to the subject as mere beliefs. The subject makes a truth-claim, with the attitude of presumed knowledge. An unqualified truth-claim (that is, a truth-claim that is not bracketed by some clause like “as far as I can see,” or “I’m assuming this,” etc.) arguably implies that the person takes herself to be in the position to make this claim. In the terms of the ancient debates, this means that she takes herself to be a knower of the relevant claim. Many attitudes that we, today, might classify as beliefs (thereby using the notion in a wide sense), thus are not described as beliefs. Any claim, for example, that comes with even a mild proviso – a qualifier that indicates that the subject merely assumes that this is how things are, or considers it possible to revise her view in the light of further evidence, and so on – does not count as a belief. Instead, it would count as an assumption, or a hypothesis, or something of that kind. In belief, the subject does not take herself to hold ‘merely’ a belief. According to her self-perception, she is in a position to make an unqualified truth-claim. Thus beliefs are blind in the sense that they are instances of self-deception. They are ignorance in a Socratic sense: presumed knowledge. All beliefs are, from the point of view of the cognizer, true: they are truth-claims. The subject would not believe what she believes if

³⁶ In Book VI of the *Republic*, Socrates is asked for his beliefs about the good. He responds by asking Adeimantus whether he has not realized that beliefs without knowledge (*aneu epistēmês doxai*) are ugly (*aischra*), shameful (*tuphla*) and crooked (*skolia*), and that even the best of them are blind (*tuphlon*) (506c)

she did not consider it true. From the point of view of the subject, then, it is impossible to hold a false belief. To believe something and at the same time believe that it is false is incoherent; arguably, this is simply not something one can do. That is, from the point of view of the subject, beliefs are non-transparent with regard to their truth and falsity; only the knower is in a position to claim that what she asserts as true actually is true.

But what about the problem that, though the knower knows her assertions to be true, knowledge itself is not adequately characterized as true? The Stoic position could be rephrased in Parmenidean terms: truth and knowledge *belong together*. That is, to have knowledge is to be in possession of truth. But since knowledge is unerring (as Plato rephrases the Parmenidean point in the *Theaetetus*), knowledge is indeed not adequately *evaluated* as true. Knowledge is, qua knowledge, *of* the truth. But no piece of knowledge can be the bearer of a truth-value. For that to be the case, there would have to be false pieces of knowledge, and there are not. Something can only be a bearer of a truth-value if it can be true *or* false. Accordingly, it is plausible that knowledge can not be evaluated as true.

V. An Application: Emotions are Beliefs

Now, someone might object that my re-interpretation of Stoic epistemology amounts to no more than a kind of ‘policing’ of the language. Why not say, in some loose sense, that Stoic beliefs are true or false? In order to show that this is not an adequate response, I shall briefly sketch how drastically one must re-interpret Stoic theory of the emotions if

one agrees with my claims about Stoic beliefs.

As is well-known, the Stoics claim that the wise (knowledgeable, virtuous) person has no emotions (*pathê*). Instead, she has rational feelings (*eupatheia*) (DL 7.116).³⁷ This idea received much attention, even outside of the circles of ancient philosophy scholarship. Its discovery in the 1990s coincided with a contemporary interest in cognitivism; the Stoics were cast as proto-cognitivists. The accounts of Stoic theory that figure in these discussions, however, are seriously misleading. They are misleading because the fundamental point that, for the Stoics, there are no false beliefs, was not recognized. Martha Nussbaum's discussions were particularly influential, and they can serve as an example: Nussbaum says that the Stoic wise person has no emotions insofar she has no *false beliefs*.³⁸ However, the Stoic wise person has no emotions insofar she has no *beliefs*. Consider two passages that contain core ideas.

6. In the case of all the soul's emotions, when they [the Stoics] call them beliefs (*doxas*), 'belief' is used in the sense of (*anti*) 'weak supposition,' and 'fresh' (*prophaton*) in the sense of 'the stimulus of an irrational contraction or swelling'. (Stobaeus 2.88,22-89,3 = LS 65C = SVF 3.378, part; tr. LS with changes)

7. Pain is an irrational contraction, or a fresh belief (*doxa prosphatos*) that

³⁷ Emotions are defined as excessive impulses, and that is, as impulses that lead up to irrational actions (Stobaeus 2.88,8-2.88,22 = LS 65A = SVF 3.378). There are two ways in which one can explain why the wise person has no emotions: because emotions are beliefs, and because emotions are excessive impulses.

³⁸ Martha Nussbaum, "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," in Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 1996, 359-401, p. 366: "Among the most notorious and paradoxical theses in the history of philosophy is Chrysippus' thesis that the passions are forms of *false* judgment or *false* belief" (my emphasis). I present a detailed version of my interpretation in Vogt, "Die stoische Theorie der Emotionen," 2004.

something bad is present, at which people think it right to be contracted [i.e. depressed]. Fear is an irrational aversion, or avoidance of an expected danger. Appetite is an irrational desire, or pursuit of an expected good. Pleasure is an irrational swelling, or a fresh belief that something good is present, at which people think it right to be swollen [i.e. elated]. (Andronicus, *De passionibus* I = LS 65B = SVF 3.391, part; tr. LS with changes)

