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The Stoics and the practical: a Roman reply to Aristotle

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THE STOICS AND THE PRACTICAL:
A ROMAN REPLY TO ARISTOTLE

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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BY

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WORKS FREQUENTLY CITED

ARISTOTLE

<i>De An.</i>	<i>De Anima</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>Nic. Eth.</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>

CICERO

<i>Ac.</i>	<i>Academica</i>
<i>De Am.</i>	<i>De Amicitia</i>
<i>De Fat.</i>	<i>De Fato</i>
<i>De Inv.</i>	<i>De Inventione</i>
<i>De Off.</i>	<i>De Officiis</i>
<i>De Orat.</i>	<i>De Oratore</i>
<i>Div.</i>	<i>De Divinatione</i>
<i>Fin.</i>	<i>Finibus Bonorum et Malorum</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>De Legibus</i>
<i>Nat.</i>	<i>De Natura Deorum</i>
<i>Parad.</i>	<i>Paradoxa Stoicorum</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>De Re Publica</i>
<i>Tusc.</i>	<i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i>

DIOGENES LAERTIUS

<i>DL</i>	<i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>
-----------	--------------------------------------

EPICETETUS

<i>Dis.</i>	<i>Discourses</i>
<i>Ench.</i>	<i>Enchiridion</i>

FRAGMENTS

<i>LS</i>	<i>The Hellenistic Philosophers</i>
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i>
<i>DK</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i>

GALEN

<i>PHP</i>	<i>De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis</i>
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PLUTARCH

<i>Comm. Not.</i>	<i>De Communibus Notitiis</i>
<i>Stoic. Rep.</i>	<i>De Stoicorum Repugnantibus</i>
<i>Virt. Mor.</i>	<i>De Virtute Morali</i>

SENECA

<i>Ben.</i>	<i>De Beneficiis</i>
<i>Brev. Vit.</i>	<i>De Brevitate Vitae</i>
<i>Const.</i>	<i>De Constantia</i>
<i>De Ir.</i>	<i>De Ira</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>

Prov. *De Providentia*
Tranq. *De Tranquillitate Animi*
Vit. Beat. *De Vita Beata*

SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

Adv. Math. *Adversus Mathematicos*

STOBAEUS

Ecl. *Ecloges*

Except where noted otherwise, translations are drawn with only slight emendation from the Loeb editions, with the exception of Aristotle. These translations are drawn, except where otherwise noted, from the Princeton version of the collected works. Where translations have been rendered by Long and Sedley, I have tried to use them, but in almost every case, with slight modification.

Neither the separation between politics and contemplation, between living together and living in solitude as two distinct modes of life, nor their hierarchical structure, was ever doubted after Plato had established both. Here again the only exception is Cicero, who, out of his tremendous Roman political experience, doubted the validity of the superiority of the *bios theôrêtikos* over the *bios politikos*, the validity of solitude over the *communitas*.

- Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*
(New York: Schocken, 2002), 86

— INTRODUCTION —

“In the pursuit of truth, which is both natural and virtuous, two vices are to be avoided; first, we must not treat the unknown as known and too readily accept it...The other vice is that some people devote too much effort and work to matters that are obscure and difficult, and not needful.”

- Cicero, *De Off.* I.vi.19

Not so long ago, nobody assumed that the truths at which different philosophers arrived, or claimed to arrive, by differing means could be directly applied in everyday life. At Rome, there was special cause for doubt that philosophy had any place in the public sphere. If philosophical theories could not be directly applied in practice, if Plato’s republic could not simply be recreated on earth, then what part could philosophy play in political life? Hence the significance of Cicero’s attempt to promote the search for truth. According to Cicero, it would bring the seeker a particular kind of knowledge, one with palpable and immediate repercussions for everyday life. We shall then claim to find in his works a kind of knowledge having, to the present day, implications for ethical and political life.

After a period of waning interest in post-Aristotelian philosophy, which has deprived us, in the meantime, of our fluency in the terms of a debate held after Aristotle’s death, we have steadily begun to preoccupy ourselves again with what the Ancients had to say about an important question. The debated question was, ‘*How does the fact of our already being immersed in practical life place constraints on what we may know?*’ The limits of human knowledge ascertained, the question for all philosophical schools then became, ‘*What of that which it possible to know has import for practical life?*’

If we want to familiarize ourselves with the terms of this ancient debate, then who better to serve as our guide than a writer, himself as much a seeker-of-truth as a practical-minded man, whose every ethical or political tract takes the relationship between knowledge and practical action as its subject matter? Who better than Marcus Tullius Cicero? Unhappily for us, the interest that Cicero took in this debate *because* he was a man of action does not recommend him to most of us as a philosopher qualified to speak on the subject, even though he talked of philosophy as the one subject which he “never interrupted and which since youth never ceased to cultivate and develop” (*Brut.* 89.306). Perhaps the fault is Cicero’s for having sometimes refused the title of philosopher, with what most would consider uncharacteristic modesty. His philosophic treatises, he tells us, were written only because he was forced out of the practical sphere in which he felt more at home. “My leisure proceeds from lack of employment, not from desire for repose,” he writes (*De Off.* III.i.1). Then there are the self-effacing disclaimers that commence some of Cicero’s works, an example of which can be found in *De Re Publica*:

Although I am not satisfied with what the greatest and wisest men of Greece have written about the subject, I am also not bold enough to prefer my own opinions to theirs. Therefore, I ask you to listen to me in this way: as someone neither ignorant of Greek learning, nor deferring to the Greeks—particularly on this subject—but as one Roman citizen, reasonable well educated by his father, and inflamed from childhood with the desire for learning, but educated much more by experience and home learning than by books. (*Rep.* I.35)¹

Though it is ostensibly Scipio who says that he would not count himself a real philosopher because he was educated more by experience than by books, we hear the author's voice. We also perceive false modesty. As someone "neither ignorant of Greek learning, nor deferring to the Greeks," Cicero thinks of himself as equally capable of ascending to the sky of ideas and descending back to earth, though he never soars too high, preferring to keep his feet upon the ground. Again and again, we find him styling himself as an intermediary moving between the theoretical and practical spheres of existence—a kind of demigod situated between earth and sky, between the material and the ideal, the practical and the theoretical planes of existence.

Cicero had a conception of practical knowledge to match. He discovered, or rediscovered in the philosophy of his predecessors, a kind of knowledge of what neither lacks immediate import for practical life, nor exceeds our practical ability to know. But in one of those great ironies of history, Cicero's reputation as a philosopher suffers because of an incompatibility we presume to exist between worldliness and philosophical profundity.²

THE STOIC PROVENANCE

One wishes to say that the conception of practical intelligence Cicero develops is Stoic, and indeed we shall treat it as deeply Stoic in inspiration because there are certain aspects of his thought that can only be understood in relation to that tradition out of which it emerges. The same themes are taken up by Seneca, Cicero's heir and successor in disseminating Stoic thought to the Roman masses, and we shall in time, call on him to shed further light on ideas which he can be shown to share with Cicero.

But Cicero and Seneca are not the heirs of an unbroken philosophical tradition. Theirs is best understood as a return to or appropriation of Stoicism. Indeed, their appropriation of Greek philosophy for their own time is about as paradigmatic an example as one could hope for of the attempt to find and retrieve something from the ancient past by making it new. Theirs is like every appropriation of this past a *reappropriation*; willingly or no, their attempt to understand an older philosophy is, as Gadamer would say, an attempt to understand it *differently*.

In asides and footnotes the reader will find the evidence that what Cicero and Seneca say has its precedent in a much older Stoic tradition, but we leave to the reader to determine

¹ Similar prefatory remarks are made by Crassus in *On the Orator* (I.111), and by Cicero himself in *De Fato* (iv).

² Clarke's view of Cicero is this: "For most of his life philosophy was not in the forefront of Cicero's interests. He believed in a union of rhetoric with philosophy and of statesmanship with philosophy, and liked to think of himself as a philosophic orator and philosophic statesman, but oratory and statesmanship came first." Martin Clark. *The Roman Mind: Studies in the History of Thought from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius*. (New York: Norton, 1968), 54.

what no author could ascertain beyond doubt—whether Cicero and Seneca reinvented Stoicism for their own time, or rediscovered a Stoicism that was already there to be found in the now lost works of elder Stoics. Whether it is orthodox or heterodox Stoicism, whatever its own relationship to its historical past may be, this is a Stoicism which interests us for the very reasons for which scholars have dismissed it as un-Stoic, and therefore as undeserving of attention: eschewing universal truth, it favors practice to theory, and then seems to pattern its account of practical knowledge on Aristotle's.

Cicero and Seneca share with each other, aside from the fact that both left us a corpus touching upon virtually every aspect of philosophy, a conception of practical intelligence. Although neither may be asserted to be identical in all particulars to that advanced by the earliest Stoics, what is particular to both can only be accounted for by the fact that both philosophers drink from the well of Stoic thought.

Their conception of practical intelligence is united by certain assumptions which are as follows: (1) as long as certain forms of theoretical knowledge are uncertain of attainment, we must try to attain a different kind of knowledge, (2) possessing this other kind of knowledge amounts to possessing the ability to perceive pursuit-worthy ends, as opposed to ones which merely seem good, (3) these pursuit-worthy ends are those pursued without our coming into conflict with our inner nature, (4) this then is a knowledge of what one needs to know in order to remain in harmony with oneself, or to put it differently, to keep reason and desire in harmony with each other, (5) it is not attained primarily by acquiring new beliefs but by removing false ones, (6) it is not fundamentally distinct from other arts or forms of technical expertise.

Seneca for one is a Stoic, and it is no compliment to him when he is rebranded an “original thinker.” His “unorthodox” appropriation of the Stoic tradition often disqualifies him as a representative of that tradition; then his “clumsy” attempt to combine it with apparently contradictory ideas disqualifies him as a real philosopher with a coherent body of thought. Seneca is not the direct vehicle of an unbroken philosophical tradition, but neither is his work a pastiche of loosely connected ideas; he articulates a mutually consistent set of ideas, which can be understood in their completeness and unity *if* they are understood as arising out of and attempting to remain faithful to Greek Stoicism. We should no sooner question our preconceptions about the early Stoics than Seneca's orthodoxy. That is a rule by which we abide here not in order to prove that Seneca is a Stoic, but in order to show that his is a self-consistent interpretation of the Stoic creed.³

As for Cicero, he is not believed to be a Stoic, though one wonders what it means to be a counted as a Stoic if Cicero is not. In the only two ethical treatises in which he puts forward his own views he openly claims to be adopting Stoic ideas (*Tusc.* IV.10, *De Off.* I.ii.6). The question of whether he is Stoic or not is not to be settled here. Nevertheless, a few words must be spoken against a common prejudice, which holds that since Cicero is not a Stoic himself, he can teach us nothing about real Stoics except how their views can be misrepresented.

³ These views are finally changing, and Reydams-Schils has taken even those of Seneca's remarks that seem most in conflict with his Stoicism, his appeals to what appears to be Platonic dualism, and shown them to exist in perfect continuity with it. Gretchen Reydams-Schils, “Seneca's Platonism: The Soul and its Divine Origin,” in *Ancient Models of Mind: Studies in Human and Divine Rationality*, ed. Andrea Nightingale and David Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 196-215.

Cicero is usually considered to have been a lifelong member of the skeptical school. As a skeptic, he was not supposed to have believed that one could attain any knowledge at all, much less that which Stoics thought possible. As a skeptic, however, Cicero was caught between the Old Academy and the New Academy.

An eighteen-year-old Cicero sought instruction in Rome from Philo of Larissa, the head of the New Academy in exile from Athens; the school maintained its skepticism about the possibility of attaining knowledge.⁴ Cicero was seeking to master the art, cultivated by Academic skeptics of arguing pro and contra for purely rhetorical ends. Nine years later, much more interested in the content than in the form of philosophical debate, Cicero went to the Academy at Athens to study under Philo's student-turned-adversary, Antiochus of Ascalon, where he taught the essential continuity of ethical thought from Socrates to Plato, from Aristotle to the Stoics. The so-called Old Academy carried on what it considered to be the Socratic tradition of seeking ethical knowledge, indeed according to some, seeking justification in Plato and Aristotle "for something that Socrates had been in the habit of reprobating entirely—a definite science of philosophy, with a regular arrangement of subjects and a formulated system of doctrine" (*Ac. I. iv.17*).

Hence Cicero's skepticism is not unreserved. He writes, "Even the people of Cimmeria whom some god, or nature, or the geographical position of their abode deprived of the sight of the sun, nevertheless had fires, which they were able to employ for light." The Academic skeptics meanwhile "have so beclouded us with darkness that they have not left us a single spark of light to give us a glimpse of sight; and if we followed them, we should be fettered with chains that would prevent us from moving a step" (*Ac. II. xix.61*).⁵ The exigencies of practical life do not afford us the luxury of blithely holding all beliefs and intuitions equally suspect; we must act, and when it comes to using the limited capacity for knowledge we possess, we cannot hang back with the Skeptics, "for what can I suppose that one who is attempting to rob us of light will do about matters hidden in darkness?" (*Ac. II.ix.30*).⁶ *Though an epistemological skeptic, practical necessity makes Cicero an ethical Stoic.*

It is mistaken to say that Cicero's skepticism hinders him from providing an undistorted picture of Stoicism. On the contrary, his latent skepticism is the single most important thing that informs his account of Stoicism. *For Cicero wants ethical tools that do not compromise our skepticism about the possibility of attaining theoretic truth.* And he finds such tools in Stoicism. His Skepticism is of specific benefit to us, since it will lead him to emphasize those aspects of Stoic practical knowledge that make it particularly well adapted to a world in which certainty is an impossibility. Indeed, he will emphasize those aspects of Stoic practical knowledge that make it attainable independently of theoretical knowledge.

"I am inclined to think Socrates all the wiser for having given up all concerns of this sort and for saying that research into natural philosophy seeks things either greater than human understanding can follow or things that have nothing at all to do with human existence" (*Rep. I.15*). With these well-known words, Cicero announces a first imperative he heeds in the course of philosophic inquiry. It is to follow Socrates in eschewing all knowledge that is unattainable in

⁴ "But if all these old thinkers found themselves floundering like babies just born in a new world, do we imagine that all these generations and these consummate intellects and elaborate investigations have not succeeded in making anything clearer" (*Ac. II.v.15*).

⁵ The reproach is repeated at *Ac. II xii.38* and *Ac. II xxxiv.109*.

⁶ "...for who would dare to call himself a philosopher who came without ethical precepts to hand over?" (*De Off. I.ii.7*).

human life. When it comes to the Stoics, he looks to see whether they heed the same imperative.

The second imperative Cicero recognizes and thematizes is that of bringing philosophy down to earth so that it can be practically useful in everyday life. Here his purpose is to rescue the moldering remains of Greek theorizing and, thereby, to revive philosophy in Rome, where it would normally be regarded by his more practical-minded countrymen as useless. Cicero saw the Greeks as philosophical theorists and the Romans as practical men, and he saw himself as their intermediary. In this, Cicero finds himself assuming a defensive posture, explaining the utility of a Greek import to Romans suspicious about its ability to contribute positively to their action-oriented ethos. Cicero's purpose is to prove that philosophy is *not* a distraction from the *vita activa*, and that it does indeed have a place in practical life. This is important for us because his every occasion for reflection upon the value of Greek philosophy for Roman life becomes an occasion for broader reflection upon the value of philosophy to everyday life.

Cicero's attitude toward all philosophical doctrines is difficult to discern given the double imperative he heeds. In particular, his attitude toward Stoicism, among the most dogmatic of philosophies, is uncertain because he embraces its truth while maintaining his skepticism.

The problem of doing philosophy without becoming philosophically dogmatic is a Platonic problem requiring a Platonic solution, and for Cicero, that solution is writing dialogues. Cicero finds inspiration in the dialogue form for the *vetus et Socratica ratio contra alterius opinionem disserendi*, 'for the old Socratic method of speaking against the opinion of another,' which Socrates himself regarded as the means of discovering truth (*Tusc.* I.iv.8). For it "is characteristic of the Academy to put forward no judgments of its own, but to test (*probare*) those that seem most similar to the truth to compare arguments; to draw forth all that may be said on behalf of any opinion; and, without asserting any authority of its own, leave the judgment of the auditor whole and free (*integrum ac liberendum*) (*Div.* II.lxxii.150). Cicero therefore endorses no doctrine straightforwardly, but writes dialogues in which doctrines are defended and attacked. The difficulty is that anyone who would learn about Stoicism through Cicero's dialogues has to recognize that Stoic views are defended *and* attacked. Cicero in short treats the Stoics' views with as much skepticism as sympathy.

One of the problems which has continually followed Cicero is that his selective treatment of philosophic themes is subordinated to his ends as a writer. By far the prevailing approach is to disregard what Cicero says except when we can be sure that saying it does not merely serve his practical or literary aims as an author. But we should take his practical motives into account. Rather than simply discarding as untrustworthy and unusable an instance in which he appears to portray a philosophy in an even slightly distorted light, we should try to understand why it appears to us that way. Usually it is Cicero's intention that it so appear, because he is trying to portray in overstated form the points of convergence and divergence between two different philosophical positions, or to draw out and expose tensions or ambiguities within a single position. That Cicero does this should not be ignored, but neither does it justify ignoring Cicero. *In this way we strive to uncover not a Cicero rid of his unthinking, truth-distorting prejudices, but a knowing Cicero who is trying to show us something true, albeit in an exaggerated light.*

STOICISM AND THE TRADITION

Zeno wished to follow in the footsteps of radical pedagogues like Socrates and Diogenes the Cynic, whose own positive views, if they ever took form, did so gradually, over time, in reaction to opposing views, so that, in the words of Malcolm Schofield:

Zeno may have seen a compensating need for a direct and explicit articulation of the Socratic vision (glimpsed in part through Cynic spectacles) to be built upon the definitions later Stoics so prized, to be rooted in a theoretical account of nature, and to recapitulate all that was most important in previous thought, whether from Heraclitus or Plato's later dialogues. On that hypothesis, he will not have perceived himself as presenting a philosophy of human life different from Socrates' or Diogenes' (hence the difficulty we have in finding palpable differences between Zeno and the early Cynics where their views on the same topics are recorded), *but as communicating that very same philosophy in a new form: the form of a system.*⁷

Cicero for one does not assume that the Stoics thought of themselves as developing a completely original philosophy, and in fact, the Stoics may have seen themselves not as philosophical innovators, but as the inheritors of a long tradition, stretching from Socrates to Aristotle, which they took upon themselves to systematize. It may be argued, Aristotle notwithstanding, that it was the first time *any* philosophy had ever been so systematized.⁸ As it thus brought together divergent strains of thought, and gave birth to a unified system, Stoicism surely created something new.

But if the Stoicism saw the birth of a genuinely new philosophical system, unlike any seen before, then the question arises, 'Can we start from the presumption that continuities remain between it and the philosophical tradition preceding it?' The accepted wisdom has always been that we cannot turn to Cicero for an answer to this question, because he is not impartial. Cicero therefore cannot help us to prove that the first Stoics saw themselves as the direct inheritors of the preexisting philosophical tradition.

As we shall see, not even Cicero assumes they were its direct inheritors. But Cicero can help us to answer the question of whether and to what extent Stoicism eventually converges with Aristotelianism. For even if the first Stoics hadn't come under direct Aristotelian influence, as is in fact nearly impossible to doubt, they eventually came to see themselves as sharing much in common with Peripatetics.⁹ This is why Cicero never fails to repeat that the Stoics disagreed with the Peripatetics *verbis magis quam sententiis* 'more in words than in ideas.' (*Ac. II.v.15*).¹⁰ The presumption from which he proceeds is not that the first Stoics were Peripatetics, but that that the Stoics share much in common with Aristotelians. He then attempts to answer the question

⁷ Schofield, Malcolm. "Stoic Ethics," In *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 235.

⁸ 'The articulation of ethical concepts' is one subheading under which many of Chrysippus works are placed, and the Stoic Sphaerus wrote an entire book called *The Arrangement of Ethical Topics* (*DL VII.199, 177*).

⁹ See Appendix One.

¹⁰ *Fin.* III.41; IV.72; V.74, 89; *Tusc.* V.32, 120; *Nat.* 1.16; *Leg.* 1.54.

of whether the Stoic sect *succeeded* in distinguishing itself from, or else, broke *too* radically with the Aristotelian. Cicero therefore starts from the assumption that later Stoics understood themselves in relationship to the preexisting philosophic tradition, and then sets out to understand the significance and extent of the Stoics' attempt to distance themselves from that same tradition.

“Do these Stoic ideas strengthen Aristotelian ethics or do they undermine it?” is how Julia Annas poses the question.¹¹ The question is not whether Stoics are the direct progeny of Aristotle. The question is what this Stoic approach to ethical life was, and why, when it arrived on the philosophical scene, it seemed so similar, and yet so different from Aristotle's. We shall turn to Cicero for answers—because Cicero is himself interested in *this* question.

Like Aristotle, the Stoics seem to describe the relationship that preferably exists between the subject and an external truth. If so, it must be determined whether Stoicism describes in a new way, different than Aristotle, the nature of this relationship. Then, it might be asked how and why the manner of its conception allows Stoics to take practical steps toward improving their own relationship to the truth.

Since for Cicero, Aristotelian practical knowledge is taken as the standard to which the Stoic practical knowledge is held, the kind of practical knowledge of which Stoics speak may prove more or less adapted to practical life than its Aristotelian counterpart. We must turn to Cicero's dialogues because it is in them that we find this relationship to an external truth subjected to a test—the test of practical life. Stoic practical knowledge, along with Aristotelian practical knowledge, is subjected to the trial of its ability to actually help us attain practical ends. Each philosophy is in fact subjected to a test on all sides: its vocabulary to the test of its ability to resonate with everyday ways of thinking and speaking, the philosophic life it demands to the test of its ability to meet the demands of political life.

A PHILOSOPHIC SYSTEM IS BORN

What are sought by these means are some clues as to how to answer the question of why Stoicism is more practically oriented than other philosophies. It has already been remarked by Thomas Bénatouïl that, though Stoicism has been profitably described as a “way of life,” a “practice of the self” and a repertoire of “spiritual exercises” by Hadot and Foucault, it is perhaps not distinct among other ancient philosophies in this regard. Bénatouïl, who has written the only authoritative book on the subject, is right to say that Stoicism can be considered unique in its practical aspect, neither because to choose it is to choose a way of living, nor because it simply places more emphasis on ethics than physics and logic. Stoicism is, as he says, unique because of “its pedagogical rather than systematic calling.”¹² This offers us an initial clue as to what the Stoics intended in constructing their philosophic system.

If the Stoics did convey old ideas in a new form—the form of a system—then we should also ask ourselves not just how, over the course of time, a certain set of philosophical attitudes were rendered self-consistent, but also how and why the Stoics first set about constructing a system of philosophy.

¹¹ Julia Annas, “The Hellenistic Version of Aristotle's Ethics,” *Monist* 73 (1990): 80-96, 82.

¹² Thomas Bénatouïl, *Faire usage: la pratique du stoïcisme* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2006), 7.

Again, Cicero is partisan in the debate since he appears to care very little for Stoicism, taken as a theoretical system, writing “I shall at my own option and discretion (*iudicio et arbitrio nostro*) draw from these sources in such measure and in such manner as shall suit my purpose” (*De Off.* I.ii.6). Indeed, there is no more widely held prejudice about Cicero than that he plucks from Stoicism what he can adapt to practical ends, and that he frequently tears certain elements of Stoicism out of their theoretical context, thereby severing them from their theoretical basis. One cannot therefore read Cicero without constant suspicion that he has cut Stoic ideas off at their theoretical roots. Since he borrows from original sources whose contents may remain forever unknown to us, we can never assure ourselves enough that he has not made cursory practical use of something that deserves fuller theoretical treatment.

But if Stoicism does perchance represent the end of a long process of development during which time certain strains of philosophical thought were woven together into the tightly-knit fabric of a philosophic system, then we cannot assume the “system” of philosophy the Stoics ended up inventing was systematic in quite the same way as we would expect one to be today. Thus we cannot assume from the outset that Cicero leaves behind those aspects of Stoicism that would make it resemble a modern philosophic system.

Our anxiety about this possibility springs largely from our own philosophical presumptions about the manner in which we think ethical philosophizing should be done. We usually think that general philosophic theories about the world should be firmly established in the form of a “system” before we set about finding a way to put them into practice. From these theories, which Pierre Hadot called “general philosophy,” we think one must “in some way draw the consequences for man and for society of the general principles of the system.”¹³ When we read Cicero, we therefore are racked by the continual anxiety that he is severing the practical from its systematic foundations, that we are being given Stoic practice without its philosophical support, and that adopting this ethical stance would mean doing so without solid theoretical grounds upon which to stand. Our interpretations may therefore sometimes bear the mark of our attempts to provide “philosophical justification” where we consider it lacking.

THE THEORETICAL SUPPORT FOR A WAY OF LIFE

Since Cicero presents it as connected in the most minimal of ways to the Stoics’ own ideas about the nature of the universe, anyone who purports to accept his account of ethical Stoicism also finds him or herself at the center of a debate about the degree to which Stoic ethics can be taken apart from Stoic physics. For it has long been assumed, in the words of one of the foremost experts on the subject of Stoicism, that to “live virtuously and to be happy as a Stoic, you need an understanding of nature which presupposes the truths of Stoic theology and physics.”¹⁴

¹³ Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 17; *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 2.

¹⁴ Understanding the principles of Stoic natural philosophy “changes one’s conception of the relation of virtue to the universal order (it tells me that if I am virtuous my way of life is congruous with the order of the universe), but *does not change* either the *content of virtue* (courage, temperance, self-knowledge, justice are virtuous qualities regardless of whether or not I am atheist: they are virtuous also for atheists) or the *conception of happiness* (virtue remains the necessary and sufficient condition for happiness even if one does not believe in the theocratic principle).” I agree with in every detail with the position articulated here by Vlastos in a personal note to Long, from which Long quotes. “Stoic Eudaimonism,” in *Stoic Studies* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1996: 179-201), 188.

The debate about whether ethics or physics are ever separable from each other is far from alien to Cicero. The very characters in his dialogues take up first one, then another, side of this debate. When Scipio says that Socrates rejected natural philosophy and tried to set ethical philosophy on an independent basis, Tubero protests: “I don’t know Africanus why people say that Socrates rejected all discussions of this kind, and was concerned only with life and morality. Plato is the fullest source we have about him, and in his books Socrates frequently, when he discusses morals, virtues, and even public life, seeks to link them in the manner of Pythagoras with numbers and geometry and harmony.” The reply this provokes is that “since he loved Socrates above all others, and wanted to attribute everything to him,” Plato, who was himself a devout Pythagorean, “wove together the wit and subtlety of Socratic conversation with the obscurity of Pythagoras” (*Rep.* I.16). At least according to Scipio, Plato tried to marry two things that coexist in uneasy tension—Socratic ethics and Pythagorean natural philosophy.¹⁵

In the modern world, debate has arisen about how a philosophical system like Stoicism is created, and especially, about the manner in which its constituent parts, ethics, logic, and physics, fit together to form a whole. It has been proposed that, while the theorems of each field of study can be viewed as mutually complementary, one or another branch of philosophy cannot be viewed as depending upon another for its premises. We should accordingly cease to see ethics as dependent for its theoretical support upon premises established by natural philosophy.¹⁶ Instead, ideas should be seen as arrived at through the independent study of one branch of philosophy. But these ideas can be transposed by analogy to another branch. Thus, the branches of philosophy are mutually complementary but not mutually dependent. But supposing that this is true, one must question rather the relationship in which this system of philosophy, or one of its parts, taken independently, stands in relationship to the *practice*. For even if it could be proven that ethics, logic, and physics all depend upon each other for their premises, the unshakable edifice of thought they combined to form would still stand in uncertain relationship to practical knowledge. *Even if it were learned by heart, this elaborate theoretical framework might not help anyone to know any better how to act in particular situations.*

As we shall see, nothing requires the student of the Stoic way of life, according to Cicero, to treat nature as an object of human knowledge about which objective, universal statements can be made.¹⁷ Ethics is for Cicero, as we shall soon see, distinct from physics and natural philosophy, first, in the sense of being a philosophical discipline that does not rest directly upon the premises of another sub-field like physics. Second, ethics as a theoretical

¹⁵ The story of Plato’s time with Pythagoreans and his acceptance of the natural philosophy that Socrates rejected are also recounted in *De Finibus* (V.87).

¹⁶ Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 161-162, 199-200. For Gill the interesting thing about Stoicism is that its other branches of knowledge are not reduced to physics, nor ethical claims to physical ones: “The key underlying thought is not that ethical claims are grounded in facts established by physics, and are thus shown to have an objective foundation of a type they would not otherwise have. It is, rather, that branches which are independently grounded can also be used to reinforce each other by their findings” (194).

¹⁷ For the opposite view see Striker, “Following Nature: A Study in Stoic Ethics,” in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 221-80. The Stoic ethic is premised upon seeking “accord with nature,” which seems to entail learning about nature, or at least how and in what sense it is to be followed. According to Gisela Striker, “The first thing to ask about Stoic ethics would therefore seem to be, why is it good to follow nature?” (3); The interested reader is referred to Christopher Gill’s authoritative account of the debate. See Section 3.3, “Stoic Development and Ethical Wholism,” *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*, 144.

discipline exists for the sake of ethical, or more specifically, practical knowledge. Practical knowledge, meanwhile, does not consist of theoretical knowledge, whether of the physical or ethical kind.

All theoretical knowledge may be said to consist of general, universal truths about the structure of the world as viewed from an objective, third-person perspective. These truths apply across time and space so that the person who gains even an ounce of this knowledge has that knowledge at all times and places. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, is what a person may know about a given set of circumstances, viewed from the perspective of someone who must respond to them. Most of us have practical knowledge in some contexts, and not others.

It is not that theoretical knowledge has no place in Stoicism. It is simply that we make use of theoretical knowledge as we engage in practice necessary to attain practical knowledge. Theory has its use in practice. Once attained through practice, practical knowledge does not require theoretical knowledge because it does not depend directly upon theoretical knowledge in the sense of being “built” upon or “deduced” from it.

It is to this fact that the question of whether ethics is “based” upon the foundation physics must be referred. Universal statements about the nature of the world can certainly play a useful part in the process of acquiring ethical knowledge of a theoretical kind, but only as a theoretical discipline does ethics appeal *directly* to physics for its foundational principles. Ethics as lived practice has its goal in the attainment of a knowledge that does not lean upon theoretical knowledge for support.¹⁸ Theoretical knowledge is therefore reduced to the status of a prop we rely upon to reach practical knowledge; when practical knowledge is reached, the prop is discarded.

The relationship between practical knowledge and ethical knowledge of the theoretical kind may be even further specified. It is not that we need theory to justify practice and the practical knowledge in which it results, since theory never fully justifies practice. Rather, a theoretical framework can only be justified by the practical outlook it helps one attain, and for the Stoics this outlook is justified only when and if it leads to practical action unified with itself and consistently pointed in the right direction.

Pierre Hadot questions the assumption we make when we seek guidance in ethical life from a kind of truth that he calls ‘philosophical’ because, (1) it is demonstrated by the logical consistency of a set of propositions, (2) it comes in the form of pronouncements about the nature of reality that hold universally, and (3) it receives support from something besides *doxa*, or the ‘beliefs and opinions’ upon which we habitually rely in everyday life.¹⁹

We have reason to believe that the Roman Stoics gave an answer, unusual even by ancient standards, to the question of how, and in what way, a philosophical outlook on the world, *taken as a whole*, must underwrite the way one comports oneself, a fact which could explain the observation that these Stoics seem “more concerned with the systematic classification of concepts than with such questions as the justification and grounding of Stoic

¹⁸ We may therefore need to distinguish between ethics as theory and ethics as practice, for as Annas writes “there are two levels on which one studies ethics: first as a subject in its own right, with the proper kind of methodology, in which our intuitions are subjected to reflection and articulation, and theoretical concepts and distinctions are introduced which explain and make sense of our intuitions; and then later (if one advances that far) as a subject within Stoic philosophy as a whole.” Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 164.

¹⁹ *Qu’est ce-que la philosophie antique?*, 17; *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 3.

ethics.”²⁰ Our initial answer to the question how the Stoics grounded their system will be that the question itself is not well posed; the question presumes that the Stoics would have thought of their system as “founded,” in the way in which we expect all ethical positions to be founded on sweeping, “firmly established” pronouncements about the nature of reality as a whole.

We cannot simply assume that even the early Stoics philosophically *grounded* their ethics in physics or metaphysics in the same way many of us think most ethical practice has to be founded directly upon firmly established universal theories about the world as a whole. In beginning such a study as this, we cannot make such preemptory assumptions for fear of projecting onto the Stoics our own assumptions about the relationship that *we* believe holds between theory and praxis.

“There are two broad approaches to studying the moral psychology of the Stoics,” writes Tad Brennan, “which we may characterize as ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches. The first starts from some general considerations about the kind of philosophers the Stoics were—rationalists, teleologists, psychic monists, and so on—and works its way down to the psychological details on that basis.”²¹ This first approach is the one we want to avoid in order not to similarly presume that the Stoics wanted their ethics to be deduced directly from universal claims about the nature of the world.

Let us search out in Cicero, and then Seneca—for we will find what we are looking for *if* it is there to be found—signs of a practical knowledge amounting to more than just an applied theoretical knowledge. We will find it soon enough.

Not coincidentally, it is a knowledge Cicero portrays as sharing much in common with practical knowledge as Aristotle conceives it. In Aristotle we also find a theoretical discourse about ethics, and this discourse does not completely derive its force from scientific knowledge. This in brief, according to Sean Kirkland, is why Aristotle is a near perfect example of Hadot’s hypothesis, according to which discourse seeks a basis for itself in a way of living in and perceiving the world. For the Stoics, the adoption of a certain way of living and perceiving is necessary *before* a certain philosophical discourse can appear true. For Aristotle, most of us have *already* adopted a practical perspective in life, and this serves as the foundation upon which Aristotle’s philosophical discourse comes to rest. For our practical outlook and the set of habits we have adopted in practical life are already well-founded enough to allow us to perceive, though always incompletely, something about the world. “Following Hadot,” writes Kirkland, “we must say that for the ancients a way of life *can* ground a philosophical understanding of the world and of ourselves only because it is *always already grounded*, in some sense.”²²

We consequently find ourselves in the company of many other students of Stoicism in arguing that it is in continuity with Aristotle that the philosophical movement is best understood.²³ This is not because we can be certain Stoicism is a branch off of the tree of Aristotelian philosophy, but because the Stoics of Cicero’s day had already begun to see

²⁰ Anthony Long. Arius Didymus and the Exposition of Stoic Ethics.” *Stoic Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 119.

²¹ Tad Brennan. “Stoic Moral Psychology,” *The Cambridge Companion to Stoicism*, ed. by Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 283.

²² Sean, Kirkland, “The Tragic Foundation of Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 30 (2009): 4.

²³ Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*; A. C. Lloyd, “Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology,” ed. John Rist (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 233- 246; Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Anthony Long, “Aristotle’s Legacy to Stoics Ethics,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* Vol. 15 (1968): 72-85.

themselves as sharing an approach similar to Aristotle's. For Aristotle and the Stoics, ethics as a branch of theoretical knowledge, takes the form of pronouncements about human nature grounded by nothing other than a practical outlook on life we either *could* have or *do* have already. Insofar as Aristotle or the Stoics believe practical knowledge can be achieved by means of theoretical knowledge at all, it is not theoretical knowledge of nature, taken as a whole, but human nature. This leads them both to substitute ethical naturalism for natural philosophy.²⁴

A VERSION OR PERVERSION OF ARISTOTLE

Prevailing opinion, however, holds that in his haste to root Stoicism in an older Aristotelian tradition and found it anew on Aristotelian “premises,” Cicero only manages with great strain, and much difficulty, to secondarily bring Stoic ethics back into connection with the natural philosophy upon which it originally relied for its *true* justification.

There are those who will always believe it is precisely *because* Cicero was too busy comparing Stoics and Peripatetics, that he never did their real views about natural philosophy any justice. Indeed, those who think Cicero's Stoicism rests too comfortably on Aristotelian premises will certainly always see his discussion of “a life in accord with nature” as impoverished, and his subsequent attempts to tie Stoic ethics back to Stoic physics as belated and half-hearted.²⁵

Here is where Cicero must speak in his own defense. In *De Finibus*, Piso complains, on behalf of Antiochus, that the Stoics identify a single end for themselves in a kind of virtue that they cannot *prove* to be their actual end. They only say that our own impulses lead us toward it. But our natural impulses seem to lead in another direction entirely, straight toward external goods. *In other words, the Stoics claim to proceed from the Aristotelian idea that our desires always already point us in the direction of our good, our ultimate telos. They claim to follow these fundamentally Aristotelian premises to a Stoic conclusion. But the connection between Aristotle and Stoicism is highly suspect.*

If we look at Stoicism with Piso's Antiochian eyes, we agree only too readily that if Stoicism rested upon a sound basis at all, it rested on something *other* than Aristotelian premises. When we fail to find what *we* would consider more “valid” reasons for pursuing virtue as one's exclusive aim, we conclude, like Antiochus before us, that the Stoics must have simply adopted Aristotelian ways of speaking about our end as “that at which our desires aim” because it lent an air of legitimacy to their superstitious and slavish devotion to the one thing they revered above all others—virtue.

Piso points out what seems undeniably true—that though the Stoics “go to the nursery, because they believe nature presents itself most clearly to them in childhood” (*Fin.* V.xx.55), they end up championing virtue as their exclusive end, and all because they tell an all-too-improbable story about how a child's desires for external goods are, over the course of his or her development, transformed into the yearning for virtue *alone*. In a naturalistic account of desires like Aristotle's, they claim to find support for a view that Aristotle's could never justify.

²⁴ See Appendix I on the subject of the historical influence of Aristotle on Stoicism.

²⁵ Gisela Striker's view is typical: “Apparently, he thinks he has shown what the highest good is, and that it is living in agreement with nature...but he offers no further argument, and proceeds to take the Stoic view as established. Now I think it is fairly clear that Cicero has produced no such thing as an argument to show that the end is living in agreement with nature...I think Cicero's account is a confusion.” Striker, “Following Nature,” 7.

Cicero himself does not take up a firm a position on whether the Stoics are naturalistic Aristotelians or whether they have abandoned their Aristotelian heritage. The characters in his dialogues are meant to speak for one or the other side in this debate. Cicero presents Stoicism by taking us back to its philosophic roots in Aristotle. He presents us with an account of Stoicism in which we must, just as in Aristotle, go whither our inborn impulses lead, which is for him as much as for Aristotle toward the full realization of our inborn human potential. But then he asks *if* there comes a moment at which the Stoic begins to overvalue actualizing his potential because he has learned something new about nature, and now seeks a new kind of harmony with nature. Then, his question is whether *that* leads him to adopt a wholly new perspective—one that is antithetical to the spirit in which he first allowed himself to be guided by his impulses. If so, this moment coincides with the one at which the development of our rational faculties becomes our overriding concern and the body’s imperatives are forgotten altogether.

Translated into the language of theory and praxis, he asks whether there is a point at which Stoic philosophy *stops* appealing directly to everyday, habitual, pre-reflective activity and the ends at which it is directed, and appeals instead to an objective order, an external truth, grasped by the mind—and then whether there comes a point at which, what the mind grasped on a purely intellectual level, overrides all practical concerns. *In short, he wants to know if and when intellectual truth becomes an end in itself overriding our whole practical-orientation towards the world.*

No wonder Nicholas White assumes that, if the Stoics had a good reason for upholding virtue as their sole aim in life, it is not to be found in Cicero’s naturalistic, Aristotelian account.²⁶ Cicero’s own characters seem to attest to the fact that, if the Stoics’ ideal has any philosophical justification whatsoever, then it must (1) proceed from something beyond a simple Aristotelian account, and that it must (2) lie in a more “philosophical,” that is, deeper metaphysical account, not to be found in Cicero’s corpus.

But even when Cicero makes an appearance in his own dialogues, he is a character in a staged drama in which two opposing sides are represented and neither side claims to represent Cicero’s final word on Stoicism. Piso represents a single perspective on Stoicism championed by the second of Cicero’s teachers, Antiochus, which says that the original contributions the Stoics *added* to Aristotle were ones that actually *conflicted* with the spirit of Aristotelian philosophy from which they drew inspiration, and from which, they actually ended up *subtracting*. Long after Piso has said his peace, the dialogue actually ends in *aporia*. The question Cicero leaves unanswered is precisely that of whether it isn’t perhaps just as accurate to say that the Stoics tried to keep Aristotelianism consistent with itself as it is to say that they contradicted its teachings. But that question, whether we should “represent Stoicism as an extreme version or perversion of Aristotelian eudaimonism,”²⁷ is not one Cicero answers. It is one he raises.

²⁶ Nicholas White sees that the historical background from which later Stoicism emerges is undoubtedly Aristotelian. That is, he does not think it can be a complete historical coincidence that for later Stoics as much as for Aristotle, our natural impulses combined with our discovery that we possess reason “leads to a desire to develop reason and to live life in accord with it, so as to preserve and develop our true selves” (136). However, he doubts Stoicism was ever originally based in a “self-realizationist” view like Aristotle’s. He cautions us not to fall prey to Cicero’s own tendency to conflate this hybrid Aristotelianism *cum* Stoicism, a later development, with true Stoicism. Nicholas White, “The Basis of Stoic Ethics,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83 (1979): 143–78.

