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Healing Body and Soul in the Letter of James – DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

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Introduction

In his book entitled *Jesus as Healer*, Harold Remus addressed the function of the social group within healing stories, and he observed how in the Letter of James, it is the *presbyteroi* who perform the healing of the person who is “sick” (ἀσθενεῖ) in Jas 5:14.¹ Precisely what the letter means by “sick” as well as the sort of healing James has in mind is subject to debate,² but as Remus noted, the healing is a communal endeavour. The scenario described is also consistent with much of James, as the text addresses group behaviour repeatedly throughout, and instructs the recipients on a variety of topics related to social interaction, such as speech (Jas 4:11-12). This emphasis upon the social body, however, does not mean that James ignores the individual body, whether it is a body subject to healing by others, or a body that is tempted (πειράζεται) by its craving or desire (ἐπιθυμία) to which James refers in the first chapter (1:14). Whoever wrote James presumably understands that it is the interaction between individual bodies that creates the social body,³ and provides a consistent pattern of criticism but also constructive exhortation regarding how to live at both the personal/individual and communal levels throughout the entire letter.⁴

Just as there is an intimate connection between the individual and the group in James, so does the letter evince interest in both the body and the soul. Probably the most famous line in James, “faith without works is dead” (2:17), is preceded by the teaching that if one tells a poorly dressed and hungry brother or sister to go in peace, warm up, and be filled without providing them with the things necessary for the body (τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος), then what is the point (2:15-16)? However, James is even more concerned about the state of the soul (ψυχή) and describes the unstable “double-souled” person, perhaps even inventing a new word, δίψυχος (Jas 1:8; 4:8),⁵ to identify such a state, upon which he elaborates. Of course, matters of body and soul are not particular to James but are topics that preoccupy many ancient writers.⁶

¹ Harold Remus, *Jesus as Healer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 115.

² See Andrew M. Bowden, “An Overview of the Interpretive Approaches to James 5.13-18,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 13 (2014): 67-81. For some of the history of interpretation and reception of the pericope, see Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ICC (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 740-90.

³ Judith H. Newman, “Ritual and Worship in Early Judaism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 393.

⁴ For example, John H. Elliott (“The Epistle of James in Rhetorical and Social-Scientific Perspective: Holiness-Wholeness and Patterns of Replication,” *BTB* 23 [1993]: 71-81) demonstrates how James advocates holiness and wholeness at the personal, social, and cosmic levels consistently throughout the letter.

⁵ Stanley E. Porter, “Is *dipsuchos* (James 1, 8; 4, 8) a Christian Word? *Bib* 71 (1990):469-98.

⁶ See, for example, John P. Wright and Paul Potter, ed., *Psyche and Soma. Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Brad Inwood and James Warren, ed., *Body and Soul in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

The healing referenced in Jas 5:14-16, which does not refer to the soul nor explicitly to the body, is subject to disagreement among interpreters as to whether the verses have “physical” or “spiritual” healing in their purview.⁷ Some exegetes think that spiritual restoration must be at stake, for otherwise, the section sits rather awkwardly next to the rest of the letter. But if we attend to James’ interest in soul care, or psychagogy, while considering the larger ancient philosophical context, there are implications for how we understand Jas 5:13-20. My argument is that the physical body is indeed what the author has in mind in these verses, and that such a shift to somatic concerns coheres quite well with the letter of James as a whole.

Profiling James

Before turning to questions of health in James, it may be useful to provide a brief rehearsal of some of the broader features of the letter. Although the date, author and provenance remain debated,⁸ there has been considerable development in attitudes towards James’ structure and coherence since Martin Dibelius’ landmark commentary, published in the early 20th century.⁹ Dibelius granted that James wrote in “relatively polished Greek,”¹⁰ included a variety of *hapax legomena*, and reflected literary features such as alliteration (1:2), and *homoioteleuton* (1:6) among others,¹¹ but he did not think James was a letter. Rather, he described the document as paraenesis, or compendium of traditional ethical teachings understood as a loose collection of exhortations with no structure or “continuity in thought whatsoever.”¹² Although one could trace thematic unity, linked by catchwords, in various sections of James, “jumbled” is probably an apt term to describe Dibelius’ view of the letter.

Recent work has thoroughly rejected these conclusions about James’ structure and genre. There is no consensus about the rhetorical or literary structure of James, but there is wide agreement that units of James conform to rhetorical patterns, such as the elaboration of a theme exercise outlined in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and elsewhere.¹³ Some continue to view James as paraenesis, but they challenge Dibelius’ view of the category, observing that paraenesis can take epistolary forms, and reflect either traditional or innovative teaching as evident in Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*, for example.¹⁴ Many now think that James is indeed a letter, albeit a literary letter, comparable in some ways to diaspora letters such as the encyclicals preserved within 2

⁷ See Bowden, “An Overview.”

⁸ For some more recent surveys of scholarly positions on the authorship, date, and provenance of James, see John S. Kloppenborg, *James*, New Testament Guides (T & T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2022), 11-38; Rainer Metzner, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, THKNT 14 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 3-25. For a collection of essays on what sort of author “James” might be, see Eve-Marie Becker, Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, Susanne Luther, eds., *Who Was James? Essays on the Letter’s Authorship and Provenance*, WUNT 485 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

⁹ Martin Dibelius, *Der Jakobusbriefe*, KEK 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921); *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ed. H. Greeven, trans. M. Williams; Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

¹⁰ Dibelius, *James*, 34.

¹¹ Dibelius, *James*, 37.

¹² Dibelius, *James*, 6.