Emotions, then, are said to be beliefs, not false beliefs. They are beliefs in the sense that they are *weak suppositions*. As we saw, *all* beliefs are weak assents. That is, though many emotions are likely to be assents to false and to non-cognitive impressions, emotions can also be assents to true and to cognitive impressions. Consider an example for an emotion that traditional interpretations cannot explain. Suppose I am grieving because I realize that I am not virtuous. For a moment, I see things clearly: virtue is the only good; I am not virtuous; this is misery. These impressions are *true*, and since I see things clearly, *cognitive*. However, they throw me into an irrational, emotional state. I am in grief about my misery. The assents I give to these true and cognitive impressions are beliefs. Not being wise, I cannot assent with the stability and firmness of the knower.³⁹

This becomes evident when, a week later, I recover from my grief. Not being wise, I tend

³⁹ My claim that an emotion could be assent to the cognitive impression that something good is lacking, implies that emotions and their rational replacements do not engage exclusively with preferred and dispreferred indifferents (wealth, health, etc.), but also with the good and bad. The misleading reconstruction, according to which emotions always involve acceptance of a false impression, may imply that, in every emotion, something that is not genuinely good or bad is judged to be good or bad (cf. Nussbaum 1996, 399). Though many examples are of this kind (say, money is judged to be good), not all are (cf. Andronikos, *De passionibus* 6.1-4 = SVF 3.432). In a sense, it is clear that such examples are crucial to the Stoic theory. The wise person's rational feelings must engage with the good (say, in well-wishing, the wise person certainly hopes for something that is genuinely good for others). If there is to be progression towards wisdom, the emotions of progressors must also engage with the genuinely good and bad.

to default to the typical views of a fool: health, pleasure, and so on, seem good to me; I forget the momentary insight that virtue is the only good. Last week's judgments were merely beliefs, and as such they are not stable. However, I do not recover from my grief at the very moment I recall my old views, according to which I'm quite well off because I'm healthy and tend to have a lot of fun with my friends. Emotions have – because judgments are movements of the mind – a kind of physiological inertia. I shall not instantly feel better. Last week's beliefs were, in the technical terms of the Stoics, *fresh* beliefs. At the moment of judgment, the mind was stirred up. Such a state of mind cannot be wiped out in an instant. The Stoics explain this through the image of someone who runs.⁴⁰ If the runner were to think “now I'll stop,” she would still need to make a couple of steps – she cannot come to a halt instantaneously. This is how emotions work: though one might have changed one's mind, they still need some time to ‘fade out.’

The Stoics also consider the opposite phenomenon: suppose someone grieves for the death of her child. This person is not likely to change her mind any time soon. The premature death of her child seems terrible to her. And yet, the grief eventually wears off, or comes to have a less acutely painful quality.⁴¹ Again, this is because emotions are *fresh* beliefs. The pain is generated at the moment when the belief is formed. While the belief

⁴⁰ Galen, *On Hippocrates' and Plato's doctrines* 4.2.10-18 = SVF 3.462, part = LS 65J.

⁴¹ Chrysippus discusses the case where one's judgment is not altered, but the pain still wears off, in his second book *On the emotions*: “On the lessening of pain, the question might be asked as to how it occurs, whether because a particular belief is altered, or with them all persisting”. Chrysippus favors the second answer: “I think that this kind of belief does persist – that what is actually present is something bad – but as it grows older the contraction (...) lessen(s).” (Galen, *De plac. Hippocr. et Plat.* 4.7.12-17 = LS 65O).

persists, the movement in the agent's mind comes from the *formation* of the belief, not from the fact that the belief persists; accordingly, the emotion eventually loses intensity.

Emotions, then, are weak assents and fresh beliefs. That is, insofar as they are a particular kind of belief, this reflects a *temporal gap* between beliefs-revision and alteration of emotions. But in no way is it suggested that emotions are false beliefs. Otherwise, there could be no grief in seeing how bad it is not to be virtuous. Though many emotions involve assents to false and non-cognitive impressions, this is not a necessary feature of emotion. In particular, the kind of back and forth I sketched, between the realization of the importance of virtue, and lapsing back into one's old ways, is integral to how the Stoics imagine the path toward virtue. Certainly, their theory should be able to account for it.⁴²

VI. Conclusion

The Stoics are quite unambiguous about the claim that beliefs are not bearers of truth-values. As I tried to show, getting clear about this aspect of Stoic philosophy shall affect how we reconstruct other Stoic theories. Most immediately, however, it helps understand that Stoic philosophy contains a conception of belief that is rather different from our conception of belief. Though this conception might initially appear alien, it is not clear to

⁴² For example, one might think that many of Seneca's *Letters* exemplify the emotional struggle of someone who tries to make progress toward virtue, but constantly falls back into old ways, concerning herself with money, reputation, health, and so on. Another well-known example of this kind is Alcibiades, as depicted in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. I am grateful to Gretchen Reydam-Schils for reminding me of this example.

me that, in the end, it is implausible. The Stoics' division of labor between logic and philosophy of language on the one hand – the fields that analyze the bearers of truth-values – and normative epistemology on the other hand – the field that formulates norms for engaging with impressions – seems compelling. The claim that beliefs are not bearers of truth-values reflects the equally basic point that pieces of knowledge are not bearers of truth-values. If knowledge is 'unerring,' it is *associated* with truth. It is misleading to evaluate particular bits of knowledge as true. This would suggest that knowledge could also be false. The truth-values, it seems, are quite adequately assigned to something else, namely the Stoic cousin of today's propositions: *axiomata*.