²⁷ I quote Long, who while more firmly convinced than anyone else of a broadly accurate portrayal of Stoicism by Cicero and the influence of Aristotle upon the Stoics, nevertheless argues against those who would “read it as merely, or at least largely, a variant of or contribution to a longer tradition. That is how Antiochus of Ascolon (Cicero’s chief source

THE QUESTIONS ASKED

Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, the first Stoics, posed the question “how can we establish certain facts about the world that dictate how we should act in it?” The framework of ethical thought was important for teaching novice Stoics about the kind of practical knowledge they possessed by virtue of being human beings in a world such as ours. But it is less clear that this theoretical framework is what they needed to learn before they gained the practical knowledge that they seemed to have by right of being human beings, not by right of being instructed in Stoic doctrine. Thus, the Stoics did approach the question of theory and praxis in a traditional way by asking “what facts can we establish about the world that have bearing on ethical life?” Or, “what can we know in theory that we can put into praxis?” But there was also for them a quite separate and quite vital question.

Cicero and Seneca, it will be argued, posed the additional, and in some sense, more important question “under what circumstances does *logos* come into harmony with *hormé*, reason with human action?” Or, “how can we explain the occasional conflict between *logos* and impulse, and what is the cause of this conflict? What practical steps can we take to resolve the occasional conflicts that emerge between the two?” Since these are the questions upon which ethical life actually turned, living ethically depended for many like Cicero and Seneca upon being able to answer these questions. These questions will then dictate our approach.

IN SEARCH OF INNER HARMONY

We begin with the task the Stoics inherited from their predecessors. This was to explain the practical intellect in its relation to nature on the one hand, and to human artifice on the other, that is to *phusis* and then to *techné*. Since nature was the Stoics’ first concern, it shall be ours as well. As we shall see, practical intelligence had to have, as such, a connection to *phusis*. *Logos*, in the form of practical intelligence, had to guide one in the direction of that specific *telos* toward which one was already drawn by one’s inner nature.

We shall see that the Stoics as Cicero and Seneca understood them, were concerned like Aristotle, with the failure of human *logos* to point one towards one’s natural *telos*, a problem which both traced to a certain divergence between the two, with one’s nature pointing in a direction opposite that indicated by *logos*. As we shall see, it was agreed by both that the direction in which impulses moved should be made to coincide with the course of action dictated by the *logos*. Both believed in bringing impulse, along with the action in which it resulted, into harmonious conformity with *logos*. *And both therefore sought to diagnose the causes of a certain disharmony between logos and impulse.*

The coexistence of conflicting motivations in a single person, who is consequently described as being drawn in two opposing directions at once, is the focus of our second chapter.

and mentor) interpreted Stoic ethics, and I think Irwin’s approach may be fairly so described. Was it all that Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus intendend?” Long, “Stoic Eudaimonism” *Stoic Studies*, 185.

This state of inner conflict, described as natural by Aristotle, is the *very* conflict that Cicero and Seneca find to be wholly *unnatural*.²⁸

The first implication is that *the false dichotomy between what we know in theory and do in praxis is to be avoided*. For it is only when a person finds him or herself in this *unnatural state* of inner conflict that it becomes possible to say of her that what she grasps theoretically stands in conflict with the practical imperatives she cannot help but heed. That is to say, it is only in the mind of such a person that there exists a palpable distinction between that which is practically imperative and that which is theoretically true. Most of us suffer these conflicts from time to time. For us, the task is to restore a preexisting unity between theory and praxis, although it is in a certain sense always already fractured.

Everything that follows in subsequent chapters proceeds from the assumption that Cicero and Seneca strove to restore the fractured harmony of the self with itself. All chapters start from the presupposition that they were not just seeking *any* kind of knowledge, but a specific kind. Teach me not vain things, says Seneca: *fac potius, quomodo animus secum meus consonet nec consilia mea discrepent*, ‘rather how my soul may be in harmony with itself, and that my purposes not be out of tune’ (*Ep.* lxxxviii.9). Seneca was seeking after a kind of knowledge that would bring harmony to reign in his soul. *We then ask in these chapters what Seneca thought he had to know in order to attain harmony with himself.*

We see straight away that Cicero and Seneca were in fact chiefly concerned with the problem of how to bring practical intelligence into accord with one’s *inner* nature. But it will not be until Chapter Four that we see how they added to the Aristotelian, and ultimately, Socratic insistence that we remain in harmony with our inner nature, the insistence that we come into harmony with nature *as a whole*. Since one comes into instantaneous accord with the cosmos when one comes into harmony with oneself, Cicero and Seneca could concentrate upon attaining harmony with themselves without sacrificing the imperative to attain harmony with the cosmos. For the second goal was achieved simultaneously with the first.

IN SEARCH OF AN ART OF LIFE

The first chapter gives a broader historical account of how the knowledge required for becoming virtuous gained a reputation for being unlike other arts. It is an account that focuses on Aristotle because he is the representative of two different approaches to ethics: one that conflates and one that contrasts our ethical insights with the intuitions upon which we routinely rely to attain everyday, technical objectives.

The question of art is returned to in our third chapter. Here we first encounter the claim that the art of life differs from the other arts “only by excelling them in the material with which they work and the treatment of it” (IV.ii.4). We shall see that the early Stoics developed a definition of art that Cicero and Seneca were able to adopt as a paradigm for thinking about virtue. The significance of this was, of course, that it reversed the trend in philosophy of distinguishing practical intelligence from artistic expertise.

In the fifth chapter, we shall ask most directly the question, “what makes the art of life an art?” We shall see however that while all Stoics collapsed the distinction between virtue and

²⁸ This is substantiated by Cicero’s tendency to characterize the Stoics as having departed from Platonism and Aristotelianism mainly by refusing to naturalize the passions, as their predecessors had, by instituting a bipartite soul (*Ac.* I.x.38).

art, they preserved it in other respects. Without arguing that virtuous individuals possessed a different kind of knowledge than artisans, tradesmen, and craftsmen, Cicero and Seneca assert that the art of life is different from other arts. The difference, however, is simply that practical intelligence is a more far-reaching, adaptable, useful, and subtle art than that possessed by most people. Virtue became, in effect, an art to be refined, practiced, and perfected with more virtuosity than the others.

Usually, the Stoics are considered by their enemies and their modern interpreters to have had a conception of virtue making it extremely difficult to draw this analogy between craft and virtue. The way the Stoics speak of virtue simply does not remind one of any art. But it is not the Stoics' conception of the arts to which the analogy with virtue is ill-fitted, but our own. We shall argue that early Stoics redefined the nature of an art. As a result, the art of life ceased to appear unusual among the arts and crafts. *It became, instead, and almost exemplary art.*

But what this art of life has to do with theoretical knowledge we shall discover beforehand, in the fourth chapter. By then, we will already have a sense of that at which this art of life aims—the harmony of the soul. It only remains therefore to ask what the artist needs to achieve this goal. In this chapter, we shall see that what it requires from the artist is exercise and practice. The practices themselves use, as their tools, truths of varying kinds, including theoretical truths. But even these truths are not “theoretically established” in the traditional sense, and their role, as well as the role assigned to theoretical contemplation as understood by Aristotle is an extremely limited one. Indeed, we shall say that theoretical contemplation and knowledge have a merely functional role to play in helping the subject to attain practical knowledge.

- CHAPTER ONE -

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND ITS OTHERS,
TECHNÉ AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

“I am inclined think Socrates all the wiser for having given up all concerns of this sort and for saying that research into natural philosophy seeks things either greater than human understanding can follow or things that have nothing at all to do with human existence.”

- Cicero, *Rep.* I.15.

Almost as soon as Greek philosophy is born, two related questions need answering. First, it becomes incumbent upon human beings to speculate about the means by which they are permitted to gain enough control over nature to pursue their own ends in an environment generally hostile to their endeavors. How, in other words, is it that human beings eventually wrest the Promethean fire from the gods? The second question concerns not so much the way that human beings are enabled to attain their own ends, but the conditions under which they may be said to attain those ends *virtuously* or *well*. If we look at the history of philosophy, we see that wherever the first of these two questions is posed, the second is sure to follow. Indeed, it was at the moment that the ancients had said most about the technical crafts and sciences, and at the precise moment that these crafts were most venerated, that Socrates posed the question whether the technical know-how possessed by skilled craftsmen sufficed to make them virtuous. In effect, his question served to point out a possible distinction that could be made between simply succeeding at a task and performing it in an admirable or virtuous way.

The question Socrates posed was whether virtue amounted to no more than some kind of technical proficiency or whether it, in fact, required something more than that. In a sense, this became the philosophical question *par excellence*, for in posing it, Socrates posed the question of whether human beings needed *only* to know what was sufficient to gain ascendancy over nature, or whether it was requisite for them to also acquire some further knowledge of things lying beyond the natural world—to gain, in other words, knowledge of precisely those kinds of things bound forever to escape the notice of even the most perceptive tradesmen. For the most part, philosophers have only ever answered Socrates’ question in the affirmative, and asserted that becoming ethical or virtuous requires a specialist’s knowledge of things to which most skilled laborers are totally blind.

In what follows, I would like to show that Stoic thought may represent one of the few currents of thought, ancient or modern, to resist this general philosophical trend. For the Stoics seem to have made explicit their intention to undermine some of their predecessors’ assumptions about the knowledge required for virtue. They did so, however, even while

attempting to answer Socrates' question by making an explicit distinction between the truly virtuous and those merely possessing technical skill.

What cannot be underestimated is the reversal effected in Greek society when *technê* is set off and distinguished from a form of knowledge possessed only by the virtuous. Neither can the speed with which this reversal takes place in Plato's day. The technical arts seem no sooner to have developed, bringing with them a new society in which metallurgy, pottery, ship-building, and architecture became central to life, than the importance of *technê*, 'technical proficiency, skill or know-how,' to the living of a virtuous life was downplayed. In *Prometheus Bound*, a work concerned with the subject of *technê*, Aeschylus neither acknowledges the existence of a non-technical form of knowledge, nor distinguishes between individual *technai*.¹ The mathematician, the horse-trainer, and the potter all have *technai*; none of them possesses a knowledge that is superior to the rest. There is no notion of what distinguishes *technê* from any other form of knowledge. "There is no clear idea of what defines the realm of technology as such."² Yet, by the time Plato reflects upon the same Promethean myth in the *Protagoras*, *technê* is set in opposition to a much "truer" kind of knowledge possessed only by the virtuous and wise.

In order to understand the increasingly ambivalent attitude of the Greeks to their own technical practices, one must understand that they found themselves, for the first time, surrounded by skilled tradesman for whom specialization was not the exception but the rule. By the time of Plato, technology had advanced to the point at which the division of labor had developed to a significant degree.³ As a result, the tradesmen began to reflect upon their own arts, and explain their societal role. Reflection of this sort was especially common among the sophists, who reaped the undeserved rewards of a skill whose real moral and social value was the subject of boisterous debate. The sophists had to occupy themselves with the question of what it was about the skill they possessed that made them worthy of all the advantages that could be derived from the practice of their art. Proving they were worthy of these rewards was an uphill battle because, in the eyes of society at large, their *technê* had made them wealthier than others, but certainly not more virtuous or wise.

It is important to recall that, although Plato is the first to offer a passionate case for the disassociation of *technê* from virtue, attributed only to those with a more profound kind of knowledge than mere technical skill, the craftsman's trade had likely already become an object of contempt. The reason is not far to seek, for the individual trades had come to supplant the mode of life depicted by Hesiod sometime between 750 and 650 B.C.E., the agricultural life. While the farmer, to be sure, possessed a kind of knowledge, his was of a different kind entirely than that attained by the specialized practitioners of the trades, and it was considered to have been a kind of knowledge more closely associated with virtue because its possessors always had qualities that the craftsman was sure to lack.

The first of these virtuous qualities was a kind of attunement to nature that manifested itself in the farmer's intimate familiarity and acquaintance with the natural world. For if the farmer possessed any knowledge at all it was of the natural cycles of growth and decay with which he tried to harmonize his activities. It was never forgotten that the farmer required the

¹ Vernant, "Prometheus and the Technological Function," in *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 242.

² *Ibid.*, 242

³ *Ibid.*, 242.

cooperation of nature; his task would never be accomplished if divine forces did not help along his endeavors. The very fruit that he plucked from orchard trees had to be considered a gift from nature, and such gifts were not given to those who did not receptively cooperate with nature. They were decidedly *not* given to those who tried too hard to willfully impose themselves upon nature. We can say with Vernant, then, that “when Hesiod’s farmer contributes through hard work to the growing of the wheat, he does not feel that he is applying a cultivation technique to the soil or that he is practicing a trade.”⁴ He does feel that he submits himself to the laws of nature so that his actions accord so closely with the divine ordering of the world as to be almost pious. Vernant even goes so far as to argue that the daily routine of the farmer was understood as a kind of daily religious ritual.⁵ This is why the skill of the farmer cannot help but be considered that of a virtuous man. If his trees bear fruit it is precisely because he is being rewarded for heeding and cooperating with the natural order of things. For only the man who carefully observes natural cycles of growth and decay, plans his activities accordingly, and then reaps the benefits of this labor, is one who can be regarded as beloved of the gods.

The fact that this knowledge was still not exactly of a specialized kind only made it seem more specific to virtuous men. The fact that it could not be easily passed down, as the skilled trades were, from mentor to apprentice, meant that it could be acquired only by those who were patient observers of nature. The farmer, indeed, had knowledge of nature’s secrets, but these secrets were surface apparent and were readily disclosed to anyone who took the time to look.⁶ This is a constant theme echoed throughout the literature of the period. Xenophon makes repeated reference to the fact that no special instruction is needed to become a farmer.⁷ The land, he says, “has no special tricks, but simply reveals what she is capable of doing and what she is not.” So the farmer’s knowledge was knowledge that anyone could gain by simply observing and taking note of natural cycles, and letting nature reveal itself.

Another quality the farmer possessed that the gods were sure to reward was staying power. For Hesiod, it was through the endurance of daily labor that one became dear to the immortals.⁸ When skilled labor finally arrived on the scene, it immediately stood out as a form of activity requiring very little *ponos*, that is, ‘effort or strain.’ Skilled laborers were therefore to be regarded with suspicion, because their art seemed a magic one, capable of producing its products without the laborer’s needing to expend much energy.

In short, the Greeks had reason enough to mistrust the supposed intelligence and virtue of local craftsmen, who were, to all appearances, men covetous of trade secrets that allowed them to live a life absent of piety and hard work. A simmering ambivalence about the social role of *techné* reached its boiling point when Plato’s Socrates took two seemingly contradictory stances on the issue. He seemed to expect that, if a virtuous person had anything like what we might call knowledge, this knowledge would be similar enough to technical know-how that analogies could be drawn between the two, and the former measured by the same standards as the latter; before the “knowledge of the forms” was invented, there was no other kind of knowledge with which to compare the “intelligence” of the virtuous man. At the same time,

⁴ Ibid., 277.

⁵ Ibid., 278.

⁶ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 17.3.

⁷ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 15.10, 18.10, 15.4, 6.9.

⁸ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ll.822-828.

Plato's Socrates is the first to repeatedly emphasize those aspects of *technai* that make their practitioners appear anything but virtuous, and from that point on, a strict distinction must be made between those who possess *technê* of a common and ordinary sort, and those whose virtue is secured through their possession of a decidedly different kind of wisdom. No one captures better than Vernant to what degree, in Plato, *technê* becomes the simultaneous object of adulation and ridicule:

It is remarkable, however, that the importance that Plato attached to technology did not affect his conception of man, or rather, it only affected it, so to speak, negatively. None of the psychological aspects of technology appears to him valuable in human terms: neither the concentration demanded by work as a special type of human effort, nor technical artifice as a form of intelligent inventiveness, nor technological thought in its formative role in human reasoning. On the contrary, Plato takes pains to separate and contrast technical intelligence and intelligence proper, the craftsman and his idea of man, just as, in his city, he separates and contrasts technology and the two other functions.⁹

One very popular interpretation, shared by commentators as diverse as Aristotle¹⁰ and Nussbaum, holds that Socrates himself expects to find virtue comparable to *technê* in essential respects, and that it is for this reason that he so frequently exhorts his interlocutors to compare their virtues to *technai*,¹¹ but this interpretation is clearly not held by Sean Kirkland, who looks upon the entire Platonic corpus as an attempt to throw light on the ways in which virtue contrasts with *technê*. To him, the whole Platonic corpus reads like a long diatribe against those who would try to conflate virtue and *technê*, either by asserting that their *technai* make them virtuous, or by counting their virtues among the *technai* in which they have proficiency. Socrates' interlocutors make these claims again and again, because they are unwittingly lured into drawing analogies between their virtues and their *technai*. Some end up suggesting that their virtues are *technai* with their own particular fields of expertise, and some merely suggest that their virtues can be relied upon as much as *technai* to produce concrete results.¹²

⁹ Vernant, "Prometheus and the Technological Function," 242-243.

¹⁰ *Nic. Eth.* 1116b5-7, 1144b18-22, *Eud. Eth.* 1216b3-11, and *Mag. Mor.* 1182a15-24, 1190b28-32.

¹¹ Sean Kirkland, *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato's Early Dialogues* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), Chapter Four, 59-92. Kirkland casts this into doubt, writing as follows: "Rather, although the Socratic philosophical project does on the surface require a *technê*-like grasp of the being virtue, it should be seen to *aim at* and even *accomplish* an altogether different relation. In the *Apology*, when Socrates introduces the *technê*-model of human virtue, in addition to denying that he himself possesses any such knowledge, he associates this *technê* with the sophists and characterizes it as out of accord with essential human insufficiency, that is, as *hubristic*. Furthermore, he presents his own lifelong philosophical project there as *purely* elenctic, as simply refuting his interlocutors in their false pretense to knowledge with respect to human virtue. This activity aims at and results in the only wisdom he is willing to claim for himself and others, the properly human wisdom that is *nothing other than* the acknowledging of *not* having a *technê*-like grasp of virtue" (83). Indeed, each of Socrates encounters with his interlocutors furnishes a new opportunity to expose their presumption to possess a technical knowledge of virtue (*Protag.* 318a-319a, *Gorg.* 461b, *Euthd.* 273d-274a, *Hip. Maj.* 286d-e, 296d, *Charm.* 174b-e, *Republic* I.348d-349a).

¹² An example of these first two suggestions can be found in the *Charmides*, where Critias avers that Charmides' temperance is the like a knowledge with its own field of expertise, just as medicine has, as its field of expertise, health. What field of objects does this *technê* have mastery of? What things does it have knowledge of? These are the questions that are also posed to Ion and Gorgias (*Gorgias* 449d; *Ion.* 538b). Socrates also asserts, in the *Charmides*, that temperance can be relied upon to produce a beneficial result, just as medicine can be relied upon to produce health (*Charm.* 165c-d).

TECHNICAL SKILL AND VIRTUE IN PLATO

It seems right to view each Platonic dialogue as a new installment in the unfolding drama that surrounds Socrates' mission to humble, if not humiliate, all those who dare confuse *technê* with virtue, as well as those who confuse virtue with *technê*. Still, it is not clear whether Plato's Socrates means to question the whole idea that virtuous people have knowledge, or just the notion that their decidedly different kind of knowledge favorably compares with the knowledge upon which technicians habitually draw. For our purposes, however, it is important only to point out that Socrates quite definitely rejects, *technê*—the form of knowledge upon which we most rely to know and master nature—as a model for ethical knowledge, and that he does this because he sees no necessary connection between our mastery of the physical world and our knowledge and mastery of the things with which we must become acquainted if we are to become virtuous.

If a man were a doctor, we “would ask if he also knew to whom he should apply such treatments, when, and to what extent... The doctor must know not only how to raise or lower a patient's temperature, or to make him vomit or excrete, but also ‘to whom he is to do each of these things, and when, and to what extent’” (*Phaedrus* 268a, c). We would not accept that man could mix a drink “without asking him about its preparation or serving; in what way, to whom, with what accompaniment, in what condition, and to people in which condition it is served” (*Laws* 638d3). At times Socrates seems to seriously believe that intrinsic to an art itself is the knowledge of how to appropriately apply it; more often, he seems to throw this into doubt. One could conclude that artisans are at a disadvantage in this respect because they do not know the further ends to which the ends they seek are a means, and indeed Plato seems to have ultimately suggested that what artisans lack but a virtuous person possesses is an idea of the Good toward which they strive. Thanks to the *Republic*, that is the lesson generations have learned from Plato's Socrates.

But perhaps the message that Socrates the man bequeathed to the generations immediately succeeding him was rather the lesson Bénatouil¹³ finds the Stoic learned, that the arts did not apply unconditionally because they were not unconditionally good. Socrates showed that an art applied to the circumstances under which its end could be attained; it could always attain that end, so long as it worked within the bounds of its own particular sphere of expertise. But it could not itself teach the artisan to apply the art discerningly within its own domain. What artisans lack is an understanding of context, the circumstances under which the arts may be employed, and within those circumstances, specifically when and to what they should be applied, and to what extent. The lesson drawn, in other words, (unless, in fact, there was an art *totam pertinens vitam*, ‘applying to the whole of life,’ an art of life itself) was that *no* art was infinitely applicable and always well applied to its object. Nonetheless, the lesson that

In general, wherever virtue is described in technical terms, the question of the concrete products in which it results figures prominently. The minute Euthyphro describes piety as “service to the gods,” Socrates compares it to medicine, generalship, horse-rearing, and house-building before finally asking: “Tell me then, my good sir, to the achievement of what aim does service to the gods tend?” (*Euthyp.* 13e). In the first book of the *Republic* the same scenario plays out to great effect when Socrates asks Polemarchus, “Now, what does the craft called justice give, and to whom and what does it give it?” (*Rep.* 332c).

¹³ Bénatouil cites the *Gorgias* among other examples. Gorgias uses a “universally applicable” art to convince anyone of anything at any time. He may not, however, make proper or just use (*dikaiôs chresthai*) of this ability of his under all circumstances (*Gorg.* 456a-457c). Bénatouil, *Faire usage*, 91-96.

succeeding generations, and we ourselves, have drawn is that, since no such art exists, art *cannot* be a model for virtue. What virtue demands—the ability to act appropriately *under all circumstances*—can only be supplied by a knowledge that is precisely *not* an art.

The Republic is just the Platonic work in which the tendency to distinguish between technical proficiency and virtue is most apparent. There, the knowledge possessed by poets and other craftsmen is sharply distinguished from the *epistémé* of the logician who is able to arrive by means of a *logos*, or an ‘argument’ or ‘account,’ at knowledge of the Good (*Rep.* 534b). After this distinction is made, the history of philosophy will never be the same. From this point on, the knowledge that we gain in the course of our interaction with the sensible, natural world must be distinguished from the knowledge we gain through philosophical argument—the knowledge upon which virtue depends.

What Socrates is seen to do is to draw a contrast between virtue and our most habitual and dependable means of skillfully interacting with nature, even with which we still fall far short of virtue. But what of the intimate knowledge of nature possessed, not by technicians, but by natural scientists? This, once again, is a kind of knowledge that is completely without bearing on our ability to perform virtuously. In fact, scientific knowledge of nature has even less to do with virtue than technical skill, and what’s more, the knowledge of nature gained by natural philosophers more often proves a hindrance than a help to them in their quest for virtue. This may even be taken to be the general thrust of Socrates’ “second sailing” in the *Phaedo*.

Usually, this conversion story of Socrates’ is simply taken to narrate the events that led him to cease inquiring into physical causes and begin inquiring into others. Socrates is taken to be saying that we must not think of things as caused simply, or even primarily, by the kind of sensible things that are open to our observation, but by metaphysical entities—the forms. These, he says, should be treated as the real causes of sensible phenomena, and the proper objects of serious philosophical study.

While this interpretation is undoubtedly correct, it also sometimes goes unnoticed that, while Socrates seems generally concerned to point out the “truest” causes of all things, he is especially concerned to point out the “true causes” of virtuous action. What he finds *truly* intolerable about the approach of Anaxagoras and all such *phusikoi*, or ‘natural philosophers,’ is that they are forced to cite bones, sinews, flesh, air, ether, and other such things as the causes of even those virtuous actions that Socrates considers himself to have performed. Socrates objects: “To call these things causes is too strange (*atopos*)” (*Phaed.* 99a). His objection is really the following: Virtuous actions are the most obvious examples of things that are least capable of being accounted for with reference to natural objects. It seems impossible to account for them except by tracing them back to their origins in the mind of the actor, as Anaxagoras originally perceived. Thusly, if virtuous actions are to be traced to their origins at all, then these origins must be found in the non-material soul’s ability to access a non-material reality. What Socrates consistently fails to do in this dialogue, however, is prove the existence of a soul with the ability to access such a reality.

All his arguments for the existence of a non-material, non-sensuous soul are unconvincing, but it is at this juncture in the dialogue that the soul undoubtedly begins to look like a real possibility to even the most incredulous of his interlocutors. It does so now, and only now, because Socrates’ audience is suddenly helped to see that our souls would be our sole means of access to the form of the Good, thus, our sole means of accounting for virtue. Socrates asks his audience members to indulge him, and his request is the following: “I assume the existence of the Beautiful, of itself by itself, and a Good, and a Great, and all the rest. If you

grant me these, and grant me this, then I hope to show you the cause [of my virtue] as a result, and to find the soul to be immortal” (*Phaed.* 100b). His request is thus that his audience members take for granted the existence of the Good, so that he may then proceed to beg them to accept the soul as the condition for the possibility of our virtuous communion with the Good.

Of course, there is another sense in which the request that Socrates makes of his audience is that they, instead of looking to the sensible world in search of the origins of virtue, look to another, the existence of which he now implores them to avow.¹⁴ What he begs of them is that they give up natural science in order to account for virtue, for which he says an explanation can only be found in the non-sensible causes to which natural philosophers, in their attention to sensible, material causes, remain permanently “blind.”

The indulgence he asks of his audience, then, is that they give up natural philosophy in favor of ethics.¹⁵ It is important to realize, of course, that neither we nor Socrates’ audience members are permitted to choose both natural philosophy and ethics. The genius of Socrates’ account is that he forces anyone who hears his speech to choose between the two. This is not to say that one cannot concern one’s self with virtue while searching for the origins of things in the natural world; it is to say, however, that one cannot pretend to care about virtue as long as one is still tempted to find the “truest causes” of things in the material realm. To do this is to forget that virtue cannot be accounted for by these means, and without recourse to a super-natural realm. Thus, a natural philosopher who is serious about virtue will not be able to preoccupy himself with the sensible realm for long before he is lured by the promise of virtue to accept the existence of a non-material reality—the only one from which virtue may be said to spring.

Socrates gives up natural philosophy to keep from being “blinded” by the things that natural philosophers allow to occupy their exclusive attention. This is not just the catalyst of his turn to ethics; it is its precondition, since he cannot do ethical philosophy so long as he retains the tendencies of a natural philosopher. The upshot of all this is very simple: ethics requires us to forsake physics. For Socrates, a choice is always forced between the two, so that those who wish to reflect upon the conditions under which human beings conduct themselves virtuously must set aside their scientific inquiries into nature, for as long as they study ethics, they must also set aside the methods of natural philosophers.

Socrates is permitted to give ethics independent standing apart from physics. I mean by this that he is permitted to ground his ethics on its own solid footing, so that a person can become ethical without bothering about nature, and without gaining knowledge of it. He is nevertheless forced to ground his ethics on something that we might instead be tempted to call ‘metaphysics,’ the knowledge of which he believes crucial to ethical living. In a certain sense, his effort to sever and disentangle virtue from the natural world that once teemed with deities, and from which virtue had previously been inseparable, succeeds only by reconnecting ethics to

¹⁴ “Cicero does not say that Socrates called philosophy down from heaven [or the divine] to earth, for the earth the mother surely of all earthly things and perhaps the oldest and therefore the highest goddess, is itself-superhuman...Cicero speaks not of ‘heaven’ but of ‘nature’: the higher than human things from whose study Socrates turned to the study of human things, is ‘the whole nature,’ ‘the *kosmos*,’ ‘the nature of all things.’” Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1964), 13.

¹⁵ For the traditional view that Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens to human affairs see: *Tusc.* V.101 *Brutus* 31; *Memorabilia* I. 1.11, 1.15, *Oeconomicus* 7.16, 7.29, *Met.* 987b1, *Nic. Eth.* 1094b7, 14-17; 1141a20, b7; 1143b21; 1177b31.

something else—a super-sensible world. Thus, Socrates succeeds at the task of severing the connection between virtue and the natural world at the cost of replacing the natural with the supernatural, the physical with the metaphysical. As a result, virtue has nothing to do with knowing or participating in nature, but everything to do with knowing and participating in something *beyond* nature.

It could be plausibly argued that Socrates does not totally divorce ethics from physics, and that his attempt to ground ethics in metaphysics is, in fact, an attempt to appraise some human activities as virtuous when they display a knowledge of, a participation in, or a longing for, those things that give the *kosmos* its coherence and structure. In fact, this is exactly what he says the forms are—the source of order in the natural world. In the *Phaedo*, for example, he says that they are what give his universe the order and coherence he finds lacking in the universes portrayed by his predecessors:

...one man surrounds the world with a vortex to make the heavens keep it in place, another makes the air support it like a wide lid. As for their capacity for being now placed in the way in which it is possible for them to be best placed (*tên de tou hōs oion te beltista auta tethēnai dunamin outō nun keisthai*), this they do not look for, nor do they believe it to have any divine force, but they believe they will sometime discover a stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more, and that what is good and binding really binds and holds together—this they do not believe (*kai hōs alēthōs to agathon kai deon oudein kai sunekin ouden oiontai*). I would gladly become the disciple of any man who taught the workings of that kind of cause (*Phaed.* 99c1-5).¹⁶

In other words, natural philosophers always fail at the one task they set themselves—that of pointing to the source of order in the world.¹⁷ Each one tries to offer physical explanations for order, but this task can only be accomplished by the philosopher who withdraws enough from sensuous appearances to keep from being “blinded” by them, and who is allowed to see the true sources of order in the world. This approach is the best way to avoid the error that natural philosophers make when they champion an “Atlas” that is both less divine and less capable of explaining order—the best approach by which the sources of unity in the world may be explained, and their divinity preserved.

Viewed from his own perspective, Socrates’ ethical philosophy is one that revolves around nature. Nevertheless, his ethical philosophy declares that the *sole and exclusive* aspect of nature, the consideration of which we may incorporate into ethical life is found in eternal forms; it thus declares that there is *no other* aspect of the natural world with which we already have direct experience, and which we already perceive immediately through our senses, that should figure as prominently in ethical considerations.

Plato rejects nature only as long as it is associated with mechanistic causality, but only until in his later works he can, “redefine and redeem nature” in the words of Gretchen

¹⁶ Translation mine.

¹⁷ See also the *Sophist*: “Some of them are dragging down all things from heaven and from the unseen to earth, and they literally grasp in their hands rocks and oaks; of these they lay hold, and obstinately maintain, that the things only which can be touched or handled have being or essence, because they define being and body as one, and if any one else says that what is not a body exists they altogether despise him, and will hear of nothing but body” (246a5).

Reydams-Schils.¹⁸ Re-imagined in the *Timaeus*, nature is enlivened by the World Soul, which directs everything in it toward the better. Once his conception of nature allows for purposiveness and design, a truer natural science emerges to take the place of that allowing only for mechanism. Plato recommends that men study the motions of the universe. “These,” he says, “each man should follow, and correct the courses of the head which were corrupted at our birth, and by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, should assimilate the thinking being to the thought, renewing his original nature, and having assimilated them should attain to that perfect life which the gods have set before mankind (*Tim.* 90c)

Thus, the Socrates we have here depicted as bypassing entirely a relationship with nature in favor to a direct conduit to the divine is not the only Socrates to be found in ancient Greek philosophical literature. If afterwards the task that fell to the Stoics was to establish an ethical relationship to the world that was nonetheless a relationship to nature, then they could have found inspiration, if not in Xenophon’s Socrates,¹⁹ then certainly in Plato’s.²⁰ Once nature in Plato begins to exhibit the qualities of craftsmanship and art, the arts themselves gain in stature. The Stoics could once again claim that nature was a craftsman, and this would have had the result that if, a model for human intelligence could be found in divine intelligence, then human and divine intelligence were alike in precisely their technical aspect.²¹

THE KNOWLEDGE OF VIRTUE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF NATURE

In what follows, I should like to show that with Aristotle the understanding virtuous men are supposed to have is thrown into ever sharper relief with the understanding of nature, that upon which we commonly draw both in our everyday life and in the workshop. The knowledge possessed by virtuous men grows ever further removed from the knowledge upon which “the many” draw in their daily lives. Indeed, I will not hesitate to point out that this general trend, which is slowly set underway in the Platonic dialogues, reaches its sudden and dramatic culmination with Aristotle, for whom the understanding possessed by the virtuous is not just to be starkly contrasted with that possessed by craftsmen; it is also to be contrasted with the

¹⁸ Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato’s Timaeus* (Turnout: Brepols Publishers, 1999), 73.

¹⁹ The Socrates who appears in Xenophon is more interested in matters of physics and theology, as well as their relationship to human affairs, and it could have been to him that the Stoic looked for inspiration. And indeed, Sextus Empiricus mentions that Zeno took his theological starting point from Xenophon (*Adv. Math.* 9, 101). As Long writes upon making this discovery, “We now have a source, independent of Plato which credits Socrates with doctrines fundamental to Stoicism—thoroughgoing teleology, divine providence, the god’s special concern for man, and cosmic underpinning for law and society. But we have still more. Reflection on Socrates remarks here about the structure of the senses, and their capacity, in concern with reason, to enable human life to proceed according to a divinely ordered plan, could have served Zeno well. Not only could it have helped him to shape his conception of a life in agreement with nature; it could also have stimulated his efforts to find an account of sense-perception and knowledge which might be given Socratic endorsement.” Anthony Long, “Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy,” “Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy.” *Classical Quarterly* 38 (1988): 150-177, 162.

²⁰ Reydams, Schils, *Demiurge and Providence*, 85.

²¹ But in what precise sense *logos* in nature and human *logos* were the mirror image of each other for the Stoics cannot be gathered from Plato, Long’s attempts notwithstanding. In Chapter Three and Five, we will turn rather to Aristotle. “Zeno’s Epistemology and Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” in *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 223.

understanding possessed by those who “know nature” in the many other ways Aristotle thinks possible.

What I am to chronicle here is the long history of virtue’s disassociation from our most habitual and immediate means of access to nature. Understood one way, the history I am narrating is the history of the long attempt to purge virtue of its connection to our understanding of nature. But I will in the course of this history address several other metaphysical dualisms, and that is because these follow in the wake of that distinction that is first drawn by Socrates when he distinguishes between the virtuous man’s knowledge and the craftsman’s knowledge. Among these are the distinctions that are subsequently drawn between theory and praxis, knowing and doing, mind and body—all distinctions the Stoics want to efface.

ETHICS REGAINED AT THE COST OF ITS SEVERANCE FROM PHYSICS

For Aristotle, one only gains ethical understanding of one’s situation by turning to particulars and away from universals. This, of course, brings one a kind of “practical understanding” of one’s circumstances, but one that is gained at a cost, since this turn away from universals also requires one to turn away from the natural world to which universals serve as one’s sole means of access.

To fully understand just how much this turn to ethics, originally intended to be a turn from metaphysics, devolves into a turn from nature one must understand the enduring place that universals continue to occupy in Aristotle’s philosophy. Whether we have technical, scientific, or theoretical knowledge, for Aristotle, the specific thing of which we have knowledge is always a universal.²² But it is impossible to gain knowledge of universals except through a process we probably mistakenly call ‘induction,’ but which Aristotle himself calls *epagōgē* (*A. Po.* 81a38).

We usually think that Aristotle, in speaking of *epagōgē*, speaks of the inductive procedure we perform when we move from observing particulars to arriving at knowledge of universals. As long as this is our understanding of what Aristotle means by *epagōgē*, we will be inclined to gravitate toward the hypothesis that he so overwhelmingly understands all knowledge as requiring the knowledge of universals (and the knowledge of universals as itself requiring the gleanings of universals from particulars) that we will become suspicious of what will appear to be, from our perspective, an all too belated attempt, on Aristotle’s part, to describe another way of coming to know the world.

According to one hypothesis, which finds its most outspoken advocate in the person of Joseph Dunne, Aristotle starts with such an impoverished account of knowledge, in which knowledge is always knowledge of universals, that he has to invent *phronēsis*, an entirely unprecedented form of knowledge that can deal with particulars, to supplement his otherwise insufficient account of human knowing.²³ Supporters of this hypothesis see *phronēsis* as little more than an *auxiliary*, add-on faculty of the mind Aristotle has to invent in order to supplement all the ways in which he thinks we typically gain knowledge through universals.

²² *Epistēmē* is always said to be of *ta katholou*, or of ‘things according to the whole’ (*Nic. Eth.* 1140b31).

²³ *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgments and the Lure of Technique* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 240.

We can agree with Dunne, even though we may also need to question what Aristotle means by *epagōgē*. It may be that he has in mind the more complicated way in which, as the etymology of the word suggests, particulars “lead” us to what they share in common with other particulars. What we are talking about need not be understood as the procedure by which human beings abstract or extract the universal essence of things from their particular instantiations; still, we would have to agree that *epagōgē* makes at least as much use of universals as to make it an unsuitable source of virtuous action, for the very fact that Aristotle seems to distinguish those forms of knowledge which rely upon *epagōgē* from *phronēsis* shows that they draw upon universals in a way that *phronēsis* does not.

A question for later will, however, be whether *phronēsis*’ correct functioning does not actually depend upon *epagōgē*. Since the man of practical wisdom is possessed of a kind of knowledge, and since all knowledge is of universals, his knowledge will undoubtedly have to derive from his familiarity with things that hold, not just in particular circumstances, but universally. However, for the time being, we must suppose that it was not without reason that Aristotle singled out for special attention a single power possessed by human beings for deliberative action, a power capable of being exercised independently of, and without reliance upon, such powers of mind as *epistēmē*, *technē*, and *sophia* (*Met.* 982a5). We must trust that Aristotle did this with the aim of distinguishing practical knowledge from all forms of knowledge arrived at by the process of induction (*Nic. Eth.* 1142a230).²⁴

Recall that while Plato may have successfully resisted the urge to compare the craftsman and the sage, he still retained the idea that both drew upon a set of procedures applicable in many varying contexts—that is to say, he retained the idea that both drew their power from their knowledge of rules with universal applicability. What the craftsman always had knowledge of was the *eidos*, literally, the ‘look’ or ‘visible aspect’ of his final product. For Plato, the virtuous man had knowledge of an *eidos*, though this *eidos* was not so much an unrealized design given concrete instantiation through work, as an ideal to emulate. Thus, an *eidos* still figured in his ethical activities, though not so much as an end *to be attained through* action as an ideal *to be imitated in* action. Still, this *eidos* was something that could be drawn upon under many varying circumstances; in that sense, it recommended the same course of action under many different sets of circumstances.

So while Plato may have resisted the urge to draw parallels between technical know-how and virtue, he still believed that the cobbler’s and the carpenter’s successes hinged upon their knowledge of something with universal applicability; and he said, in essence, that the same held true of the virtuous man. While Aristotle must have appreciated Plato’s efforts to set virtue apart from technical know-how, he must also have perceived that Plato had still, despite his best efforts, retained a fundamental point of commonality between the two.

Now, Aristotle’s position is a difficult one. He may choose to retain virtue’s association with the knowledge of the forms, and with it, its association with technical know-how—or else, he can divest virtue of its association with the knowledge of the forms, but at the cost of divesting it of its association with the technical ways in which we are most habitually said to “understand” nature.

Let us first consider what Aristotle stands to gain from disassociating virtue from the knowledge of the forms. Coming in Plato’s wake, Aristotle would have clearly seen the disadvantages of the Platonic approach, and he would have become especially cognizant of the difficulties Plato’s intellectualism posed the aspiring sage. He would have perceived that it was

²⁴ *Phronēsis* is explicitly distinguished from the knowledge of universals in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at 1109b23, 1126b4, 1141b13, 1143a32, 1144a20, 1147a3, and in the *Metaphysics* at 981a15.

requisite for the man who wished, not merely to strive after virtue, but to actually *become* virtuous to first attain knowledge of the form of the Good. This precondition placed on virtue—this requirement that one *know* the good before attempting to *do* the good—as Aristotle clearly saw, placed extreme limitations on who could be virtuous. It rendered it all but impossible for anyone but advanced philosophers to become virtuous, since one had to know what all good things shared in common. In other words, one had to know the universal first; only then could one hope to know one’s way around the particulars of an individual ethical situation.

To even to put confidence in the Platonic approach to ethical life is to believe in such a thing as an immutable ‘good’ that can be found across varying contexts, always displaying the same essential characteristics. As Nussbaum points out, this approach has its allure, because if such a good could be defined, then we would have, in effect, a system of rules that would “prepare us before the fact for the demands of a new situation.” We could then proceed by “trying to get ourselves to see the new situation in terms of the system, as merely a case falling under its authority.”²⁵ The undeniable advantage of this approach would of course be that we would “never be taken by surprise.”²⁶ Of course, one can only ever proceed in this manner if one has already accepted that the particulars of a given situation are relevant only insofar as they represent instances of a universal. This is because, underlying the attempt to subsume all situations under a rule, is a latent assumption about particulars; this is that the only relevant particulars in a given situation that should matter to us are those that are members of a class, instantiations of an oft-repeated pattern. So in the first instance, the universal may not help us to isolate the most important parts of a given situation—the ones with which we should actually be most concerned. On the contrary, we have every reason to suppose that ethics concerns itself most with “things that do not fall under any *technê* or *paraggelia*,” that is, those particulars upon which we cannot bring to bear any ‘craft or rule of thumb’ (*Nic. Eth.* 1104a7).