¹³ See Duane F. Watson, “An Assessment of the Rhetoric and Rhetorical Analysis of the Letter of James,” in *Reading James with New Eyes. Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of James*, ed. Robert L. Webb and John S. Kloppenborg, LNTS 342 (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 99-120. For a survey of scholarship on the structure of James, see Mark E. Taylor, “Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James,” *CBR* 3 (2004): 86-115.

¹⁴ Kloppenborg, *James*, 42-43.

Maccabees (2 Macc 1:1-9; 1:10-2:18).¹⁵ Several scholars also maintain that there is an overall organization, framed around key themes such as enduring temptation, for example.¹⁶ As a piece of literature, therefore, contemporary analyses view James as more internally coherent and consistent than has been acknowledged in the past, and are receptive to the classification of James as a letter.¹⁷

There is no question that this literary letter is embedded within early Judaism, although questions of direct borrowing and/or parallels with ideas and specific texts in this tradition are subject to debate.¹⁸ In addition, and comparable in some ways to writers such as Philo, James is deeply indebted to Hellenistic literary and philosophical traditions. Matt Jackson-McCabe's comment that "James's Hellenistic character is no less obvious than its Jewish character" is appropriate.¹⁹ James even challenges elements from the LXX. For example, the statement that God does not tempt anyone (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ... πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα) in Jas 1:13 conflicts with traditions in the Israelite scriptures, including Gen 22:1, to which James refers in Jas 2:21. As John Kloppenborg points out, the notion that God does not tempt, and that God is the source of benefits, influenced other writers in early Judaism because of the overall influence of Hellenistic philosophy.²⁰ For example, Sirach states that one cannot blame God when one has lost their way (Sir 15:11-12) and Philo insists that evils are in ourselves; there are only good things with God (*Fug.* 79). Interpreters have also tended to view Jas 1:17, which speaks of the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow because of change, as a declaration of the marked contrast between a consistent God and the changeableness of the celestial spheres. Such a characterization of the deity, as an "unmoved mover,"²¹ is squarely "at home" amongst many Graeco-Roman writers and those within Hellenistic Judaism.²²

The lexical profile of James is important to mention here. Not only does James employ vocabulary drawn from Hellenistic Judaism,²³ he uses words that are least common in Greek prior to the second century, such as ἀδιάκριτος (undecided) in Jas 3:17, and ἀκατάστατος

¹⁵ See Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "Der Jakobusbrief im Licht frühjüdischer Diasporabriefe," *NTS* 44 (1998): 420-43.

¹⁶ Matt Jackson-McCabe, "Enduring Temptation: The Structure and Coherence of the Letter of James," *JSNT* 37 (2014): 161-84.

¹⁷ Some that James conforms to *both* letter traditions and wisdom instruction. See, for example, Luke L. Cheung and Kelvin C. L. Yu, "The Genre of James: Diaspora Letter, Wisdom Instruction, or Both?" in *Reading the Epistle of James. A Resource for Students*, ed. Eric F. Mason and Darian R. Lockett; SBLSPS 94 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 87-98.

¹⁸ See, for example, Benjamin Wold, "James in the Context of Jewish Wisdom Literature," in *Reading the Epistle of James*, 73-86.

¹⁹ Matt Jackson-McCabe, "The Letter of James and Hellenistic Philosophy," *Reading the Epistle of James*, 45.

²⁰ John S. Kloppenborg, "James 1:2-15 and Hellenistic Psychagogy," *NovT* 52 (2010): 66.

²¹ Aristotle, *Cael.* 279A.

²² Allison, *James*, 277. In contrast, Donald J. Verseput ("James 1:17 and the Jewish Morning Prayers," *NovT* 39 [1997]: 177-91) perceived a connection between Jas 1:16-19 and Jewish morning prayers, indicating that James is not describing God as unchangeable, but that God is constant in providing benefits to humanity.

²³ As Kloppenborg ("The Author of James and his Lexical Profile," *Who Was James?* 198) explains: "Of the sixty-three words that appear only in James and not in any other New Testament writing, forty-five are also attested, unsurprisingly, in the LXX. If one looks at the distinctive lexemes in James that occur 0-3 times elsewhere in the NT, another profile can be seen: James displays striking agreement with the singular vocabulary of later NT writings: Luke-Acts, 1-2 Timothy, 1-2 Peter; with the later books of the LXX: 1-4 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach, and with Philo."

(unstable) in Jas 1:8, that is, they appear only five to thirty-three times in 600 years of Greek writing prior to the letter.²⁴ James is written in common Greek and his sentence structure is simple, but as Kloppenborg, who has done the most work on these questions of the letter's lexical use and linguistic register, discerns, James sometimes employs rare words such as "maritime" (ἐνάλιος), which appear in Homeric poetry, as if he wants to sound learned.²⁵

These brief remarks about the literary character and content of James indicate that, comparable to other writers within Hellenistic Judaism, the writer absorbed and used ideas and vocabulary from Hellenistic traditions, integrating them together with traditions and ideas from the LXX. In addition, and as has been explored for some time, James integrates forms of Jesus' teachings into his letter, but recasts them to suit his own context.²⁶ A variety of sources and influences thus surface in this short document as it seeks to counsel its audience as to how they should conduct themselves.

The author of James was not a philosopher, but the character of the letter supports the possibility that he borrowed and adapted concepts current in philosophical parlance. Readers of James have long noticed similarities between James and Stoic texts and ideas. Augustine, for instance, observed the similarity between James' notion that whoever keeps the whole law but fails in point is guilty of all of it (Jas 2:10) and the Stoic idea that all virtues and vices are equal.²⁷ The consequence of this Stoic view, known as the Stoic paradox, is that a person who possesses one virtue possesses them all, and if they lack one, they lack all.²⁸ Nineteenth century commentator Joseph B. Mayor provides an extensive list of parallels between James and Stoic teaching, surmising that these parallels are explicable possibly "as reminiscences of Greek Philosophy filtered down through the writing of some Hellenistic Jew ... [and] would not exclude the possibility that Stoic parallels in St. James may be taken directly from such a writer as Posidonius."²⁹ Jackson-McCabe has argued that one can interpret James's notion of the "implanted word" (ἐμφθτος λόγος) in Jas 1:21 in light of Stoic notions of natural law, also identifiable with the law (νόμος) of freedom in Jas 1:25.³⁰ David A. Kaden argues for parallels

²⁴ Kloppenborg, "The Author of James," 199.

