a rule of thumb. Moreover, he provides a convincing discussion of the reasons for which one might want to entrench rules *even when* they are certain to yield sub-optimal results in many cases. Since *praecepta* are important in Stoic moral reasoning, it helps to compare such *praecepta* to Schauer's rules. Like them, *praecepta* are always subject to what he calls situational inadequacy; and nevertheless, as we shall see, there are good reasons to entrench them, reasons which include justifiable doubts about the ability of the typical rational agent to decide correctly in many circumstances, the intractable mass of information relevant to a particular decision, and the inevitably open texture of moral decision contexts.

Schauer's work shows that practical reasoning can employ rules and yet escape most of the common grounds for criticism of rule-based systems, and that deductive rule-case reasoning is not the only way to use rules which preserves their normative force.[40] Hence it helps to create room for a more flexible assessment of the Stoic account of moral reasoning, leaving scope for its compatibility with the autonomy and freedom of the wise man. For the generality and defeasibility of rules on this view is compatible with insisting that they should function as constraining rules or generally stable guidelines for *ordinary* decision-makers and also with allowing an *idealized* moral reasoner to set aside the rule, to de-entrench it and treat it as no more than a dispensable rule of thumb, an aid and guide to moral reasoning but no more. None of the theoretical discussions of rules normally invoked can account for the distinct ways in which rules function for the wise man and the mere progressor; Schauer's can. A further advantage will be that his theory provides a framework which works for a range of texts wider than the two key letters of Seneca, including Cicero's *De Officiis* and other works of Seneca.

---

[40] By contrast, the typical view of moral rules forces us to choose between regarding them as mere rules of thumb without independent normative force and a view which endows them with some ultimate and general normative power independent of particular situations. Nussbaum's posing of the dilemma at *The Fragility of Goodness*, 299–300, is typical; Mitsis and Striker make the same assumption, though not so overtly.

Confusions about the status of rules in Stoicism dissolve when one resorts to a fully articulated theory of rules like Schauer's. Thinking of Ariston's challenge to mainstream Stoicism (as reported by Sextus in *Adversus Mathematicos* 11.64–7), we can now say that mainstream Stoics did not insist on the universal connections which Ariston demanded and were prepared to talk about natural preferability (preferred status) without insisting that it represent a class every token member of which is worth choosing.[41] Ariston, unlike Chrysippus, does not want any moral agent to be guided by defeasible rules—he will insist on obedience to such invariant rules as 'pursue the good' or on deliberation which is based directly on substantive background justifications. The mainstream Stoic will allow the wise man to reason in that direct way, if he sees fit, but offer to all other moral agents entrenched but modifiable general rules prescribing appropriate actions as a framework for their thinking. This freedom to reason directly in terms of substantive justifications is the basis for what our sources recognize as the sage's authority to act on his own, even in contradiction of the 'rules'.[42]

It is vital to moral reasoning that the agent know which kinds of actions are normally appropriate and why. That is why they are the subject of 'rules' or instructions (*praecepta*). But it is also crucial that the agent be good at spotting relevant exceptional circumstances. What the Stoics need—and I hope to show that they have it in the *formulae* and *regulae* found in Seneca and Cicero—is a set of tools for moral reasoning which link up their general principles with concrete actions and decision contexts.

The distinction between normally and exceptionally appropriate actions operates at the level of types; it is a distinct point about token actions that the concrete particulars of each situation, including the character of the agent and the place of the action in his life as a whole, determine the final moral evaluation of that particular action. And even when the particulars of the agent's character and situation determine that a given action was wrong, the action may well turn out to have been appropriate; as

---

[41] See 'Stoic Ethics I', *CHHP*.   [42] See nn. 13, 24 above and esp. DL 7.121.