What’s more, the knowledge of the Good may not find immediate application in everyday life. For as Aristotle points out, even if the Good did exist, knowing it would not tell us how to bring into being any of the particular things we call “good,” since these require a more specialized knowledge to which the knowledge of the universal contributes nothing. Taking a detour to virtue by pursuing the path to enlightenment may not further us along the path to our goal, and it may, in the end, prove “impractical.” It might, in the end, only distract us from what we set out to achieve.

In a second sense, the Platonic strategy may also prove “impractical” because it is not a feasible way of coping with the exigencies of life that call for an urgent response, and that cannot await further investigation. If the carpenter can quickly learn how to fashion a table without first gaining knowledge of the Good, then it is more than likely that we can attain any of our particular goals in life, and especially our highest goal in life—that of becoming a good human being—without having to bother ourselves about knowledge of the universal Good.²⁷

Socrates turns from physics to ethics, and narrows his purview in an effort to restrict his focus to the question “what is good?” For Aristotle, this question is still too broad, and Socrates has still not narrowed his purview nearly enough. Consequently, Aristotle bests Socrates at his own game by confining his focus, not to nature, nor even to “the good’ broadly conceived, but

²⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 230.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁷ These arguments and others can all be found in Book I, Ch. 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

to “the human good.” He asks not “what is nature?,” nor even “what is it that all good things have in common?,” but “what is the human good?” He thus limits the scope of ethics so that it becomes a field focused very narrowly on the answering of just this one question.

By arguing that we don’t have to know the universal good in order to pursue the human good, Aristotle is saved, not just the trouble of having to define the universal good, but the necessity of tracing ethics to a mental faculty capable of grasping such universals. By arguing, instead, that ethics requires of us nothing more than a power for sighting and pursuing the human good, Aristotle is able to endow us with the ability to act ethically by endowing us with a power of mind that does no more than simply direct us ever more unswervingly toward *to agathon prakton* or ‘the good deed’ to be done in a given situation (*Nic. Eth.* 1097a24).

The crucial thing for Aristotle is that we not understand *phronêsis*, this power we have for attaining our goals in life, as a power we have for making completely evident to ourselves that final end or *telos* toward which we daily strive. As Sean Kirkland argues, Aristotle would not endow us with a faculty for *eubolia* or ‘judgment about the best course of action,’ a faculty of mind powerful enough to, either on its own or in combination with another mental faculty, throw the light of reason upon our ultimate *telê*.²⁸ Rather, Aristotle assigns *phronêsis* a much more limited function, and allocates to it only the power to illuminate the surest and most direct *path* to ends which are already given for it in advance. Since it cannot operate without these ends, it is from them that it draws its power to illuminate the surest path to their attainment. But these ends are dictated simply by our desires and by our good habits; so as long as *phronêsis* has these to draw from, it can function perfectly well on its own; no higher-order cognitive abilities are requisite for its functioning.²⁹

If Aristotle believed that *phronêsis* could, whether on its own or with the assistance of an allied faculty of mind, illuminate the very end of the path along which we travel in life, then his ethics would take the same form as most modern philosophies. If he believed that we had this ability, then his ethics would recommend to us that we make good use of this faculty to *first* discover our ends in life, and *only then* start out after them, once confident of our knowledge of them. As Aristotle reminds us before rejecting the Platonic approach, the starting point from which even philosophers must begin is “what is known to us” (*Nic. Eth.* 1095b4). For Aristotle, this means beginning an inquiry into ethics by examining our habitual activities and the direction in which they presently tend, the same activities that appear, viewed from our present perspective, to promote certain ends. So even when we, as philosophers, undertake reflection upon life, we must start by observing those behaviors of ours with which we are on most intimate terms, and which present themselves to us most clearly for our observation. This is why Aristotle does not, as modern philosophers do, deflect attention from our present activities, nor aver that our present actions and the evaluation of them can only enter into ethical deliberation once we are sure of our ends, and finally in a position to view them from an objective and disinterested perspective, as either a furtherance or a hindrance to aims that are well-established as desirable ones. This is simply because we have no other choice for, as Kirkland explains, we can never see our futural aim in life with the clarity and exactitude with

²⁸ Sean Kirkland, “The Tragic Foundation of Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 30 (2009): 128-129.

²⁹ *Êthikê aretê* makes our aim right, while *phronêsis* illuminates the means to the end-in-view (114ab20; b30; 1144a6). The fact that *orexis* or ‘desire’ dictates our ends is evinced in the first sentences of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle gleans our ultimate aims in life from the examination of our desires (1094a1).

which we view objects at close range.³⁰ Attempting to find some means of discerning those ends with perfect clarity, even by positing the existence of a Platonic soul suited for the purpose, is to overstep the limitations placed on us by our own humanity. Our own situation in life is precisely such that we cannot understand what is “furthest from the senses” without great difficulty. Nothing is therefore gained by searching out a means for human beings to see the final end of the path along which they travel.

It is important to see that Aristotle here regains a sense of virtue disassociated from its Platonic connection to universals, and that he does this at a moment when philosophers find themselves at a crossroads, forced to decide whether they should try to cast their nets wide, and begin their inquiry into ethics with an inquiry into the cosmos, or whether they should adopt the comparatively modest aim of inquiring simply and uncomplicatedly into what makes human action praiseworthy. Aristotle presumably feels the force of this dilemma because he comes in the wake of philosophers, like Socrates, who see fit to deliberately turn away from natural science in order to concentrate solely on things of direct relevance to human conduct, and he is forced to decide between continuing in this direction or breaking with the Socratic tradition.

Aristotle elects to leave physics to one side and address ethics in isolation from the study of nature. Again, this strategy is not without its advantages, for it allows him to posit the existence of a separate faculty of mind that points us toward the human good and helps us along the path to its attainment. But, as I said, it must be admitted that something is both gained *and* lost by this approach. First, what is gained: Aristotle is able to regain an account of human excellence that makes it attainable for the person who does not have knowledge of the natural order of things. *One does not have to solve the mysteries of the universe, on Aristotle’s account, before one can set to the urgent matter of overseeing one’s practical affairs. For Aristotle, the care of the self need not wait pendant upon the achievements of physics.*

PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

Now we come to the disadvantage of Aristotle’s approach: Aristotle can insist that moral excellence is possible without the kind of knowledge traditionally credited with allowing us access to the reality of the natural world. He has assumed that the human good can be known and intuited without the knowledge or intuition of the universal good, or for that matter, the final good or *telos* of human life, but he has also taken for granted that virtue is possible without the kind of knowledge we believe to give us greatest access to nature’s secrets—that is, knowledge of eternal, universals, unseen causes, and the like. As a consequence, practical knowledge is divorced from any of the knowledge that allows us to comprehend and commune with the natural world. *In brief, ethical knowledge and life are deprived of their connection to the natural world.*

Perhaps the situation would not be so such if Aristotle had merely said that *phronēsis* could be counted on only to point us toward the human good, and left it the most superior of our faculties. Unfortunately, he does not rest content to say that *phronēsis* gives us the best access to the good that human beings can hope to find in this life. Instead, he posits a higher good beyond the one toward which *phronēsis* points us, nature’s good or end, and begins to speak of

³⁰ Kirkland argues “[o]ne might think that it is incumbent upon the ethical agent to rid the future of its indefinite character through rational calculation... [but] in properly utilizing the tools Aristotle describes, the ethical agent does not transcend the specific moment by accessing absolute and universal ethical principles” (Ibid., 134).

theôria as allowing us to perceive it. Now when our theoretical abilities are compared with our practical, Joseph Dunne says, *phronêsis* appears “much as a dog’s great sensitivity in smelling and sniffing might appear from the vantage point of *phronêsis* itself.”³¹ So long as the what *theôria* is capable of perceiving is given more elevated standing than than the good of *phronêsis*, the importance of the faculty itself increases in due measure. Despite its status as a *non*-practical faculty of mind, *theôria* becomes our sole way of communing with that which is both “highest and best,” and thus, that which has the power to make us not just good, but divine.

The fact is that Aristotle does not prevent himself from indulging an impulse to speculate about the nature of goodness in general; nor does he stop short of explaining in what the intrinsic goodness of nature resides. He cannot help but assign higher value to certain things in the universe, and to call some of them ‘better’ or ‘more noble’ than others. This impulse of his, however, leads him to elevate in stature eternal things at work behind nature, and along with them, the faculties of mind by means of which they are seen and beheld; and it also leads him to do this at the cost of distinguishing the faculty of mind that allows us to become “good” in the sense of “quasi-divine” from the faculty of mind that allows us to become “good human beings.”

Quite simply, it is because he accepts that there are things in the world more worthy of being known than the particulars of human existence, and that among these are the properties of mathematical entities, the motions of heavenly bodies, and the activity of a first mover. These things are more worthy of being known than the things that occupy the object-domain of *phronêsis* because they exhibit an order and a harmony present in the cosmos, but this fact alone is not enough to account for their being “more worthy of being known.” Nor is it enough to account for their high standing, as Aristotle does in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, by simply pointing out that “It is odd if one thinks that political excellence and practical wisdom are the best things, if the human being is not the best being in the universe” (1141a20).

It is important to see that Aristotle did not have to elevate the objects of *theôria* to the status of “the best things in the universe” (1141a20). They are awarded this status primarily because they are permanent and unchanging. Undoubtedly, the Greeks would have revered whatever they thought to be at the origin of order and harmony in the cosmos, but they might not have been persuaded that these things were “more worthy of being known” than *ta êthika* if Aristotle had not appealed to the old Greek reverence for permanence, and declared these things “worthy of being known” by virtue of their everlasting fixity. But Aristotle could expect his audience to take the equation of the eternal and the divine for granted.

However, certain assumptions Aristotle makes, which we might not even question today, appear not to have been taken for granted in the period following his death: (1) there is a higher end in nature distinguishable from that which human beings pursue through praxis, (2) since human beings cannot strive toward this end through their own praxis, they can only participate in it through contemplation. *Thus, Aristotle assumes, we participate in the order of the universe most fully through contemplation.* At the same time: (1) that which is most eternal in nature is that which is most characteristic of it, and (2) since the causes of natural phenomena are eternal, nature reveals itself most fully to the human intellect when it looks upon these causes. *Thus, Aristotle assumes, we grasp nature most fully by means of theoretic knowledge*

If these assumptions are questioned, however, then theoretic knowledge no longer retains priority over practical knowledge as the best means by which to (1) participate in the

³¹ Dunne, *Back to The Rough Ground*, 240.

natural order, or (2) to comprehend it. Practical knowledge would then assume preeminence and theoretical knowledge becomes a pleasant pastime that could not be defended on account of its intrinsic merit. To quote Chrysippus: “All who suppose that philosophers should follow the scholarly life seem to me to be initially mistaken in presuming that one should do this for the sake of some pastime or something else similar, and protract one’s whole life in this sort of way, which if clearly studied, means pleurably. We should not mistake their meaning since many say this openly, and a good number more obscurely.”³² Chrysippus may be responding directly to Aristotle and Theophrastus when he says the contemplative life can only be defended, on Aristotelian grounds, because of its intrinsic pleurableness (*Nic. Eth.* 1099a7; 1177a22). *This is no defense at all, as we shall see. Theoretic life must then justify itself insofar as it contributes to practical knowledge.*

The final wedge that Aristotle drives between theory and praxis is hammered into place when he asserts the total irrelevance of one activity to the other. Again, this is not accidental. In order to argue that *phronēsis* can operate independently of *theōria*, he *must* show the total irrelevance of *theōria* to the practical sphere, and this he does repeatedly, and with great fervor, particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he stresses the inutility of theory to praxis by asserting that it “is loved for its own sake; for nothing arises from it apart from *théorēsai*, while from practical activities we gain more or less apart from the action” (1177b4). Even those who excel at contemplation, such as Anaxagoras and Thales, acquire at best, only a knowledge of those things that while “remarkable, admirable, difficult and divine” remain ultimately “useless” (1141b6). It is in this same work that *theōria* is described as something that can only be practiced by those who have enough leisure to detach themselves from the practical sphere, to which their theorizing will never relate back (1139b20). Again, in the *Metaphysics*, *theōria* is described as something sought after, not because it has any practical import, but simply because “all men desire knowledge” and are inspired by *thaumazein* or ‘wonder’ (98b1220).

But if, as we have reason to believe is the case in Stoicism, theoretical knowledge becomes a useful accessory or support for practical knowledge, then the rigid distinction between the life of contemplation and the political life disappears. This would explain why the Stoics endorse a new kind of life, the *bios logikos*, which encompasses both the *bios theorētikos* and the *bios praktikos*.³³ But primarily, this distinction is closed because practical knowledge is not superseded by another, distinct form of knowledge which is better equipped to put us in communion with the natural world. *The Stoics, instead, remain perfectly content to insist that practical knowledge is itself the knowledge that puts us in harmony with the cosmos without positing the existence of distinctly different kinds of knowledge.*

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMAN VIRTUE AND NATURE REINSTATED

³² Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1033C, *SVF* 3702, *LS* 67X. Bénatouil argues that Aristotle himself must be the target of this critique. Bénatouil, “Le débat entre platonisme et stoïcisme sur la vie scholastique,” in *Stoic Platonism, Platonic Stoicism*, eds. Mauro Bonazzi and Christoph Helmig (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 1-22.

³³ *DL* 7.130.

Of course, it would be wholly inaccurate to cast Aristotle as the great dualist who bequeathed to us a rigid distinction between our faculty for virtue and ability to participate in and gain truthful insight into nature. The very introduction of theoretical contemplation seems to be intended as a solution to a problem it unfortunately worsens, that of bringing ethical life back into connection with nature. If it is true that Aristotle deprived ethical life of its connection to nature, it is also difficult not to see Aristotle as having tried to bridge the gulf between virtue and nature in equal measure.

Socrates, in an effort to show that menial craftsmen were outmatched in virtue by their philosophical rivals, began a search, which has in a certain way, continued unabated until the present day, for a certain power of mind that philosophers could be shown to possess but that craftsmen, artisans, and technicians of all kinds might be shown to possess in a no more than undeveloped form. Virtue belonged only to those who awakened a part of themselves capable of perceiving what the limited perceptive faculties of craftsmen, permanently trained on the appearing natural world, could not.

But when, one day, a special part of ourselves with its special power for gaining knowledge of those things of special relevance to ethical life was distinguished and set in opposition to the rest of the self, that was the same hour that a line was drawn down the center of the self dividing it in two. A certain “split in the soul,” as I shall henceforward call it, eventuated when these two parts of the soul were distinguished from each other on the basis of their ability to perceive different sorts of things, and when only one of the two was assigned the special ability to perceive those things pertinent to the attainment of virtue.

This “split in the soul” originally denotes nothing more than the fact that our capacity for virtuous action is distinguishable from our more workaday capacity for interacting with the appearing world. However, despite these seemingly innocuous beginnings, the distinction quickly becomes the basis for making a further one between a part capable of attaining true knowledge and a part capable only of everyday, minimally reflective action. *The distinction between true knowing and knowing in a merely practical, unreflective way is of interest to us because the Stoics refused to draw it.*

Before we can show just how this “split in the soul,” first opened by Platonic philosophy, was gradually closed by Aristotelian philosophy, and then slammed shut by Stoic philosophy, we must devote some thought to the ways in which Aristotle was already engaged in a similar attempt to heal the wound created when the human being’s rational part was taken and severed from another part of the self, whose capacity for thought was largely shaped by the praxis in which it was already engaged.

As we have seen, if Plato’s “virtuous self” is alive and responsive to an extraordinary reality from which it derives its virtue, it can only be contrasted with a part of the self that negotiates everyday aspects of reality, and which, since it is less attuned to supernatural realities, may be described as the “natural self.” By the “natural self,” I mean the part of the self that remains an extension of *physis* or ‘nature’ either (1) because it can be described as being governed by the same principles as natural things, which are always *appearing* things, or (2) because it is *responsive to* and allows itself to be *affected by* those appearing things.

Plato lived at a time when debate about materialist accounts of action raged. By the time Aristotle wrote *On the Movement of Animals*, Diogenes of Apollonia would have already claimed that air, which “steered and ruled” all things, composed the soul and could be held

responsible for thought.³⁴ Democritus, for his part, also claimed that the soul was composed of atoms that imparted their movement to other things.³⁵ Socrates realized that materialist accounts of this sort had to explain human movements with reference to certain material substances whose inherent properties were such as to produce change. He chose to restore intentionality to human actions by bisecting the soul in two so that virtuous action, which henceforward found its seat in the rational part of the soul, stood in opposition to action arising from the “natural” part of the soul. The fact that this part of the soul was one that animals possessed, and one that lay behind our animalistic impulses, meant that it had to be distinguished all the more from a rational, human part with the capacity to subdue it.

Aristotle’s ambition would be to assign human beings a power for virtue but not to accomplish this aim, as Plato’s Socrates had, by starkly contrasting it with the natural self. The difference between Aristotle and Plato, as we shall see, is that while, for Plato, the fount and seat of virtue is *distinguished from the technical self, and along with it, the natural self*, it is, for Aristotle, *more closely aligned with the natural, though still in some sense strictly distinguished from the technical*. Not until Chapter Five however will we see to what extent Aristotle continued to distinguish the virtuous from the technical self.

I will thus argue that Aristotle shares with Stoicism’s founders a powerful conviction that ethical questions cannot be answered if we, like Plato before us, take the ethical human being in isolation from his or her connections to the natural world, and emphasize only those aspects of human nature that seem to set it apart from nature. Plato describes virtuous human action as though it issued from a “self-moving, purely active, self-sufficient intellect, generator of valuable acts.”³⁶ But Plato has to admit that we are equally beholden to recognize human beings as an extension of the natural world, subject to the influence of things in the natural world. The lesson here—the lesson we learn in all the middle dialogues—is that the divine part of the self always has to be at least contrasted with another part of the self, a part of the self that we have to admit to finding moved by things from without, subject to the same laws of causality to which all of nature’s creatures are subject.

Nussbaum argues quite convincingly that Aristotle sets out to correct this problem in Plato. Stated most succinctly, the problem is that the human being as an ethical actor is treated in isolation from the human being as a part of nature. The task then is to give an account of human action that does not fly in the face of what we already believe about the connection human beings maintain to the world of which they are a part. We must “save appearances” by giving an account of human action as though it could be explained in the terms not just of ethics but also of natural philosophy.

Now we come to an important insight, which cannot be overemphasized because of the influence it must have exercised over the Stoic imagination: As nature instills within each of us a desire to “stretch out” and “take in” certain externals, this desire is to be trusted. The desire itself is a desire for the good, so we cannot entertain the idea that there might be a desire alternative to it, or that it might rouse us to the pursuit of anything but the good.

Already implied in Aristotle’s assertion that we deliberate about the means to an end, and not the end itself, is the idea that *orexis* guides our actions whether we like it or not. For we are no exception the rest of the animal kingdom in our subjection to natural law which inclines

³⁴ DK 64 B4 5.

³⁵ *De An.* 405a8-13, 406b15-22, 403b31-404a16.

³⁶ Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 164.

us to seek out certain ends, and which exerts a hold on us equal to that of an external motor force. Desire quite literally pushes us in a certain direction.

Several things follow from this as a consequence: First, we are relieved of responsibility for our own desire. What we desire is not up to us, so there is no sense in deliberating about it, for as Aristotle remarks, nobody deliberates about what is incapable of being otherwise (*Nic. Eth.* 1139b7). Second, reasoning is not to be held up as an alternative to desiring, nor is there to be any question of desiring's being suspended in favor of reasoning. We cannot but act on the basis of our desires, so the role of reason must be the supplementary one it plays as the discoverer of the means by which desires may be fulfilled.

Not only does what Aristotle says in Book III, Chapter 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggest that it is not possible to choose an end other than the one nature has set for us in advance, it also suggests that it is nonsensical to talk of any good apart from the one nature has assigned us. Since the good is definable as that for the sake of which we do all the things we do, the good is, almost by definition, that which lies at the end of a path down which nature leads us, and all other human beings. The good is defined right from the start as whatever we as human beings are naturally disposed to pursue. The good is then, for all intents and purposes, practically equivalent to 'the natural.' This explains why Aristotle says that it would never occur to us to treat someone as though they were responsible for their ultimate end-in-view; this end would not be an end for them at all if it were not one they already found themselves ineluctably compelled by nature to pursue.

Orexis is what makes our action like that of any other creature of nature, but we have yet to explain how we can be held responsible for our actions. If we inquire into the reasons for which we can be held accountable for our own action, we shall discover that a clue lies in the fact that nature sets the end that we ourselves take responsibility for pursuing more diligently through the employment and use of the best tool we have for accomplishing this task—reason. Aristotle makes this point in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he effortlessly draws a simple conclusion:

The end, being what we wish for (*ontos boulétou tou telos*), the means what we deliberate about and choose (*bouleutōn kai proairetōn tōn pros to telos*), actions concerning means must be according to choice and voluntary. Now the exercise of the virtues is concerned with means. Therefore virtue is in our power, and so too vice. (*Nic. Eth.* 1113b2)

The conclusion Aristotle has drawn is the following: our ultimate end is in a certain powerful sense already set for us. We are powerless to choose it, and it would seem that it might then be difficult to hold us accountable for the final end we pursue. When certain means appear to us as a way of promoting the good, it is them we choose, and it is on account of this choice that our actions take the form they do. This means, quite simply, that whatever results from our own *prohairesis* is almost by definition the result of our own deliberation, of our own choosing—that is to say, it is something for which we must shoulder responsibility. Of course, it could be objected that *prohairesis* itself is not within our control—that is to say, that the way we choose is predetermined or otherwise beyond our control. But Aristotle's only criterion for an action's being voluntary is that it originates from within the self. Since he believes that *prohairesis* is the efficient *archē* of human action (1139a33), and that it also lies within the self, he concludes that action issuing from *prohairesis* is traceable to the self. Why, for Aristotle, would this be enough for the action to qualify as voluntary? Simply put, "the acts whose moving principles are in us must themselves also be in our power and voluntary" (*Nic. Eth.* 1113b20). That is to say, as long

as the *archê* of our action lies in our rational faculties, then the *archê* of action lies within us. If *logos*—and more specifically, *prohairesis*—lies within our power, then so too do all the actions for which the virtuous and the vicious may be either commended or condemned.

All this gives us a good sense of how well Aristotle succeeds accounting for human action, and specifically, in portraying it as something explainable in terms of natural processes as well as something for which actors can be held in varying degrees of esteem. We, like all other natural beings, are moved by a motor force, and *orexis* is the name we give to that force which moves us no less than the rest of nature's creatures.

And yet, reason supervenes upon *orexis*, to guide it towards its correct objects, and to illuminate the route that leads most directly to them. In this sense *logos* has a transformative impulse on *orexis*, which is pointed more directly at certain objects because *logos* perceives them as the means to ends which it was already seeking.

Although it might be initially difficult to understand precisely how the Stoics could have, starting out from Aristotelian premises, arrived at the conclusion that a well-lived life should be one in harmony with nature, we can see presentiments of a philosophy of harmony in Aristotle. It is necessary only to realize that *phronêsis* is nothing other a kind of harmony, and that the very word *phronêsis* is itself a simple word used to denote the complex form of harmony that results when two particular things come into perfect alignment with each other—these being *logos* and the desires at least partially instilled by nature. What we seek is *aletheia homologôs exousa tê orexei tê orthê*, the harmony that results when 'truth holds harmoniously with the right desire' (*Nic. Eth.* 1139b30). It is the harmony of *logos* with a desire whose source lies in nature.

Even the very actions that we undertake are contingent upon our ability to bring the end, and the means must accord with each other into a practical syllogism. The reason that detects the means must follow, and remain consequent upon the desire which points the way to the end. Thus, it is as Nussbaum says that, "'The good' and 'the possible' must come together for movement to result." Here the good is dictated by desire, and the possible by reason.³⁷

Virtue is under all circumstances merely the result of a harmonious alignment of two things that are very often discordant. These two things may be given a thousand different names. To one interpreter, it will appear that Aristotle's concern is for the alignment of reason with desire, to another, a major premise with a minor premise, to another, an ends with a means. Those who are convinced by the genealogy we have traced will also be convinced to understand this 'harmony' as one between *logos* and *phusis*, mind and nature. Those readers will want to see this 'harmony' as one that results in virtue when the human knowledge find tis self intimately connected with nature, when *logos* aligns itself with desires and inclinations that nature first instills within us.

³⁷ Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 227.

- CHAPTER TWO -

THE DIVIDED SELF AND THE ARISTOTELIAN AND STOIC SEARCH FOR INNER HARMONY

“The *summum bonum* is the
harmony of the soul.”

- Seneca, *Vit. Beat.* VIII.6

In what follows, we shall explain how, for Cicero and Seneca, irrational impulses arise—that is, how it happens that we feel impelled to take a course of action other than that reason has determined best. But we will not seek to discover the theoretical basis upon which the Stoics built their argument against irrational impulses.

To take that approach would be to start from premises assumed “foundational” to Stoic thought. One would then attempt to logically deduce from those premises reasons for rejecting irrational impulses as unnatural and, therefore, pernicious. The result will be that, insofar as these impulses occupy a significant place in Stoic thought, their significance, will seem to us to derive from their logical relationship to a set of theoretical propositions. Irrational impulses will be lent a significance borrowed from their relationship to a system of thought. But precisely the inverse relationship exists between the theoretical claims the Stoics make—about virtue and external goods—and their approach to irrational impulses. The very claims that seem to explain and justify the Stoics’ approach to irrational impulses may be explained by that very approach. We accordingly defer reference to the Stoics’ more dogmatic ethical claims until after we have gauged the significance these impulses had in their own right. For in light of this, their ethical dogmas will make more sense; not *vice versa*.

Our task here is not to place Stoicism upon a secure foundation since we cannot presume the Stoic “system” was built in modern form upon unshakable theoretical foundations. If the shortcoming of our approach is that it starts from a less established version of Stoicism, less agreed upon by scholars, it is justified by the fact that it helps us to avoid assuming a point that, in the end, we may wish to dispute. Namely, that the Stoics are concerned, as philosophers are throughout the modern period, with establishing theoretical truths that can then be used to govern the actions of the practically-engaged self. Rather than assuming that the Stoics already ground praxis upon theoretical truths in the modern fashion, let us take another approach.

Further, the Stoics would not have seen it as any more needful than Socrates would have to argue against irrational impulses. Such impulses were considered as undesirable in the ancient world as they were common. For there was an extremely common ailment in antiquity that Seneca sought to diagnose when he wrote, “Now all men suffer from ignorance of the truth; deceived by common report, they make for these ends as if they were good, and then, after having won their wish, and suffered much, they find them evil, or empty, or less important

than they had expected...You know how seductive many evils are. That which is true differs from that which looks like the truth...But that which attracts and allures, is only *like* the truth; it steals your attention, demands your interest, and draws you to itself” (*Ep.* cxviii.7).

In Michal Frede’s words, “it was agreed by all that there really are such irrational affections of the soul that move us to act irrationally, despite our better judgment.”¹ He writes, “in order to understand the Stoic position, we first of all have to understand why the Stoics take issue with the way the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition conceptualizes the affections as irrational movements of the soul.”² We shall do just this. For it seems clear that the Stoics take it as their task to isolate and remove the causes of irrational impulses.

They sought to understand the relationship between human *logos* and impulse. But they usually limited themselves to an account of how an *unharmonious* relationship between the two could arise and, consequently, of how to promote a *harmonious* relationship between them. Since for Aristotle the rational part of the soul is assigned the merely subsidiary role of assisting the non-rational soul to attain its own ends, one would not expect a conflict to arise between the two. For the Stoics, the two work so closely together that it is impossible to even speak of them as being distinct. Cicero and Seneca therefore seem almost to have outdone Aristotle in insisting upon this natural harmony. Like Aristotle, they asserted that reason and desire were capable of working in perfect concord with each other.³ Unlike Aristotle, they more persistently refused to trace the source of their occasional disharmony to a natural tendency to conflict; hence, their singular solution to the problem of irrational impulses.

NATURALLY ACTING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

Since, for Aristotle, that which is natural is that which is drawn seemingly ineluctably toward certain ends, the natural part of the soul has to be just that part of it that gravitates towards a fixed *telos*. On this point, let the words of William James serve as a prelude to Aristotle:

If some iron filings be sprinkled on a table and a magnet brought near them, they will fly through the air for a certain distance and stick to its surface. A savage seeing the phenomenon explains it as the result of a love or attraction between the magnet and the filings. But let a card cover the poles of a magnet, and the filings will press forever against its surface without its ever occurring to them to pass around its sides and thus come into more direct contact with the object of their love. Blow bubbles through a tube into the bottom of a pail of water, they will rise to the surface and mingle with the

¹ Michael Frede, “The Stoic Doctrine of the Affections of the Soul,” in *The Norms of Nature. Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, eds. Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 97.

² *Ibid.*, 95.

³ The way in which the Stoics and Aristotle viewed action as a combination of two things, desire and consciousness, was most fully recognized by Inwood when he made it the basis of his own inquiry into Stoicism, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, writing this in the Introduction: “Like Aristotle and like Epicurus, the Stoics analysed actions done by an agent (whether human or animal), in contrast to motions undergone by them in terms of two basic factors. There is a desiderative state in the animal, which programmes it to pursue or avoid certain things (or more generally, to act) in various circumstances; and there is an informational component, some sort of awareness of factors or aspects of the situation which indicate that the achievement of a goal is in the animal’s power. For the simplest case, they are the only factors one has to mention in explaining an action, for one’s desires and one’s awareness that they can be achieved suffice on this theory to explain a piece of behavior” Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 4.

air. Their action may again be poetically interpreted as due to a longing to recombine with the mother-atmosphere above the surface. But if you invert a jug full of water over the pail, they will rise and remain lodged beneath its bottom, shut in from the outer air, although a slight deflection from their course at the outset, or a re-descent towards the rim of the jar where they found their upward course impeded would easily set them free. If now we pass from such actions as these to those of living things, we notice a striking difference. Romeo wants Juliet as the filings want the magnet; and if no obstacles intervene he moves toward them by as straight a line as they. But Romeo and Juliet, if a wall be built between them, do not remain idiotically pressing their faces against its opposite sides like the magnet and the filings with the card. Romeo soon finds a circuitous way, by scaling the wall or otherwise, of touching Juliet's lips directly. With the filings the path is fixed; whether it reaches the end depends on accidents. With the lover it is the end which is fixed, the path may be modified indefinitely.⁴

James speaks of the way humans, no less than other things in the world, are moved by natural forces. Specifically, humans and natural things alike have ends that determine the trajectory along which they travel; we as humans also have certain endpoints toward which we strive. The only difference between human beings and the rest of nature is that, while for natural objects the paths to the ends they seek are fixed, ours are many and variable, so that we need not pursue a single route to a given end. The rest of nature travels along a straight and unflinching trajectory, directly to its goal; the many alternate routes we take are always circuitous and variable.⁵

Since we are no better than iron filings at determining our ends, we cannot except ourselves from the natural order in order to assert that we, as human beings, are distinguished by having particularly virtuous ends. Romeo's ends are not more virtuous than those of the iron filings. For if we have any capacity at all for virtue that the rest of nature lacks, it cannot be found in any ability to select ends. That at which we humans excel is to be found elsewhere, in our ability to select means. This, it will be suggested, is an insight that is fundamentally Aristotelian in origin. This will be my first point. My second point will be that this is an insight upon which Stoicism capitalizes in order to find some way of bringing virtue back into connection with nature.

As Arendt says, "The starting point of Aristotle's reflection on the subject is the anti-Platonic insight that reason by itself does not move anything."⁶ It was Plato of course, who introduced a division in the soul by contrasting *boulêsis*, 'rational desire,' with *epithumia*, 'appetite,' and also *thumos*, 'spirit or emotion,' in order to suggest that reason could operate autonomously, on its own prompting, independently of desire (*Rep.* 435d). Aristotle unifies the

⁴ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 7.

⁵ The reader will observe where my position falls relative to the controversy surrounding what, for Aristotle, fills out the content of our final end, *eupraxia*, to which the practical intellect discovers the means. Traditionally, interpreters have embraced either one of two alternative positions concerning the origin of "moral principles," asserting either that these ends are supplied by intellectual intuition or by the naturalistic desires of the non-rational soul. I favor the latter interpretation, but I am far from inclined to conclude that our desires dictate our end by illuminating it in an unambiguous light, since nature does not shine a direct light on the end of the path down which she leads us. For a scholarly account of the darkness shrouding the uncertain end towards which we strive see Kirkland, "The Tragic Foundations of Aristotelian Ethics," 2.

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of The Mind*, vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), 57.

soul. In *De Anima* III.9, among other places, he attempts to explain that *bouleusis*, our reasoning, ‘deliberating’ faculty is not one that functions independently of *boulésis*, ‘desire,’ since without the latter, it would have no power of its own to initiate action (*De An.* 433aa21; *Nic. Eth.* 1139a35).

He makes an initial attempt at closing the Platonic “split in the soul” by making the soul practically identical with a fundamental, all-pervasive tendency to reach out towards externals. The word he uses to describe this tendency or nature of ours is *orexis*. The related verb *oregein* was used from at least the time of Homer onward to refer to any action of stretching or reaching out toward something. As Nussbaum has observed, this verb is strongly transitive. One simply does not stretch or reach out unless one is ‘stretching or reaching out’ *for* something.⁷ In the middle voice, the verb may be translated as stretching or extending one’s self for the sake of something. It seems thus to have taken on the additional sense of ‘grasping’ or ‘aiming’ at something, and with Thucydides and Euripides, the sense of ‘longing for’ something.

To use this word to describe human psychology is to imply that each of us is *by nature* ‘stretching out’ toward and desirous of taking in certain externals, and that this desire and tendency to stretch out toward externals is not fundamentally distinct from our tendency to pursue the good. In fact, ‘the Good’ is nothing other than that which we desire. This much is established in the very first sentence of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle says, “Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for that reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (1094a1). From this moment on, we have absolutely no other way of understanding the good except as that which is desirable, and that which is desirable as nothing else but that toward which our desires generally lead us. This being the case, our desires are not to be shunned or belittled, but trusted and depended upon. We cannot entertain the idea that there might be a good that is anything other than simply “that which we desire.” As we shall see, there is still, for Aristotle, a strange way in which our desires sometimes lead us astray rather than toward ‘the Good.’ Nevertheless, Aristotle wishes to assert that, since ‘the Good’ is ‘the desirable’ by definition, desires are overwhelmingly *for the Good*—even if they are for the good, as it manifests itself to us by way of unclear indistinct appearances.⁸

For Aristotle, a few things follow from this: First, “The end cannot be a subject of deliberation but only the means,” so we seem to be relieved of responsibility for determining our ultimate ends through the use of reason (1113a1). For Aristotle, nobody deliberates about what is incapable of being otherwise, and that natural trajectory we find ourselves on as a consequence of the fact that we are natural organisms, is not something open to debate. Since

⁷ Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 174.

⁸ Since it is my overall goal to show the ways in which the revelation of our end is dependent upon our own action, it is far from my intention to neglect here the important role of habituation. If I neglect the role of habit now, it is only because I take its function to be that of more directly orienting our action toward the ends that our nature is *already* inclined to seek. I regard natural desires as orienting us toward what are, from our perspective, ever-illusive natural ends, but the reader will observe that my interpretation is left, at this point, intentionally open to the suggestions of Broadie, to which I will return later, that it is through the cultivation of habits and the practical pursuit of means that our more final ends are revealed to us. Broadie, “The Problem of Practical Intellect in Aristotle’s *Ethics*,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1987): 248.

what we desire is at least to this extent dictated for us, just as ineluctably for us as for anything else in nature, there is no sense in devoting ourselves to the selection of our ends (1114ab5).⁹

Second, reasoning is not to be held up as an alternative to desiring, nor is there to be any question of desire's being suspended in favor of reason. We cannot but act on the basis of our desires, so reason must be relegated to the supplementary role it plays as the discoverer of the *means* by which desires may be fulfilled. Just as James describes above, as humans, nature determines the destination to which our reason merely finds varying routes.¹⁰

Let us now consider whether Aristotle's ethical philosophy can be justifiably referred to as "naturalistic." What Aristotle says in Book III, Chapter 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that it is nonsensical to talk of any good apart from that which we find it *natural* to pursue. This is true no matter how much our good habits may modify the course we would otherwise, apparently "naturally," take in life. The fact that our first impulses may overshoot or fall wide of their target, under the distorting influence of drink, or other causes of pain or pleasure (*Nic. Eth.* 1113a38), does not mean that we could ever spend our lives in pursuit of anything but that which our human impulses have always themselves been pursuing, even if obliquely. If we respond to certain things in the appearing world with desire, it is because these are the ones toward which humans naturally respond, and if we respond to them at all, it is because that natural response is at least one path among many by which nature leads us in the general direction of the end she has assigned us. It remains the case, therefore, that what is *ultimately* good for someone is always the same thing as whatever it is in their nature to *ultimately* pursue. Hence, the equivalence of 'the Good' and 'the Natural' in Aristotle; the Good *is* Nature.

This idea underpinned the whole of Aristotle's ethical philosophy, it came to dominate Hellenistic thought, and the Stoics became its foremost advocates. Returning to Aristotle, we shall find clue as to the reason for which human beings, being moved in equal measure by the same natural forces as other animals, are capable of actions beyond those that animals perform. The clue lies in the fact that nature sets the end we take responsibility for pursuing through the conscientious use of the best tool we have for that purpose—*nous praktikos* or 'practical reason.' Aristotle makes this point in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he effortlessly draws the conclusion that, since nature dictates our desires, and since we cannot be either congratulated or despised for the long-term ends we seek—since they are never ours to choose—we can only find virtue or vice in the choices we make about *how* to pursue these ends:

⁹ There is, of course, a sense in which ends are to be determined through habituation. This, in fact, serves to underscore a point we will make at further length. This is that although Aristotle, in a sense, acknowledges that natural desires serve to point us in the right direction, he also denies this. The insufficiency of our natural desires to guide us correctly must be compensated for by habituation. But in Book VI, the preeminent role of habituation relative to nature is finally challenged when Aristotle must explain how we form good habits in the first place if we don't already have them. If we need them even to exercise and to eventually gain practical judgment, then practical judgment alone cannot be their source. Aristotle asks why we should need to have practical judgment, rather than to just have the right impulses from the outset: "we are no more able to perform these actions by knowing about them, if indeed the virtuous action arises from the right (1143b22). Virtuous habits must *result* from practical judgment (1144a21). But as it turns out, we cannot acquire judgment in earnest unless we already have virtue. Thus, everything including practical judgment must arise from good impulses, which are simply given, for "it is clear that it is impossible to be possessed of practical judgment without being good" (1144b1). Here Aristotle actually retreats to the position that virtue is natural and inborn in to such a degree that we are able to exercise practical judgment from the start (1144b). This is also the Socratic intellectualist position that Aristotle, as we shall see, ultimately shares with the Stoics. Desire is for the good, and virtue or vice ultimately depends upon our ability to perceive it correctly. "It is for this reason that some people say all virtues are forms of wise judgment" (1144b20).

¹⁰ Here my interpretation is strongly influenced by that of Sean Kirkland. Kirkland, "The Temporality of *Phronêsis*," 127.

The end, being what we wish for (*ontos boulētou tou telos*), the means what we deliberate about and choose (*bouleutōn kai proairetōn tōn pros to telos*), actions concerning means must be according to choice and voluntary. Now the exercise of the virtues is concerned with means. Therefore virtue is in our power, and so too vice. (*Nic. Eth.* 1113b2)

The conclusion Aristotle has drawn is the following: the end is set for us. However, it always lies within our power to choose the means by which this end is pursued. When certain means appear to us as a way of promoting a good, it is them we choose, and it is on account of this choice, when it is well made, that our actions take on the character of virtue. Quite simply, it is only what results from our own *prohairesis*, that is, what is the result of our own deliberation, which is something for which we can be praised or blamed.

Now we see that the success of Aristotle's account is in part that it does not, as Plato's had done, contrast the part of us upon which our virtue depends with the part that is more "natural," insofar as it is (1) moved by principles inhering in natural things or insofar as it is (2) more responsive to the things of nature. Our natural tendencies, upon which we habitually act in everyday life, do not run fundamentally counter to the commands of the part of the soul from which virtue springs.

A SOUL DIVIDED IN ARISTOTLE

The success of this endeavor, however, is jeopardized by the problem of *akrasia*. Here Aristotle finds himself at a crossroads, faced with two equally undesirable ways of explaining the phenomenon: He could, siding with Socrates, explain every failure of will as a failure to see what is truly to one's advantage. But admitting this would have the disastrous result of once again placing the burden for ethical action solely on the shoulders of the intellect. This would place the intellect again in the role of discerning the proper object of desire unaided. Desire would merely follow in the wake of reasoning as the latter pointed the way. To be sure, since Aristotle speaks of desire as obedient to and following *logos*, his analyses retain the flavor of a Socratic and Stoic intellectualism. But Aristotle's distinctive contribution to ethics, which he cannot abandon, is to cast doubt on reason's ability to independently discern the direction in which pre-reflective impulses are subsequently and secondarily guided to move. In the modern-day language of theory and praxis, *the intellect cannot, for Aristotle, acting independently, establish what is subsequently and secondarily put into praxis.*¹¹

It seems implausible that desire or impulse could even lead us from the path *phronēsis* would have us take, the very path, it should not be forgotten, that we are set upon by nature.