²⁵ See John S. Kloppenborg, "James 3:7-8, Genesis 1:26, and the Linguistic Register of the Letter of James," in *Christian Origins and the New Testament in the Greco-Roman Context: Essays in Honor of Dennis R. MacDonald*, ed., Margaret Froelich, Michael Kochenash, Thomas E. Phillips, Ilseo Park (Claremont: Claremont Press, 2016), 109. On the attempt of the author of James to present James of Jerusalem as a literate scribe, see Gregory P. Fewster, "Ancient Book Culture and the Literacy of James: On the Production and Consumption of a Pseudepigraphical Letter," *ZAC* 20 (2016): 387-417. As well, a recent book on James analyses the letter in comparison to the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, finding that James employs language and style to buttress the authority and *ethos* of the ostensive author as a wise teacher. See Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, *James Among the Classicists. Reading the Letter of James in Light of Ancient Literary Criticism*, *Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica* 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021).

²⁶ There are many studies of James and Jesus tradition and James and Q. For a recent discussion, see Richard Bauckham, "James and Jesus Tradition," *Reading James*, 9-26.

²⁷ See, for example, Seneca, *De Ben.* 5.15.1. Philo also refers to this teaching in *Vit. Mos.* 2.7.

²⁸ Augustine, *Ep.* 167; *PL* 33, 733-42. For discussion, see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "The Stoic Paradox of James 2.10," *NTS* 31 (1985): 611-17.

²⁹ Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1892), lxxix.

³⁰ Matt Jackson-McCabe, *Logos and Law in the Letter of James. The Law of Nature, the Law of Moses, and the Law of Freedom*, *NovTSupp C* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 136-92.

between James and the Stoic Epictetus, who began his career in Rome. Both ancient writers stress the importance of works, for example, and the importance of consistency between deeds and ideas.³¹ Kloppenborg has discussed the letter's attention to psychagogy in a variety of publications, most recently in his introductory book on James.³² The degree to which interpreters think that James was influenced by Stoicism, perhaps indirectly and/or via other Hellenistic literature, varies, but there were correspondences between James and elements of this long philosophical tradition. Given these affinities, consideration of Stoic understandings of body and soul could be productive for the examination of James.

Body and Soul in Stoicism

In the early centuries of the Common Era, Stoic thought had penetrated widely throughout the Roman Empire and was broadly popular.³³ Generally speaking, Stoics sought to articulate and live what constitutes a wise life, requiring virtue or a commitment to the good. This sort of life was in accordance with nature and was the only way in which a person could be happy. The goal was to be consistent in beliefs and actions over the course of one's days. Such a stress on consistency throughout one's life undergirds the idea of the Stoic paradox, mentioned above.³⁴ It also points to the fact that the Stoics did truly think some people could attain this state of being perfectly wise, although they granted that only a few had done so. Seneca describes such a person:

We understand that in him virtue was complete. ... [Virtue] was shown to us by this man's orderliness and fittingness and consistency, the mutual agreement of all his actions and the greatness which rise above everything ... That man, the one who is complete and has attained virtue, never cursed fortune, was never gloomy in his acceptance of what happened; believing that he is a citizen and soldier of the cosmos, he took on difficult tasks as though commanded to do so ...³⁵

This perfectly wise person also feels joy at the truly good, and this joy contributes to what Seneca describes as an expansion of the soul (*Ep.* 59.2).

Stoics, unlike the Epicureans, did not seek pleasure, nor did they seek pain. However, Stoics recognized and accepted that people could feel both pleasure and pain; these are inevitable experiences of mortal existence. Such phenomena are not destructive passions, but what the Stoics referred to as "indifferents" (ἀδιάφορα). In his descriptions of Stoics, Diogenes Laertius discusses how these "indifferents" are in contrast to virtue in that they are neither good nor bad, and can include things such as health, wealth, strength, beauty and their opposites, among other

³¹ Compare Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.4.14-15 to Jas 2: 24. See David A. Kaden, "Stoicism, Social Stratification, and the Q Tradition in James: A Suggestion about James' Audience," in *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Early Jesus Traditions*, ed. Alicia J. Batten and John S. Kloppenborg, LNTS 478 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 97-119.

³² Kloppenborg, *James*, 97-109.

³³ See Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. Volume 2. The Stoicism in Christian Language and Thought Through the Sixth Century*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

³⁴ See Seneca, *Ep.* 95.57. See the discussion by Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 174-75.