¹¹ Hence, Vernant's observation that the human animal is conceived by Aristotle very differently than today. In the modern world, every human being wills his or her action. "In action the agent is recognized as preeminent; the human subject is assumed to be the origin and efficient cause of all the actions that stem from him." In Aristotle, however, there is no corresponding term for the word will. The word Aristotle seemingly uses to describe action that is "willingly" performed is incorrectly translated. The oppositional terms *hekōn* and *akōn* do not mean 'intentionally' or 'unintentionally,' but instead 'in accord with oneself' or 'in opposition to oneself.' "To see that *hekōn* cannot mean willed, intentional (*voluntaire*) we have only to note that, when declaring that an act of passion is performed *hekōn* and not *akōn*, Aristotle substantiates this by saying that otherwise we should have to say that neither would animals be *hekōntes* in their action, an expression that patently cannot have the sense of 'intentionally'" (*Nic. Eth.* 1111a25, 1111b7). Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Imitations of the Will in Greek Tragedy," *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. trans. by Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 56.

Indeed, desire would seem unable to diverge from the path set by *phronêsis* to any extent at all, for *phronêsis* merely points us in the direction of the path that our desires are already naturally following. Everything said above would make it seem quite strange to speak of reason and desire as though they were at war with each other, and yet the central paradox of Aristotelianism is that *the same natural impulses and desires that dictate our ends in life often end up diverting us away from those same ends.*

However, Aristotle finds it necessary to suppose that this happens quite often, for his attention is immediately drawn to the matter of explaining those many, many instances in which the rational soul falters, presumably under the influence of something besides reason that offers it resistance. For the rational soul may *keleuei* or ‘give commands’ that either go unheard or unobeyed, and Aristotle’s only explanation for those occasional failures of reason to “command” a given course of action is that these imperatives go unheeded by a part of the soul bent on “disobeying” it. He says precious little about this unruly part of the soul, but that it exists—of this he is certain:

There seems to be another irrational element in the soul—one which in a sense, however, shares in the rational principle. For we praise the rational principle of the continent and the incontinent man, and the part of their soul that has such a principle, since it urges them aright and toward the best objects; but there is found in them another element naturally opposed to the rational principle, which fights against and resists that principle. For exactly as paralyzed limbs when we intend to move them to the right turn on the contrary to the left, so it is with the soul; the impulses of incontinent people move in different directions. But while in the body we see that which moves astray (*to parapheroumenon*), in the soul we do not. No doubt however, we must nonetheless suppose that in the soul too there is something contrary to the rational principle (*para ton logon*), resisting and opposing it (*enantioumenon kai antibainon*). In what sense it is distinct from other elements does not concern us. Now, even this seems to have a share in the rational principle, as we said, at any rate in the continent man it obeys (*peitharchei*) the rational principle—and presumably in the temperate and brave man it is still more obedient; for in him it speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as the rational principle (*panta gar homophônei tōi logōi*). (*Nic. Eth.* 1102b15)

In both continent and incontinent, temperate and intemperate men we find a rational soul that urges them on toward ends, but in the intemperate more than the temperate man we find a soul that meets resistance from another part of the self. This is a part of the self that is, by its very nature, set upon resisting the rational soul, and in the incontinent man this part of the soul will often succeed in giving rise to impulses that move one in a direction contrary to that of the rational soul. According to Aristotle—and here, the language he uses is very interesting—this is a part of the soul that is like a limb that moves in the wrong direction. It is the *parapheroumenon*, and it is literally that which is ‘led astray’ or ‘moved in the wrong direction.’ At its most literal, the word implies that this is a part of the soul that is ‘carried away,’ ‘carried out,’ or ‘carried beyond’ something, and that from which Aristotle clearly believes it to be led astray is precisely the course of action that reason directs it towards.¹²

¹² Aristotle goes on to say express the relationship between the rational and the irrational part of the soul by saying that the irrational part *logon echei tou logou*, which is to say it ‘takes account of *logos*’ or more literally, that it ‘has a *logos* of *logos*.’ This phrase not only implies that the irrational part of the soul ‘takes heed’ of *logos* and that it is guided by a *logos*, but

If the courageous act fails to appear to us as our end, it is because our more instinctive impulses prevent us from seeing this clearly. What courage requires of us is unpleasant. “Nevertheless, it would seem that the end which goes with courage is pleasant, but is blocked from sight by the things which encircle it; such a thing happens in gymnastic contests, for to boxers, the sake of which they fight is pleasant, the crown of leaves and the honors that come with it, but being hit is painful, since boxers are made of flesh, and burdensome, as is all the hard labor, and because these pains are many, that for the sake of which they are endured, since it is a small thing, appears to be nothing pleasant at all” (tr. Sacks, 1117b1).

Since Aristotle thinks of *phronēsis* as a power of perception, allowing us to see what is truly good (1114a6), the metaphors he uses to describe its relation to impulse suggest that this relation is one in which impulse retains the ability to “blind” *phronēsis*. Our natural impulses, if they are indulged from birth, will “pervert us” and cause us to lose sight of opportunities that present themselves as a means of advancing long-term ends, thus causing us to be “deceived about the starting points of action” (1114a35).

Specifically, pleasure is one kind of good that may more immediately appear to us as such, and in this lies its corrupting potential. When our habitual impulses are set off by near and present triggers, *nous praktikos*’s ability to direct us toward longer-term ends is sometimes paralyzed under the overwhelming weight of these impulses. So for Aristotle, a certain problem arises when we have responses to the immediately appearing world that are strong enough to temporarily incapacitate *phronēsis*’s ability to perceive what is less immediately apparent. To ensure that we are not “blinded,” that our impulses are not such as to cloud or obscure our perceptive powers, we must somehow make sure they awaken the phronetic “eye of the soul” and help it to see the better.

Ultimately, the answer that Aristotle gives as to why is that the fault lies with desire, and not reason. If we fail to perceive the good, it is not through the absence of knowledge, but the *presence* of desires that point in the opposite direction. Here he may exaggerate the role of desire as a force outside the control of and naturally tending to move in a direction counter to reason.

Aristotle writes, “Now some may say that all men desire the apparent good, but have no control over the appearance, but the end appears to each man in a form answering to his character” (1114a32). Aristotle’s allusions to sight suggest that good habits can actually help us perceive what we might otherwise not, and in this sense, it seems, he believes that *phronēsis* depends upon good habits. While it may be objected that we are not responsible for any failure, on practical reason’s part, to notice that which best contributes to the attainment of our *telos*, any such failure *can* be traced to a failure on the part of one’s moral character and the set of habits of which it is composed. If we have habituated ourselves to find pleasure in courageous deeds, it will appear to us more clearly as a pursuit-worthy end, even as danger threatens. Aristotle is thinking here of the hero’s habit of reacting to his military orders with pleasure and the coward’s habitual way of reacting to danger with aversion. For “moral excellence is always concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do good things and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones” (1104b9).

As much as Aristotle stresses that ‘the desirable’ is already ‘the good,’ he is equally careful to stress, time and again, that our natural inclinations cannot be relied upon to guide us to the greater good, and therefore, do not suffice for virtue without correct habituation. As Aristotle frequently reminds us, “none of the moral virtues arise in us by nature” (1103a19).

that it is commensurate with *logos*. This is because, in mathematics, the phrase can also mean ‘to be rational’ in the sense of commensurable.

Aristotle effectively confirms what had been a latent assumption guiding his inquiry. That is that desire, in its natural form, is not enough. It always falls short of its mark *unless* it has already been correctly formed under the benevolent influence of some other force, and if not of the intellect, than of culture. Nature, it turns out, is a necessary, but not a sufficient guide in life. *Nature points us only so far in the direction of the good, and where it leaves off culture must pick up.*

Natural desires now fall short of directing us toward the good, and what is worse, undisciplined natural desires gain a tendency of their own to swerve off in a the opposite direction. There are places then in which Aristotle suggests that our natural impulses do not just need cultivation, they need cutting back. A child is like a plant “...for anything that has a lot of growth while stretching out toward ugly things needs to be kept back, and of this sort most of all are desire and a child. For children too live in accordance with desire, and the desire for what is pleasant is greatest in them...if desires are great and vehement, they knock the reasoning power out of commission. Hence it is necessary that desires be moderate and few...” (tr. Sacks, 1119b5).

Reason is still guided by desire for the *telos*, but now the unthinkable is possible and Aristotle asserts what the Stoics will deny, *that logos can point us in one direction while nature points us in another.* So though Aristotle, in assigning reason a merely supporting role as the torchlight illuminating the means to naturally desired ends, presumed a certain natural harmony between *logos* and *phusis*, it seems that *intellect and nature have, despite his best efforts, come apart.*

When we fail to see the good, “the error seems to be due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not” (1113a26). Especially with regard to pleasure then, our natural and uneducated impulses are not to be trusted, for Aristotle says that, “in everything the pleasant or pleasurable is to be guarded against” (1109b19). Thus, on the whole, “if we dismiss pleasure we are less likely to go astray” (1109b10).¹³

In one of the most pivotal of all passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says, “both the *logos* must be true and the *orexis* right, if *prohairesis* is to be good, and the latter must pursue what the former asserts” (1139a25). Aristotle uses the verb *diōkein*, invoking the language of the hunt to describe the relationship between reason and desire—a relationship, apparently, in which reason pursues and chases desire as it takes the lead. The imagery is apt because desire must first illuminate our ends, so that reason can follow in its wake and chart for us the best path by which we may reach them. Here it should be emphasized that the relationship between reason and desire is explicitly described as one of *harmony*. For example, Aristotle defines practical intelligence as what is usually translated as “the attainment of truth corresponding to right desire.” But the Greek is *alêtheia homologôs exousa tē orexei tē orthê*, so what Aristotle is trying to capture in language is the harmony that results when, put one way, ‘truth holds in harmonious agreement with the right desire’; this is none other than the harmony which results when our powers of reason are maintained in perfect accord with our desires (1139b30).

But even if Aristotle had not used language of such provocative force and not spoken of a kind of “harmony” or “agreement” subsisting between reason and desire, we would still have to conclude that the relationship between reason and desire could be no better described than

¹³ “If these consequences are unpleasing, are we to say that absolutely and in truth the good is the object of wish, but for each the apparent good; that that which is in truth an object of wish is an object of wish to the good man, while any chance thing may be so to the bad man, as in the case of bodies also the things that are wholesome and unwholesome – or bitter or sweet, or hot or heavy, and so on; since the good man judges each class of things rightly, and in each the truth appears to him? For each state has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and the measure of them. In most things, the error seems to be due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not” (1113a26).

by invoking those words. Aristotle at first describes *phronêsis* as both deliberative desire and desiderative deliberation because the important thing for him is neither that desire follows deliberation, or deliberation desire (1113a9; 1139823b4); both must be the case. Desire must inform reason so that what we reason about are the means of attaining the ends dictated in advance by desire.

But over the course of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it becomes increasingly clear to the reader that this harmony between *logos* and *orexis* is not pre-established because of desires' innate tendency to move in a direction counter to reason, and so this harmony has to be created in a particular kind of way: It is not so much reason that must adapt itself to desire, but desire that must be brought into line with reason.

A metaphor that Aristotle sometimes implicitly invokes to describe the relation between reason and desire seems to be that of a split pathway, *phronêsis* pointing us in one direction, impulse in the other direction. In the first direction lies our *telos*, in the other that which we merely suppose to be *to ariston* or 'the best.' This is because our aiming is not *authairetos*, that is, 'independently' or 'self-chosen' (1114b5). If the short-term ends to which we respond with desire in the here-and-now are not to come into conflict with reason then they must not lead in any other direction but towards those larger ends themselves. By our impulses we are driven off of the path *phronêsis* sets us upon and down another. If the goods that we pursue on the prompting of our impulses lie in a direction opposite the one in which reason moves, then, in coming under the sway of these impulses, we come to a fork in the road and head off in a direction that diverges sharply from the path we should travel. If this is the metaphor we use to understand the relation of reason and impulse, then harmony can only result when our impulses are trained such that they never cause us to swerve from the path of reason.

It is not without reason, then, that Aristotle adopts a way of speaking which frequently leads the reader to suppose that he has the same understanding of the relationship between reason and desire that has come to suffuse our way of thinking about theory and praxis: it is incumbent upon reason to establish order in the household of the soul by bringing the inclinations under its direct command. Our actions are guided by *phronêsis*, and our character is formed under the influence of *phronêsis* employed again and again over the course of a lifetime.¹⁴ Recall that Aristotle spoke, in our opening quote, of the need for a well-trained appetitive soul that "speaks, in all matters, with the same voice as the rational principle," but that he also said this was possible only in a man who had an irrational principle that was exceptionally "obedient" and allowed itself to be, in a manner of speaking, "persuaded" by reason. But this was originally meant in a merely metaphorical sense. As the *Ethics* progresses, we become increasingly justified in taking it literally.

¹⁴ What follows, it must be remarked, is but an incredibly prevalent interpretation of the phenomenon of *akrasia* in Aristotle. It is simply that throwing the Aristotle and the Stoics into sharpest relief. This is not coincidental. Aristotle is struggling to distinguish himself here from the Socratic ideas, in which the Stoics found inspiration. Thus, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues that *akrasia* arises when practical reason and desire come into direct conflict. However, in *De Anima* he argues that, since action arises from the combination of reason and desire, *akrasia* occurs when *orexis* overcomes *orexis* (3.9-11). As we shall see, if Aristotle holds this view he is in accord with the Stoics, that is, as long as he maintains that the conflict inside the soul, not as one of reason versus desire, but as one of desire versus desire—as one of like versus like. Strange has made the point that insofar as it is a conflict of like versus like, the account Aristotle gives of *akrasia* in physical terms is remarkably similar to the Stoics,' the difference being that for the Stoics reason conflicts with reason. In this way, Strange shows that the differences between Aristotle and the Stoics may be merely apparent. Steven Strange, "On The Voluntariness of the Passions," in *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 44-45.

Nevertheless, Aristotle makes repeated reference to the injurious results of a soul at variance with itself. Even in the context of his discussion of friendship he is at constant pains to emphasize that the soul must not *diapherein*, ‘disagree’ or ‘differ’ with itself. The word used here is a strong one, and even suggests a soul being ‘torn apart.’ Since the verb, taken in its most literal sense, means ‘to carry off and away’ the image conveyed is one of a soul split in two, with one of its parts tearing itself away from the other and then carrying itself off and away from it. Of people in such a state Aristotle can only say:

...they are at variance with themselves, and have appetites for some things and rational desires for others. This is true, for instance, of incontinent people; for they choose instead of the things they think good, things that are pleasant but hurtful; while others again, through cowardice and laziness, shrink from doing what they think best for themselves. And those who have done many terrible deeds and are hated for their wickedness even shrink from life and destroy themselves. And wicked men seek people with whom to spend their days, and shun themselves; for they remember many a grievous deed, and anticipate others like them, when they are by themselves, but when they are with others they forget. And having nothing lovable in them they have no feeling of love to themselves. Therefore, also such men do not rejoice or grieve with themselves; for their soul is rent by faction, and one element in it by reason of its wickedness grieves when it abstains from certain acts, while the other part is pleased, and one draws them this way and the other, as if they were pulling them in pieces. If a man cannot at the same time be pained and pleased, at all events he is pained because he was pleased, and he could have wished these things had not been pleasant to him; for bad men are laden with repentance. Therefore the bad man does not appear to be amicably disposed even to himself, because there is nothing in him to love; so that to be thus not at the height of wretchedness, we should strain every nerve to avoid wickedness and should endeavor to be good; for so and only so can one be either friendly to one’s self or friendly to another. (1166b6)

To be “rent in two” by opposing factions in ones’ own soul—this, Aristotle says, is the “the height of wretchedness” and the very thing in avoidance of which we strive to improve ourselves and cultivate virtue. Virtue then is what exists when the soul is not torn in two. Within Aristotle it becomes necessary to maintain a kind of harmony in the soul, which can only be maintained through a relationship of concord between *phronêsis* and impulse, or reason and desire. Of course, when a split occurs for Aristotle it is simply evidence of the fact that our impulsive natural responses have an *innate* tendency to come into conflict with our rational faculty for virtue. Such a division in the soul is to some degree inevitable.

This is where the Stoics and Aristotle part ways. For the Stoics, I shall argue, “this split in the soul,” as I have called it, is not a naturally occurring gap originally needing to be bridged through moral education; it is a *perversion* of the natural order of things in which our rational faculties already maintain themselves in perfect accord with our natural impulses, and our desires with reason. It will now be suggested that this makes ethics much less for the Stoics than for Aristotle, a matter of closing a preexisting gap between reason and desire, since for Aristotle desire has an inherent tendency to conflict with reason. But we emphasize now how important it is for Aristotle that this harmony exist because it is one point upon which Aristotle and the Stoics are utterly agreed.

REASON IN HARMONY WITH IMPULSE, AND A SOUL UNITED

Zeno, whom Cicero describes as having differed with his predecessors, “more in terminology than in substance,” still makes a few needed corrections to Platonic and Peripatetic thought, and these are summarized by Cicero, in *De Academica*, in the following way:

...whereas they did not remove emotion out of humanity altogether, but said that sorrow and delight and fear were natural, but curbed them and narrowed their range, Zeno held that the wise man was devoid of all these diseases; and *whereas the older generation said that all these emotions were natural and non-rational*, and placed desire and reason in different regions of the mind, he did not agree with these doctrines either, for he thought that even the emotions were voluntary and were experienced owing to a judgment of opinion, and he held that the mother of all the emotions was *a sort of intemperance and lack of moderation*. (I.x.38)

It is the last and most significant of these corrections with which we shall begin because Zeno’s refusal to place natural inclinations and reason in different regions of the mind completely turns on its head the Aristotelian proposition that desire naturally comes into conflict with reason, so that this conflict in the soul, far from being an indication that one has not yet attained a state of virtue, becomes an indication that one has already allowed one’s self to slip from one’s natural state of virtue into one of utter vice and depravity.

The Stoics assert the natural unity of the soul, but the fact that they are able to make such an assertion appears all the more remarkable given that they are surrounded on all sides by thinkers who follow in the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition of neatly bisecting the soul in two. The Stoics resist making the assertion that the soul is bi-partite, one part reason and one part desire. But we have just seen that Aristotle describes reason and desire as working so closely in tandem that one could hardly be separated from the other. One might even speak of them, under ideal circumstances, as one and the same. Our next task is to show that, for the Stoics like Seneca, unlike for Aristotle, this is not just an ideal. It is as nature preordained that reason and desire should be inseparably joined. In order to understand this, we must understand Seneca, and Cicero, as in some sense more Aristotelian than Aristotle himself in seeing reason and desire in their fundamental unity.

More than previous scholarship has allowed, this will enable us to view late Stoic thought in continuity with Aristotle, and thus to understand how it enlarges upon an Aristotelian conception of practical knowledge already familiar to us. But we must first overcome the many obstacles which have so far prevented scholars from seeing Cicero and Seneca’s Stoicism as Aristotelian—or if Aristotelian, then legitimately so.

One such obstacle is the common tendency to attribute to all “genuine” Stoics—Cicero and Seneca’s Aristotelian leanings exclude them from this category—a brand of intellectualism according to which reason subsists in effective independence from desire. Reason arrives at its own conclusions independently and then dictates to the desiring self what it is to desire. It will be argued that this reinscribes into the soul the very schism between reason and desire that Stoicism, as understood by Cicero and Seneca, rejects. It thus reifies the very dualism which Cicero and Seneca understand Stoicism as overcoming. Further, it divides and establishes a hierarchy between theory and praxis: What is established theoretically by the intellect proceeds and determines practical action.

A further obstacle to the comparison is the assumption that the Stoics cannot have an account of practical deliberation similar to Aristotle's, since Aristotelian deliberation is premised upon the mutual cooperation of two *separate* things, reason and desire. It must be shown that the Stoics have something like an Aristotelian conception of deliberation, and that this is so *because*—not *despite*—their disinclination to partition the soul.

According to Inwood and others like him,¹⁵ the Stoics have in common with Aristotle a sense that impulse follows directly upon the realization that something belongs to a class of objects we should or must seek. “‘I have to drink, says appetite. ‘Here’s a drink,’ says sense-perception or *phantasia* or thought. At once he drinks. This then is the way that animals are impelled to move and act,” says Aristotle (*De An.* 701a33-36). Here an impulse to drink exists before one perceives the appropriate object of this impulse. The impulse sets reason searching for a clear *phantasia* or impression of the object at which this impulse may direct itself. Once it has clearly perceived the object at which it was *already*, in some sense, directed, it now has the same impulse in a different form. It recognizes the impressing object, as of a kind to satisfy this impulse and, one might say, ‘assents’ to the fact that it is indeed the proper object of that impulse.

But the practical syllogism is not a process of reasoning that takes place independently of desire or impulse. It cannot exist in the first place if we do not already desire a certain class of things to which we may subsequently realize certain particulars belong. Aristotle, for example, explains that we have an antecedent desire for sweet things. We ascribe the predicate ‘sweet’ to the cake and immediately desire it. Our reason tells us that cake is sweet, and our impulses that we desire the sweetness predicated of the object. The Stoics seem to stress that we desire, not so much the object itself, as the predicate we ascribe to it.¹⁶

But for far too many, the practical syllogism that Stoic reason performs is one in which desire plays no part. How is it that we come to perceive the cake as appropriate to ourselves *at this moment in time* is something that many scholars describe in purely intellectual terms. For Brad Inwood, reason must arrive by itself at the insight that eating the cake is the appropriate act. Now that reason has objectively and independently reached the verdict that a course of action is appropriate unassisted by desire, the question for Inwood is how this purely intellectual realization is translated back into the imperative to act. His solution: The indicative proposition ‘it befits me to eat this cake’ is transformed into the imperative ‘eat this cake!’ Inwood thus interprets Chrysippus literally when he says of impulse that it is “the reason of man commanding (*prostatikos*) him to act¹⁷—the *imperative* which it apparently falls to another part of us to *obey*.

For Margaret Graver, we reason thus: (1) Objects of type T are good, (2) If a good is present, it is appropriate for me to pursue it, (3) Object O, being of type T, is now present. We

¹⁵ Inwood, *Human Nature and Action*, 15. Lloyd draws our attention equally to *De Motu Animalium*, where Aristotle describes the antecedent desire to drink, the way in which something is discerned as drinkable, and the subsequent *orexis* or ‘desire’ to drink it, which precedes the immediate act of drinking (701a32-35), that is, unless something prevents the action (701a17). He has also found in *De Amina* 3.7 an account of the emotion recalling the Stoics: ‘Something is seen or heard to be something else, and it is, Aristotle says, as though our senses asserted that it *to be* that thing. If it is asserted to be pleasurable or painful, pleasant or harmful, then it is pursued or avoided automatically. Lloyd, “Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology,” 236.

¹⁶ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1.138, *SVF* II.336, *LS* 55A. But properly speaking, the object itself is the material and efficient cause of the movement.

¹⁷ Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1037f, *SVF* III.175, *LS* 53Q.

conclude: It is now appropriate for me to pursue Object O.¹⁸ In this practical syllogism so unlike Aristotle's own, reason starts with the knowledge that some objects are good, and concludes under its own power, without the input of desire at all, that a course of action is appropriate. An impulse now somehow arises as a result.

Practical deliberation, as Seneca and Cicero understand it, is not like this at all; it is much more like that described by Aristotle. It begins and ends with desire. It begins with pre-rational desire, and it ends with desire directed at its proper object by reason.

But here again we meet with another obstacle. Those Stoics who spoke of pre-rational impulses must have believed in a non-rational source of action. Since these Stoics profaned the purity and rationality of the soul in which all true Stoics believe by allowing irrationality into it, they committed the greatest heresy. They introduced division into the single indivisible soul, partitioning it into rational and non-rational parts. For such a crime, scholars threatened Seneca with having his titular affiliations to Stoicism revoked, and all his writings on Stoicism declared heretical, the Stoicism espoused therein declared suspect of actually being a clandestine form of Platonism. But we do not have to decide between excommunicating philosophers like Seneca who make reference to such impulses, or else explaining away their mention of them as a rhetorical front that can be stripped away to reveal Stoic orthodoxy underneath.¹⁹

Many Stoics seem to acknowledge the existence of pre-rational impulses. These include the *proto-pathê*,²⁰ the 'pre-emotions' described by Seneca and others. These impulses do not seem to belong, to employ Frede's distinction, to that class of impulses that are 'irrational' in the sense of dictating a course of action in conflict with what reason would command. But they do seem 'irrational' in the sense of being pre-rational. Thus arises the possibility that when the Stoics deny the wise man irrational impulses "they do not mean to deny him, without exception, all the feelings which the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition calls affections of the soul and locates in the irrational part of the soul."²¹

Examples of pre-emotions are "shivering when sprinkled with cold water and the recoil from certain contacts. At bad news, our hair stands on end, at improper words, a blush suffuses us, and vertigo follows when we look at a steep drop" (*De Ir.* 2.2.1). These impulses are not completely 'irrational' in being beyond reason's power to influence. They are simply *pre-rational* in not having *yet* been assented to by reason. The proof is that these pre-rational

¹⁸ Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 44.

¹⁹ Some common readings of Seneca which would place him either under the influence of Plato or Posidonius are discussed by Inwood in his "Seneca and Psychological Dualism" in *Reading Seneca, Stoic Philosophy at Rome*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 27-30. But he writes, I believe that one reason for imputing to Seneca an 'unorthodox' philosophy of mind flows from his use of images to more vividly portray psychological relationships and actions" (32). "I suggest that the general nature of the text and immediate context should suppose us to strip off the figures of speech and leave Seneca with a reasonably orthodox if not technically precise theory" (35). Here then is the dilemma that faces us. Either we dismiss Seneca as an unorthodox Stoic whose writings have no technical philosophic merit, or we strip away these illusions to the Platonic soul, discarding them as though they were philosophically insignificant literary devices. This is the dichotomy that the interpretation offered here refuses in order to uphold both the significance which Seneca undoubtedly attributed to these metaphors and his credibility as a Stoic philosopher.

²⁰ Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, Ch. 4, 85-108.

²¹ Frede, "The Affections of the Soul," 95. See also Sorabji for the view that "all emotions seem to be thought by Chrysippus as involving *akrasia* in the sense of conflict with one's better judgment." Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 313.

impulses are confined to the slightest twinges of desire and aversion, to sudden starts and recoils. They do not extend any further to sustained action, because sustained action is precisely that which is sustained through our rational assent. We will come to this momentarily.

First, it may be argued that while *some* of our impulses begin life as pre-rational, the larger part of our actions are initiated by reason *alone*. Reason *independently* perceives the good, and later *directs* us to desire it. In *De Academica* Cicero writes, “By nature, all people pursue those things which they think to be good and avoid their opposites. As soon as a person receives an impression of something which he thinks is good, nature itself urges him to reach out after it” (3.24). Thus, when *logos* perceives something as good,²² desire for that thing is soon to follow.

Here, we must pause to explain the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*. But since even Peripatetics eventually adopted it as their own, it would be a mistake to find in it something distinct from Aristotle’s *orexis*.²³ Recall that for Aristotle *orexis* can refer to desire, which *precedes* reasoning, and to desire, which is the *result* of reasoning. But what the Stoics share in common with Aristotle, and which they perhaps give even greater emphasis is the fact that we desire things which are appropriately suited to our constitution, and thus allow us to realize our nature. This is a tendency aptly named *oikeiōsis*, for which we only have ‘appropriation’ or ‘making-one’s-own-ization’ as possible English translations. The Stoics’ point was obvious to the point of tautology, for as their wordplay suggests, we try to “appropriate” or “make our own” things for no more apparent reason other than that they seem to “belong” to us, and us to them.²⁴

It may at first appear that we desire things because reason apprehends them as appropriate to us.²⁵ But we do not desire things because we judge them appropriate; we judge them appropriate because we desire them. Seneca writes, “Impulses towards useful objects, and revulsion from their opposites, are according to nature; without any reflection to prompt the idea, and without any advice, whatever Nature has prescribed, is done.” Reason is not necessary for animals for “it is clear that they have such understanding from the fact that, even if you add understanding, they will act no more adequately than they did in the first place” (*Ep.* cxxi.19).

²² Inwood advances a distinction between hermetic and non-hermetic impressions. He follows Lloyd in finding a basis in Aristotle for distinguishing between impressions with ‘practical predicates’ such as ‘is good,’ ‘is beneficial,’ and ‘is pleasant.’ Only impressions with these kinds of predicates provoke the subject to action. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 59; Lloyd, “Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology,” in *The Stoics*, ed. John Rist, 233- 246. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 263. See. *LS* 53P; 53Q; 53A; 33I; 53S.

²³ See Appendix Three for more on the manner in which Peripatetics began to recast their own ideas using Stoic terminology. As is there explained, rather than adopting Stoic terms, the Peripatetics defected from Aristotelianism; thus we should conclude that the Peripatetics wanted to adopt a new, “up-to-date” way of speaking about old Aristotelian ideas. The Peripatetics begin to speak like Stoics of *oikeiōsis* not just because it would allow them to do battle with the Stoics on their own terrain, in their own language. As Annas has argued best, the Peripatetics also made this concession because they believed that the language of *oikeiōsis* allowed them to articulate what they already considered to be an important theme in Aristotle—to be found in Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*—that of self-love, described as the motivating force behind all human action. The concept helped them establish self-love as a new starting-point from which to build a stronger account. Annas, “The Hellenistic Version of Aristotle’s Ethics,” 87.

²⁴ Pembroke, “Oikeiosis,” in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed., Anthony Long, 114- 49; Anthony Long, “The Logical Basis of Stoic Ethics,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1970/71), 85-104; Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 182-201; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1. 350-54; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis: Moral Development and Social Interaction in Early Stoic Philosophy* (Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1990).

²⁵ Plutarch seems to describe *oikeiōsis* as intellectualized in defining it as both the *aisthesis*, ‘perception,’ and *antilepsis*, ‘apprehension,’ of what is akin to oneself (*Stoic. Rep.* 12, 103ac).

It might also be asked how anything could appear as desirable purely in the light of reason. In fact, it cannot. Seneca eliminates every possible way in which it might. It is not, for example, that we are born with a list of things that are harmful or beneficial to us. This appears to be controverted by the fact that we have a ‘preconception of the good.’²⁶ To be sure, we have a preconception of sorts, but not one that is purely rational. Insofar as we have a preconception at all, it is the kind of preconception that birds have of what is harmful. As they instinctively draw back from a shadow overhead, so we respond immediately to the sight of certain things (*Ep.* cxxvi.18). Thus, to say that we have a preconception of what is beneficial is to say that we have a tendency to respond to certain *phantasia*, or impressions, *as though they indicated good*. Thus, it is not that we know how to respond to certain things, once we have apprehended them as appropriate; we know that they are appropriate by the way we respond to them.²⁷

As we shall see in succeeding chapters, Cicero also seems to assume that our natural impulses are given and that reason merely detects the means to these ends. We do not need reason to establish, independently of impulse, what is an appropriate object of appetition. For this, it seems, impulses largely suffice. As with Aristotle then, our impulses appear to point in the right direction, toward our natural good, which is not to say we do not need reason to *add* something to these impulses.

If reason were to stand detached in any way from these impulses, and to arrive by itself at one conclusion or another, then the non-rational impulses of which Seneca speaks *would* raise a question as to whether this is a *bipartite* soul. But in fact, the relationship in which reason stands to these impulses is more intimate. These impulses are described even by early Stoics as listening to²⁸ and allowing themselves to be guided by reason, presumably toward their proper objects, and in this sense shaped by reason. Diogenes Laertius for example says, reason comes along after impulse and acts as the craftsman of it (*technitês gar outos epiginetai tês hormês*).²⁹

As in Aristotle, we desire things before we perceive them. Once we receive a *phantasia* or impression of what we desire, we may respond instinctively. Or, in the light of *logos*, the object

²⁶ This is despite the fact that the Stoics often speak of human beings as having a preconception of what is good. Seneca speaks of preconceptions that we have *at birth*, and he says we can benefit from experience or instruction. These preconceptions may be the same that other Stoics appear to refer to as arising with time. These conceptions according to Brittain are formed on the basis of repeated experience of a kind and thereafter and it was widely believed in antiquity that they should be retained and “serve as a negative criteria, or as a standard of knowledge which can be used to rule out some false beliefs” (see for example Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1052b, *Comm. Not.* 1075e; Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.53). Chrysippus is cited twice as referring to preconceptions (*SVF* 2.105; 2.841), and once as referring to them by use of the term *emphutoi prolêpseis*, which suggests they are not ‘innate’ but ‘implanted preconceptions’ (*Stoic. Rep.* 1041E). Epictetus too speaks of innate *emphutoi ennoiai*, of good and bad, proper and improper (*Dis.* 2.11.3). McCabe-Jackson has argued that Chrysippus believed at least that we have an innate tendency to distinguish between things appropriate for our constitution and not, and thus to perceive that the appropriate lies in the fitting. This means that we arrive, in time, at the idea of the good as ‘the appropriate.’ Brittain, “Common Sense: Concepts, Definition, and Meaning in and out of the Stoa,” in *Language and Learning*, ed. Dorothea Frede and Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2005. 185; McCabe-Jackson, “The Stoic Theory of Implanted Preconceptions,” *Phronesis* 49 (2004): 323-347.

²⁷ Those things which are appropriate to us we recognize as such *not* because we have any antecedent understanding of what *our* constitution is, for Seneca is clear about the human being: “that very constitution of his own he only understands confusedly, cursorily, and darkly...every one of us knows there is something which stirs his impulses, but he does not know what it is” (*Ep.* cxxi.12).

²⁸ In Stobaeus and Clemens the word used to describe the relation between reason and impulse is that same used by Aristotle. Reason must *peitho*, ‘persuade or convince,’ and impulse must *peithomai*, ‘obey or believe.’ (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* II.888,8, *LS* 65A, *SVF* 3.378; *Ecl.* II 88.6W, *LS* 65A, *SVF* III.378, Clemens, *Strom.* *SVF* III.377)

²⁹ *DL* 7.86, *SVF* 3.178, *LS* 57A.

may appear *as* the desired object. Once the object appears in a certain light, pre-rational desire is directed at the object, at which point it becomes a rational desire. For Seneca, assenting simply consists in assenting to the fact that *logos* has correctly revealed the object *as* the object of impulse. In this sense, reason is not entirely distinct from impulse. Reason merely molds or shapes an active impulse by assenting to a *phantasia*, so that impulse is guided (*aēgetai*) in the right direction.³⁰ To understand this, we only need to take Seneca at his word when he tells us that such an impulse is not *distinct* from reason; *it constitutes instead the initial impetus behind a continuous response to the world that, as it unfolds, becomes increasingly rational.*

This impulse is, at first, an instinctive reaction to a *phantasia*. For example, when we first receive the *species injuruae*, the ‘appearance of injustice,’ Seneca says, an impulse is roused to harm he who is source of this injustice, and an impulse rushes out toward him. Seneca sometimes calls this the *primus multus*, the *primus pulsus*, or the *primus ictus animi*. We have here *principia proludentia adfectibus*, ‘beginnings preluding emotion’ (*De Ir.* 2.2.2). “Emotion, then, is not when one is moved upon receiving impressions of things, but when one surrenders oneself to and *follows* this chance movement (*sed permittit se illis et hunc motum persequi*)” (2.3.1).

We have then impulses in advance of assent.³¹ In his letters, Seneca also describes so called ‘preliminary impulses’ that precede assent, receive assent, and result in an impulse to action (*Ep.* cxii.18). These preludes to action are the beginnings of an impulsive response to an impression—to which we can assent. If the impulsive response is not appropriate to the received impression, then that same impulse becomes anger, an impulse “pressing on toward revenge through desire and judgment (*ad ultionem voluntate et iudicio pergentis*) (2.3.5).”³² Sometimes, we too readily give our assent to one or another impulse. And it is indeed our impulse that we assent to although, properly speaking, it is not just to the impulse that we give our assent; it is to the object which elicits this response in us by giving us a certain impression. That is why assent is sometimes spoken of as though it were given to an impression (*Ac.* I. 40).

Speaking even more strictly, reason cannot assent to an impression alone, but only to the significance it *attaches to that* impression. Reason can only give its assent to something which it can understand rationally, and this must be something that can be expressed in the form of a

³⁰ Ensouled things are moved ‘by’ themselves when “an impression occurs within them that calls forth an impulse...A rational animal however, in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason which passes judgment on impressions, rejecting some and accepting others in order that the animal may be guided accordingly” (Origen, *On Principles* 3.1.3, *SVF* II.988, *LS* 53A).

³¹ Here I am entering into a debate about whether it is possible for impulses to precede assent that has been carried out between Inwood and Ioppolo. Here, and most explicitly in Seneca’s *Letter* xciii.18, Seneca appears to affirm that impulse does precede assent, and Ioppolo draws from similar references in Cicero’s *De Fato* and Plutarch’s *Adv. Col.*, 1122b-6, all of which Inwood dismisses as late departures from Stoic orthodoxy (“Il monism psicologico”). Seneca’s preliminary impulses therefore have to be explained away in a subsequent essay of Inwood’s, where they become the somatic side effects of rational impressions. On other points however, where it seems more clear that Seneca is advancing the idea of an impulse which results simply from an impression, as opposed to one which is also the result of judgment and assent, Inwood simply abandons Seneca’s defense and declares him unorthodox. See for example *Ethics and Human Action*, 179. Anna Maria Ioppolo, “*Il monismo psicologico degli Stoici antichi*” *Elenchos*, 8 (1987): 449-466; “Seneca and Psychological Dualism,” *Reading Seneca*, 55.

³² Stevens has raised the possibility that this second impulse following assent be classified as distinct from that which precedes it. This would again have a devastating result for an argument against dualism, essentially suggesting that we have two different kinds of impulse: that which arises without reason and that which issues from reason. This will deliver us right back into the hands of the bi-partite soul. We will have a soul closely resembling Plato’s with separate desires issuing from separate parts of the soul. John Stevens, “Primary Impulse in Stoic Psychology,” *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2000): 139-168.

proposition: ‘this thing making an impression upon me is a such-and-such’³³ We then give our assent not just to the impression but to the judgment it entails—to both the impression and that ‘it is an act of injustice.’

No strict distinction is to be drawn between assenting to the impression and to the corresponding judgment.³⁴ Some scholars would also draw a further distinction between two different kinds of judgments, one of which seems to follow upon the other.³⁵ But that would mean we give our assent twice, first to the thought that ‘this is injustice,’ and second to the thought that it ‘is to be avenged’; we then assent first to the impression that something ‘is lovable’ and then to the idea that it “is to be loved.’ But what we give our assent to is the whole proposition that ‘this is lovable and therefore to be loved.’

It might seem necessary to distinguish one kind of judgment that is merely descriptive from another which is normative and action-producing. But the Stoics do not have the same interest that modern ethicists do in policing the boundaries that separate facts and values, nor did they think that judgment has to take on a fundamentally different form before it can elicit action. As with Aristotle, all that is necessary for a judgment to provoke action is to place an action among a class of things to which we have a natural response. Lloyd writes, “Making a judgment that Helen is lovable is the same act or event as having, meaning, or being aware of a lovable mental representation of her. Choosing or deciding to love Helen is the same act as assenting to the impression that she is lovable.”³⁶

We are already beginning to feel an inkling of a loving response. Seneca might say that what we are effectively assenting to is an impulse already making itself felt, *in addition* to that *phantasia* that the object is lovable. In a sense then, when we are responding precisely to the impulse we are *already* halfway on the way to enacting.³⁷ Indeed, we affirm the reaction that we are *already* having. It was indeed an appropriate momentary response to the appearance of the

³³ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* 7.151.4, LS 41C .

³⁴ As Lloyd says, “Stoics were willing to treat images themselves as objects of assent, so the distinction of image (representation) and judgment tended to dissolve.” Lloyd, “Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology,” 237-244; While acknowledging that “the interchange of presentation and proposition suggests that their relationship must be a very close one,” Inwood is more insistent that assent is given to the proposition itself. He does, however, agree that “the presentation could only be said to be true if and only if the corresponding proposition were true.” Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 57-56.

³⁵ As Hadot points out, Marcus Aurelius makes no firm distinction between a *phantasia* or ‘impression’ and a *hupolēpsis* or ‘judgment’, advocating withholding assent from the former as often as the latter, and yet he will distinguish between the two if and when it suits his purposes to say that impressions must be assented to and judgment-making avoided. Hadot writes, “we find Marcus saying either (VIII.29) ‘Erase your representations (*phantasiai*),’ or else (VII.40) ‘Suppress your judgment,’ without there being any apparent difference in meaning. And yet Marcus is sometimes quite capable of distinguishing inner discourse—and hence the judgment—which the soul develops *about* a particular representation—from the representation itself (VIII.49): ‘Don’t tell yourself anything more than what your primary representations tell you. If you’ve been told, “so-and-so has been talking behind your back,” then this is what you’ve been told. You have not however been told that “Somebody has done a wrong to you.”’ Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 104.

³⁶ Lloyd, “Emotion and Decision in Stoic Psychology,” 244.

³⁷ Frede makes a similar point in arguing that an impression does not just come with propositional content, which is alone assented to. One assents to the propositional content, the impression from which it derives, and the way this impression affects one. Frede, “The Affections of the Soul.”

unknown object on our horizon.³⁸ Now we affirm that is *still* indeed the appropriate one, and that it should continue. We decide whether, as the object offers itself for closer inspection, it should *continue* to provoke in us the response it is beginning to provoke. We can only once articulate in thought what it is about the object that might provoke the response. We assent to these thoughts, and thus to a response which is already partly underway.³⁹ It is in this sense that *hormai*, ‘impulses’ are to be understood as ‘assents’ that occur when we perceive an action as presently appropriate to us.⁴⁰

Do these pre-rational desires reintroduce a bipartite soul in which, one part, impulse, is ruled over by another, reason? To pose Inwood’s question, “If one thing, reason, is in a position to sit in judgment over something else which has a kind of life of its own in the soul, do we not find ourselves on the doorstep of dualism?”⁴¹ But reason does not sit in impartial judgment over something other than itself. Reason assents to its own thoughts, and merely *reaffirms* its own first impressions and *renews* its vow to the practical consequences they entail.

To say that impulse precedes and is the object of assent is never to set reason in judgment over another part of the soul. It is to remain true to that original insight of Inwood’s holding that the Stoics share an approach to human action in common with Aristotle. They both explain it in terms of a practical syllogism. This is what Aristotle calls *boulêsis*, ‘deliberation.’ To apply the concept of deliberation to Stoicism may seem to stretch the limits of the term’s applicability. Even Inwood objects. This is because it denotes the *logizesthai*, or ‘thinking out’ more or less consciously of *different* possibilities for action *meta logou* ‘in speech.’⁴² Meanwhile, the Stoic does not appear to consider *different* possibilities.

For Aristotle, it certainly seems that at any given moment we can think a wide range of thoughts about a wide range of things. Considering each in turn, we can come to regard one of them as an appropriate object—the appropriate object of *one* of our many desires. For this reason, the Aristotelian looks to have a greater number of possible paths of action to choose between, thus more control in selecting *between* different possibilities. But from another perspective, the Aristotelian has almost as little choice as the Stoic. He or she must simply *affirm* that a present object is in fact *the* correct object of the desire he or she feels most strongly. From

³⁸ “What activates impulse, they [the Stoics] say is an impression at once capable of impelling an appropriate act (*to de kinoun tèn hormên ouden heteron einai all, ê phantasian hormetikên tou kathêkontos*)” (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.86.17, *SVF* III.169, *LS* 53Q). Note Inwood’s alternate rendering. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 224.

³⁹ Aulus Gellius also transcribes the following words, taken from the lost Book V of Epictetus’ discourses:

Mental ‘impressions,’ through which a person’s mind is struck by the initial aspect of some circumstance springing on the mind, are not voluntary or a matter of choice...But the ‘assents’ through which those same impressions are cognized are voluntary and happen by one’s own choice. That is why, when some terrifying sound occurs, either from the sky or from the collapse of a building or as the sudden herald of some danger, even the wise person’s mind necessarily responds...by certain rapid and unplanned movements antecedent to the office of the intellect and reason. Shortly, however, the wise person, in that situation ‘withholds assent’ from those terrifying mental impressions and rejects them and does not find anything in them which he should fear...the nonwise person thinks that the kinds of things which when they first struck his mind impressed him as scary or harsh really are that way, and ‘adds belief,’ endorsing those same beginnings as things rightly to be feared...” (*Attic Nights*, 19.1, *LS* 65Y).

Translation by Graver. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, 85-86.

⁴⁰ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.7.9 86W.

⁴¹ Inwood, “Seneca and Psychological Dualism,” 63.

⁴² Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 83-84.

this point on, action follows ineluctably. The action that results is automatic, for “an animal moves and goes forward by desire or choice when some choice has occurred in accord with sensation or *phantasia*” (*De Mot.* 701a6). For this reason we shall speak of the Stoics as having an Aristotelian conception of ‘deliberation.’ The Stoics simply emphasize more strongly than Aristotle that in most cases we can only *react* to particulars outside of our control. This may be why the Stoics do not use the word deliberation at all, but this is not to say that the word is not useful.

A SEEMING INCOMPATIBILITY

This brings us to *akrasia*. Despite the fact that Chrysippus himself describes as *akratês*, a movement of the soul that is beyond reason’s control,⁴³ and although Cicero decries the way “weak men’s wills pull them different ways, and while they indulge one they act counter to another” (*Tusc.* V.xx), the Stoics are not thought to have had, like Aristotle before them, a conception of the soul admitting of *akrasia*.⁴⁴

Scholars find it difficult to believe that the Stoics could have believed in impulse struggling to assert itself against reason if they did not believe in two distinct parts of the soul. Without believing in two parts of the soul, scholars see the experience of being divided against oneself as one the Stoics are without the conceptual vocabulary to account for, since it is an experience that, today, we find impossible to describe as anything but a conflict *between* parts.

The Stoics however only intended to deny the Platonic thesis that our soul consists of different parts if by “part” is meant a portion of the soul moved independently of the others by its own internal impetus (*Rep.* 483a). The experience of being divided against oneself was one that, so far from finding it difficult to relate to, the Stoics depicted in metaphors vivid enough even to give the appearance that they had a part-based psychology. It is then wiser to conclude that the Stoics thought it possible for the subject to feel as though he or she were torn in two. Nay, he or she *was*, that in a certain sense, divided into two different parts, with the proviso of course that these were not “parts” in Plato’s sense of the term.

However, according to scholars the internal conflict described by Stoics is merely apparent, hardly a conflict at all. This is because the Stoics believe that in such instances two beliefs take hold of us, one after another, each prompting us to a different and conflicting course of action. This is from scholars’ perspective a “conflict” in name alone because we are not *simultaneously* in the grip of two conflicting beliefs that draw us in opposite directions *at once*:⁴⁵

⁴³ Galen, *PHP* 4.4.24, *SVF* III.478.

⁴⁴ Inwood holds, for example, that *akrasia* is only possible for the Stoics in a weak and not “in the strict sense of actively defying what reason *at the same time* resolves to do.” If a man fails to act on his practical decision, according to this view, it is only an apparent failure, for the agent that has actually changed his mind or his assent was not sincere in the first place. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 48; see also Striker, “Skeptical Strategies,” “Skeptical Strategies,” in *Doubt and Dogmatism*, eds. Malcolm Schofield et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 79.

⁴⁵ For Brennan and others, weakness of will may be a reality, “But each belief, and so each impulse, maximally occupies the mind; one can only fit a single belief into one’s ‘belief box’. The phenomena that have misled other theorists into positing conflict between multiple concurrent beliefs are instead explained as vacillation in thought, which is so rapid that it escapes our notice (thus, also revealing some limitations on introspective access to our thoughts). I first believe that I ought not to do X, but then this thought is driven out by the contrary thought, during which phase I actually do X, only to be overwhelmed by regret on the return of the belief that X was not the thing to do.” In other words, weakness of the will is affirmed, but the possibility of genuine internal conflict denied. Brennan, “Stoic Moral Psychology,” 275.

[The Stoics] say that passion is no different than reason, and that there is no dissention and conflict between the two, but a turning of the single reason in both directions, which we do not notice owing to the sharpness and speed of the change. We do not perceive that the natural instrument of appetite and regret, or anger and fear, is the same part of the psyche, which is moved by pleasure towards wrong, and while moving recovers (*epilambanesthai*) itself. For anger and appetite and fear and all such things are corrupt opinions and judgments, which do not arise around just one part of the psyche but are the inclinations, yieldings, assents and impulses of the whole control centre, and are, quite generally, activities which change rapidly, just like children's fights, whose fury and intensity are volatile owing to their weakness.⁴⁶

What Plutarch describes does not seem to rise to the status of an internal conflict because it arises from a mistaken value judgment. Reason momentarily fails us. But after a brief lapse in judgment, reason recovers itself, though it may perhaps lapse once more as correct judgments alternate with incorrect ones. There is an oscillation between two competing beliefs, a false one, followed by a true one. There is no doubt that the first belief urges us in one, the second in a contradictory direction. It is therefore possible for us to distinguish between two "parts"; one is distinguishable from the other because it moves in a direction the other does not, even if these two parts do not pull against each other in opposite directions *at the same time*.

However, more controversially, there may also be a sense in which it *is* correct to say that we move *simultaneously* in opposite directions. We must say this, in fact, in order to account for the oscillation between competing imperatives. For there are, clamoring to be heard within us, two distinct voices. One voice, the voice of truth, fights to be heard so powerfully that it is capable of gaining a foothold in consciousness. It gains ascendancy long enough for it to momentarily drown out the voice of falsity before it is once again muffled. The voice temporarily drowned out by a false judgment is not just the voice of truth speaking to us from some abstract realm. It is the voice of truth inside us, and false judgments cause us to act counter to this inner voice. As Strange avers, "Passions are genuinely akratic because the logos that they are disobediences to is one's own dominant and hegemonic logos, not merely the 'right reason' which states the objective prescription that applies to the particular situation in which one finds oneself."⁴⁷

In fact, it is difficult to account for the way one imperative gives way to the next if we think that it must vanish, roots and all, before another springs up in its place. For in fact, precisely what distinguishes a passion is that the belief responsible for it is not completely relinquished before it is displaced by a truer belief. "For when people have been deceived, for instance, over atoms being first principles, they give up the judgment, once they have been

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.* 446e, *LS* 65G, *SVF* 3.489.

⁴⁷ Here we place emphasis on idea that has received insufficient attention since it has been propounded by Endberg-Penderson and Strange. Both have sought to equate the passions with *akrasia*. Strange argues, "one will always possess or at least have available to one, a correct and relevant *doxa* about the good." He continues, "If one decides to do something against one's better judgment, as we say, what is occurring is that there are two judgments in the soul that are opposed to one another, the one declaring that it is appropriate to perform a certain action A, and the other that it is not right to do so. Logically, these two judgments are of course, contradictory, but this only entails that they both cannot be entertained, or in Stoic terms assented to, at one and the same time. One will find oneself wavering between them." Strange, "On The Voluntariness of the Passions," 44-45.

taught that it is not true. But when people are in states of passion...they still do not give these up.”⁴⁸

One can only conclude that the false belief is not dissipated, and in fact reasserts itself again and again over a truer belief because it is literally struggling *against* that belief with which it is held simultaneously. Within the self therefore coexists alongside the false belief the power to render a correct judgment. *The ever-present voice of reason or conscience, struggles to be heard over the voice of reason-gone-astray.*

However, if somewhat ironically, the same scholars who deny the possibility of internal conflict in Stoicism also believe that the soul is heir to another, similar kind of conflict. A Stoic, they assume, will occasionally feel divided between what he grasps in theory and what he does in practice. The practicing Stoic will then be subject to a kind of conflict between what his reason tells him and his impulses desire. But while Cicero and Seneca acknowledge the reality of this kind of inner conflict, and in fact believe it lies at the root of the kind of conflict we have just described, they also think it is an *aberration*, that is to say, not natural or normal.

The Stoics perhaps only mean to deny that the soul was *normally* divided against itself. In any case, it is not impossible for it to arise that the soul is in some way, set against itself. We must simply explain how this can occur *contrary to nature* when a false judgment “sets into motion a forcible and excessive impulse.”⁴⁹ This brings us to how the Stoics explained irrational impulses, for an impulse is “called irrational whenever an excessive impulse which has become strong and dominant carries it off toward something wrong and contrary to the dictates of reason.”⁵⁰

OVERREACHING

Just as we ‘reach out’ or extend ourselves toward objects that we wish to take into ourselves, we also withdraw, or ‘shrink away from’ others. The Stoics use the same language of extending and contracting to describe emotions. But this extending or contracting is now described as violently exaggerated. In his *Tusculan Disputations*, where Cicero adapts ideas originally contained in Chrysippus’ *On the Emotions* for a Roman audience,⁵¹ Cicero says the mind becomes “puffed up” and “distended” and he speaks often as though it were the mind itself that extended too far and contracted too much, almost as though it were this alone that made its inherent rationality turn irrational (III.ix).

Aristotle had already spoken with the voice of popular Greek morality when he wrote that “both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases, not well; but to feel them at

⁴⁸ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.888, 8-90,6; *LS* 65A: *SVF* 3.378.

⁴⁹ Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.* 449c.

⁵⁰ Plutarch *Virt. Mor.* 440e-441d, *LS* 61B.

⁵¹ Cicero defends here the position of Chrysippus, citing him frequently by name (3.79, 4.9, 4.23,4.53, 4.63), and communicating the ideas we know were contained in his work *On the Emotions*. Graver argues that Cicero could not be drawing from a similar work by Posidonius, though he may perhaps have been referring to another intermediary. In that case, however, the ideas contained in the work of this intermediary could not have differed significantly from Chrysippus’ own. For a complete list of the respects in which Cicero can be shown to hew closely to Chrysippus, see Margaret Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Appendix C, 203-214.

the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way” (1106b17). After Aristotle’s death the Stoics accused his followers of failing to put limits to human impulses:

Therefore the thoughts and declarations of the Peripatetics are soft and effeminate, for they say that the mind must necessarily be agitated, but at the same time they lay down certain bounds beyond which that agitation is not to proceed. And do you set bounds to vice? Or is no vice to disobey reason? Does not reason sufficiently declare that there is no real good which you should desire too ardently, or the possession of which you should allow to transport you? ...But what are those degrees by which we are to limit it? (*Tusc.* IV.xvii)

The question “what are those degrees by which we are to limit it?” asks whether the Peripatetics have any way to impose limits on their impulses. The Stoics believe that if our impulses are rational, they will be intrinsically measured and limited. The Peripatetics give free reign to impulses that they admit to be prone to excess,⁵² and therefore irrational. Then, they try to keep them within certain bounds. The Stoics regard this as an overdue attempt to impose measure on impulses that have already been allowed to become resistant to our attempts to do so.

Zeno launched hundreds of years of Stoic reflection on emotions by simply defining each one of them as a *pleonazousa hormê*. He did not just define each one as a *pleonastikê hormê*, an ‘excessive impulse.’ If he had said only this then he would only have made the unremarkable observation that our most emotional impulses are those with such a ferocious intensity that they usually drive us to act in the extreme, to behave far in excess of what the situation in which we find ourselves demands. No doubt, an emotional impulse is one that is powerful enough to make us slam doors, tear papers, kick rocks, to list just a few of the examples Seneca gives of the “excessive” reactions to which we are provoked. But if Zeno had only meant to imply that emotional impulses were strong enough to provoke excessive behavior, then he would have defined each emotional impulse as a *pleonastikê hormê*, as one so excessive in its intensity that its results were sure to be excessive too. Instead, he defined every emotional impulse as a *pleonazousa hormê*, an impulse actively ‘overreaching’ or ‘overshooting.’⁵³

Which boundaries ‘exceeding’ impulses were believed to cross, which limits they were supposed to surpass, remains to be determined. The question concerns *what is it that impulse may be said to exceed?* The answer to this question is not far to seek:

If impulses overstep their bounds, if, leaping away, so to speak, whether attracted by something or repelled, they are not adequately *restrained by reason*, then indeed they

⁵² They referred to this impulsiveness as excessive, meaning only that “it was naturally inclined to receive excess, not that it was already excessive” (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.38).

⁵³ Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 67. Any Greek-speaker would have attached immediate significance to the fact that Zeno defined emotion (*pathos*) as *hormê pleonazousa* rather than *hormê pleonastikê*. The fact that other Stoics did is evidenced by Stobaeus’ reference to a Stoic who is quoted as having said “He [Zeno] does not say ‘an impulse whose nature is to exceed,’ but ‘one that is in fact exceeding.’ For it is not a matter of the capacity but the activity (*Ecl.* 2.7.1 39W, *SVF* 1.206). For those instances in which *pathos* is referred to as an excessive impulse see *LS* 65A,J.

transgress due measure and limit. They abandon, they cast off, obedience, they do not submit to reason to whom they are subject *by the law of nature.* (*De Off.* I.xxix.102)

Cicero does not necessarily mean that impulse must be, like a horse with reins, forcibly restrained. Impulse must “obey” reason in the sense that it should reach out for the things reason perceives as the ‘fitting’ or the ‘appropriate’ objects of impulse. Since reason causes and conditions impulse, our impulses come with built-in limits;⁵⁴ our impulses never arise without reason, and thus, they never lead us to perform acts in excess of what reason has given assent to. Reason, in other words, fixes clearly in its sights, the targets at which impulse must aim. It therefore puts limits on impulse by fixing upon the targets it should not overshoot.⁵⁵ If reason fails, we over-exert ourselves. The result is that we reach too far out towards, and eventually out beyond, the objects toward which our efforts *ought* to be directed.

We are speaking here of the measure imposed on impulses by reason itself. This is what Galen refers to as *tên kata logon summetrion*, and Clement as *ta kata logon metra*, that is, ‘the measure of reason.’⁵⁶ Moreover, these are the limits placed by nature, and not by man on human striving:

Natural desires are limited; but those which spring from false opinions can have no stopping-point. The false has no limits. When you are travelling on a road, there must be an end; but when astray, your wanderings are limitless. Recall your steps, therefore, from idle things, and when you would know whether that which you seek is based upon a natural or misleading desire, consider whether it can stop at any definite point. If you find, after having traveled far, that there is a more distant goal always in view, you may be sure that this condition is contrary to nature. (*Ep.* xvi.9)⁵⁷

That nature itself gives measure and proportion to our striving was an idea the Stoics shared with the Epicureans. In the words of Chrysippus himself, Stoics sought to avoid the overstepping of “that measure in impulses which is natural.”⁵⁸ Nature puts limits on our desires. We can see why this is so. If our impulses are responses to the objects that elicit them, then they ought not be more forcefully elicited than is needed to attain the object.

According to Seneca, an “excessive” response is avoided because “whenever impetus is necessary, it does not break out in anger; it is roused to action and relaxed to just the extent it thinks necessary, in just the same way that the range of a missile shot from a catapult is under

⁵⁴ Thus desire does not want unconditionally, but only when reason presently perceives the object as fitting. Only if one is angry, according to Seneca, does one want vengeance not *si oportet*, if it appears ‘fitting,’ but *ubique*, ‘whatever the circumstances’ (*Ep.* ii.41).

⁵⁵ *Enkrateia* is defined as a disposition not to go beyond (*diathesis anuperbatos*) what is coming to be in accord with reason (*tôn kat’ orthon logon gignomenôn*) (Sextus, *Adv. Math.* IX.153, SVF III.274). The word *nauperbatos* could have a passive meaning, making the disposition ‘indomitable.’ But Gourinat argues that the passive meaning is not possible. *Anuperbatos* thus has the active sense of ‘not going beyond.’ Therefore *enkrateia* is a disposition never to go beyond what reason presents as an appropriate object of impulse. Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, “*Akrasia* and *Enkrateia* in Ancient Stoicism,” *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*, ed. Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destree (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 247, 242.

⁵⁶ Galen, *PHP* 4.2.8, *LS* 65J, *SVF* III.42.

⁵⁷ In Galen, this is described as a judging of things as good, “and a running toward them in excess of what is natural” (*PHP* 4.5.21, *LS* 65L, *SVF* III.480).

⁵⁸ Galen, *PHP* 4.2.14-18, *LS* 65J, *SVF* 3.462.

the control of the operator” (I.9.1). Seneca’s remark recalls Aristotle, who says that “we must not exert ourselves nor relax our efforts too much or too little.” Seneca even writes in his letters that “impulse is regulated by the worth of the individual object, adjusting itself to feeble or vigorous according as the object merits effort” (*Ep.* 89).

In the end, the Stoics arrived at a conclusion that was not un-Aristotelian. *Orthos logos*, ‘right reason’ gives measure and due proportion to our impulses, for we must not exert ourselves too much but specifically “to an intermediate extent and as the right rule (*orthos logos*) dictates” (113ab27). That is to say that *orthos logos* always determines a moderate response. It is simply much more explicitly stated for the Stoics than for Aristotle that the moderate impulse is one proportionate to that to which it comes as response. But what matters most where impulses are concerned is “to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive” (1106b17). The proportionate and well-measured response is not just one lying mid-way between two arbitrarily chosen extremes, but one that is proportionate precisely to its stimulus and object.⁵⁹

Seneca is describing genuine moments of internal conflict: impulse “resists and is not submissive when ordered, but is carried away by its own caprice and fury, as little under the mind’s power to control” as is the soldier who disregards the signal for retreat (I.vii.6).⁶⁰

It would seem contradictory for the Stoics to maintain that impulses are rational enough to be “excited by an opinion of either good or evil,” (*Tusc.* III.xi) and at the same time, that they occasionally take on a life of their own, sufficient for them to not only *transsilire* or ‘overleap’ reason but to ‘drag’ reason along with it, to use Seneca’s wording (*De Ira* IV.2.4). The words may be Seneca’s but the reason he doesn’t see himself to be betraying Stoicism is that the idea that an impulse can begin its life as a judgment, and then become something over which the mind can neither exercise judgment nor persuade—that is an idea predating him. Even for the older Stoa reason both gives rise to an effect, and this effect *ceases* to come under the controlling influence of its originating cause, which it is precisely to say that it becomes something distinct, that is irrational⁶¹: “‘irrational’ is equivalent to ‘disobedient to reason’ (*apeithes tō logō*). For ever passion is compelling (*biastikon*), since often people being in a state of passion see that it is not suitable to do this (*hoti ou sumphei tode poiēin*), but being carried away by the intensity (*hupo tēs sphodrotētos expheromenos*), just as though by a disobedient horse, and are

⁵⁹ This emphasis on proportion can also be found in many of the ancient texts: Impulse must be *ikanos*, or ‘equal to’ achieving what is appropriate, and it must continue in the case of things that appear worthy of continued effort. Plutarch writes: “And Cleanthes, in his treatises on physics, having said that tension (*tonos*) is a bit of fire, and that, if it becomes sufficient (*ikanos*) in the soul to achieve what is appropriate, it is called strength and power, (*ischus kai kratos*) and adds literally the following words: ‘This strength and power, when it arises in the case of things appearing to be adhered to (*epi tois phaneisin emmeneteois*) is *enkrateia*...’” (*Stoic. Rep.* 7.1034d, *SVF* I 565, *LS* 61C). Meanwhile, Galen writes, “the proportion (*summetrian*) of a natural impulse (*phusikēs hormēs*) is what accords with reason (*hē kata ton logon*), and is of such a kind, to the extent to which reason deems it worthy” (*PHP* 4.2.18, *LS* 65J, *SVF* III.462).

⁶⁰ But once he is angered, a man “cannot now avoid arriving at the goal toward which he might once have avoided starting” (I.vii.3). We are therefore concerned with those instances in which we are continually goaded to punish a wrongdoer whether or not the actions to which our impulses drive us *still* are recognized by reason as appropriate (IV.ii.4).

⁶¹ Inwood, however, attempts to discredit all of the many accounts that are given in which impulse is described as overpowering reason. He attempts to discredit even Arius Didymus, cited here, who he admits “is often an excellent source of information on the old Stoa.” Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 141.

compelled (*lit.* are led, *anagesthai*) to do it; also often saying they agree with the oft-quoted verse: ‘even having knowledge, nature compels me.’”⁶²

When speaking of passions we are speaking of effects *disproportionate* to their cause, of *over-reactions*. But it is usually taken for granted that an effect must be proportionate to its cause. And yet, if we turn to the Stoics’ physics, we find that nothing could be more foreign to them than the idea that an effect must be proportionate to its cause. The transformation undergone by one thing cannot be ascribed whole and entire to an efficient cause that acts on it from without. When one thing acts upon another, the second thing is usually of such a nature that it is effected to a greater or lesser degree. A cylinder that rolls when pushed provides an ideal example. Since the cylinder would not roll if it had another shape, for Chrysippus, its motion serves as the perfect analogy on which to understand the emotions:

It is in reference to this that we speak of the ‘excessiveness of the impulse’ (*pleonaxei para tēn hormēn*) because it oversteps that natural due proportion of impulses themselves which is natural and through oneself (*to tēn kath’ autous kai phusikēn tōn hormone summetran huperbainein*). What I mean would be more comprehensible through the following: When one walks through impulse, the movement of the legs is not excessive but is to some extent joined together with the impulse, so that if a person wishes to stop or make a change, he can do so. But when people run through impulse, this is no longer the case: the movement of the legs exceeds the impulse (*pleonazei para tēn hormēn*) so that they are carried away (*echpherasthai*) and do not make a change when one initiates it, as in the previous case. I think that something very similar happens in the impulses, because of overstepping the measure that is in accordance with reason (*to dia tēn kata logon hupobainein summetrain*), so that when one has an impulse one is not being persuaded (*mē eupathōs*) by reason.⁶³

External things have a stronger effect on some minds than others.⁶⁴ These minds, like a cylinder is more likely than another shape to roll when pushed, are extraordinarily susceptible to external impressions and more likely to be moved by them. A movement, once initiated can gather a speed and momentum of its own, and once this happens, it has a force not just equal to, but greater than, the thing that originally set it in motion. This makes it “excessive” in the sense of being disproportionately forceful. As its strength builds, it ceases to be dependent, for its momentum, upon the thing that originally imparted it. The analogy to be drawn here is thus between the movement imparted to the cylinder by an external “push” and the force imparted to impulses by impressions. If everything goes smoothly, our impulses’ force remains measured—that is to say, proportionate to the instigating propulsion. But if they pick up speed,

⁶² Stobaeus *Ecl.* II.888,8, *LS* 65A, *SVF* 3.378. “A passion is an impulse which breaks the bounds of reason (*hē huperteinousa ta kata ton logon metra*), a deviant impulse beyond the control of reason (*hē hormē expheromenē kai apatheis logon*) (Clemens, *Strom.* *SVF* III.377). In Stobaeus a *pathē* is *pasin hormē pleonezousan kai apathē tō airounti logō*, ‘an impulse exceeding and disobedient to (*lit.* unpersuaded by) *logos*’ (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* II 88.6W, *LS* 65A, *SVF* III.378).

⁶³ Galen, *PHP* 4.2.8, *LS* 65J, *SVF* III.42.

⁶⁴ Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*, p. 86. The Stoics believe that, as Graver puts it, “our ways of interpreting and responding to states of affairs are determined by our mental states.” Thus “the propositions we accept as true are just those which we recognize as fitting with beliefs we already hold.” Our own dispositions and not the impressions we receive are themselves to blame for our accepting them (*De Fat.* 41). But if we accept a false belief it is because we are already predisposed to accept it by having false beliefs. Sextus claims, for example, that we favor beliefs consistent with those we already hold (*Adv. Math.* 8.275-76, *SVF* 2.223).

they hurtle down their own path, becoming increasingly impervious to the belated attempt reason finally makes to respond to truer impressions, to set out along another course of action. *Suddenly, impulse becomes something distinct from reason, so distinct, in fact, that reason recommends one course of action and impulse swerves in the opposite direction. At the moment this happens, impulse becomes distinguishable from reason in the sense that it impels us to action that “the better part of us” does not recommend.*

The Stoics are happy to build on the Platonic analogy⁶⁵ in which reason figures as a charioteer directing the movements of an unwieldy horse. But this did not mean that reason gave measure to impulse by literally reigning it in. Transforming the Platonic analogy, Chrysippus made it a metaphor for the conditions under which a bad master turns his own horse against him. No longer properly guided by the human intellect, the horse develops a mind of its own and hurtles off in a direction that its master no longer finds advantageous. Since, for the Stoics, reason and impulse are an inseparable pair, the fault for the conflict that erupts between them can only result from the charioteer though it ends in the charioteers’ being forcibly dragged along by a now disobedient horse. Thus Stobaeus says that people in states of passion are carried away “just as though by a disobedient horse, and are compelled (literally, ‘are led,’ *anagesthai*) to do it...”⁶⁶ The Stoics were willing to use this analogy, however, only so long as it was understood that it did not apply to a healthy person, in whom the distinction between charioteer and horse, reason and desire, was nowhere to be seen.

Thus, the Stoics stressed that desire would automatically be kept within the proper bounds and in accord with reason if reason did not err. If reason functioned correctly, desire would not overstep its natural bounds. *Neither would reason be in conflict with desire, nor thought with action.*

Many scholars, however, assume that the rational intellect must play in some sense the typical role that has been assigned to it throughout history, that of placing limits on a desire, which is by its very nature *inherently* limitless. Inwood, for example, argues that reason must add to each of our internal imperatives the proviso ‘do this—provided fate allows.’ In this way, we are able to keep desire “within bounds,” which for Inwood means, to keep our desires from being disappointed. He argues that the result and not the cause of this disappointment will be a *pathé*.⁶⁷ The effect of this assertion is, however, to undo the claim that Inwood makes better than anyone else, that desires are *inherently* rational. Desires become inherently capable of carrying us beyond the bounds of reason. Thus, Inwood reintroduces the very dualism he tries to fend off: reason rules over and governs desire. This is the very Peripatetic assumption the Stoics tried to fend off as well.⁶⁸

Rather than start out from a distinction between reason and desire, the Stoics assumed the original unity of the soul, and only then set out to explain the conditions under which such a picture of the soul as Plato and Aristotle presented might obtain. Their conclusion was that

⁶⁵ Inwood dismisses this passage as a misinterpretation of Chrysippus’ analogy, bearing the mark of Posidonius’ influence. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 170.

⁶⁶ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.888,8, *LS* 65A, *SVF* 3.378.

⁶⁷ Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 166-167.

⁶⁸ “There has yet to be a fully satisfactory account of what it means for an impulse to be excessive,” according to Inwood (*Ibid.*, 155). Inwood’s comes as close as possible to giving such an account except for the fact that he excludes two of the most important ways in which excessive impulses were understood in antiquity. “The excessiveness of the impulse is not, as Plutarch thought, a reference to the exceeding of some ideal and moderate degree of a motion in the soul, nor is it as Galen thought, a reference to a lack of rational control of an intrinsically irrational psychic movement” (*Ibid.*, 170).

the divided self of which Plato and Aristotle spoke was one that emerged out of reason's tendency to overreach its own boundaries. Thus, they concluded that those who testified to the fact that they sometimes felt themselves "pulled in two directions at once" never lied. They simply described a condition of vice into which they would never have descended if they had not already allowed reason to overreach its own boundaries. In short, far from denying the validity of the experience of *akrasia*,⁶⁹ the Stoics tried to give new meaning to the old Euripidean refrain, 'although having full knowledge, nature compels me.'⁷⁰ They merely suggested the following alternative: 'although inclined by nature, *reason* compels me.'

A SOUL UNDIVIDED BY UNBRIDLED REASON

One must survey the many ways in which Stoics like Cicero and Seneca make use of the fundamental unity of the soul in order to claim, with no further argument, that the unity of the self can, and should be, preserved at all costs. Thus, we shall proceed through a list of things that we might today suspect to be the inevitable cause of our own internal strife. We shall see however that for Cicero and Seneca, none of these things are capable of setting us against ourselves—unless we allow them to.

The first thing that seems to inevitably set us against ourselves is the external world. When Cicero begins to outline the Stoic theory of emotion in the *Tusculan Disputations* he starts with a meditation on the extremes to which we would have to go to prevent reason from giving rise to irrational impulses. Would it require us to completely inure our intellects to the perceptible world? Wouldn't even a wise man find himself susceptible to certain impressions, and thus liable to the emotional impulses to which they give rise? After all, "we are not the offspring of flints; but we have by nature something soft and tender in our souls, which may be put into violent motion..." (*Tusc.* II.5).

What is necessary, as it turns out, is not that we blind ourselves to sense impressions. We inevitably receive impressions from the world and are consequently affected by them, and freedom from emotional impulses, even if it could be purchased at the cost of our reception of impressions from externals, would not be worth the price of rendering ourselves insensitive to their effects. It is only necessary that we remove false beliefs. It is to these that Seneca refers to when he says, "Certain things sink into us making us sluggish in certain ways and hasty in

⁶⁹ Gourinat ultimately ends his study of *akrasia* in Stoicism with the conclusion that the Stoics did not assign an important role to *enkrateia*. *Akrasia* is for most Stoics, a minor virtue merely referring to people able to withstand pain and pleasure. "However," he says, "some texts illustrate a tendency to extend the scope of self-control and incontinence beyond pleasure, and to make incontinence, if not the *source* of all passion, then at least the vice *dealing with* passions" Indeed, as Gourinat has documented, *enkrateia* seems to have progressively assumed a more important role in Stoicism (232—239). Plutarch records that for Cleanthes, it took its place among the four cardinal virtues, replacing *phronêsis* (*Stoic. Rep.* 7.1034d, *SVF* I 565, *LS* 61C). "One cannot say," writes Gourinat, "whether this was because some ancient writers had misunderstood Chrysippus' doctrine or because later Stoics had modified it, or because Chrysippus himself had remained ambiguous or changed his mind. In any case, it was not the mainstream conception in the Stoic school" (247). Here, Gourinat must explain away passages in which Chrysippus himself describes every passion as arising from a mind that is *akrateis* (Galen, *PHP* IV.4, 24, *SVF* III 476). He must also discount passages in which Cicero calls *intemperantia* as the source of all vices. He argues that Cicero is translating *sophronunê*, not *akarasia* (*Tusc. Dis* IV.22). This is beside the point since *akrasia* and *akolasia*, appear to be synonymous in Cicero's vocabulary. Gourinat, "Akrasia and Enkrateia in Ancient Stoicism," 247, 242.

⁷⁰ Stobaeus *Ecl.* II 89.4W, *SVF* III.389. Note also the omission of this remark, conspicuous by its absence, from Long and Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (*LS* 65A).

others. These two qualities, the one of recklessness and the other of sloth, cannot be respectively checked or roused unless we remove their causes...” (*Ep.* xcv.37).

“*Kai gar to pathos einai logon ponêron kai akolaston ek phaulês kai diêmartêmenês kriseôs sphodrotêta kai rhomên proslabousês.*”⁷¹ We may translate this as ‘They say that a *pathos* is *logos* that is painful (or useless) and unbridled (literally, not checked or kept within bounds) acquiring vehemence and strength from an erroneous and careless judgment.’ What this emphasizes is that the judgment we make is itself careless or offhand, easily and thoughtlessly given, and that the *logos* is itself *akolaston*. This word derives from the verb *kolazō*, which means ‘to keep within bounds, to check, to bridle.’ (Aristotle himself speaks frequently of the vice of *akolasia* or ‘lack of restraint.’) A *logos akolaston* would be one that was not reigned in or kept within proper limits.

But how can *logos* itself possibly be “restrained”? What does it mean to “bridle” reason? The answer to this question can only be found in Cicero’s *De Academica*. We turn to this work in particular because it is here that we find the Stoics in conversation with their Academic adversaries. The Academics, who *do* wish to close their eyes to the world and prevent themselves from assenting to even the most basic of propositions claim a distinguished lineage for their position, and believe that, in blinding themselves, they follow in the footsteps of no less a philosopher than Socrates, whom they summon to mind in the following way:

...so hidden in obscurity did he believe everything lies, nor is there anything that can be believed or understood, and for these reasons, he said, no one must make any positive statement or affirmation or give the approval of his assent to any proposition (*neque adfirmare quemquam adsensione approbare*), and a man must always *restrain his rashness and hold it back from every slip* (*cohibereque semper et omni lapsu continere temeritatem*), as it would be glaring *rashness* to give assent either to an assent or something not certainly known, and nothing is more disgraceful than for assent and approval to *outstrip* knowledge and perception (*cognitione et preceptioni adsensionem approbationemque praecurrere*. (*De Ac.* I.xii.45)

Thus ends Book I. When, in Book II, the Stoics have their say, they argue that the world is not *akatelêpton* or ‘ungraspable,’ but that it can be grasped. Zeno seems to stretch this analogy to its limits, comparing the human mind to an outstretched hand. He implies that the world can actually be got hold of and touched by almost physical means. At the most physical of levels, he says, we are affected by physical things; they “touch” us when they make an impression upon our senses. However, this does not preclude, for the Stoics, the possibility that external things can be ‘grasped’ even when there is no direct physical contact between them and our souls. The qualities things possess need not, in order to be grasped, be so fully present to the senses. The qualities that things possess can be “impressed” upon us by indirect means:

But then whatever character belongs to these objects which we say are perceived by the senses must belong to that following set of objects which we say are perceived not by actual sensation, but by a sort of sensation (*quodam modo sensibus*), as for example: ‘Yonder thing is white, this thing is sweet, that one is melodious, this fragrant, this rough.’ This class of precepts consists of comprehensions or ‘graspings’ grasped by our mind, not by our sense (*animo iam haec tenemus comprehensa, non sensibus*). Then, ‘yonder object is a horse, yonder a dog.’ Next follows the rest of the series linking on a chain of

⁷¹ Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.* 441D, *LS* 61B.

larger precepts, for instance the following, which embrace as it were a fully completed grasp of the objects: ‘If it is a human being, then it is a rational mortal animal.’ (*De Ac.* II.vi.21)

Under discussion here is reason’s ability, not just to take in impressions, but to take impressions as present “signs” or indicators of things that are *not* yet fully present to the senses and still off “yonder.” A dog need not be fully perceived before his silhouette on the horizon signals that he will, upon being directly perceived, have typically canine qualities. A fruit need not be tasted; it can be expected to be sweet. No sooner do we see a thing than we call to mind its associated qualities. These qualities are *not experienced directly* but they come to mind in connection with what *is* experienced. Thus, it is by somehow amplifying present sensations with remembered sensations that our minds perform their function.

De Academica is concerned with the Skeptic or Academic question of whether the Stoics rashly “go too far” in making the assertions they do. The Academics point out that even to look at a seascape and say “this is blue” is to assent to an impression that may be false. What we see may resemble blueness to us, but perhaps the object giving rise to this perception is not what we habitually refer to by means of the word “blue.”

Here, what can be said of our perceptions can be equally said of our judgments. We give something the name of the thing that it resembles. For example, we call one twin by the same name as his brother, even though he is not the same person. As the example shows, we may attach the wrong name to things. We confuse them with the things to which certain names actually refer, but again, this is not because human consciousness has no grasp of the world. It is because nature is a dissembler—a producer of phenomena having the look of things from which they are totally distinct. To quote an example from Cicero, nature produces eggs that look indistinguishable but that actually come from different chickens (II.xviii.55).⁷²

For the Stoics, we can say, “This is grey...and it is a grey cloud...and it portends rain...” and we can stop ourselves before we assert a falsity. Queried as to how he knew when to stop, Chrysippus would have responded: “...like a clever charioteer, before I get to the end, I shall pull up my horses, and all the more so if the place they are coming to is precipitous” (II.xxix.94). The Stoics’ position is then that we can assent to impressions and yet remain aware of when we have assented to what an impression does not *itself* reveal.

Whereas the Stoics will always assert that limits must be placed on reason, and that it must be restrained, the Academics will assert that reason is lacking restraint by its very nature, for as they say:

No faculty of knowing absolute limits has been bestowed upon us by the nature of things to allow us to fix exactly how far to go in any matter...If we are asked by gradual stages, is such and such a person a rich man or a poor man famous or undistinguished,

⁷² The Stoic response to this line of argument begins in earnest at II.xviii.54: “but the way in which they harp on cases of resemblance between twins, or between the seals stamped by signet rings is childish. For which of us denies that resemblances exist, since they are manifest in ever so many things? But if the fact that many things are like many other things is enough to do away with knowledge, why are you not content with that, especially as we admit it, and why do you prefer to urge a contention utterly excluded by the nature of things, denying that everything is what it is in a class of its own and that two or more objects never possess a common character differing in nothing at all? For example, granting that eggs are like eggs and bees like bees, why therefore do you do battle? Or what are you at in this matter of twins? For it is granted that two twins are alike, and that might have satisfied you, but you want them not to be alike but downright identical, which is impossible.”

are yonder objects many or few, great or small, long or short, broad or narrow, we do not know at what point in the addition or subtraction to give definitive answer. (*De. Ac.* II.xxix.92)

Reason is a horse that exceeds all limits, which gallops too far ahead, but that can be pulled up short on the Chryippean analogy. If it is a horse, then it is one without a rider, and without limits placed on it in the first place, for there are, according to the Academics, no limits for it to respect given that it has no way of knowing at what point it has transgressed the line separating factual observation from baseless conjecture.

On the other hand, the Stoics did find it necessary to enforce a distinction between what they called *phantasia kataléptikê* and a non-‘grasping impression;’ they restricted the use of this phrase to ideas “impressed and molded from the object from which it came in a form, or taking an appearance, such as it could not have if it came from an object that was not the one it actually did come from” (II.vi.18).⁷³

Indeed, a kataleptic impression would have been desired because it was so absolutely singular that, in assenting to it, one assented to an impression that could not have many possible referents. One assented to its being an impression of a singular object, with a singular way of appearing, its imprint being *unmistakable*. To take the Academics’ example: We experience something vaguely blueish and quickly connect this to the memory of a ‘blueness’ different than what we are experiencing. The idea of blueness we now entertain could have come from something other than the object from which we believe it to arise. We should catch ourselves in the act of *expecting* a present event to resemble a remembered one. And “expecting” is the operative word. For one way to describe what is happening here is indeed to say that something is being “expected” or “anticipated.” When the Stoics speak of our *proptôsia* or ‘precipitancy’ they mean our tendency to “anticipate” that an impression can be connected to memories in a certain way.