³⁵ Seneca, *Ep.* 120.11-12 (trans. Brad Inwood, *Seneca. Selected Philosophical Letters* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007] 81).

things.³⁶ One can use these indifferents either well or poorly, and therefore they cannot be said to be “good.” However, for Seneca, some of these indifferents, such as illness, physical or emotional pain, poverty, and death, can serve as opportunities to exercise virtue. Without such experiences, therefore, it is difficult to manifest the qualities of character – the virtues – that were so essential to a good life.³⁷ As Catherine Edwards remarks, “Seneca describes the life without challenge as a wretched one (*De prov.* 4.3).”³⁸ The Stoic advances in wisdom as they exercise their reason, discerning what is truly important and essential for happiness versus what is not. By exercising their reason, and distinguishing what is truly good, the Stoic will recognize that clinging to or pining after “indifferents,” such as health or wealth, is not appropriate for these are things not subject to the Stoic’s control.³⁹ Character, therefore, requires training and practice such that eventually one develops virtuous habits.⁴⁰

The soul (ψυχή) is of primary importance for the practice of virtue. As reported by Origen, the early Stoic Chrysippus thought that the soul, which was made up of spirit (πνεῦμα) enables those possessed of it (humans and animals) to move with purpose.⁴¹ Although one cannot see or touch the soul, it is corporeal, separate from the body, and is responsible for the “cognitive, moral, and voluntary motor activities.”⁴² Although the soul was essentially rational, it required care, for it could become ill. Plutarch reports on Chrysippus’ perception that the soul could suffer a deficiency in reason:

... but the same part of the soul (which they call thought and commanding-faculty) becomes virtue and vice as it turns around and changes in passions and alterations of tenor or character, and contains nothing irrational within itself. It is called irrational whenever an excessive impulse which has become strong and dominant carries it off towards something wrong and contrary to the dictates of reason. For passion is vicious and uncontrolled reason which acquires vehemence and strength from bad and erroneous judgement.⁴³

³⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 7. 101-104.

³⁷ Seneca, *Ep.* 82.11.

³⁸ Catherine Edwards, “The Suffering Body: Philosophy and Pain in Seneca’s Letters,” in *Constructions of the Classical Body*, ed., James I. Porter (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 255. Edwards (“The Suffering Body,” 266, n. 11) points out, however, that elsewhere Seneca “implies” that a pleasant life can provide as many occasions for the exercise of virtue as a painful one (Seneca, *Ep.* 66.14-15).

³⁹ Epictetus writes: Make it, therefore, your study at the very outset to say to every harsh external impression, “You are an external impression and not at all what you appear to be.” After that examine it and test it by these rules which you have, the first and most important of which is this: Whether the impression has to do with the things which are under our control, or with those which are not under our control; and, if it has to do with some one of the things not under our control, have ready to hand the answer, “It is nothing to me,” (*Ench.* 1; trans. W. A. Oldfather; LCL 218 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928], 485).

⁴⁰ See Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.18.1-32.

⁴¹ Origen, *Princ.* 3.1:2-3.

⁴² Heinrich von Staden, “Body, Soul, and Nerves: Epicurus, Heirophilus, Erasistratus, the Stoics, and Galen,” in *Psyche and Soma. Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 96.

⁴³ Plutarch, *De virt.* 441 (trans. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers. Vol 1* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987] 378). Cited by Chrisoph Jedan, *Stoic Virtues. Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics*, Continuum Studies in Ancient Philosophy (London: Continuum, 2009), 18.

For Chrysippus, the soul can erupt into passion if reason is not operating properly within it.

Epictetus, who provides concrete instruction for how to develop one's character, speaks of how passions erupting in the soul can cause scars and bruises, which, if left untended, will become wounds the next time that passions appear.⁴⁴ Again, although the soul is understood to be unitary, without the right moral knowledge and the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος),⁴⁵ the individual's soul will be weak, resulting in an inconsistency of opinions.⁴⁶ With deficient reason, this sort of mental conflict might arise placing the person in the position of needing to re-assert their reason in the face of new challenges. As Epictetus counsels, "if you form the habit of taking such exercises, you will see what mighty shoulders you develop, what sinews, what vigour,"⁴⁷ thereby creating the image of the intellectual and moral athlete.

The wise person, therefore, practices virtue consistently guided by a soul informed by reason, and does not seek "pseudo-goods," which Stoics understood to be "desire" (ἐπιθυμία).⁴⁸ The soul, however, was subject to "impurity" according to Stoics such as Epictetus. What makes it impure? Bad judgements. The cure is therefore intellectual, for the "pure soul is the one which has the proper kind of judgements, for this is the only soul which is secure against confusion and pollution in its own functions."⁴⁹

Stoics took a different approach to bodily ailments. Health, as mentioned earlier, was one of the "indifferents" while the soul was not.⁵⁰ This did not mean that the body was subject to neglect but reflects a recognition that reason could not reign in the body in the same way that it could in the soul or mind. The body could fail, a person could become ill, and Stoics realized that this was often beyond their control. Yet there was a relationship between the body and soul. The second century CE Stoic Hierocles seems to say that self-perception and sense-perception are the results of the constant interaction of body and soul in a creature:

For by stretching out and relaxing, the soul makes an impression on all the body's parts, since it is blended with them all, and in making an impression it receives an impression in response. For the body, just like the soul, reacts to pressure; and the outcome is a state of their joint pressure upon, and resistance to, each other. From the outermost parts inclining within, it travels ... to the commanding-faculty, with the result that there is an awareness both of the body's parts and of the soul's. This is the equivalent to an animal's perceiving itself.⁵¹

Although there is a connection between body and soul, some Stoics betray a somewhat dualistic attitude towards these two things. For example, Epictetus provides some advice for how to deal with the body:

⁴⁴ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.18.12

⁴⁵ Diogenes Laertius (7.88) claims that Chrysippus viewed universal law to be "right reason."

⁴⁶ See Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 165.

⁴⁷ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.18. 26 (trans. W. A. Oldfather; LCL 218 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928], 357).

⁴⁸ Brad Inwood, *Stoicism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 84.

⁴⁹ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.11.8.

⁵⁰ Brad Inwood, *Later Stoicism. 155 BC to AD 200. An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 315.

⁵¹ Hierocles, 4.48-53 (trans. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*), 314.