A SOUL UNDIVIDED BY ANTICIPATION

There is a distinction—though perhaps only one of degree—between the way we react with desire and aversion to evils that are imagined in the future and those that are present and near-at-hand. The Stoics make this distinction in order to highlight the differences between many varieties of emotion, which are explained as follows:

They [the Stoics] would have the divisions of the perturbations to arise from two imagined goods, and from two imagined evils; and thus they become four: from the

⁷³ Kataleptic impressions either force or strongly encourage our assent. As such, Inwood sets them aside as largely inconsequential to ethical action, which he assumes to come in response to less clear impressions. But he goes perhaps too far in denying that a kataleptic impression is ever a hormetic impression. Hormetic impressions *should* be kataleptic. Since animals had no possibility of comprehending *lekta*, they had, according to the Stoics, only the possibility of reacting instantaneously and automatically to *phantasia*. Inwood suggests *eixis* or ‘yielding’ was the term designating this *automatic* or animal-like response to an impression, a negatively connoted one, denoting not what humans but what animals should do. For Inwood, human assent must always be assent in the true sense of *assent* to a *lekta*. However, if Inwood observes that, with the passage of time, the difference between assent and *eixis* was obscured, it may be suggested that the Stoics wanted human assent to imitate animal assent, since animals after all, did not suffer from passions. Thus we should not be surprised to find in Cicero and Seneca the idea that all kataleptic impressions are hormetic. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 76-77.

good proceed lust and joy—joy having reference to some present good, and lust to some future one. They suppose fear and grief to proceed from two evils: fear from something future and grief to something present; for whatever things are dreaded as approaching always occasion grief when present. But joy and lust depend on the opinion of good; as lust, being inflamed and provoked, is carried on eagerly toward what has the appearance of good; and joy is transported and exults on attaining what was desired: for we naturally pursue those things that have the appearance of good, and avoid the contrary. (*Tusc.* VI.vi)

Here is a first way in which we may distinguish between different varieties of emotional impulse: We may say that some are a reaction to something bad while others arise in response to something good. Secondarily, we may distinguish between those emotional impulses that cause us to incline towards or to retreat from something *presently experienced*, and those instances in which we are caused to incline towards or retreat from *future* goods or evils—even though the thought of the these future goods or evils may be occasioned by a present object.

This would seem to imply that a present object is itself responsible for the action it provokes. We may cite Cicero’s discussion of grief, since this emotion is a prime example of a reaction to an evil supposed be “present” when the reaction occurs. Specifically, “there must be grief where anything has the appearance of a present sore and oppressing evil.” As Cicero says, grief merely “consists in the notion of some present evil.”⁷⁴

This brings Cicero to a consideration of the ounce of truth in the Cyrenaics’ position, which can be found if we investigate the *source* of something’s appearing *as* evil. Whence does this appearance of evil arise? For the Cyrenaics, it is the unexpectedness of the event that is at fault. But throughout the book Cicero goes on to clarify what is meant by an event’s “unexpectedness.” He cites Zeno’s claim that it is the *freshness* or *recentness* of (*prosphtatos*) about something’s badness that causes grief.⁷⁵ This, he thinks, is an entirely clearer way of talking about the source of our belief that something is bad, for it emphasizes that we are not just

⁷⁴ The same point is frequently reiterated in Cicero’s works:

These four perturbations are divided equally into two parts: for two of them proceed from an opinion of the good, one of which is exulting pleasure, that is to say, a joy elated beyond measure, arising from an opinion of some present great good; the other is a desire which may fairly be called even a lust, and it is an imtemperate inclination after some conceived great good without any obedience to reason. Therefore, these two kinds, the exulting pleasure and the lust, have their rise from an opinion of the good, as the other two, fear and grief, have from an opinion of evil. For fear is an opinion of some great evil impending over us, and grief is an opinion of some great evil present; and indeed, it is a freshly conceived opinion of an evil so great that to grieve at it seems right: it is of that kind that he who is grieved at thinks he has reason to be so. (*Tusc.* III.xi)

The same claims are also echoed by Stobaeus, among others:

Desire is a reaching which is disobedient to reason, and its cause is believing that a good is in prospect, in the presence of which we will flourish, the belief itself including a disorderly impression and motive element. Fear is a withdrawing which is disobedient to reason, and its cause is believing that an evil is in prospect, the belief itself including a disorderly and fresh (*prosphtaton*) motive element as to that being genuinely a thing to avoid. Distress (*lupê*) is a contraction of psyche which is disobedient to reason and its cause is a fresh believing that some evil is present toward which being contracted (*episustellesthai*) is appropriate (*kathêkei*). Delight (*hêdonê*) is an elevation of psyche which is disobedient to reason, and its cause is a fresh believing that some good is present towards which being elevated (*epairesthai*) is appropriate (*kathêkei*) (Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.7.10b 90W; See also *DL* 7.102).

⁷⁵ References to a fresh opinion are found in: Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.89.2-3, *LS* 65A, *SVF* III.378, 389; Andronicus, *On Passions* I, *LS* 65B, *SVF* III.391; Galen, *PHP* 4.2.1-6, 65D, *SVF* III.463.

moved to grief by recent events, but also by those events which, recently passed or not, have not lost their sting and thus retain their power over the mind that receives them: “as long as there is any force, vigor, or freshness in the imagined evil, so long it is entitled to the name of recent” (III.xxxi).

The problem is thus never with the unexpectedness of events *per se*, but with the mistaken conclusions that we occasionally reach them when they fall out so unexpectedly and so quickly that we are not given enough time to consider them and their full import. Among the mistaken inferences we draw from our impressions of events are (1) that they are of more importance than they actually are, and (2) that they might have been prevented, and thus that they are an appropriate object of action. If given enough time, we grow accustomed to events and our mind corrects these errors when “custom teaches what reason should—that those things that before seemed to be of some consequence are of no such great importance, after all” (III.xxii). But the fact that time will help us correct these errors does not mean that we cannot speed the process or prevent ourselves from succumbing to these errors in the first place. We just have to heed Cicero’s advice:

There are two ways, then, of discerning the truth, not only of things that seem evil, but of those that have the appearance of good. For we either inquire into the nature of the thing, of what description, and magnitude, and importance it is—as sometimes with regard to poverty, the burden of which we may lighten when by our disputations we show how few things nature requires, and of what a trifling kind they are—or without any subtle arguing, we refer them to examples, as here we instance a Socrates, there a Diogenes, and then again that line in Caecilius, “Wisdom is oft concealed in mean attire.” For as poverty is of equal weight with all, what reason can be given why what was born by Fabricius should be spoken of by anyone else as insupportable when it falls upon themselves? (III.xxiii)

For Cicero, the path to the prevention of grief is clear. We must convince ourselves that these things are not actually harmful or detrimental, and this we can do by several means: First, we must come to realize that those things we think are evil actually have very little affect on our well-being in the long term.⁷⁶ If this is to no effect, then we would do well to examine the lives of others, which serve as concrete examples of just how few consequences these things have on human well-being. This explains why a remedy for grief is to be sought in time, the proverbial “healer of all wounds,” but why there is nothing magic about time itself that gives it meliorating power. “Since we find that grief is removed by length of time, we have the greatest proof that the strength of it depends not merely on time, but on the daily consideration of it. For if the cause continues the same, and the man be the same, how can there be any alteration in the grief, if there is no change in what occasioned the grief, nor in him who grieves?” Cicero’s answer is that “it is from daily reflecting that there is no evil in the circumstance for which you grieve, and not from the length of time, that you procure a remedy for your grief” (III.xxx).

⁷⁶ Second, we can adopt a Cyreanic approach, for the Cyreanics stumbled, if unwittingly, upon one remedy for grief, which consists in “taking a near view of, and gaining a thorough acquaintance with, all human affairs, in not being surprised when anything happens, and in thinking before the event, that there is nothing but what may come to pass” (III.xi). This approach works not because expected evils are easier to bear. “How,” Cicero asks, “will anyone be enabled to bear his misfortunes the better by knowing that it is unavoidable that such things should happen to man?” (III.xxiii). The approach works, he explains, only because it reminds us that, “all things are tolerable which others have born and are bearing.”

More specifically, the case of grief shows that even a present event, which we may believe to present itself fully to our consciousness for our complete understanding, has a certain aspect that only fully reveals itself to the human intellect with the slow passage of time. It speaks of the fact that, for the Stoics, events are such that they cannot be fully understood all at once. They require time to unfold themselves. Cicero does not think the realization that death makes little impact upon happiness will fully come home to one who has not experienced this for him or herself, or has not looked at the lives of others and seen that even the worst of events never have completely disastrous repercussions.

This can also be left to nature herself, who will, with the passage of time, reveal things to us for what they are (III.xxiv). What this means—and now our digression comes full circle—is that emotion results when we are too quick to assent to an impression before it has fully revealed itself to the intellect as it will with the passage of time. “So precipitancy (*propiptein*) and assent before *kataplêspis* are attributes of the precipitate inferior man (*propetê paulon*) and do not befall the man who is well-natured, and perfect and virtuous.”⁷⁷ We first mentally leap ahead by drawing unwarranted conclusions about the present and attributing more significance to present events than they actually warrant, sometimes even imagining an all too vivid, yet unlikely future for ourselves. When we do this, we literally “get ahead” of events and presume to know the direction in which the tide of events is turning, and also—since nature is nothing but the order and connection of events—the very direction of nature herself.

If the impression does not arise so much from the way a present object *presently* impresses us, but the way we *expect* it to, then the impulse itself ceases to be a response to a present object and begins to be a response to something that is merely anticipated. Since the response is not triggered *directly* by an immediately present object, but is rather the result of many associated ideas, the response is disproportionate to its true catalyst, *and it will have more force behind it than just what the present object would normally impart*. The impressing object has *not yet* fully impacted the senses in the way we expect it to, but since it is *presumed* that the object could or would shortly reveal itself to us in this light, we respond to a reality that may never come into existence. These reactions can then indeed be said to direct themselves to a reality that has not yet come into being. In this sense they are “anticipatory.”

If we can understand this, then we can also understand why our impulses are described as “overreaching.” They overreach their proper targets. Ideally, certain real-world objects trigger impulses, which then turn around and respond directly to those objects. The object serves as the impetus and objective. Impulse is caused and conditioned by it. But sometimes our reactions are not always *provoked* by the same things they turn around and *act upon*. They are provoked by phantasms of the mind, yet they attempt to unleash themselves on existing objects. Our efforts are then misplaced in the literal sense of the word, since they are aimed at the wrong target. *Thus, impulses overreach their true targets because they end up being aimed, not at existent targets but at imagined ones.*

When reason gets ahead of us this way, it creates an impulse with its own momentum that now impels us to hurriedly “leap ahead” to the performance of acts that are not appropriate given the circumstances. It is this, and this alone—by which is meant the tendency of *logos* to get ahead of events—that produces internal conflict. Pernicious impulses arise. At the same time, reason has not completely lost its capacity to respond to a world recommending the opposite course of action. An impulse hastily speeds us off in the direction opposite the one that

⁷⁷ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.111, 112,8; *SVF* III.548, *LS* 42G.

is advised by another, more “rational” part of us. But that part remains responsive to an unfolding series of events and it struggles to make its voice heard over what has become another “part” of the self. If we can see the truth of this, then we can no doubt see the truth of the Stoics’ claim that what we undergo in these instances is a *pathê* in the fullest sense of the Greek term. The impression in combination with our mind, acts as an external force that deflects us from the course of action that events would naturally recommend to us, and that we would *naturally* travel. We can see that, for the Stoics, a *pathê* would have this connotation, and that suffering one would mean being temporarily diverted from the path of action proscribed *by nature*.

THE PASSIONS IN ARISTOTLE AND IN STOICISM

It must first be noted that the war between reason and impulse that sometimes erupts in the Aristotelian soul can be called a *pathê*, and that this is significant for several reasons. A *pathê* is, by definition, “a quality in virtue of which change is possible” (*Met.*1022bff). Some potentialities are in things’ natures, and need only to be awakened in them under pressure from external influences. But a *pathê* is in general aroused whenever some potentiality is awakened within a thing that is contrary to its nature.⁷⁸ Any activity a thing performs, quality it exhibits, or a potentiality it actualizes that does not spring from its internal nature but is occasioned by some cause acting upon it from without is a *pathê* (*Met.* 1022b).

Many impulses fall under the heading of “good *pathê*” for Aristotle because they incline us to respond with pleasure or pain to the right things, at the right time, in the right way. But he will condemn many of those instances in which we allow ourselves to be moved with pleasure or pain at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and in the wrong way—in a way that conflicts with practical reason—and when he does so it is because, in these cases, we seem to be moved by a passion in the truest sense. That is to say, we seem to be moved by something in the appearing world that *deflects* us from the path we would naturally follow to our *telos* if we were not so affected.

We are more than justified in seeing something paradoxical in Aristotle’s account. The natural world arouses our impulses from *without*. Our inner nature arouses certain desires from *within*. Nature, working from *without* interferes with nature working from *within*, guiding us to our *telos*. Oddly, we must therefore occasionally restrain natural impulses if we are to attain to our full nature.

For Aristotle, the blame seems primarily to be laid at the feet of the appearing world and the susceptibility of the non-rational soul to its overweening influence, that is, at the feet of *our* nature and nature itself. The Stoics do not blame nature, which is naturally good. “They say that misdeeds do not come about without cause, since every animate being, in that it partakes of the divine, does indeed pursue the good, but errs sometimes in the judgment of what things are good and what things are evil”⁷⁹ They blame reason. *A revealing fact is that for*

⁷⁸ Amelie Rorty explains the ethical significance of *pathê* of Aristotle, and specifically his belief that they are often to be considered misfortunes. Amelie Rorty, “Aristotle on the Metaphysical Status of *Pathê*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 37 (1984): 529.

⁷⁹ Calcidius, *On the Timaeus of Plato*, 165, SVF 2.229.

*Aristotle, children are paragons of vice because their instincts are irrational, while for the Stoics, by contrast, the young seem incapable of erring because they have not yet developed reason.*⁸⁰

The problem for the Stoics is not that nature makes one desire things counter to reason, but that reason creates its own desires counter to and in excess of nature's, for these arise "because they consist of judging that each of these things is good, but also because of *to epi pleon ekpeptôkenai tauta tou kata phusin*, because, 'one is attracted to them in excess of nature.'⁸¹ Thus, human reason brings about its own disharmony with nature. Indeed, the Stoics are so unlike Aristotle as to assert that reason itself must bring itself into alignment with natural desire, and not vice versa. One should in fact "harmonize action with impulse." Life, Seneca writes, "is at harmony with itself, when action has not betrayed impulse." (*Ep.* xxcvix)

There are three important ways in which, from the Stoic point of view, we cease to be human when we suffer an emotional upset. There is none among them to which the other two can be reduced. For when one suffers a *pathê* three important human capacities are impaired:

(1.) *The capacity to follow alongside nature in the wake of a chain of events:*

First, a *pathê* is a misfortune because it hinders our ability to respond to an unfolding series of events in nature. For our every action should come in response to a sequence of events. As Cleanthes writes while addressing Zeus: "nor is any deed done without you, God, not on earth nor in the divine fiery heaven nor on the sea, except the deeds done by bad men on account of their folly."⁸²

(2.) *The capacity pursue the ends nature has dictated we pursue:*

In a second sense, a *pathê* also has to be, as Aristotle says, a "misfortune" because it deflects us from the path that it would be in our nature as human beings to travel. The Stoics speak often of this path. It is the very path we must travel straight in the direction of our *telos*. "For one virtue underlies them all, a virtue which makes the mind straight and unswerving" (*Ep.* 66.13). Vice always appears to onlookers as a sudden diverging from a course of action, an erratic departure from this path. But we must not allow a *pathê* to cause us to veer from it according to Seneca, "for if it begins to lead us off course the return to the safe path is difficult" (*De Ir.* I.viii.1).

(3.) *The capacity to pursue ends in a human manner, and to perform one's human function:*

In a third and final sense, a *pathê* is unfortunate because in not being guided by reason, we fail to actualize our full potential as rational human beings. Since our specifically human *telos* is to be guided by *logos*, then anything that interferes with *logos*' workings also throws a wrench into our ability to function properly as a human being. This is probably the most serious sense in which our reactions become *pathê*, since the very meaning of a *pathê* is something which prevents a thing from functioning in the manner in which it naturally does.

⁸⁰ Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, p.72-73. Children are not subject to passions because they have not acquired reason (Origen, *SVF* 3.477).

⁸¹ Galen, *PHP* 4.5.21, *LS* 55L, *SVF* III.480.

⁸² *SVF* 1.537,11.

A SOUL UNDIVIDED BY EXTERNALS

We have seen some of the ways in which the Stoic soul *is* capable of being divided against itself, even though this division is not naturally occurring. But there is one respect in which we tend to assume that the soul is divided. This is in fact a latent supposition on the part of many scholars. They assume, in their own way, that externals act upon us in such a way as to force a choice between an external and a course of action that appeals to our rational side rather than a course of action appealing to our animal nature. *These parts of our nature are then naturally brought into conflict, and one, it is assumed, must win out against the other.*

However, the Stoics do *not* see externals as naturally having the capacity to sow division in the soul. It is in this light that we must understand their disdain for externals. The Stoics hold that wealth, health, property, and nourishment are all ‘to be chosen,’ and their opposites ‘to be rejected.’ But these things are neither good nor bad in the strict sense, though this is not because the Stoics deny that “they are capable of activating impulse and repulsion”⁸³ Externals have intrinsic to themselves a quality which makes them naturally attractive or repellant, and makes them worth perusing or avoiding “when circumstances permit,” but they can also be reacted to at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and in the wrong way. Not only do we feel the push and pull of external goods and evils, pleasures and pains, but also the sources of moral error are described as residing partly in “the persuasiveness of external things.”⁸⁴ Things exert an influence over us that is difficult to resist, so that we are always “impelled toward the appearance,” a fact which is difficult to explain unless we assume that the impressions of things may at first produce reactions in us that we cannot help:

...Furthermore, Chrysippus says that both god and the wise man implant false impressions, not asking us to assent or yield to them but merely to act and be *impelled towards the appearance*, but that we inferior persons out of weakness assent to such impressions.⁸⁵

The impression and the initial impulse cannot be helped, but the error is ours for assenting to the impression. Cicero appears no different than other Stoics in denying that the “persuasiveness of external things” is ever the sole and sufficient cause of moral error without assent,⁸⁶ but as an Academic he is yet more forgiving of the errors that externals are partly responsible for inducing. By drawing attention to their tendency to present themselves in the guise of what they are not, he is according to Margaret Graver, detailing in what precisely the “persuasiveness of externals” consists.⁸⁷ She would draw our attention to a favorite example of his: flattery’s tendency to appear in the guise of and to be taken for well-deserved praise.

⁸³ *DL* 7.104-5, *LS* 58B, *SVF* 3.119.

⁸⁴ *DL* 7.89 ; Galen, *SVF* III.229a.

⁸⁵ Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1057a-b, *LS* 41E, *SVF* III.177.

⁸⁶ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *SVF* 2, 980; Seneca, *SVF* III.307.

⁸⁷ Cicero, in fact, may be closely faithful to Chrysippus’ own ideas here. In Calcidius’ commentary on the *Timaeus*, we find this very important account of the sources of moral error: “There is more than one cause of error. First is that which the Stoics call ‘twofold corruption.’ This arises both from circumstances themselves and from the transmission of rumor. For the very experience of being born involves some pain, because one is moving from a warm and moist place into the chill and dryness of the surrounding air, and as remedy for this the midwife provides a warm bath and swaddling to recall the womb, to ease the young body with pleasant sensation and quiet. Thus...there arises a kind of natural belief

Nevertheless, the fault lies, for all Stoics, in our tendency to assent to these appearances. Appearances alone do not suffice to account for moral error, not even when we receive two different impressions, dictating two contradictory courses of action. This happens, according to Plutarch not infrequently:

[Fate]...frequently produces impression in matters of very great importance, which are at variance with one another *and pull the mind in opposite directions*. On these occasions the Stoics say that those who assent to one of them and do not suspend judgment are guilty of error; that *they are precipitate if they yield to unclear impressions*, deceived if they yield to false ones, and opining if they yield to ones which are incognitive quite generally.⁸⁸

Thus, although some externals naturally exert an influence upon us, they do not naturally compel our assent. And even when two impressions strike us at once and *begin* to “pull the mind in opposite directions,” it is the assent to one of the impressions that actually causes this to occur in earnest. Precisely what we assent to in most cases is that an external is as good or bad as it first appears.⁸⁹ If, as a result, an impulse arises in us that is at variance with our reason, *it is not because the part of us that is susceptible to externals has a natural tendency to come into conflict with reason*.

Externals, thus, may give rise to an impulse contrary to reason. If reason yields too quickly to them, however, they may override the functioning of the very thing that both chooses them and for which they are chosen. For reason is a well-functioning tool. “Who but yourself will prevent you from using it?,” Epictetus asks. “But how do you prevent it from performing its function unhindered? When you are eager for what is not your own, you lose that very thing?” (*Dis. I.25.3-5*). *The fault lies in overvaluing externals*.

This brings us to the second, and more important, cause of moral error mentioned by Diogenes Laertius. Although impressions are “persuasive,” this alone does not explain why we allow ourselves to be persuaded by them. The cause of our gullibility is society. But we shall return to the role played by society in moral error in the coming pages.

DENYING EXTERNALS VALUE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The theory of indifferents holds that virtue is the only good, vice the only evil. Externals are a matter of indifference. This dictum is usually taken to be the one unquestioned assumption upon which the Stoic system rests. It is not to be proven; it is axiomatic. But we have now arrived at the point of grasping how Stoic ethical doctrine, specifically the doctrine of indifferents, stands in relationship to irrational impulses. The Stoics are commonly taken to

that everything sweet and pleasurable is good, and that what brings pain is bad and to be avoided...as they mature, they retain this belief that everything nice is good, and everything troublesome, even if it brings some advantage, is bad. Consequently, they love riches, which are the foremost means of attaining pleasure, and they embrace fame rather than honor.” Here, as in Cicero’s account, an apparent good takes the place of and is mistaken for a real good (Calcidius, *On the Timaeus of Plato*, 165, *SVF* 2.229).

⁸⁸ Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1056e5-f, *LS* 41E, *SVF* II.993.

⁸⁹ The way we do this either well or badly can only be explained by the second source of moral error that Diogenes Laertius specifies, and which we shall assign greater importance in the chapters that follow: “communication with acquaintances.” For moral error, while partly owing to externals, is chiefly caused by false ideas about them that we have learned from others. This “double source of perversion” is also referenced by Calcidius in his commentary on the *Timaeus* and echoed by others (*On the Timaeus of Plato*, 165-66, *SVF* III.229-236).

have, starting from the theoretical assumption that externals are irrelevant to happiness, attempted to put their theory into practice.

Thus, it is established that externals are in theory indifferent. But the question then arises of how to practically apply this theory. The most common response has been to suppose that we can put the Stoics' theories into practice by somehow preventing externals from exerting undue influence over our decisions.⁹⁰ Thus, in order to keep ourselves from acting as though externals have value, we should make decisions in a more or less rational manner, without allowing those decisions to be excessively determined by our desire for external goods.⁹¹

In fact, this presupposes that the doctrine of indifferents was a moral principle intended to be put into practice. The Stoics do indeed already assume, what should be obvious, that virtue is the most important good, and infer that externals can only be of indifferent worth. But what they mean is that externals neither benefit nor harm *intrinsically*. The best of them are not incapable of harm,⁹² presumably because they can cause us to act counter to the one thing that is intrinsically beneficial, virtue. This is not say they are lacking in their own potential to do good, but it is to remark that they indeed contain the potential for harm if they can sometimes cause us to act counter to virtue. Things are bad insofar as they conflict with virtue, but good insofar as they coincide with it.⁹³

The reason externals are denied value is not an exclusively theoretical but a primarily practical one. In a letter in which Seneca justifies the rigidity of the Stoic position on externals to an unbelieving Lucilius, he writes, "Everything that is virtuous is untroubled, calm. If it rejects anything, laments it, if it judges that something is bad, then it has admitted disturbance and is enmeshed in great dissension. From strife, the sight of what is straight beckons, from the other unease about what is bad pulls him back." (*Ep.* lcvii.17). Seneca here claims that even if we were to act virtuously, that virtue would be destroyed if, at the same time, we had a conflicting impulse. This impulse would create an inner discord, which according to Seneca, would destroy that very virtue. He explicitly states that this virtue is preserved with, nay

⁹⁰ This interpretation is frequently implied by the very way moral reasoning is described. Long and Sedley write for example: "The role of moral judgment is to decide whether, given the objective preferability of health to sickness, it is right to make that difference the paramount consideration in determining what to do in the light of all the circumstances." The very phrasing of this sentence suggests that the preferability of health to sickness enters, only insofar as it is an "objective" fact grasped by reason, into moral decision-making. It is one among other competing considerations which reason weighs *impartially*. Thus, our reasoning remains pure. Externals are prevented from unduly influencing our deliberation. Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 358.

⁹¹ Externals are not indifferent in the Kantian sense that reason chooses a course of action by its own means, while externals and their hold upon us remain completely indifferent to our decision-making. This is what Cicero is usually taken to mean when he says we should "conform to virtue always and, so far as other things go which are in accordance with nature, to select them if they do not conflict with virtue" (*De Off.* III.iii.13). 'Preserving virtue,' as the proponents of this so-called *salva virtute* assume, that every deliberator enters a given situation with a set of criteria by which to discern the virtuous course of action, which he then proceeds to apply with complete indifference to externals, giving way to his desire or aversion to them only when and if it coincides with what reason has *already* established to be virtuous. The alternative model, called the 'indifferents-only' model, rejects Cicero's claim that we must try to 'preserve virtue.' It holds that to deliberate is only ever to deliberate about indifferents. Deliberation thus requires us to consider nothing but the indifferents before us. The present view holds that when we respond to indifferents correctly we automatically 'preserve virtue' without needing to apply a theory of virtue. See Brennan, "Stoic Moral Psychology," 281.

⁹² *DL* 7.101-3, *LS* 58A; *DL* 7.104-5, *LS* 58B, *SVF* 3.119.

⁹³ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.24.18-85.11, *LS* 58E, *SVF* 3.128. Thus, they say, they are good by virtue of coinciding with virtue, and not of their own intrinsic merit, just as the king's officers derive their priority and importance primarily from their relationship to him, and not from themselves.

identical to, our ability to advance in a single direction *without being pulled in an opposing direction by fear, lust, or some such conflicting impulse*. This is, for Seneca, the reason why we must believe that virtue is not just the highest but the *only* good. For if we accept that externals are sometimes more important than virtue itself, then we hand them the ability to drag us from the path of virtue.

If one simply accepts the proposition that only virtue can make one happy, the novice will end by having the truth of that assertion borne out, since in the very act of withholding assent to the goodness or badness of external events, one effectively deprives them of their ability to upset one's virtue, and thus, one's happiness.

As for Cicero, the next and final chapter of the *Tusculan Disputations* just happens to be devoted to a full exploration of the dictum the "virtue is the only good," so it is expected to finally give solid grounding to the claim upon which Cicero's *Disputations* have so far rested but for which he has not supplied any proof. So far, we have merely been asked not to assent that externals are good or bad, but to regard virtue as the only good and vice as the only evil. Intriguingly, though this is the founding premise of Stoicism, it does not function in the philosophical system as the first, solidly established truth, so self-evident that it is one upon which others may be piled up, and upon which the whole system may itself soundly rest.

Cicero's arguments for the sufficiency of virtue are very poor because they are not intended to be arguments, at least not arguments built or derived from foundational premises. It is an attempt to show that we *already* define happiness in a certain way. We think of it as a lasting feeling of composure characterized by a lack of anxiety about the future and even a certain feeling of invulnerability to chance. This suggests that happiness is *by definition* something which is unperturbed by externals. Thus, we cannot admit that externals have the power to affect it, without giving to externals the power to disrupt what is, by definition, the feeling of invulnerability in the face of them (*Tusc.* V.xv).

This indifference of externals may be called "the founding premise" of the whole philosophic system only because it is the first belief from which a devotee must start in order to make moral progress. It does not worry Cicero that it may have to be taken on faith. Cicero seems to maintain that it *can* be taken on faith because it will later be borne out by experience. *In this sense, this truth is almost performative in character, which is to say, it is a dictum that demonstrates its own truth to the person who acts as though it were true.*

A SOUL UNDIVIDED BY INCONSISTENT BELIEF

Another reason to suppose that internal conflict is natural and normal is that it arises from mutually contradictory beliefs. So long as it seems inevitable that we will entertain contradictory beliefs, it seems inevitable that we will contradict ourselves. But here again, we find the Stoics asserting that it is not inevitable that our beliefs conflict. Thus, it is not inevitable that we should live in contradiction with ourselves. So far, we have only spoken of a "disharmony" between reason and desire, whereby the latter is loosened and acquires a separate existence apart from the former, but now we must realize that this disharmony has its roots in an even more fundamental disharmony, one *between competing beliefs*:

Here the Stoics, especially Chrysippus, give themselves unnecessary trouble to show the analogy which the diseases of the mind have with those of the body... Let us, then, understand perturbation to imply a restlessness from the variety and confusion of

contradictory impressions (III.x)...As there is some analogy between the nature of the body and mind in evil, so there is in good; for the distinctions of the body are beauty, strength, health, firmness, quickness of motion: the same may be said of the mind. The body is said to be in a good state when all those things upon which health depends are consistent: the same may be said of the mind when its judgments and opinions are not at variance with each other. And this union is the virtue of the mind, which according to some people is temperance itself...And as what is called beauty arises from an exact proportion of the limbs, together with a certain sweetness of complexion, so the beauty of the mind consists in the equality and constancy of opinions and judgments, joined to a certain firmness and stability, pursuing virtue, and *containing within itself the very essence of virtue.* (III.xiii)

Cicero will later observe that the Stoics, especially Chrysippus, use this analogy to excess (*Tusc.* IV.xxiii). The analogy is drawn between the relation of the minds, beliefs, and the relation between the parts of a harmoniously proportioned whole. Our mind has the same character if all our impressions, judgments, and opinions are such as to be in harmony, rather than in conflict with each other. Harmony reigns in the mind just as it does in the body, when all the parts of the whole mutually reinforce each other. When our opinions cooperate together, they are like the limbs of a body in which each part works in tandem with the rest. This normal state of health is corrupted, however, when one part of the body swells to disproportionate size, overtaking all the other parts, and so it is with our minds. One belief or judgment can always exceed its proper limits, receive disproportionate emphasis, overwhelm and finally, *overpower* the rest.

Of course what we have inside our minds is a host of discordant beliefs, some being true and others false. The discordant beliefs are always in potential conflict as they never are for the sage who has a fully self-consistent set of beliefs, and this is why he never assents to a false impression.⁹⁴ This has ramifications for the Stoics' conception of theory and praxis. In a certain sense, it would be futile to attempt to establish the truth of a proposition by theoretical means. If many of our beliefs are false, then anything will appear as true that coheres with them. On the other hand, so long as a false belief appears consistent with other false beliefs, the falsity of a theoretical proposition can only be demonstrated by the way it causes us to *act*. A new belief is one that has the potential to conflict with older beliefs that we already act upon, and which thus already forms the basis of practical life. The potential conflict between what we already believe and a truth that we give our assent *becomes a real conflict* when it gives rise to an impulse that then leads us into conflict with ourselves. *The emotional impulse thus illustrates the discordant state of our beliefs.*

This conflict in the soul is not just a state of affairs we would avoid if we were thinking correctly—though it is that—it is *the living manifestation* of a belief which does not accord with the rational part of us and, as such, an emotional upset is all the evidence we need that we have accepted a belief we shouldn't have. It is, in effect, *the living proof* of the fact that we have accepted a belief that must be false because it does not accord with the rest of who we are and what we believe. *In this sense, the fit of emotion is a theatrical dramatization of what happens when we accept a belief that is false.*

⁹⁴ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.73.16-74.3, *LS* 41H, *SVF* 3.112; *Ecl.* 2.111 18-112,8, *LS* 41G, *SVF* 3.548.

Sometimes, it seems we do not learn the lesson soon enough that we have accepted a belief in conflict with past and future beliefs, and have to suffer an emotional upset, which illustrates for us more dramatically than anything else just how far into contradiction with ourselves we have been led. Indeed, we soon find that we have allowed our thoughts to wander so far that we have produced a whole impulse within ourselves to act in a way that the rest of us completely resists. The lesson is always a difficult one to learn, but at least we are the ones who suffer the proof of our own mental error, since *a slight inconsistency in our thinking can lead to a dramatic inconsistency in our deeds*.

SOUL UNDIVIDED BY ETHICAL AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If we assume that the *summum bonum esse animi concordiam*, that ‘the harmony of the soul is the highest good’ (*De Vit.* VIII.6), and hold this idea firmly in mind as we search for signs that the Stoics placed this at the very heart of their philosophy, then we *should* find that this ideal is attainable. At least, the natural world should not foreclose the possibility of attaining harmony with oneself.

In Kant, we find a universe that does not accommodate our moral imperatives. Conflict is bound to occur—conflict between desire and reason, selfishness and altruism, autonomy and heteronomy, objective facts and subjective values. In Stoicism, one can find oneself faced with a choice between two competing, two mutually exclusive courses of action. But the Stoics do not, in the manner of Kant, put this choice down to an unavoidable conflict between moral rules and an objective state-of-affairs that make it inconvenient or undesirable to implement them. This, in short, is the thesis of Gretchen Reydam-Schils.⁹⁵

Thus, the world we live in must be one in which such conflicts do not have to arise, and indeed, such a world is to be found in *De Officiis*. The world depicted there is one in which internal conflicts do not have to occur. When they arise, they must be blamed on the conflicted individual, for *in ipsa dubitatione facinus inest*, ‘for in the very irresolution there is something blameworthy’ (*De Off.* III.viii.37). Here, Cicero is concerned with an indecision or irresolution, which he regards as a lesser, preliminary form of internal conflict, presaging and portending the coming onset of a full-blown struggle of self against self. It too can be taken as a sign or symptom that something is wrong—*with ourselves*.

In this open-letter to his son, Cicero’s main purpose is to counsel him about what to do in such situations, *in quo considerando saepe animi in contrarias sententias distrahuntur*, ‘in the considering of which their souls are divided or torn apart in opposite ways of thinking.’ The Latin verb is *distrahere*, literally meaning to be drawn, pulled, wrenched or torn apart, or to be divided. When this occurs the course of action that appears *utile*, that is ‘useful, beneficial, expedient,’ often seems to *pugnare* or ‘conflict’ with the course of action that appears *honestum*, that is, ‘proper, fitting, virtuous.’ We all know the feeling: the *utile* seems to *ad se rapere*, to ‘carry one off from oneself in one direction,’ while the *honestum* seems to *contra ad se revocare*, to ‘call one back to oneself in the opposite direction,’ so that *distrahatur in deliberando animus afferatque ancipitem*

⁹⁵ Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 71-72. Thus, as we shall see, “It is not true that self-preservation corresponds to the lower-level *oikeiōsis* that we share with animals, and that altruism corresponds to our *oikeiōsis* as rational beings.” Reydam-Schils demonstrates that ancient sources suggesting otherwise are mistaken (71). Likewise, autonomous action does not exclude or exist in conflict with action determined by the external world. To be autonomous, the self must carry inside itself a moral law, which, precisely because it is not merely a subjective but an objective part of the world, does not need to come into inevitable conflict with that world (44).

curam cogitandi, ‘the soul is torn apart in deliberation and brings to it the trouble of thinking in two directions (I.iii.9). Cicero also expands his inquiry into the means of deciding, *duobus propositis utilibus utrum honestius, itemque duobus propositis utilibus utrum utilius*, ‘where there are two honorable courses of action, which is the more honorable, when a choice of two expedients is offered, which one is more expedient’ (I.iii.10). He wants to help us resolve these internal conflicts. Thus, we can begin by asserting that *De Officiis* is and should be read as a practical guide to resolving internal conflicts.

Cicero therefore approaches the question of how to resolve these conflicts by describing the world in which they occur—a world, it will be argued, in which internal conflicts need not arise. Because his specific way of understanding those moments of indecision is to understand them as moments in which we feel torn or internally divided between a course of action that appears to be *honestas* and another *utilis*, his concern is to show that the world we live in is one in which the truly *honestas* course of action will always be *utilis*. The *utilis*, meanwhile, is only truly *utilis* when pursuing it does not preclude a course of action that is truly *honestas*.

Cicero depicts this world in the following way: He begins by describing an impulse toward self-preservation as an impulse to appropriate what is proper or suitable for the preservation of our own constitution, and takes this, like all Stoics, as the *archên aristên...tês êthikês stoiceiôseôs*, ‘the best starting point for the elements of ethics.’⁹⁶ The Stoics explain that our ethical relation to our circle of intimates as an extension of this impulse to hold near and dear to oneself whatever conduces to one’s own well-being. Of a person’s impulse Cicero writes:

It drives him to desire that men should meet together and congregate, and that he should join them himself; and for the same reason to devote himself to providing whatever may contribute to the comfort and sustenance not only of himself, but also his wife, his children, and others whom he holds dear and ought to protect. (*De Off.* I.ii.12)⁹⁷

For the Stoics, the *oikeiosis* of a given thing lies behind its tendency to perform a range of activities from seeking, joining, maintaining, protecting, and preserving. What it seeks out, joins with, supports, and maintains is in every case something different, but in every case the seeker is preserved and sustained by what is sought. This impulse that, in heeding, *nature ispius vocem viere audimur*, ‘we heed the call of nature herself.’ This is not just an ethical impulse that calls us to preserve those who are integral to our well-being; in Cicero, this impulse is also a political one, *a quo initio profectam communem humani generis sociatatem persequimur*—‘to which starting-point we trace the perfected *societas*, or ‘sociability of the human race.’ *Ex hoc nascitur ut etiam communis hominum inter homines naturalis sit commendatio, ut oporteat hominem ab homine ob id ipsum quod homo sit non alienum videri*—‘from it follows that mutual attraction among human beings is also something natural, thus the mere fact that a human is a human makes it necessary not to look upon him as alien.’ (*Fin.* III.xix.62-63).

Cicero reiterates this idea, invoking there as he does elsewhere the metaphor of the body (*Fin.* III.xix.62-63; *De Off.* III.iv.22). Just as parts of the body have a common interest in

⁹⁶ Hierocles 1.34-9, *LS* C57. Similarly, Porphyry writes that followers of Zeno make *oikeiôsis* the *archê* of justice (*Abst.* 3.19). Plutarch confirms that self-preserved instincts are at the root of all just action. He tells us that Chrysippus discusses these instincts in *On Justice* Book One, and that he “wearies us to death in writing that we have an appropriate disposition relative to ourselves as soon as we are born and to our offspring” (*Stoic. Rep.* 1038b; *LS* 57E).

⁹⁷ Similar descriptions can be found in: *DL* 7.85-6, *LS* 57A; *Ep.* 121.6-15, *LS* 57B; Hierocles 1.34-9-2.9, *LS* 57C.

the health of the body that sustains and preserves them in their individual functioning, we have an interest in the health of the wholes of which we are a part, the communities of which we are a member, upon whom we depend not just for our sustenance but also for our continued well-being. “Supposed by way of comparison,” Cicero writes, “that that each one of our bodily members should conceive this idea and imagine that it could be strong and well if it should draw off to itself the health and strength of its neighboring member; the whole body would be enfeebled and die, so, if each one of us should seize upon the property of his neighbors, and take from each what he could appropriate to his own use, the bonds of human society must be inevitably annihilated” (*De Off.* III.iv.22). A part cannot self-interestedly do harm to the whole upon which it depends. *The principle he articulates is that of no harm: never harm what you depend upon for your own well-being.*⁹⁸

Itaque natura sumus apti ad coetus, concilia, civitates—‘we are therefore fitted by nature to form unions, societies, states’ (*Fin.* III.xix.63). Thus, the impulse, which at first extends only as far as a circle of intimates, can and *should* extend as far as possible to others; “nature impels us to benefit as many people as we can” (*Fin.* III.xx.66).⁹⁹ But this will not be without problems since, as Reydams-Schils observes, the Stoics do not ask us to sacrifice our obligations to intimates for acquaintances and strangers.¹⁰⁰ Conflict emerges if and when we try to serve those beyond our familial sphere.¹⁰¹ And Cicero does not deny that ours is a world in which impulses to benefit our nations, states, and communities may come into conflict with an impulse to benefit ourselves and our immediate circle of friends and family. Such conflicts are precisely the ones Cicero wants to discuss, as for example, he discusses the case of the man who has either to turn in his father for crimes against the state and benefit the populous, or protect his father. However, he doubts the efficacy of solving these conflicts by subordinating intimates to the imperative to do the greatest good for the greatest number.

He could be mistaken to mean that distant relations always trump proximate ones, when he agrees that *patria praestat omnibus officiis*, ‘that the state comes first in the order of our

⁹⁸ Cicero would hold that war is permissible as long as it is non-aggressive (I.xi.34), a fact which would seem incompatible with his claim that we may never harm anyone. This is evidently because the local community must be preserved against outside attackers. Under such conditions, we must sometimes decide between allowing harm to come, to those we love or to strangers; and where harm will come to one or another through our actions, our first duty is to preserve loved ones against harm. This is to be explained below.