You ought to treat your whole body like a poor loaded-down donkey, as long as it is possible, as long as it is allowed; and if it be commandeered and a soldier lay hold of it, let it go, do not resist or grumble. If you do, you will get a beating and lose your little donkey just the same.⁵²

Seneca's views are similar, for although the ruling power of the soul is related to the body (*Ep.* 121.10),⁵³ he views the body as enslaved, versus the mind or soul, which is free:

It is a mistake for anyone to believe that the condition of slavery penetrates into the whole being of a man. The better part of him is exempt. Only the body is at the mercy and disposition of a master; but the mind is its own master, and is so free and unshackled that not even this prison of the body, in which it is confined, can restrain it from using its own powers, following mighty aims, and escaping into the infinite to keep company with the stars. It is, therefore, the body that Fortune hands over to a master; it is this that he buys, it is this that he sells; that inner part cannot be delivered into bondage. All that issues from this is free ...⁵⁴

Seneca addresses the body and the sufferings it faces, whether caused by illness or torture, extensively in his writings, and he often compares bodily sickness to mental failings or weakness (*Tranq.* 2.1-12). As Catherine Edwards remarks, "Seneca often complains that people are much more concerned to address symptoms of physical disease in themselves than symptoms of mental failings."⁵⁵ Comparable to other Stoics, and as we have already seen, he thought that the student of Stoic philosophy needed to learn how to be their own physician and to train themselves when it came to improving mental deficiencies. As an "indifferent," poor physical health could assist with this training because it provided a potential chance to exercise virtue. Bearing bodily pain was virtuous. Yet as Seneca and other philosophers understood, human beings could not control their own physical suffering, nor did Seneca think that they were responsible for it. However, their mental state and the condition of their soul, was "far more within the control of the individual; constant self-improvement is the goal."⁵⁶ Thus philosophy only went so far as an analogy for medicine,⁵⁷ for ultimately, as the ancients knew, medicine could not cure all ills, whereas for the Stoics, the cultivation of the soul, or psychagogy, could, at least in theory, enable one to lead a consistently virtuous life.

Healing Body and Soul in James

As observed earlier, interpreters have already addressed the question of James' affinity with some Stoic ideas, including the topic of psychagogy, and therefore I will largely rehearse the findings of others. Secondly, I will examine the notion of healing the body in James in light of the discussion of psychagogy.

⁵² Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.1.79.

⁵³ For discussion, see Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics. Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 35.

⁵⁴ Seneca, *Ben.* 3.20.1-2 (trans. John W. Basore; LCL 310 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935], 165).

⁵⁵ Edwards, "The Suffering Body," 257.

⁵⁶ Edwards, "The Suffering Body," 265.

⁵⁷ Edwards, "The Suffering Body," 264-65.

There is no philosophical discussion of the body or soul in this letter, but James is keenly interested in the salvation of the soul, associating σώζω with ψυχή on the only occasions when he refers to a ψυχή (1:21; 5:20). The letter expends considerably energy describing a person who is in a bad way. Their soul is unstable and “double-souled” or “double-minded” (δίψυχος; 1:8; 4:8) and they argue with or complain to God (1:6).⁵⁸ They are comparable to a wave of the sea, bashed about and tossed by the wind, and are in clear contrast to the consistent deity, who does not tempt, as we have seen, and who gives to all simply (ἀπλῶς), with no reproach (1:5). The double-minded person experiences mental conflict, and the description of the individual as ἀκατάστατος recalls the image Stoic thinkers provide of the weak souled person, lacking in consistency, and changeable in their judgement. Such a person is confused, and needs to ask God for wisdom, in faith, without arguing or complaining to God (1:6).

God is the provider of wisdom in James (3:17),⁵⁹ but the δίψυχος person cannot receive anything from God (1:8) because they ask wrongly only in order to spend what they might receive on their passions (ἡδοναῖς) (4:3). They are sinful (4:8) and behave in an opposite manner to God, wreaking havoc in the social body. They are far from “perfect and whole” (1:4).⁶⁰ Conflicts arise from fighting passions (ἡδονῶν) and unfulfilled desire (ἐπιθυμεῖτε) leading to death (4:1-2). Such a life is disordered. Like other literature from Hellenistic Judaism, James reflects the philosophical view that the passions played central roles in disturbing the human soul, which in turn, led to chaos and destruction.⁶¹

The devil is clearly a malefactor in James (4:7), and opposed to humanity,⁶² but the main culprit identified as responsible for this disorderly and chaotic type of life is desire (ἐπιθυμία) which tempts, lures and entices, subsequently conceiving and giving birth to sin, which when grown up, causes death (1:14-15). Desire is “one’s own” (ιδίας) and its direct connection to the creation of sin underscores the fact that for James, “sin is a product of human will, a corruption of the human capacity to choose and create, so that every person must be held accountable.”⁶³ Although it is unclear exactly whose soul will be saved and whose sins will be covered, the fact that the conclusion of the letter (Jas 5:20) returns to the topic of sin with an exhortation to bring back an erring sinner, underscores the significance of sin’s threat for this author.

What sort of strategy does James provide for the cultivation of the soul such that people can resist desire and subsequently, the lethal effects of sin? James stresses the need to ask God, in faith, for wisdom, but he also counsels training. In 1:2, he identifies trials (πειρασμοῖς) as

⁵⁸ I find Peter Spitaler’s (“James 1:5-8: A Dispute with God,” *CBQ* 71 [2009]: 560-79) argument that given the ways in which διακρινόμενος has shifted in meaning over the centuries, it is better translated in Jas 1:6 as “disputing” or possibly, as A. K. M. Adam (*James. A Handbook on the Greek Text* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013], 8) asserts, “complaining.”

⁵⁹ Here it is worth observing, as Jackson-McCabe (“The Letter of James,” 66) does, that Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus* prays for deliverance from humanity’s incompetence and asks for the power of judgement.

⁶⁰ Jackson-McCabe, “The Letter of James,” 57.

⁶¹ Kloppenborg, “James 1:12-15,” 49. Kloppenborg demonstrates how the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, for example, share James’ emphasis upon “singleness” of soul as a virtue.

⁶² See Benjamin Wold, “Sin and Evil in the Letter of James in Light of Qumran Discoveries,” *NTS* 65 (2019): 91.

⁶³ Walter T. Wilson, “Sin as Sex and Sex with Sin: The Anthropology of James 1:12-15,” *HTR* 95 (2002), 161.

things to be encountered with joy, ⁶⁴for such testing of faith will bring about endurance (ὕπομονήν). It is interesting that James pairs joy with testing and endurance, reminiscent of the Stoics who commented on the joy that a sage could experience and how that joy could expand the wise person's soul.⁶⁵ Endurance or steadfastness is an active endeavour that will strengthen the character of the individual, an idea found among the Stoics, as we saw, as well as other philosophers and within Hellenistic Judaism, most often in the writings of Philo, who champions it.⁶⁶ James 1:12 reiterates the need to endure trial (ὕπομένει πειρασμόν), pronouncing the one who does so blessed, for once they have stood the test they will receive the crown of life promised by God to those who love God.

The high esteem placed upon endurance is evident in a variety of texts including 4 Maccabees, Philo, and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.⁶⁷ Other writers in the New Testament engage it (Rom 1-1-5; 1 Pet 1:6-7), but James is striking in that here, endurance does not lead to the reception of the spirit (Romans) or character (1 Peter) but to becoming perfect and complete (τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι). Perfection was possible for James just as it was, at least in theory, for Stoics.⁶⁸ Endurance, for James, leads to virtue, comparable to writers such as Seneca, who, as we have seen, associates virtue with the training required by the inevitable challenges that one will face in life.⁶⁹

In addition, James also devotes considerable energy, at least in the context of a reasonably short letter, to the topic of the tongue (3:2-12). As desire could take hold, giving birth, eventually, to sin, the entire body required some sort of controlling force, or bridle. For James, the perfect man (τέλειος ἄνθρωπος) could bridle the “whole body” (ὅλον τὸ σῶμα 3:2) if he makes no mistakes in speech. This “reining” role, whether it is comparable to a bit in a horse's mouth, or a small rudder on a ship guided by the will (βούλεται) of a pilot (3:4), is essential, for muscles like the tongue are the most difficult to master. James is deeply skeptical about the human ability to tame the tongue (3:8) and he does not furnish instructions for how to do so. Interestingly, however, early Christians interpreted James here as an allusion to the importance of reason, which Stoics associated with the tongue,⁷⁰ for the control the body.⁷¹ James' exposition on the tongue demonstrates the author's concern not only about thoughtless, cruel, or hypocritical speech, but for the need of a force to restrain and control the entire body. He does not explicitly state what this should be, although it is interesting to remember the “convergence”

⁶⁴ See Kloppenborg, *James*, 103.

⁶⁵ As Kloppenborg (*James*, 103) comments, “if one reads James through the Stoic notion of virtue, it is not surprising that he begins by speaking of the endurance of testing and joy in the same breath (1:2-4) while immediately eschewing desire as pathological.”

⁶⁶ Philo, *Cher.* 78-79. See Kloppenborg, “James 1:2-15,” 64.

⁶⁷ Kloppenborg, “James 1:2-5,” 58-61.

⁶⁸ Kloppenborg, *James*, 104.

⁶⁹ Kloppenborg (“James 1:2-5,” 61) states, as well, that “[i]t is in Seneca ... that the strongest connection between enduring hardship and the production of virtue is articulated.”

⁷⁰ Jackson-McCabe, “The Letter of James,” 56, who refers to Aetius 4.21.1-4.

⁷¹ Allison, *James*, 525.

of James' notion of the "implanted word" (ἔμφθοτος λόγος) in 1:21, a "word" or "reason" that will save souls, with Stoic doctrine.⁷²

The welfare of the soul, its care and cultivation, is a central concern in the letter of James. However, the author does exhibit awareness of the physical body and its requirements as evident in the reference to basic necessities required for living in Jas 2:16. Here, however, it is important to remember that this mention of bodily concerns is in the context of moral instruction about the relationship between faith and works; it is not the focus of discussion.⁷³ James' arguments about the need to control of the body (3:2-6), including the tongue, are also linked to larger moral and theological concerns in the letter, namely, the importance of keeping desire in check. James also condemns debauchery and luxurious living in his graphic and deeply unflattering description of the rich in Jas 5:1-6; here he clearly disapproves of self-indulgent soft living. But this attack on the rich and their overstuffed bodies is connected to their greed and lack of control.⁷⁴ James' references to physical bodies serve as elements and examples within his moral teachings, which are in turn, connected to his ultimate concerns about the soul and its salvation.

However, the final section of James offers some concrete exhortations that include the importance of prayer, confessing sins, and bringing back a sinner who wanders from the truth (5:13-20). James asks if anyone is suffering or sick, and counsels prayer, gathering the elders, and anointing with oil (5:13-14). This part of James has generated much debate,⁷⁵ the entirety of which I cannot engage here. My focus is on the nature of the suffering and sickness. Is this physical suffering, as many would argue, or a type of spiritual malaise, or both? And, what is the nature of the healing?