⁹⁹ I am arguing that our obligations to others derive from our self-interestedness, while many still find it difficult to believe that the Stoics could have legitimately derived concern for others from self-preservative instincts. Pembroke observes a conceptual leap from the idea that we have self-preservative instincts to the idea that they can extend to other people; Brink argues the Stoics turned to Theophrastus in order to explain how self-preservative instincts eventually do extend to other people; Annas argues that although our instincts predispose us to do so, reason alone ultimately brings about their extension; Nussbaum attributes to the Stoics the modern idea that we are to extend concern to others by virtue of their inherent human rationality, writing that we should “recognize humanity—and its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity—wherever it occurs” (59). As with Kant, “One should always behave so as to treat with respect the dignity of reason and moral choice in every human being” (59). The account of the way we pass from self-interestedness to the extension of self-interestedness beyond the self with which I am in agreement is that of Laurand. See: Simon Pembroke, “Oikeiōsis,” in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. Anthony Long (London: University of London, Athlone Press: 1971), 114-49; Charles Brink, “Oikeiōsis and Oikeiotes: Theophrastus and Zeno on Nature in Moral Theory,” *Phronesis* 1 (1955-6): 123-145. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 449; Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*, 8; Valéry Laurand. *La politique stoïcienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 49.

¹⁰¹ Nussbaum baldly supposes that Cicero took Stoic cosmopolitanism and “reworked it so as to allow a special degree of loyalty to one’s own region or group.” But it is not to be assumed that his is inconsistent with the account offered by the Stoic Panaetius. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 52.

duties.’ But, in demanding that we not bring harm to the state through our actions, though it means allowing harm to come to our families, Cicero reaffirms the principle of no harm—*that we should never allow harm to come, through our actions, to a whole of which we are a part*, even if the alternative course of action exposes us to what *appears* to be more immediate and personally-felt harm (*De Off.* III.iv.20; vi.26). Cicero would nominally support the application of the principle of no harm to this case in this way. But then he qualifies this principle: “it is to our country’s interest to have citizens who are loyal to their parents” (*De Off.* III.xxiii.90).¹⁰²

Here, he points out that since it is the smaller wholes that form the larger ones, while we should try to benefit the larger wholes of which we are a part, it is never to the benefit of those larger wholes for us to do harm to smaller ones in the process. The example clearly shows that, while we are expected to extend our concern outward as far as possible, we can extend it only so far without breaking the intimate ties that bind family and friends.¹⁰³ Thus, Cicero’s first principle is appended by another: *we are to benefit the larger groups of which we are a part only when it causes no injury to the smaller.*

Hierocles tells us we are surrounded by a series of nesting, concentric circles, the first encompassing ourselves and the things we need for bodily survival, the second comprising immediate family, the third relatives and relations, the third community members, the fourth fellow citizens, and so on, so we may rephrase these principles as follows: (1) through our actions, we should never cause harm to a circle of which we are a part, and (2) when it seems inevitable that harm will come to one circle or another, we should never seek to directly benefit, or even prevent the harm of an outer circle, if it means harming an inner circle. It might also be remarked that, for Hierocles, this is not just an effort to redirect towards other people a self-interestedness that is, by definition, directed towards the self, but to “draw the circles somehow together toward the center, to keep zealously transferring those from the enclosing circles to the enclosed.”¹⁰⁴ It does not demand taking the self’s self-interestedness and transferring it to circles outside the self; it demands taking things that fall outside the boundaries of the self, bringing them nearer to the self, and eventually *incorporating them within the boundaries of the self*. It means expanding the very boundaries of the self until what lies outside them is encompassed by them.¹⁰⁵

Reydams-Schils writes, “Upon closer scrutiny, Hierocles’ image implies a tension between what ideally should happen, and what ordinarily happens in human society. In ordinary circumstances, all these different relationships create considerable conflicts and normative tensions. How then is one supposed to handle these conflicts without giving up on the relationships altogether. What kind of self would be best equipped to handle such a challenge?”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the self’s ability to meet this challenge depends not on the ability of the self to withdraw from social life into an inner fortress, or to simply conform to circumstances. It

¹⁰² Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 78. Reydams-Schils puts this in near identical terms: “there will be no larger community unless we start with the smaller one close to home.”

¹⁰³ Hence, the impossibility of equating the Stoics’ cosmopolitanism as an impartiality that makes no distinctions between self and others, intimates and strangers, for “it is granted that everybody may prefer to secure for himself rather than for his neighbor what is essential for the conduct of life” (*De Off.* III.iv.22).

¹⁰⁴ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 4.671,7; *LS* 57G.

¹⁰⁵ Goldin also argues that the concern of the individual for the community is a form of self-concern. “Conflict and Cosmopolitanism in Plato and the Stoics,” *Apeiron* 44 (2011): 264–286.

¹⁰⁶ Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 4. See further Chapter Two.

depends, rather, on reason, which Cicero understands to apply the two aforementioned principles naturally. These principles in hand, we can turn to the question of how Cicero re-describes internal conflicts:

But since he [Panaetius] is a man who judges the morally right is the only good, and that those things that come in conflict with it *have only the appearance of expediency* (*quae autem huic repugnant specie quondam utilitatis*) and cannot make life any better by their presence nor any worse by their absence, it follows that he ought not to have raised a question involving the weighing of what seems expedient against what is morally right. Furthermore, when the Stoics speak of the supreme good as “living conformably with nature,” they mean, as I take it, something like this: that we are always to be in accord with virtue, and to choose some of those things that are in harmony if they are not incompatible with virtue (*si ea non virtuti regnarent*). (*De Off.* III.iii.13)

When we find ourselves pulled in two directions at once, the situation must be recognized for what it is. It is not one in which we are pulled between the *honestum* and the *utile*, as we are sometimes accustomed to believe, but between what is, on the one hand, both *honestum* and *utile* and what, on the other hand, has the *species* or ‘false appearance’ of the *utile* or beneficial.

Virtue consists simply in doing as our self-interest dictates, and with virtue comes the actualization of our inner potential, and the attainment of the supreme good toward which we always strive. We should never therefore feel drawn towards any course of action that could only be chosen if the path of virtue were simultaneously abandoned. Any course of action that excluded the virtuous one would only carry us further away from the one *true* good. Since there is only *one* good, the alternative cannot itself be “good” in the moment it appears to be, and for that reason, no Stoic worthy of the name seems capable of suggesting that there will ever come a situation in which we have two “competing goods” to choose between. There is no competition:¹⁰⁷

Those, on the other hand, who measure everything by the standard of personal profits and advantages, and refuse to have these outweighed by considerations of moral rectitude are accustomed, in considering any question, to weigh the morally right against what they consider the expedient; good men are not. And so I believe that when Panaetius stated that people were accustomed to hesitate to do such weighing, he meant precisely what he said—merely that “such was their custom,” not that such was their duty. And he gave it no approval; for it is most immoral (*turpissimum*) to think more highly of the apparently expedient (*quod utile videatur*) than of the morally right, or even to set these over against each other and hesitate to choose between the two (*haec inter se comparare et in his adubitare*). (*De Off.* III.iii.18)¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Nussbaum however supposes that tensions will always be strained between our group loyalties. The error lies in her understanding of Stoic cosmopolitanism. She primarily conceives of becoming a world citizen as a means by which we rise above our own provinciality and learn to identify with others around the world, which means, for her, to identify with the values and ideals of others. But becoming a world citizen *requires* one to have *already* attained a certain amount of knowledge, as a prerequisite for binding oneself to others through ties of love. Severing ties with one’s own provincial perspective is not a means *by which* to attain “a stance of detachment from uncritical loyalty to one’s ways.” Nor is identifying with others *the means* to “promote the kind of evaluation that is truly reason based.” Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Translations are taken with some emendation from Miller.

There are those who, recognizing a distinction between ‘personal profits and advantages’ and virtue, hold that the former may sometimes come first in the order of our priorities, and these people find themselves with difficult choices to make. But if non-Stoics find themselves in the situation of having to make these decisions, the Stoic’s decision is already made for him or her—in advance, by the world, when it presents only one course of action worth choosing. Panaetius is to be taken to task if he implies that the world *itself* presents us with two possible and legitimate courses of action.¹⁰⁹

Most of Cicero’s examples resemble the man who stands to gain a fortune by forging a relative’s will, which he can do, only by acting against his own self-interests, by harming his family. Though “it is an absurd position which is taken by those people who say that they will not rob a parent or a brother for their own gain, but that their relation to the rest of their fellow citizens is quite another thing” (III.vi.28), it is less easily discerned in these situations that the course of action that harms others is also one that leads us to act counter to our own self-interests, *and* our virtue.

Something *repugante honestate*, ‘conflicting with virtue’ is only recognized by the practiced Stoic as a false good. Pleasure, fame, riches, *quae contemnere et pro nihilo ducere comparantem cum utilitate communi magni animi et excelsi est*—‘which it takes a great soul to look down and count as naught, when one weighs them over against the common good’ (III.v.24)—lose their charm when seen through Stoic eyes, for as Cicero says, *tanta vis honesti, ut speciem utilitatis obscuret*, ‘such is the force of the *honestum* that it eclipses the semblance of expediency’ (III.xi.48). It is precisely because these externals present themselves as ‘good for you’ that an alternative course of action presents itself to your untrained eyes as “good” merely for others—“good” merely morally. How then shall we keep from being blinded and taken in completely by the glittering allure of these external goods?

Quid ergo est, quod non numquam dubitationem affere soleat considerandumque videatur asks Cicero. ‘What, then, is it that may sometimes give room for doubt and seem to call for consideration?’ (*De Off.* III iv.10). Here, Cicero turns to the fact that the true good is still less easily discerned in matters where the thing that would lure us from the path of virtue presents itself in the very guise of virtue. His example of such a case will be the murder of Julius Caesar. The matter at first seemed to force a decision: Refrain from harming the circle of intimates to which Caesar, as a close friend, belongs. “What more atrocious crime can there be,” Cicero asks, “than to kill a fellow-man and especially an intimate friend?” Or, expediently dispense with an inconvenient dictator. Cicero avers that, in this case, what looks to be the merely expedient and non-virtuous course of action is actually the moral course of action. In doing so, one appears to be harming one’s inner circles to benefit the outer—precisely what Cicero has told us not to do—but in this case we merely *seem* to harm our inner circle and thus to do wrong; in reality we benefit the circle of friends to which Caesar belongs by removing the tyrant that would have eventually destroyed these and all other human bonds (III.xvi.83). “Did the beneficial overcome honorableness?” Cicero asks. “No indeed; for honorableness followed upon what benefited” (*De Off.* III.iv.19). The example shows that “what is usually taken to be

¹⁰⁹ Cicero sees himself as undertaking to finish what Panaetius started when he wrote a work in three parts, the third of which he failed to complete in the thirty remaining years of life in which he might have done so. At the end of those thirty years, he left only the first two sections—one on the *honestum* and one on the *utile*. The third section that remained to be written would have helpfully instructed readers on choosing between two courses of action, in situations in which one course was *honestis* and the other merely *utile* (*De Off.* III.12).

base, is discovered not to be base.” Indeed, what has the immediate appearance of baseness may actually be virtuous, though once again, it takes ‘a great soul’ to discern that it is indeed virtuous (III.iv.19).

The Stoic is concerned, as we said at the outset, with the harmony of his own soul. Accordingly, he is on guard against things that give the appearance of being good because a person in a state of indecision wavers between the virtuous and an apparently expedient course of action, and may choose wrongly. If he chooses the apparent good over the true good then he will not just have acted in contradiction with virtue, but also with himself. For he acts in contradiction with the self in whose very nature it is to always pursue the good. “There is nothing more in contrary to nature than baseness, for nature desires *convenientia* and *constantia*”; baseness, because it brings us into contradiction with our inner nature, it destroys the ‘harmony and concord’ in the human soul which nature intends it to have” (III.viii.35). Ethics, therefore, comprises a variety of different techniques and exercises that all aim to prevent the self from acting in contradiction with its inner nature. This being so, we can begin to articulate the place of ethical life in politics.

Here we come to the specific way that Cicero combats the degenerate state of politics in his own age by placing ethical and philosophical life at the center of republican life, and founding the political anew on ethical and philosophical foundations. Ethics “grounds” politics in the sense that it is the ethical virtue of great-souled individuals that allows them to act in a just manner. Politically, the consequences are far-reaching: *Ethics “grounds” politics, but not in the traditional sense. Harmony with ourselves becomes the new basis for harmony in the political order.*¹¹⁰

‘Ethics,’ taken in its broadest sense for the Stoics, comprises all action directed toward ourselves and the innermost of a series of concentric circles surrounding us. ‘Politics’ comprises action that is directed beyond these circles towards outer circles. Of course, ethical action should, and must, become political in the sense that our action must eventually extend to as many of the outer circles as possible; ethics should give way seamlessly to politics.

What Cicero points to is a danger that is always bound to accompany this effort, which is really the human effort to extend our concern beyond the here and now, beyond those people and things that immediately surround us, beyond that sphere of life where the effects of our actions “come home” to us and affect us directly—beyond this sphere to another that seems relatively remote and distant. There are many ways we can do harm in the process. We could turn over our own father to the state police, slay our brother to become king (III.ix.40), sever the thumbs of our enemies as a means to military victory (III.xi.47). Whatever the case, we harm a group of which we are a member, and as we try to act toward remoter ends, toward more distant circles, the potential for doing harm seems not to shrink but to grow. Politics, as the effort to extend our concern from the innermost to the outermost circles so far as we are able, attempts to do so, but *without harming or otherwise compromising our commitments to more intimate circles.*¹¹¹

The one thing Cicero wants us to understand above all else is that we cannot act counter to the interests of an inner circle without concurrently and simultaneously acting

¹¹⁰ Here, Cicero is in fundamental accord with Aristotle, for whom the political community is prior to the individual citizen—just as the whole body is prior to any of its parts (*Pol.* 1253a18–29). It is also necessary to cultivate *philia* between citizens (*Pol.* 1295b33). And in IX.4 and IX.8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle derives friendship from self-love.

¹¹¹ In this sense alone it would be correct to agree with Nussbaum that Stoic cosmopolitanism “is less a political idea than a moral idea that constrains and regulates political life.” Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 59.

counter to our own interests as individuals. But this is only part of it, because we act counter not only to our own interests, but also counter to our inner nature, and this is significant because it means that we are in a state of conflict with that inner nature, and thus in conflict with ourselves just as surely as we are in conflict with others. Maintaining a harmonious relationship with others, and with the world at large, therefore depends upon maintaining harmonious relations with ourselves, so that the relationship between ethics and politics is no better understood than as follows: If ethics is the attempt to maintain harmony with ourselves, then politics is the effort to extend our self-concern to others without coming into a state of disharmony with ourselves.

Put differently, if ethics is about maintaining ties with ourselves, then politics is the effort to extend our self-interest, and with it, the boundaries of the self, as far as possible without straining or breaking the bonds that tie us to ourselves. The one sure sign, therefore, that we have stretched ourselves beyond our limits is the feeling that we are “pulled in two directions at once.” This should signal to us that we have overreached by pursuing a good that we can only pursue while swerving from the course of virtue, thus abandoning our inner nature and fighting against it. It is a sure sign that we have overreached and transgressed by attempting to pursue an apparent good even though we could only do so at the cost of tearing ourselves away from ourselves (*ad se rapere*).

We may conclude that the relationship between ethics and politics here is an interesting one, different from the understanding of that relationship we inherited from Plato.¹¹² For Plato, the individual philosopher seeks out a personal ethical truth that is barely recognized for what it is by others, so that, if this truth is to have any bearing upon the conduct of politics, it must be imposed brutally upon an unwilling populous. In short, ethical life—philosophical life—is always in disharmony with political life. But the ethical life of the Stoic philosopher does not culminate in his or her removal from the political sphere to a realm of truth that is in conflict with it.¹¹³

Even if we were to mean by ‘ethics’ the individual’s relationship to inner circles, and by ‘politics’ his or her relationship to outer circles, it would still not be right to say, in the words of one interpreter, that there is a conflict between ethical and political imperatives because “both kinds of ethical obligations are real, and there is no easy formula by which they can be prioritized.”¹¹⁴ We cannot leave it at this because the Stoics do not stop short of leaving us with an irresolvable set of conflicting duties. Though they sometimes require choosing between family and country, the examples Cicero gives are not meant to illustrate the incommensurability of two different courses of action, one ethical and one political, but to show

¹¹² Plutarch documented that the Stoics constantly wrote against Plato’s *Republic* (*Stoic. Rep.* 134F). And yet, the Stoics may have found inspiration in the *Republic* itself for many of their own ideas. The very soul of the political virtue *par excellence*, justice, is there said to be a kind of harmony of the soul with itself, and a man who possesses this internal harmony would do all the things associated with that virtue, and “adultery, disrespect for parents, and neglect of the gods would be more in keeping with every other character than his” (*Rep.* 443a).

¹¹³ The Dream of Scipio, which better than any other passage, describes the place of the philosopher in the political order, also seems to suggest, with some reservations, that in order to find his place in the world, the philosopher must first remove himself from the world. The supposed “harmony” between the Stoic philosophical life and political life is something Cicero never speaks of without ambivalence (*Rep.* II.69).

¹¹⁴ Goldin, “Conflict and Cosmopolitanism in Plato and the Stoics,” *Apeiron* 44 (2011): 264–286.

that there is only an apparent incommensurability between them that is resolved when we find the course of action that is both ethically *and* politically sound.¹¹⁵

When one can be trusted to act in harmony with oneself then one can be trusted to act, with motivations that are as self-interested as they are benevolent, towards the good of as many as possible, while naturally placing the priority on those circles which human beings must, if society is to function at all. Where this harmony of the self with itself is lacking, then no one can ever be sure that a person's political activity is well-founded. In fact, where this harmony is lacking, one's political motivations are always suspect because they are potentially vicious. In short, the philosopher's undertaking to improve him or herself ethically is important because the ethical individual serves as the soundest foundation upon which political life rests.

Reydams-Schils arrives at a similar insight in discussing Seneca's claim that Zeno and Chrysippus did more good for society by becoming philosophers than they could have by governing nations or ruling armies (*De Ot.* 6.4). For her, the interest of the philosophical life, as it was lived by the Stoics, was that it was not in conflict with political life. Through it, one prepared to re-insert oneself into the web of human relations of which society was woven, and to find one's place in the world. One sense in which this can be taken is that philosophy casts souls ready to reenter society when it forges souls with the ability to remain in harmony with themselves.¹¹⁶

Any instance in which we struggle to choose between two courses of action can therefore only be taken as a sign that we *res a natura capulatas divillere*, or that we 'sever two things that nature has joined' (III.xvi.75), and that we as human beings *pervertunt hominess ea que sunt fundamenta naturae*, that we 'pervert the foundations of nature' (III.xxviii.101). Cicero does not deny that in such instances we feel internal conflict as we weigh one course of action against another. But he does wish to dignify this by calling it natural.

Often such conflicts result from having one's ethical and political efforts frustrated and met with resistance.¹¹⁷ The philosopher may, for example, try to act on his own nature without harming others, "for following nature a man cannot harm another man," but the world can attempt to destroy a man's internal harmony by forcing him to choose between two courses of action that would not normally be incompatible—his life and doing no harm to others. Even when his attempts at virtue are met with threats against his life, a man should not believe "that death, poverty, pain, or even the loss of children is more to be shunned than an act of injustice against another." He is mistaken, Cicero insists, "if he believes that while such a course of action is to be avoided, the other alternative is much worse—namely, death, poverty, pain," (III.v.26). So even forcibly presented with a virtuous and a non-virtuous alternative like this, the Stoic's choice should not be any more difficult, any less instantaneous. Laying down one's life for another may seem to require fighting one's own instinctual nature, but Seneca responds undauntedly to the protest that we can never choose virtue over what our very nature requires:

¹¹⁵ If "one standard is the same for the *utilis* and the *honestum*," there is also one standard for the ethical and the political (III.xvi.74). "Every good is subject to the same terms. Private and public utility are linked, to the same extent, good heavens, as what is choice-worthy and what is praiseworthy are inseparable" (*Ep.* lxvi.10).

¹¹⁶ See, Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, Ch. 3., 83-114.

¹¹⁷ This might account for the conflict Socrates felt between the competing imperative of ethical and political life. Judging by the fact that the Stoics said that a sage should participate in political life "if nothing impedes it" and retire otherwise, and judging from the fact that this is precisely what many Stoics did, this experience was no less common in their own day than in Socrates'. It is just that the Stoics account for this without resort to the idea that the imperatives of ethical life are in contradiction with those of political life (Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1045D; *SVF* III, 698).

But sometimes the circumstances in which the good arises are contrary to nature. For being wounded and melting over the fire and being afflicted with poor health are contrary to nature, but it is according to nature to preserve one's vigor amidst them. To set forth my point briefly: the raw material for the good is sometimes contrary to nature, but the good never is, since no good exists without reason and reason follows nature. (*Ep.* lxvi.38)

In choosing virtue, of course, he brings attention to the fact that the political order, under the Caesar or Nero in question, fails to accommodate our humanity. That is, the political order is so contrary to nature that in it, citizens are forced into unnatural contradiction with themselves and forced to choose between two things so vital to their humanity as their own self-preservation and their common humanity with others. Political leaders ought never to make necessary such choices between the welfare of others and ourselves.¹¹⁸

Thus, there are actually two possible explanations if we find ourselves torn in two directions at once by two apparently valuable goods. One explanation lies in the possibility that we have mistaken an apparent for a real good. Another explanation is that we have still mistaken a real for an apparent good, but this time we understandably mistake it. This is because the good in question is something healthy, or safety from harm, something that usually *is* good. Under the circumstances it becomes a merely "apparent" good because it cannot be chosen except where the choice of virtue is excluded. From the outside, the fault seems to lie as much with those who impose this decision upon us, as it does with us. But the corruption and vice of the political order continually forces us to make impossible choices, and thus assaults our inner harmony. It is a "divisive" world in the truest sense because it always attempts to divide us against ourselves. We cannot allow it to do so. We must put our harmony with ourselves before all else.

We can summarize our findings as follows: All internal conflicts are in some sense avoidable. Stoic ethics does not take internal conflict as an unavoidable fact of life, and then teach us to negotiate it. Internal conflict is the condition that ethical practice prevents from arising in the first place. It makes us the kind of people for whom such conflicts need not arise. It keeps us from becoming the kind of people for whom such conflicts arise unnecessarily.

Ethics does not therefore supply us with reasons to make one choice over another. It does not necessarily give us reasoned arguments for choosing, say, virtue over externals, our rational over our animal nature. In any case, arguments cannot be given about what externals are to be chosen and when. We cannot make any generalizations about externals, of the kind an argument would require, because they are not always bad or good. They are sometimes good and sometimes bad. It depends upon the situation. The most we can say is that they are to be chosen when they do not conflict with virtue. For an external deflecting us from the path of virtue *would* be virtuously chosen if it did not carry us away from a more virtuous course of

¹¹⁸ As Cicero writes, "This then ought be the chief end of all, to make the interest of each individual and that of the whole body politic identical" (*Fin.* III.v.20).

action. *Again, externals are bad, not intrinsically, but insofar as they cause inner conflict.*

To recapitulate, reason is deflected from the path of virtue by the appearance of something—an action or thing—mistakenly taken to be good. Cicero’s aim is then to describe conflict in the soul in this way—as one between a *truly* good and a *seemingly* good course of action. When signs of emotion are present, it is a sure sign that discord in the soul has already reached such a fevered pitch that one part of it is now acting on an impulse which is in complete discord with the another. Emotion is a sign that a belief about an external is held that is so in conflict with other beliefs that, when it gives rise to an impulse, it is one that hastily speeds us off in the direction opposite of what is advised by the now more “rational” part of us. A false appearance is thus capable of giving rise to an impulse that carries us so far afield, and so far out of earshot of the part of the soul from which it originally emerged, as to end up completely removed from and irresponsive to it.

Thus, we can see that Cicero and Seneca do not give us a reason to choose what is rational over what is desired, what is good “in theory” over what is good “in praxis.” They ask us to examine the reasons for which we find ourselves faced with such choices in a world in which one should not exclude the other. As in the case of Aristotle, the goal was to describe the conditions under which reason and desire should normally cooperate, and then to diagnose the causes of their apparent conflict.

Thus, the questions the Stoics asked themselves were not limited to ‘what truths can we establish in advance of praxis that can be applied in ethical and political life?’ These questions are sometimes asked, and responses sometimes are given. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero gives us syllogisms purporting to prove that the passions are to be eliminated. But a recent commentary to his text runs: “he accepts the arguments as valid but clearly does not expect the reader to derive much benefit from them.”¹¹⁹ What follows instead is a diagnosis of the causes and the cures of *morbi animi*, ‘diseases of the soul.’ In succeeding chapters, we approach Cicero and Seneca, not by asking what they expected us to derive from theoretical syllogisms. We will ask how they answered the question Cicero asks in *De Officiis*: Given that I wish to maintain the very harmony of my soul with itself, how can I understand instances of apparent disharmony, and how once I become aware of them, can I try and resolve them? We can now ask after the *kind* of knowledge they thought necessary to achieve *this* specific end.

¹¹⁹ Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*, 85.

- CHAPTER THREE -

THE SEARCH FOR AN *ARS VITAE*
NEITHER TOO TECHNICAL NOR TOO THEORETICAL

...nec sapientem posse esse qui aut cognoscendi esse initium ignoret aut extremum expetendi, ut aut unde proficiscatur aut quo perveniendum sit nesciat.

...no man could be a sage who was ignorant that there was a beginning of knowing or an end of striving, so that he knew neither from what he started out nor at what he should arrive.'

- Cicero, *Ac.* II.ix.29

We now attempt to approach the problem of practical knowledge in Stoicism as Cicero does, by understanding it in its relation to other kinds of knowledge. Cicero, in particular, would like us to see Stoic practical knowledge in its ambiguous relationship to the two very different kinds of knowledge. These are Aristotelian *theôria* on the one hand, and *technê* on the other. But in the end, we will conclude, as Cicero does, that the Stoics succeed in giving birth to a conception of practical knowledge distinguished from both *theôria* and *technê*.

In this way, we can begin to ask after the Stoic conception of practical knowledge. As in subsequent chapters, we shall find that practical intelligence is truly practical. It does not amount to the knowledge of abstract, universal principles, nor is it deduced from them. It is an intelligence that allows one to steer a course through a given set of circumstances with minimal recourse to abstractions and universals. We will not, however, have understood just how true this is that a universal standard of truth is lacking until we know how the character of an individual is to be assessed. Since, as we shall argue, we cannot simply hold a person's actions up to a universal standard, to see whether they conform to universally binding principles, the only standard by which we can measure a person is in terms of the consistency of their actions with themselves.

Along the way, we will want to emphasize that, for Cicero, there are two primary ways of practicing the art of life—the Peripatetic and the Stoic. For him, there is no easy means of arbitrating between the two, precisely because there is no universal standard of judgment. But the differences between the ways these two arts are conceived are not as interesting to Cicero. For Cicero, all philosophers teach essentially the same art of life, but they all practice it differently. The two different lifestyles adopted by the Peripatetics and the Stoics result in two distinct 'ways of knowing' that function in two separate ways. Each lifestyle dictates our adherence to two different bodies of thought; our adherence to this body of thought is in some respect dictated by the premises on which it rests. But our adherence to these principles is itself determined by the relationship we choose to adopt—in practice—to appearing things, especially things that appear good, to popular discourse, to others, and to ourselves. Furthermore, to choose to practice the art of life either as a Stoic or a Peripatetic has implications for practical life in general, and political life in particular. Indeed, we shall find the

whole question of how to practice the art of life to be politically charged from Cicero's point of view.

BETWEEN THEORETICAL AND TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

Recall that while he may have brought the ethical insight described by Plato down from the heavens to the earth, Aristotle still assigned it a lofty station high above the arts and crafts. If Aristotle humbles practical insight by occasionally comparing it with the industriousness and craft common craftsmen always use to find the means to attain their fore-assigned ends, he is nonetheless careful to distinguish *phronêsis* from *technê*, ethical or political intelligence from skill. As we shall see shortly, Cicero conversely portrays Aristotle as a defender of the idea that practical wisdom is like other arts. Indeed, Cicero would see Aristotle approaching Epicurus, who he takes to very clearly identify ethical wisdom with an art like any other. In the first section of *De Finibus*, it is the Epicurean Torquatus who defends in its most extreme form the idea that the *ars vitae* is exactly like other arts:

We esteem the art of medicine not for its interest as a science but for its conduciveness to health; the art of navigation is recommended for its practical and not its scientific value (*utilitate, non arte, laudatur*), because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also wisdom (*sapientia*), which must be considered the art of life, if it elected no result would not be desired; but as it is, it is as the artificer that procures and produces pleasure (*artifex conquirendae et comparandae voluptatis*). (I.xiii.42)

The question Torquatus poses is whether practical knowledge is by definition knowledge of the means to a given end. He himself claims that practical knowledge can take *no other form*, and when it is suggested that Epicurus has reduced wisdom to the commonest and basest of arts, he responds to the charge that Epicurus knows no wisdom higher than this “art of pleasure-making” by ridiculing the idea that anyone could attain a higher form of knowledge. He ridicules the very idea that any other knowledge to which a philosopher could claim would be anything but empty speculation and high-flow theorizing:

You are pleased to think him [Epicurus] uneducated. The reason is that he refused to consider any education worth the name that did not help to school us in happiness. Was he to spend his time, as you encourage Triarius and me to do, in pursuing poets who give us nothing solid and useful, but merely childish amusement? Was he to occupy himself, like Plato with music and geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, which starting from false premises cannot be true, and which moreover if they were true would contribute nothing to making our lives pleasanter and therefore better? Was he, I say, to study these arts and neglect the master art, so difficult and correspondingly so fruitful, the art of living? (I.xxi.72)

The disparaging remarks directed at Plato are typical of the ambivalence with which he is treated in Cicero's *oeuvre*, and they should remind us that the drama that is about to unfold is as old as philosophy itself. Plato's Socrates attempts to show himself, even as early as the *Apology*, to have some kind of knowledge in comparison to which craftsmen's would appear insignificant: “I asked myself,” Socrates says, “on behalf of the oracle, whether I should prefer

to be as I am, with neither their wisdom nor their ignorance”—that is, the craftsmen’s—“or to have both.”¹ He, of course, prefers philosophic ignorance to technical knowledge.

Socrates must seek an alternative to technical knowledge, and he may have no alternative but to seek it in theoretical knowledge. The refusal to see knowledge of the good as just one among other *technai* means there is nothing left with which to compare it except, perhaps, the knowledge of a religious mystic.² *Indeed, it seems anyone who would follow Socrates in seeking a “higher knowledge” than purely technical knowledge has no alternative but to seek a knowledge of things lofty and divine, things so removed from practical life that the knowledge itself risks becoming purely theoretical.*

To be sure, Cicero is quite aware of the difficulty this poses the Stoics as the inheritors of such a dilemma. The Stoics have inherited a double task: First they have to distinguish their ‘art of life’ from other *technai*, and claim it to be a knowledge of matters more “divine” than those studied by technicians. Second, they have to avoid going to the extreme of claiming for their sage a knowledge of things so “divine” and so removed from practical life that it can no longer be considered *practical* knowledge at all—only purely *theoretical* knowledge. In this connection we will begin to survey the ways in which the Stoics compared practical knowledge to the technical arts and crafts, making a rather long digression, first through *De Finibus*, and then through *De Divinatione*. We return to *De Finibus* with a clearer idea of what the Stoics understood by a *technê* and better prepared to understand what it *does* and *does not* mean to speak of practical intelligence as a *technê* or ‘art’ of life.

STOICISM AND THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

In our quote, we find Torquatus defending Epicurus against the charge that he has turned the *ars vitae* into the knowledge of the means to a specified end, and that he has neglected the knowledge of higher things. In order to defend Epicurus against this hostile attack on his person, Torquatus says that if he appears ignorant and dull-witted, unschooled in wisdom, he only appears so from the perspective of a bookish Stoic who directs his attention solely toward what is far removed from the concerns of everyday life. It all seems to imply that for a Stoic the ideal is to lead a studious, contemplative life devoted to theoretic knowledge. The suggestion at first sounds absurd. But it is not to be taken lightly because the practical knowledge a Stoic seeks does bear a certain resemblance to Aristotelian *theôria*.

If we examine Aristotelian *theôria*, we discover the source of the resemblance between the two. Recall Aristotle’s claim that “pleasure is produced in respect to each sense...for we speak of sights and sounds as pleasant” (1174b27). The pleasure of perception seems to last as long as the perception itself. On this basis, Aristotle concludes that the pleasure of contemplation is greatest since it is most enduring. “Since this activity has its end within itself, it can be distinguished from practical activity from which we more or less gain apart from the action” (1177b4). In other words, it can be distinguished from activity that has an end outside itself and that remains unfinished until it has attained this end. Contemplation, like perception,

¹ *Apology* 22d.

² This is why, according to Gadamer, Socrates seems to take on the character of “the enthusiast for myth who tells us of bizarre realms lying somewhere between religious fables and philosophical thought.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 34.

seems “to be at every moment complete, since it does not seem to lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form” (1098a15). It would therefore “seem to be loved for its own sake; for nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating” (1177b6).³ It thus retains its value independent of the external ends it either succeeds or fails to secure. But the fact that it fails to secure external goods doesn’t seem to matter precisely because the performance of the activity itself *requires* few goods. Every other activity must wait to be performed until the right material conditions are in place, so that “for deeds, many things are required, and more, the greater and more noble the deeds are” (1178b35). Contemplation “would seem, however, to need external equipment but little” (1178a240).

The pleasure that is perception’s constant companion arises from the quality of the activity and the quality of its object so that “when both object and perceiver are best, there will always be pleasure” (1174b30). Since “a sense which is in good condition acts most perfectly in relation to the most beautiful of its objects,” it is the best objects that draw forth and quicken the activity that is their match (1174b16). For two additional reasons, in the *Metaphysics*, the nature of the object confers value on the activity: (1) the objects that the activity perceives are the divine element in nature, the *archai* of the natural world, and (2) these ‘points of origin’ turn out to be the *telê*, or ‘endpoints,’ toward which everything in nature strives, so that perceiving them becomes akin to perceiving nature’s master plan and attaining a godlike perspective on the world (983a6; 982b5).⁴

If we now compare this account of sense-perception with the Stoics’ own, we find that it bears some similarity to “the way in which,” they say, “we are first struck by the sense-presentations, then *adpetitio* follows their impact, then we direct perception to this object. For the mind itself, which is the source of sensations, and even itself sensation, has a natural force that stretches out toward those things by which it is set in movement” (*Ac.* II.x.30). To be sure, the Stoics purge their writings of all mention of the pleasure of pure contemplation, but they do promote mental activity as the key to the happiness that always accompanies it.

In Stoicism, however, the human mind is stuck by external forces, which it does not remain content merely perceiving. The mind will never figuratively *intendere* or ‘stretch out toward’ the object that prompts perception, without the body impulsively ‘stretching out’ to physically grab that object.⁵ This it tries to use as a means to its own further existence because living beings are not just to be acted upon by external forces; they struggle to use light, air, moisture, all forms of nutriment for their own behalf. Thus, perception is always of that *quo primum natura moveatur*, ‘that by which the primary natural impulses are moved’ and toward which they move (*Fin.* V.vii.19).⁶

³ One might also cite the famous opening lines of the *Metaphysics*: “All men desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in the sense; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others is the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything we prefer seeing, one might say, to everything else” (*Met.* 980a20).

⁴ “The science which knows to what end each thing must be done is the most authoritative of the sciences, and more authoritative than any ancillary science; and this end is the good of that thing, and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature” (*Met.* 982b5).

⁵ “So since the human mind is wholly adapted for scientific knowledge of the world and for constancy of life, it welcomes knowledge beyond all else; and it loves *katalêpsis* which, as I said translates literally as ‘grasp’ both on its own account, and because nothing is dearer to the mind than the light of the truth—and for its use” (*Ac.* II. x.31).

⁶ Gill best explains why in Book V Antiochus mistakenly takes the Stoics for Aristotelians: He assumes they adopt the same part-based psychology as Aristotle. If Antiochus were to realize that the Stoics always take the mind to be the seat

If one forgets that the mind strives, not just toward what stimulates its own perceiving, but also toward what stimulates the body's striving,⁷ then it is easy to confuse the Stoic's mental activity with that of an Aristotelian engaged in theoretic contemplation.⁸ Whereas most activities derive their value from the practical ends they help one attain, that in which the Stoic is engaged is not valued because it is instrumental to external ends. Both the Stoic and the Aristotelian can say that their mental activities retain intrinsic value whatever their practical results happen to be, because both the Stoic's activity and the Peripatetic's derive worth *from what sets the activity in motion—that is from its archai*.

But it is not even necessary to compare Stoic knowledge with Aristotelian *theôria*, to detect, in the self-satisfied way the Stoic comports himself, that he or she is absorbed in a mental activity carried out at a remove from practical life. The Stoic appears to be turned inward, engaged in a mental activity that is minimally dependent upon the external world, and which retains value even when it does not achieve results in the external world.

These passages in Torquatus' speech in can be considered to represent the concerns of the dialogue as a whole. It will be argued that there is a single debate that runs through all five books of *De Finibus*. It is a debate about whether some knowledge may be too "practical" in the sense of "technical," and whether some may be too "impractical" in the sense of "theoretical." For Cicero, a delicate balance must be struck between knowledge that is too technical and too theoretical. The question for him is whether we can resist comparing the *ars vitae* to the menial arts and crafts without flying to the opposite extreme, and completely depriving it of what makes it *practical* rather than just *theoretical* knowledge.

Still, the question is not *just* whether the Stoics fall too far on the side of seeking theoretical rather than practical knowledge.⁹ The question is whether the Stoics might actually be able to claim for themselves a knowledge that does not fall toward either extreme—a knowledge neither too similar to other *technai*, nor too similar to *theôria*. Because Cicero writes a dialogue that raises this question without presuming to answer it, he shows the Stoics trying to take up a middle ground—fighting on two fronts at once—against the tendency to reduce virtue to a mere art, and against the tendency to equate it with a knowledge of the divine that would be too lofty, too high-minded to retain any value in practice.

of action, then they could not be accused of vaunting the exercise of the mind over and above the activity of the body. Gill, *The Structured Self*, 169.

⁷ This has the result that, in Stoicism, unlike in Aristotelianism, the perceiver does not just perceive the *archai*, or 'points of origin,' of nature as a whole. The mind is not directed toward those things that initiate the striving of *other* things in nature. Rather, the mind perceives that which is 'the point of origin' of the living creature's *own* striving. But at least at first glance, the Stoic's activity is just like the Aristotelian's insofar as it derives its value from the fact that, through it, he makes mental contact with the archaic and divine springs of movement in nature.

⁸ Indeed, Piso will make this assumption, and it will lead him erroneously to the conclusion that a Stoic values *scientia* as its own end, as *quod in eo sit optimum*, as 'that which is highest in one' (IV.xiii.34) Antiochus then attributes to the Stoics, whether rightly or wrongly, the very Aristotelian valuation of theoretical over practical life that we, his readers, know the Stoics would refuse. When it comes to accurately portraying Stoicism as philosophical movement, the fact that Antiochus, a character in Cicero's dialogue, elides the difference between the Stoics and Aristotle serves as no indication of the reliability or unreliability of Cicero's or his sources. Cicero simply wants to show that, whatever the original truth of orthodox Stoicism might have been, it lent itself to this Antiochean interpretation. As he proceeds, the question he asks is whether the Stoics can *indeed* be accused of valuing theoretical over practical life *despite* the fact that they would refuse the very distinction.

⁹ The Stoic doctrine that holds that the chief good is "coupled with virtue, which falls only to the wise man" is said to derive from Xenocrates and Aristotle (IV.vi.15).

IN EPICURUS AND ARISTO, TWO EXTREMES EQUALLY TO BE AVOIDED

“I was down at my place at Tusculum, and wanted to consult some books from the library of the young Lucullus; so I went to his villa, as I was in the habit of doing, in order to help myself to the volumes I needed. On my arrival, seated in the library I found Marcus Cato.” He was surrounded by books on Stoicism. “Each of us being equally surprised to see the other, he at once arose and began to exchange the usual greetings. ‘What brings you here?’ cried he” (III.ii.8). Cicero no sooner explains that he is there looking for some books of Aristotle to read, during the precious time he is afforded away from politics. Cato then cries out, “Would that you had turned to the Stoics! You of all men might have been expected to reckon virtue the only good.” Cicero protests, “‘Perhaps *you* might rather have been expected,’ I answered, ‘to refrain from adopting a new terminology, when in substance you think as I do.’” Then come the words that establish the terms of the debate to follow: *Ratio enim nostra consentit, pugnato oratio*, says Cicero—‘Our reasoning agrees, only our words differ.’ *Minime vero consentit*, replies Cato—‘it doesn’t agree at all.’ (III.iii.10).

So begins Book III of *De Finibus*. In what follows, Cato will loudly denounce all those who consider anything but virtue valuable, and to Cicero, who counts himself among their number, he says, *quidquid enim praeter id quod honestum sit expetendum esse dixeris in bonisque numeraveris, virtutis lumen extinxeris et virtutem penitus evertis*—‘call anything but virtue desirable and number it among goods, and you will have extinguished the light of virtue and completely ruined virtue’ (III.iii.10). This view that virtue’s value can be upheld only when value is denied to everything else is too much an all or nothing approach for Cicero. He finds the idea to be so extreme, in fact, that he thinks it approaches the zealotry of Aristo whose specter he now invokes: “That is all magnificently said, Cato, but are you aware that you share your big talk with Pyrrho, and with Aristo, who level down everything equally?” (III.iii.11). In Book II Aristo was cited as an example of someone who had taken the rejection of Epicureanism too far in the direction of denying all value to externals, or as he called them, ‘indifferents’ (II.xii.42).