Andrew Bowden has outlined helpfully the various interpretive possibilities regarding the nature of the illness and healing Jas 5:13-18.⁷⁶ Bowden and several other scholars think that James has spiritual illness and healing in mind; the author is not talking about bodily ailments. They argue that ἀσθενέω from verse 14 should be understood according to its meaning in New Testament letters, where it refers to "weakness" (see 2 Cor 13:3) versus Synoptic accounts, in which it clearly refers to physical sickness (Mark 6:56).⁷⁷ The word κάμνοντα (sick one) from 5:15 is understood to be one who is weary, possibly from suffering. Yet as Dale Allison explains, the use of σφίζω with the accusative participle of κάμνω was a general phrase associated with

⁷² See Jackson-McCabe, *Logos and Law*.

⁷³ The discussion of faith and works fits well with James' worries about those experiencing mental conflict. Just as a person should be consistent in what they think and say, so should they be consistent in what they do.

⁷⁴ See Alicia J. Batten, "The Characterization of the Rich in James 5" in *To Set at Liberty: Essays on Early Christianity and Its Social World in Honor of John H. Elliott*, ed. Stephen K. Black (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 45-61.

⁷⁵ Allison, *James*, 740.

⁷⁶ Bowden, "Recent Interpretive Approaches."

⁷⁷ Bowden ("Translating Ἀσθενέω in James 5 in Light of the Prophetic LXX," *The Bible Translator* 66 [2015]: 91-105) has written an additional article in which he builds on the thesis from Karen Jobes that the LXX Minor Prophets functioned as an important literary context for James. Bowden argues that in the LXX, ἀσθενέω refers to the spiritually fallen. He thinks that this meaning has influenced James' understanding of the term, better fits the literary and thematic context of Jas 5:13-20, and the letter as a whole.

physicians saving the sick.⁷⁸ Those who perceive the illness as spiritual interpret James' direction that the elders should anoint the sick person with oil to imply that the oil was for "refreshment and grooming" based on the meaning of "anoint" (ἀλείφω), but the same verb is used in Mark 6:13, to refer to the disciples anointing the sick in body and curing them.⁷⁹

The vocabulary in this pericope does not conclusively demonstrate that spiritual illness is what James has in mind. Bowden additionally points to early use of these verses by Origen (*Hom. Lev.* 2) and Chrysostom (*Sac.* 3.6) who engage Jas 5:14-15 in their larger discussions of forgiveness of sin.⁸⁰ Yet early Christian biblical interpretation was not uniform, and it was often allegorical. There were other writers, such as Cyril of Alexandria, who referred to Jas 5:14-15 as a prescription for bodily suffering (*De adorat.* 6), and later, Caesarius of Arles, who preaches (Sermon 265) that those who are sick should follow the instructions in James,⁸¹ who understood Jas 5:14-15 to be about physical affliction. Early interpretation of James appears to have interpreted these verses in both ways.

There are further reasons why it makes sense to understand the reference to the sick person as physically ill. Oil, for example, was widely used medicinally in antiquity (Mark 6:13),⁸² although it had other purposes as well.⁸³ For James, perhaps the oil was perceived as possessing both medicinal and magical powers? In addition, Allison has convincingly argued that there may well be a liturgical tradition lying behind Jas 5:13-20. This tradition, which he discerns in a diversity of Christian texts including the *Testament of our Lord*, the *Didascalia*, Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, and 1 *Clement*, consists of a combination of the imperatives to care for the sick and to turn back those who have wandered, as we see in Jas 5:13-20. Such instructions, moreover, are not confined to Christian sources, but also appear in the Eighteen Benedictions of ancient Judaism.⁸⁴ These texts are either liturgical or prayer texts. There is also an association between healing and returning to God in LXX Ezekiel 33-34, a tradition which likely influenced the liturgical and prayer texts above, as well as Jas 5. The upshot of all this is that Jas 5:13-20 may well be an adaptation of a liturgical tradition that the author integrated into his letter. This hypothesis is relevant to the question of what sort of illness and healing James had in mind because the liturgical and prayer texts mentioned above refer to bodily sickness and bodily healing.⁸⁵ It is also worth mentioning that Allison's argument about the potential background of Jas 5:13-20, provides a response to those who think that the verses are a jumble of

⁷⁸ Allison, *James*, 766. In note 153, Allison cites a variety of ancient sources, including Diodorus Siculus 1.82; Philo, *Sacr.* 123.

⁷⁹ Allison, *James*, 760.

⁸⁰ Andrew M. Bowden, "Sincerely James: Reconsidering Frederick Francis's Proposed Health Wish Formula," *JSNT* 38 (2015): 248-49.

⁸¹ See David B. Gowler, *James Through the Centuries*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 300.

⁸² Mark 6:13; Philo, *Aet.* 63; Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 9.11.1-2.

⁸³ See M. Dudley and G. Rowell, ed., *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1993); Sarah E. Bond, "'As Trainers for the Healthy': Massage Therapists, Anointers, and Healing in the Late Latin West," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2 (2015): 386-404.

⁸⁴ Dale C. Allison, J., "A Liturgical Tradition behind the Ending of James," *JSNT* 34 (2011): 3-18.

⁸⁵ Allison, *James*, 754.

random ideas.⁸⁶ Rather, this combination of healing and turning back the wanderer was a “tradition” that James may well have adapted to suit his own literary context.

Some scholars think that if the references to the sick and healing in Jas 5:13-20 are about physical matters, then they do not cohere with the letter as a whole. As Bowden says, “[t]he fact that these verses function as the letter’s conclusion has sometimes puzzled interpreters, who occasionally find themselves at a loss to explain how a conclusion dealing with physical healing fits in an epistle that otherwise focuses on spiritual matters.”⁸⁷ My contention is that when we read James while considering philosophical traditions about psychagogy, the ending of James makes absolute sense.

First, we recall that for Stoic philosophers at least, the health of the soul was requisite, as only a healthy soul could receive the wisdom needed in order to practice virtue consistently. The health of the body was not unimportant, but it was not the priority, at least not for Stoics,⁸⁸ and given that even wicked people could be healthy, a sound body must not be a highest good.⁸⁹ Poor health could afford one a means of practicing virtue. But just as philosophers did not seek to be ill, they did not preoccupy themselves with salubrious concerns. James, like the Stoics, and Philo, who himself demonstrates some affinity for Stoic ideas, likely valued the health of the soul more than the health of the body,⁹⁰ and this prioritizing is reflected in the degree of attention he devotes to each in his letter.

The Stoics taught that people needed to practice and train themselves for the improvement of the soul, and we have seen that these interests in psychagogy are reflected in James. The health of the body, however, could not be controlled, at least not most of the time, through psychological and/or intellectual development. One might be able to make the pain more bearable “by thinking about it in the right way,” but thinking cannot overcome or eliminate physical suffering.⁹¹ Poor health, injury, physical pain, disease, were not welcome or good things, and no amount of philosophical and moral advancement could completely eradicate them. James appears to understand that reality, and thus in chapter 5, and likely drawing from a liturgical tradition, he instructs the audience to call for the elders, to pray for the sick person, and to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord (5:14). The invocation of the name may presuppose “the supernatural power of the divine name.”⁹² This “treatment” of the sick person simply underscores the fact that humans cannot effect their own physical healing, a view shared by philosophers. In this particular section of James, where psychagogy is not in view, it makes sense

⁸⁶ See, for example, Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 431. Allison (*James*, 746) observes that a number of expressions repeat themselves throughout this section of James, thereby assisting in holding the verses together.

⁸⁷ Bowden, “Sincerely James,” 250.

⁸⁸ Catherine Hezser, “Health and Hellenism: Philo of Alexandria’s Discourse on Health in the Context of Greek Philosophy and Hippocratic Medicine,” in *Jews and Health. Tradition, History, and Practice*, ed. Catherine Hezser, Brill Series in Jewish Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 48.

⁸⁹ Philo, *Post.* 46.159.

⁹⁰ Hezser, “Health, Hellenism,” 49.

⁹¹ Edwards, “The Suffering Body,” 265.

⁹² Allison, *James*, 760.

to focus on the participation of the group, and how others may assist through anointing and prayer.

Jas 5:13-20 also makes it clear that God is central in restoring people to health. The author does not mention physicians, but Philo, to whom James is often compared, reconciled God as a provider of health, and the benefits of the medical advancements in his city of Alexandria. Philo thought that God had given humanity healthy bodies, but such bodies could benefit from the skills of doctors and medicine, through which God operates (*Leg.* 3.62.178).⁹³ It is hard to say, but this could be James' position as well. Clearly other people had a role to play in the healing of the individual, but ultimately, given the importance of prayer, including the fact that James even refers to an exemplar of prayer, Elijah (5:17), God is the restorer of the sick one: "The Lord will raise him up" (5:15).

James does not provide an explicit etiology for illness.⁹⁴ Is it simply a reality, a fact of life, or is it caused by sin? As Harold Remus pointed out in his entry on health and illness in the *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Judaism and Christianity "have often ascribed illness and death to sin," and there is plenty of evidence for it, but there have also been challenges.⁹⁵ Jas 5:15 is clear that the sick person is not necessarily a sinner, for it says "and if" (κἄν) he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Sin, therefore, is not identified as the unequivocal cause of his illness. However, in the next verse there is a connection between sin and illness, as it exhorts the audience to confess their sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that they may be healed, using the verb *ἰάομαι*, which commonly referred to physical healing. It therefore appears that sin *could* cause illness according to James. Remembering that desire would eventually give birth to sin (Jas 1:15), the links between a sick soul, ruled by desire, and poor physical health seem possible in James. Although it is hyperbole, the gold and silver of the rich, of which James clearly disapproves, will eventually "eat" their flesh (5:3). There is, it seems, a connection between the body and the soul in this letter. Yet, it is only the healing of soul that the person can engage in; the healing of the body is not something that psychagogy can accomplish. Here, the involvement of the group, including mutual correction (confess your sins) and the participation of God who is addressed through prayer, are required.

Although the final verses of James are rather confusing (whose sins are covered, the wanderer's or the one who brings back the wanderer?), this stress on the role of the members of the audience to correct one another fits this final section of James well, as it is consistent with the focus on behaviour within the church. Here, there is no mention of physical illness; rather, it centres on a person who has strayed from the truth, and the mutual correction that could bring them back into the fold. The fact that James thus closes with a reference to saving the person's

⁹³See Hezser, "Health and Hellenism," 50.

⁹⁴Martin Albl, "Are Any Among You Sick?" The Health Care System in the Letter of James," *JBL* 121 (2002): 135.

⁹⁵Harold Remus, "Health and Illness," in Erwin Faulbusch et al., ed. *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 505. For example, Deut 28; Acts 5:1-11. See also, Hector Avalos, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1999), 64-65.

soul (ψυχή) from death returns us to what is a preoccupying theme of the letter: the care of the soul.

Conclusion

This essay has joined other studies of James that identify an interest in psychagogic teaching throughout the letter. My claim has been that attention to this aspect of James can shed light on how we understand the final section: Jas 5:13-20. Contrary to others who think that these verses focus mostly on spiritual illness and healing, I have argued that the sickness is physical, while its remedy includes physical and “spiritual” activities, such as prayer. I have also attempted to demonstrate that the way in which James describes how to treat poor health at the end of his letter makes sense when we consider his psychagogic concerns, as well as the philosophical traditions with which the author came in contact in whatever manner he did. A person with physical ailments could not cure themselves by their own initiative; they relied upon others – the social body - and God, for assistance. In contrast, one could try to improve one’s soul, and for James, a healthy soul was paramount. It does not mean, however, that the body must be left behind.