In order to understand why Cicero at first assumes that a Peripatetic will have everything in common with a moderate Stoic, one has to glance back at the preceding book to see that they share a common enemy. That enemy is of course Epicurus, whose conception of the *ars vitae* Cicero must expose as wrongheaded. Cicero’s reasons for rejecting this ‘art of life’ all hinge upon showing its inapplicability to a *specific aspect of life*, namely political life:

Profess in any public assembly that the motive of all your actions is the desire to avoid pain. If you feel that this, too, does not sound sufficiently dignified or respectable, say that you intend both in your present office and all your life long to act solely for the sake of your own advantage—to do nothing but what will pay, nothing in short that is not for your own interest; imagine the uproar among the audience. What would become of your chances for the consulship, which as it is seems to be a certainty for you in the near future? Will you then adopt a rule of life that you can appeal to in private but which you dare not openly profess or parade in public? (II.xxiii.76)

Torquatus must admit that he could never stand for office as an Epicurean since that would essentially mean running for office as a man committed to the proposition that his ends always justify the means to their attainment. The fact that Torquatus could not run on such a platform

demonstrates that it is *in something besides* its expediency toward given ends that we demand action be based. Deprive people of any reason for acting besides its expedience, and you destroy the very fabric of society.¹⁰

Then, can nothing give impetus to our action and propel it in the right direction when externals would lure it in another? If there is such a thing, it goes by the name of ‘virtue’—a word that Cicero now defines. ‘Virtue’ is *sua vi propter seque expetendum*, that which is ‘desirable for its own sake’ (II.xii.44). It is *detracta omni utilitate sine ullis praemiis fructibusve per se ipsum posit iure laudari*, ‘that which deprived of all utility, apart from any fruit, can justly be praised in itself’ (II.xiv.43). It is valuable all the time, not just if and when it secures external goods. In practical terms, then, virtue carries the day even when the course of action it dictates does not promise to “yield fruit.”

But for Cicero there is an immense difference between asserting that the siren song of externals can be resisted, and asserting that externals have no seductive charm.¹¹ If Cato uncompromisingly and unyieldingly demands that Cicero place total faith in virtue before Cato will admit that their respective philosophical persuasions have anything in common, it leads him beyond just rejecting Epicureanism. In rejecting Epicureanism, *and* Peripateticism, which still follows Epicureanism in upholding the value of externals, he also rejects a moderate form of Stoicism, and goes so far in the direction of despising externals that he goes to the opposite extreme. In fleeing Epicurus, he runs straight into the arms of Aristo, and joins a radical Skeptical and Stoic fringe dedicated to an extreme version of the idea that *in una virtute omnia esse*, ‘everything is in virtue’ (II.xii.43).

This means that he has abandoned the middle ground that he, as a moderate Stoic, might have shared with a Peripatetic-leaning man like Cicero. That is important because, in a moment, Cicero will begin to make a further claim: He will claim that the common terrain that the Peripatetics and the Stoics might have shared, *if* Stoics like Cato had not attempted to go “beyond” Peripateticism, would have also kept the Stoics’ approach solidly grounded in practical life. Stoics who abandon their Platonic-Peripatetic roots, according to Cicero abandon the very thing that once kept their approach sensible and pragmatic—in a word, *practical*.¹²

¹⁰ We want politicians who can put public service before their own designs; and as Cicero’s long discussion of friendship shows, we want intimates who can put their relationships before their own ends (II.xxvi.83).

¹¹ To assert, not that externals exercise no power over us at all is to turn oneself into a follower of Aristo or Pyrrho¹¹:

Aristo and Pyrrho thought all these things utterly worthless, and said, for example, that there was absolutely nothing to choose between the most perfect health and the most grievous sickness; and consequently men have long ago quite rightly given up arguing against them. For thus insisting that all is in this one virtue (*in una virtute sic omnia esset voluerunt*), so as to rob it of choice among things (*ut eam rerum selectione exspoliarent*), and neither giving it anything from which it might originate (*nec ei quidquam aut unde oriretur darent*), and upon which it may be supported (*aut ubi niteretur*) they destroy the very virtue they cherish. Again, Erillus in calling everything back to *scientia*, saw one specific good, but not the greatest, nor one by which life could be guided (*nec quo vita gubernari possit*). Accordingly Erillus has long ago been rejected; since Chrysippus no one has even troubled to refute him. (II.xiii.43)

Here in Book II, Cicero explains why it would be dangerous to put total faith in virtue. If externals are considered things of complete indifference in comparison with it, then we are left with no reason to choose one external over another. This means that virtue itself contains no criterion for deciding between ends; virtue is therefore no longer a *prudentia*, a practical form of knowledge that can usefully help us choose *between* ends.

¹² Here the influence of Antiochus on Cicero should be mentioned. He is obviously a figure who has a great, but not overweening, influence on Cicero. He is influential precisely because his system of philosophy represents the possibility

Let us see how the Stoics arrive at an art of life that is practically useless. The Stoics betray the influence of their Platonic and Peripatetic forefathers when they define their end in at least one of the ways in which they are wont, as *omnibus aut maximimis rebus ii quae secundum naturam sint fruentem vivere*, as ‘to live in the enjoyment of all, or of the greatest, of those things which are in accordance with nature’ (IV.vi.15).¹³ Scholars have lamented that this is not so much a definition of the end as a description of how it is attained. Indeed, we know the Stoics’ way of describing their *telos* had in recent years changed. They shied from giving a theoretical *definition* of the human end and instead described how this end could be attained if one adopted the proper relationship to desired objects.¹⁴

What the Stoics and the Peripatetics seem to be most agreed upon is that “since the end of every art is what nature most seeks (*quem natura maxime quareret*), the same must be affirmed of the art of life as a whole” (IV.vii.19). The question is whether the Stoics stay true to this insight and the conception of practical knowledge it entails. Specifically, the question is this: If the Stoics try to “improve upon” this conception of the art of life, can they do so without tampering with those aspects of the Peripatetics’ conception of it, which, Cicero has already begun to suggest, lie behind the success they have had in the practical sphere? “For the present, I only say that that topic, which I think we rightly call *civilis*, the Greeks *politikos*, to have fully and with seriousness by the Academics and early Peripatetics, who while agreeing in substance, differed in words.” He continues, “What a vast amount they have written on the *res publica*, and on the laws! How many precepts of oratory have they left us in their treatises, and how many

of finding a middle ground between seemingly incompatible extremes. As we shall see, Antiochus claims a place for his ideas in long philosophic tradition, the Peripatetic one, which Piso describes as having long incorporated elements of Stoicism into itself without compromising its Peripatetic commitments. The creation of Stoicism as a separate philosophical position seems, to him, like a superfluous addition to a philosophy that already contains some Stoicism inside itself. But Cicero is as intrigued as he is skeptical of this attempt to find a “middle ground,” and we shall see that he subjects to ruthless attack the attempt to try to accommodate mutually contradictory positions. Thus, it is never to be assumed that Cicero’s training under Antiochus leads him to *uncritically accept* the blending of Stoicism and Peripateticism because, as we shall see in our discussion of Book V, he contrasts with this “mixed approach” an unadulterated version of Stoicism for which he has obvious sympathy. See further Appendix Two.

¹³ The beauty of this initial definition is that it leaves ambiguous what will be debated, i.e. which of those things in accordance with nature are greatest. It comes from the Stoics Diogenes and Antipater, who defined the goal of life as *eulogistein en tēi tōn kata phusin eklogē kai apeklogēi*, ‘rational behavior in the selection of what is natural;’ Antipater added that it was *to kat’ auton poien diēnekōs aparbalōs pros to tuxanein tōn proēgeoumenon kata phusin* ‘doing everything in one’s power to obtain the primary natural things’ (Plutarch, *Com. Not.*, 26-27; *SVF* III.44-6, 57-8). Cicero has yet to explain what is most important, that is how this end is attained when selection, which is normally imperfect, becomes *eulogistein* (*cum officio selectio*). But although scholars have determined that it is more than just an invention of late Stoicism, it still draws criticism because it is believed to lack something. What seems to be lacking is an account of why proper selection puts us in harmony with nature taken as a whole. But if we assume with the Stoics that there is some way in which the correct selection places us in harmony with the cosmos, nothing is lacking but a theoretical account of how it does so. We may then take it as a sound description of the activity in which attaining our human end consists, as Striker agrees. Its lack of theoretical underpinning does not make it any less sound a definition for our purposes, unless Striker is indeed right that such a definition of a goal must “not only to give a correct description of what that goal consists in, but at the same time...make clear what makes this goal worth striving for.” Gisela Striker, “Antipater, or the Art of Living,” in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, eds. Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 193.

¹⁴ Long has documented at great length how *ta kata phusin*, originally referred to as *adiaphora*, or ‘indifferents’ began to be mentioned increasingly in connection with the Stoic definitions of the *telos*. Cicero says that Chrysippus himself defined the end of life as requiring the proper selection of things according to nature (*Fin.* 3.31), as does Epictetus who quotes him as saying that “god himself has given me the power to select *ta kata phusin*” (*SVF* III.191). Anthony Long, “Carneades and the Stoic *Telos*,” *Phronesis* (12): 65.

examples in their discourses” (IV.iii.5). Thus begins Cicero’s attempt to show that the Peripatetics developed rhetoric and politics to the point at which nobody could surpass the contributions they made to practical life. Their practical philosophy simply could not be improved upon.¹⁵ Cicero is careful to show that the Stoics owe every practical philosophical idea they have to Aristotle, so if they strike out too far in their own direction, they do so only at some peril, at the risk of sacrificing that aspect of Peripateticism that makes it so well-adapted to the practical and political spheres of life.

It appears to Cicero that the Stoics may indeed have broken with the only way he knows of conceiving the art of life. It holds that the *officium munusque sapientiae in hominis cultu esse occupatum*, that ‘the office and function of wisdom is occupied with the cultivation of man’ (IV.xiv.36). It thus likens *sapientia* to the *cultura vitium*, the ‘cultivation of vines,’ “whose function is to bring the vine with all its parts into the most thriving condition” (IV.xiv.38). Just as this art never ceases to secure all that is needed *ad colendam vitem*, ‘for the nurture of the vine,’ the art of life remains fixed on procuring the means of our subsistence and growth, and *ratio* never abandons this *curatio* or ‘care’ of things *praeposita*—since, literally translated, these things are ‘placed before others’ and given priority as the means by which we will be able to come into a condition of thriving and well-being (IV.xiv.39).

Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy are both said to start from the assumption that our end lies in the “attainment of the largest number of the most important things in accordance with nature” (IV.x.26). But since the Stoics appear to have let drop the requirement that the *ars vitae* helps us attain the things we need to preserve and sustain ourselves in the condition which is natural to us, the question becomes how the Stoics have succeeded in diminishing the importance of those things that our nature instinctively seeks as the means of its own self-perpetuation:¹⁶

...by what means do you contrive, starting from the same principles, to reach the conclusion that the chief good might be living *honeste*, for that is either living in service to virtue or nature (*vel e virtute vel naturae congruenter vivere*). By what means and at what point did you suddenly discard the body, and all those things which follow nature but are out of our power, and even our *officium* itself? How comes it that so many things that nature so strongly recommends might be suddenly abandoned by *sapientia*? (IV.xi.26)

Cicero claims that the one defining moment when Stoic philosophy breaks away from the Peripatetic premises on which it is founded comes when the Stoics deflate the importance assigned to external goods by unduly inflating the relative importance of mental activity. But the value of mental activity can only be inflated by denying externals all value. This lends credence to Cicero’s suspicion that this ‘practical knowledge’ isn’t practical at all, since practical knowledge, at least as the Peripatetics conceive it, exists in order to enable the attainment of desired ends. This then brings us to the *first* respect in which the Stoic practical knowledge shows itself to be strangely “impractical”: *It is a practical knowledge that doesn’t need to*

¹⁵ See also IV.xxii.61.

¹⁶ The chief cause of disagreement between Aristotle his successors is said to be the invulnerability of the wise man to fortune. Here, Piso credits Aristotle himself with having believed in the inability of happiness to be destroyed or impaired by virtue. It is actually Theophrastus who is said to, in his book *On Happiness*, depart from the idea that wisdom suffices for happiness by assigning too much importance to one’s fortune and material circumstances. “This theory,” says Piso, “seems to me to be too enervating and unmanly to be adequate to the force and dignity of virtue” (V.v.12).

lead one in the direction of what seems desirable in order to be practical. In fact, it threatens to drive one from the path leading in their direction.

We call many things “good” in ordinary life because we experience them as such. For Cicero, one never ceases to see as good those things that present themselves as good, and it even seems to him that good things continually presented themselves as good to Zeno himself:

If in fact he set no lower value on those things he himself denied to be good than did those who said they were good, what then did he want by altering their old name? He ought at least to have diminished their importance and to have set a slightly lower value on them than the Peripatetics, so as to make the difference appear to be one of meaning and not merely of language. (IV.xx.57)

Here Cicero seems to acknowledge that philosophers always try to reform or correct the way we perceive certain things as good. But what perplexes Cicero about Zeno is that he does not seem to care whether we go on regarding externals as good or not; he only cares that we stop referring to them as “good” and begin referring to them as “indifferent.” If we continue to think about them and treat them as goods, as even Zeno goes on doing, then this is a grave problem for Cicero. It amounts to a confession that philosophic discourse either doesn’t need to, or cannot, change the way things appear to us as good and the way we respond to them in kind.¹⁷

For Cicero, this is cause for shame, as it means that the same phenomena that one continues to find valid in everyday practical life are denied validity in philosophy. That is to say, one asserts in practice what one denies in theory. And it is this ever-widening gulf between what is asserted in theory and what is believed in practice that Cicero subjects to attack:

I should have thought that to be worthy of philosophy, and of ourselves, particularly when the subject of our inquiry is the supreme good, the argument ought to reform our lives, purposes and wills (*vitam nostrum, consilia, voluntates*) and not just our words. Could those concise and pointed arguments which you say you delight in possibly make any man alter his opinions? Here are people all agog to learn why pain is no evil; and the Stoics tell them that, though pain is irksome, annoying, hard to bear, it is not an evil, because it involves no dishonesty, wickedness, or malice, nor moral blame or baseness. He who hears this may or may not want to laugh, but he will not go away any stronger to endure pain than when he came. (IV.xix.52)

Stoicism, like most philosophies, often adopts a perspective that is in conflict with the way we normally see the world. Stoicism, however, does not try to alter our pre-philosophical orientation towards the world. Instead it is content that our philosophic and ordinary ways of perceiving the world should remain. It is not troubled by the fact that its philosophic discourse may exist, side by side with an unchanged way of seeing the world.

¹⁷ Hence, Cicero’s attack on the Stoics’ ineffectual jargon. He lambasts their habit of “coining new words, discarding those approved by use” (IV.iii.7). Where rhetoric is concerned, “they furnish a complete manual for anyone whose ambition is to hold his tongue” (IV.iii.7). As for their ability to *incendere* or ‘rouse’ listeners—“What? A Stoic rouse listeners?” (IV.iii.7). Their discourses “even if they are assented to, cannot convert the soul, and their listeners go away the same as they came” (IV.ii.7).

But it is precisely the discontinuity between philosophic and everyday discourse that Cicero subjects to critique when he quips, “they say so much that I hardly understand” (IV.iii.7). He now does so in seriousness because he discerns that Zeno’s discourse is at variance, not just with the way he thinks about “goods” in the everyday, but also with his everyday way of speaking about them. Cicero accepts that a philosopher will, out of a concern that everyday speech distorts the nature of a reality, either adopt a new mode of discourse or change the meaning of existing words; he will to a certain degree *verba versare*, or ‘twists words.’¹⁸ But presumably because it is the language that prevails in the senate and courts, he assumes that the philosopher must continue to speak the language of practical life. However, a problem evidently arises when the private language Zeno uses in discourse with himself conflicts too radically with the language he continues to use in everyday interaction with others: “What sort of a philosophy then is this, which speaks ordinary language in public, but in its treatises employs an idiom of its own?” (IX.ix.23).¹⁹

Cicero says of the Stoics, “I cannot wonder enough at their *inconstantia*” (IV.xiv.39). His choice of the Stoic watchword *inconstantia* to describe the Stoics themselves deals them a cutting blow because it implies that they possess the least of the quality they value most—consistency. This then brings us to the second of three ways in which the Stoics appear to divorce Peripatetic philosophy from the sound practical basis upon which it rests: *They adopt a philosophic discourse at variance with practical discourse, and must therefore live a double life in which they constantly deny in theory what they affirm in practical, everyday discourse.*

STOIC AND PERIPATETIC INCONSTANTIA

The Stoics, however, believe that there is only one circumstance under which we risk acting in contradiction with ourselves. That is when we mistake a real for an apparent good. The Stoics are vigilantly attentive to the possibility that an impulse may be misdirected toward what merely appears good, because when this happens, we are brought into a state of conflict with that part of ourselves that always seeks its own good. The conflict is exacerbated when we tell ourselves that the choice we have before us is a choice between virtue and a *real* good. This is precisely why, in order to avoid such conflicts, we must deny the status of a “genuine good.” to any “good” that could ever come into potential conflict with virtue. We must call it “indifferent” even if doing so means calling it an “indifferent” when our inclinations tell

¹⁸ Here, however, an important theme is introduced, or rather reintroduced, and we must consider it. For Cicero spends the first pages of Book III deep in reflection upon the kind of language proper to the art of life. It is not to be wondered that *in omni arte cuius usus vulgaris communisque non sit*, that ‘in every art whose use is not just in common and everyday life,’ new words are invented. He affirms that a new vocabulary is developed even in the rhetorical arts, which, he says, are completely *populares*, ‘of the people,’ and *forenses*, ‘proper to the forum’ (III.i.4). And since even tradesmen invent their own private language, “all the more is this to be done by the philosopher; for philosophy is the art of life.” While it speaks of its subject matter, *verba arripere de foro non potest*, ‘it cannot take its words from the forum’ (III.ii.4).

¹⁹ The charge that Cicero presses against the Stoics here vividly recalls his earlier charges against the Epicureans, who were also blamed for making a philosophical appropriation of ordinary words like “pleasure” and then assigning them a new meaning: “Do I not understand the meaning of the Greek words *hêdonê*, the Latin word *voluptas*? Pray which of these languages that I am not acquainted with? Moreover, how comes it that I do not know what the word means, while all and sundry who have elected to Epicureans do?” (*Fin.* II.iv.12, trans. mod). The Stoics are now subjected to the same reproach: “Are you then to affect an artificial language and to say what you do not think? Or are you to change your opinions like your clothes, and have one set for indoor wear and another set when you walk abroad?” (II.xiii.77).

otherwise. *In this way, the Stoic risks the charge of inconsistency precisely to preserve his or her inner consistency.*

In Book V, we read of what unifies Peripatetics and Stoics. The Stoics believe the path of virtue will coincide with the route to desired ends. The Peripatetics also assume a coincidence between virtue and external goods insofar as they believe that it is through the attainment of their desires for external goods that they will be able to actualize their virtuous potential. The difference between the Peripatetic and the Stoic lies in the way they respond to practical problems. Every Peripatetic will inevitably find him or herself, at more than a few moments in their life, in the position of having to choose between a course of action that leads in the direction of an apparent good, and at the same time, a course of action that calls out as better meeting the demands of virtue. Every Peripatetic could thus potentially have, at any given moment, *two* different courses of action to choose between. But because a Peripatetic refuses to relinquish his or her intuition that the external is genuinely “good,” he or she will continue to feel torn in two directions at once. *The Peripatetic is therefore far more prone to one kind of inconstancia than the Stoic.*

Piso says that, “With regard to those questions concerning the *finibus bonorum et malorum*, and the question of which of them are ultimate and final, the fountain-head is to be found where there are the first *invitamenta* of nature” (V.vi.12). Do the Stoics reject the idea that this ‘fountain-head’ or *fons* is to be found in our first *invitamenta*? Precisely so that he or she does not mistake an apparent good for one leading towards his or her *telos*, the Stoic must “find the source of the stream” in earnest. Having found the source of this stream, he or she can then simply allow him or herself to be carried by it in the direction of the *telos*. The source of our impulses, however, lies in the things that arouse them, the *invitamenta*—the things that act as ‘incitements,’ ‘inducements,’ or ‘invitations’ to act. What is alluded to here is it that, for the Stoic, it is by gaining knowledge of the *archai* of our own actions that we gain the practical knowledge necessary to guide us to our *telos*.²⁰

The danger, of course, is that Stoics may mistakenly allow their action to be dictated by what they take it to be in their “true nature” to do. If it is not in their nature, they may end up fighting the natural impulses by which they should be guided. In this sense, there is some truth, says Cicero, to the caricature of the Stoic who, while claiming to be in harmony with his inner nature, is continually acting against it. Hence, he exposes Stoic philosophy as one in which “‘to live in harmony with nature’ means to depart from nature” (IV.xv.41). This is the inherent danger of Stoic philosophy, for which Cicero tries to hold Stoicism accountable. Contrast the Stoic with the Peripatetic. The Peripatetic looks not toward the *archai* that should give rise to his action but toward its apparent ends. In other words, he resolves never to doubt that the things that appear to him as good are a constitutive part of his *telos*. The Stoics reject the Peripatetic’s methodology. They do not presume that to start from the assumption that the things we desire are a constituent means to it, is the only way to arrive at some clear idea of our *telos*. Instead, the Stoics buttress their attitude toward externals with a theoretical framework.

This brings us to the third way in which the Stoics appear to depart from Peripateticism and its practicality: Cicero’s main complaint about Stoic methodology is that it departs from the methodology Aristotle

²⁰ Because they never know if an apparent good is *truly* good, the Stoics seek the signposts pointing the way to their *telos* further upstream. This does not lead them to search out virgin instincts, uncorrupted by society, but their methodology does always carry with it the danger of projecting an imagined wellspring of action. For while the Stoics may claim to be guided by their “true” nature, “this revelation of our nature will actually have resulted in our relinquishing the things to which we held before that revelation took place” (IV.xv.42).

employed in proceeding from an examination of our desires and the good at which they seem to aim, to more general conjectures about the telos. The Stoics appear to flout that rule to which the Peripatetics adhere, that of starting from what is most known and proceeding to what is least known. Instead of proceeding from the certain to the uncertain, Cicero argues, the Stoics merely posit what is uncertain, and then, what's worse, they use the uncertain to disprove the certain. In brief, he says, "instead of using the certain to throw light on the uncertain, you endeavor to make the uncertain disprove the certain" (IV.xxiv.68).

This is clearly reflected in logical exposition of the Stoic system. All its conclusions are derived from principles, but these principles are themselves baseless. And this, for Cicero, detracts from the logical coherence of Zeno's system for "he held to the logical conclusions from these premises" (*his propositis tenuit prosus consequentia*). Right. I cannot deny it. Yet so false are those things that follow that those from which they spring cannot be true." The conclusions at which the Stoics arrive are not supported by our intuitions about apparent goods, and this, for Cicero, constitutes a breach of sound philosophic practice in which it is not possible to assert anything if the conclusions that follow conflict with that of which one is certain. In his words, "if those things that follow from something are false then that from which they follow is false." Or to put it yet more *succinctly, consequentibus vestris sublatis prima tolluntur*—if your conclusions are destroyed, your premises are destroyed' (IV.xix.55).²¹

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above observations, and upon the fact that the dialogue ends in *aporia*, without it being determined whether it is the Stoics or the Peripatetics who are in the right, we can indeed say that there are just as many problems with each art of life as there are advantages. To begin with just the Peripatetics, one observes that their art of life does prove to be what we might call "technical" in the same sense as the Epicureans'. The Peripatetics may look to intermediate ends as signs pointing the way to an end that is ultimately unknown, but the art that attains these ends is "technical" in the sense that it merely strives to attain pre-determined ends, without questioning them or subjecting them to scrutiny.

Where theory and praxis are concerned, the advantage of this approach is certainly that it keeps us firmly rooted in the everyday world, the world of appearances, the world of *endoxa*, and the practical realm. First, the knowledge we rely upon is never simply valuable in itself, but must always find its place in practical life by helping us to actually achieve the things we already "know" we desire. Second, since it is applied toward the end of helping us to attain the things we already regard as valuable in practical life, the good of something acknowledged in everyday practice is never denied in philosophy. Third and finally, the art of life is always based

²¹ Anyone who pays close attention to the details that make *De Finibus* a great work of literature will observe that this question resurfaces whenever the dialogues' characters dispute the form their discourse should take. Should it be that of a monologue or dialogue? For example, when Cicero begins to refute Torquatus' monologue by subjecting him to interrogation, Torquatus exclaims, "A truce to question and answer, if you do not mind. I told you from the beginning that I preferred continuous speeches" (II.vi.17). Torquatus acknowledges that speech-giving is in some sense a rhetorical device, but he claims it is a rhetorical device proper to philosophy. As we shall see, the philosopher's discourse is a discourse that must remain consistent with itself, and it is not just the Epicureans, but also the Stoics who exemplify, to an even greater degree, the philosopher's tendency to work toward a discourse that is completely self-consistent. Of course, most philosophers are less concerned with maintaining the consistency of their discourse with everyday discourse, with the discourse employed by non-philosophers. This apparently explains why philosophers are more likely to deliver monologues than to engage in dialogue.

on the *endoxa* upon which one relies in practical life, and never asserts more than just what these *endoxa* say about matters less certain.

Compared with this art of life, that of the Stoics' must appear fundamentally flawed. The Stoics' art of life places its faith in a "good" whose goodness is not supported by or derivable from our practical intuitions about what is good in life. Moreover, it may even have us travel a course that runs counter to the one our intuitions would have us take, and in that sense it may demand of us that we deny the good of those things we have always held dear in practical life, for which reason philosophy may become merely a theoretical attitude that stands in opposition to that held in practice. The art of life's intrinsic value is dogmatically asserted notwithstanding its total and complete inability to help us attain practical ends. Stoicism has its dangers.

Despite these problems, Stoicism exerts a clear hold on Cicero, and the nature of his attraction to it is evidently bound up with the fact that, despite all its pitfalls, it offers us a way of avoiding the equally dangerous traps into which the Peripatetic art of life falls. It cautions us against thinking of ourselves as possessing a "technical" knowledge that, using only appearing goods as guideposts, aims our every action at an imagined *telos*. Yet when he was busy fending off the attacks of the Epicureans, he did acknowledge the necessity of positing a knowledge that would not lead one into contradiction with the better part of oneself—one "that no penalties or rewards could induce to swerve from what it has decided to be right" (IV.xxi.59). The Stoic is, of course, always in potential conflict with *endoxa*, but since he or she guards against an external upsetting his internal harmony, the Stoic is always consistent, never induced to veer from the right course of action. *So who should we emulate—the Stoic or the Peripatetic? Cicero leaves this question undecided. It is for the reader to determine whether it is better to live in harmony with oneself, though one may be at variance with the whole world—or whether it is in fact better to be in harmony with the world and always in potential discord with oneself.*

Peripatetic philosophy and Stoic philosophy both stand accused of contradiction, and their adherents of being at variance with themselves, though each embodies a very different kind of self-contradiction. The Peripatetic is always in harmony with *endoxa*, but always potentially in contradiction with him or herself so long as there is a possibility that an apparent good turns out to be a false one, and a decision has to be made between virtue and externals. Put another way, the need of the Peripatetic to be at peace with *endoxa* means that he or she is always potentially at war with him or herself.

Cicero is interested in those moments when one has to choose between pursuing an apparent good and acting in accord with virtue, and it may be supposed that these instances hold so much interest for him precisely because they are moments in which we can either place our faith in a knowledge that appears too "theoretical" on the one hand, or too "technical" on the other. One can seek refuge in a knowledge that is seemingly "theoretical" in that it (1) is of *archai*, (2) is supported by the self-coherence of a set of premises, (3) conflicts with *endoxa*, or common opinions, (4) doesn't promise practical results, but rather (5) has intrinsic value independent of its practical efficacy in achieving ends in the external world.

On the other hand, we may see, in the same instance, the clear route we could take to what already appears to us as a certain good. If we were to pursue the means to that which presented itself to us as the most direct route to our final end, then we would be employing an art of life that, while it might have a more clear-sighted view of its end, might also have a more short-sighted view with respect to its *ultimate* end. What Cicero is perhaps most interested in is the fact that this art of life can be employed or the Stoics', and he is interested in the fact that these two different arts of life might be competing for preeminence in the same person.

*In depicting himself as refuting both the Epicureans and also the Stoics, Cicero is really depicting himself as caught between two conceptions of practical knowledge. The first of which turns ethical knowledge into a technê, and the second of which turns it into something too closely resembling theôria. Of course, we do not want to confine ourselves to a discussion of whether he accurately portrays the conflicting positions. Stoicism does not simply represent for Cicero one extreme in a dispute in the middle of which he finds himself caught. Cicero is clearly sympathetic to the Stoic account of practical knowledge, which as we have seen, he takes for his own in his mature work, *De Officiis*. For him, it seems to represent a knowledge that is neither too purely theoretical in Aristotle's sense, nor too technical in Epicurus'. It is thus as the possibility of a middle ground that Stoic practical knowledge must be considered. We might begin by noting that the Stoics did refer to their *ars vitae* as a *technê*, consistently drawing analogies between it and the arts. Let us turn then to the sense in which the art of life can and cannot be compared to other arts, as we normally think of them.*

IN WHAT SENSE VIRTUE IS A *TECHNÊ*

The idea of an art of life can be traced back to Plato and the sophists of at least the fifth century B.C.E., and in Cicero, Aristotle is not assumed to deviate from this tradition.²² In fact, Aristotle and the Peripatetics are said to have first observed “that we are so constituted as to have a natural aptitude for the standard virtues...which differ from the rest of the arts only by excelling them in the material with which they work and the treatment of it” (IV.ii.4). This is undoubtedly the most significant of the ideas that Cicero describes the Stoics as having taken from their Aristotelian predecessors, and the most practical-minded. The question is here again whether, when they got possession of it, the Stoics mangled it beyond all recognition so that the art of life all but ceased to be a practical and useful art, that is, whether it ceased to be an art at all. *The question to be answered is whether the Stoics undertand the art of life in a different way than the Peripatetics.*

It never occurs to Cicero himself to imply, by his choice of words, that practical intelligence is anything but an art. Although acquainted with Aristotle, he never uses a sophisticated vocabulary to distinguish between *phronêsis* and *technê*, and apart from a few scattered references to *selectio* or ‘choice,’ there is nothing to indicate that Cicero even reserved any special word to designate excellence of deliberation. The ethical man is simply said to have *sapientia* or ‘wisdom,’ but that does not prevent him from also being decribed as having *scientia* or ‘science,’ and importantly for our purposes, an *ars* or ‘art.’ Indeed, he has the *ars vivendi* or ‘art of life.’ *Sapientia* is the *custos* and *procuratrix*, the ‘custodian’ and ‘protector’ of our nature assigned to its job by nature at large (IV.vii.17). This is the first thing Cicero mentions as he sets out to explain on what points Aristotle and the Stoics are agreed. Both agree that we are the conservers of our own nature. This means that we immediately respond with desire to things that preserve us in our natural state or allow us to attain to our full nature. Here is one way in which it is described:

²² See *Alcib.* 128d. For the provenance of the concept of an art of life see Long, “Hellenistic Ethics as the Art of Life,” in *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-42.

A Pheidias can start to make a statue from the beginning and carry it to completion or he can take one rough-hewn by someone else and finish that. The latter case typifies the work of *sapientia*. She did not create man herself, but took him over in the rough form from nature; her business is to finish the statue that nature began, keeping her eyes on nature meanwhile. What sort of thing then is man rough-hewn by nature? And what is the function and the task of wisdom? What is it that needs to be consummated by her finishing touch? (IV.xiii.34)

Human beings are compared to statues rough-hewn by nature. Just as a sculptor takes over when his assistants have roughly carved out the shape of the statue and turned it over to him for the finishing touches, so nature has given us our general form, and turned it over to us so that we can finish it off for ourselves. In other words, the form on which human nature is patterned is sketched out in broad strokes by nature, and then turned over to an individual human being to be filled in with regard to the particulars (IV.xiii.34). We can be trusted to bring nature's design to completion. How this occurs is what Cicero must explain:

Every natural organism wishes to be its own conserver so as to be saved and preserved in its own kind. With this object, they declare man has called in the aid of the arts to assist nature, among which there is counted in first place the art of living to maintain and look after that which is given by nature and to acquire what is lacking. (*Fin.* IV.vii.16)²³

The arts then will help us preserve ourselves in the form that nature assigned us. Among these arts is the one art that is simply dedicated to choosing those things that help us preserve our form. And already we see why this *ars vitae* would go by that name—because it is best described by Peripatetics as an artistic skill allowing us to fill out the outlines of a sketch given to us in advance. In other words, we have the artistic proficiency that any master artist expects of his students, and nature trusts us in a similar way to carry to completion what it has envisioned. Thus, the analogy between wisdom and craftsmanship seems further strengthened in Aristotle by the comparison of the end of the *ars vitae* with the “bringing-to-form” of an *eidos*—the human *eidos*. *The question is then how far the Stoics might have actually gone toward revising this conception of the ars vitae as “self-sculpting.”*

To answer the question of whether the Stoics understand the art of life in a different way than the Peripatetics, we must recall that for the Stoics, all children start out employing the art of life exactly as the Peripatetics describe it. But there is a story to be told about the passage from childhood to adulthood, one that ends when we finally put off our naively Peripatetic *ars vitae* and adopt a more mature, more Stoic, version. Because Antiochus tries to minimize the differences between Peripateticism and Stoicism as well as exaggerate them, it is in his interests to make this “passage to adulthood” seem momentous in some ways and uneventful in others.²⁴

²³ This and other quotes are of Cicero's summary of Peripatetic philosophy, but he sees no immediate reason why the Stoics would quarrel with this Peripatetic analogy, which initially seems to illustrate so well in what sense Peripatetics and Stoics alike compare the art of life to a craft (VIII.vii.19).

²⁴ According to Gill, this passage to adulthood is described by Antiochus in such a way that our inborn impulses are untouched by this passage to adulthood, so that the whole process remains “a one step process,” one in which adults do not pass even beyond the first stage of the multi-step process, which Gill assumes to have been described by “real”

But why do the Stoics think one must pass from the Peripatetic art of life to the Stoic, and what is the difference between the two?

Here it must be cautioned that Cicero is not concerned, as most interpreters assume, with the historical or philological question of whether Antiochus is right or wrong to conflate or distinguish Stoicism, as a historical movement, from Aristotelianism. If Zeno succeeded in keeping Stoicism Peripatetic, then he contributed *nothing* new to Peripateticism. If he made significant changes to Peripateticism, then he has abandoned its whole philosophical basis. In neither case is the historical question of how Stoics remained Peripatetic or broke with Peripateticism interesting. This historical question is merely symbolic of a philosophical question about the development we as *individuals* undergo when our Peripateticism gives way to Stoicism: If we indeed outgrow practicing the art of life as the Peripatetics describe it in order to adopt the Stoic art of life, do we remain Peripatetic as we become Stoic? Or must we sacrifice our Peripateticism in order to become Stoics? In specific: Is the transformation we undergo so minor a transformation that the art we practice remains the same art? Or is the change so drastic that we no longer practice the same art of life, and perhaps cease to practice an ‘art’ at all? To answer these questions, we have to ask ourselves why Zeno would have wanted to revise what seems to be a “perfectly adequate” conception of the *ars vitae* (IV.ix.21).

Bénatouil’s scholarship has already shown that the Stoics rejected every conception of practical reason that reduced its value to its instrumentality. The Stoics eschewed in every form the idea that reason was a “tool,” more advantageous or disadvantageous, more or less desirable, according to the situation and its ability to make itself useful. The Stoics rejected the Aristotelian idea that reason was an *organon* or ‘tool’ that could be used, now for good, now for evil. And they asserted that reason was *intrinsically* good instead. According to Bénatouil, their thesis is essentially Socratic: Since reason itself teaches us to use things well, reason is *used well* if it is used at all.²⁵ But then, in returning to Socrates, do the Stoics move beyond Aristotle?

For all their Platonism, the Stoics never seem to stray from that essentially Aristotelian idea, familiar to readers of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that reason can be compared to all other things in nature in having an *ergon*, or function. Like everything else in nature, its value lies in its ability to perform a function. But since its relative goodness or badness depends entirely on whether it is able to complete its task and do what it is useful for, it loses value the moment it ceases to function.²⁶ In this way, reason is again reduced to its “instrumentality.”²⁷ The Stoics nonetheless deny that, like a “tool” with merely instrumental worth, reason’s value varies depending upon the external ends for which it can or cannot be used. As Bénatouil shows, the Stoics’ constant invocation of the idea that reason has a *chrêsis* or ‘use’ seems to come from the

Stoics. Because it fails to appreciate the way in which childlike impulses are either put aside, risen above, or in some general sense “transcended,” Antiochus’ philosophy is a poor copy of Stoicism—at least, according to Gill. He writes that “in the Stoic pattern, by contrast, only the first stage is explicitly presented in that way, as the realization of one’s own constitution, whereas the second stage culminates in the recognition of the absolute value of good rather than one’s own nature.” Gill, *The Structured Self*, p. 167.

²⁵ Bénatouil, *Faire usage*, 130-135. Here we could mention the reasons why Bénatouil thinks the Stoics made this claim: He argues that, for them, reason always correctly identifies those objects which are *useful* to itself; it is always the *user* of objects for the attainment of the good; and thus, it is always good *itself* (143).

²⁶ *Nic. Eth.* 1098a10.

²⁷ “But one cannot make a better use of one’s eye, in the sense that one cannot use it for anything but to see. All other action is not a *use* of the eye, so long as usage is strictly defined as the setting into work of the natural function of the organ.” Bénatouil, *Faire Usage*, 142.

Eudemian Ethics.²⁸ Yet this very language of “use” that the Stoics seem to take from Aristotle seems to be at the heart of their possible disagreement with him. Speaking of “using virtue” brings Aristotle perilously close to making of virtue a tool or instrument to be “put to use” for ends outside itself and, Bénatouil conjectures, the significance of this phrase might not have been lost on his successors.²⁹ With what consciousness and rigor they characterized Aristotle as promoting the “use of virtue” for complete life—as though reason were a tool for the attainment of an external happiness—is uncertain, but what is certain is that Aristotle *could* have been interpreted as straying from the Platonic idea that virtue has intrinsic and not instrumental value.³⁰

This is the most significant respect in which the Stoics may have wanted to distinguish themselves from Aristotle. If Aristotle’s philosophy still leaves open, in any way, the possibility that reason is to be subordinated to an external end, its sole function being to attain that end, then this is what the Stoics want to deny. *Thus they reject the straightforward identification of practical knowledge with an art having an external end.* But they must instead argue that reasoning has intrinsic worth. Its worth, then, necessarily derives from the things it perceives and the way it perceives them. Reason perceives and makes mental contact with the *archai* of its own perception. Thus the Stoics appear to fly from a technical conception of practical knowledge to a conception of practical knowledge according to which it resembles theoretical contemplation. One must ask, then, whether they have not gone from one extreme to another—from a conception of practical knowledge reducing it to the mere ability to attain external ends, to a conception of practical knowledge which reduces it to a pure knowing valued regardless whether it actually achieves anything in practical life.

If Cicero thinks that is this the conclusion to which Stoicism leads—that practical knowledge becomes theoretical—then it has not escaped the notice of his readers that he neither explicitly asserts nor denies this. But this vagueness is intentional; Cicero intentionally seems to leave it for us to decide the question of whether *this* is the position at which a Stoic will, willingly or not, arrive. This last point is especially important because many scholars seem to assume that Cicero takes this for granted that the Stoics have a certain conception of practical knowledge, and then seek to provide the theoretical grounds upon which this conception is founded. Cicero is taken—erroneously—to unlock the door to a full understanding of the Stoics’ theoretical framework through an account of the theoretical assumptions upon which it is based. But it does not take more than a cursory look at these passages to see that Cicero cannot help us to understand the *means* by which the Stoics arrive at their conclusions about practical knowledge. *He can however show us the extent to which this practical knowledge either remains an art or becomes theoretical knowledge.*

²⁸ Kenny observes the number of references made to “the usage of virtue” in Aristotle and concludes that they are a much greater number in the *Eudemian Ethics* than in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Anthony Kenny, *A study of the Relationship between the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 7-9; 68.

²⁹ Diogenes Laertius would have, along with Cicero, based his account on sources thoroughly familiar with Aristotle’s exoteric works. He can be found describing Aristotle as having retained one end, the *chrēsin aretēs en biō teleiō*, or the ‘usage of virtue in a complete life’ (*DL* 5.30).

³⁰ Bénatouil would primarily draw a contrast between the Platonic emphasis on the possession of virtue and the Aristotelian emphasis on using virtue. But we don’t seem to need to suppose that there was a pre-Stoic debate about whether virtue was possessed or used to see that, from the Stoics’ perspective, and indeed from Cicero’s, Aristotle came dangerously close to implying what the Stoics and Cicero both wanted to deny—that virtue was a means to an external end. Bénatouil, *Faire Usage*, 150-155.

THE ARTS AS THE BASIS FOR ETHICAL KNOWLEDGE

But first, in order to discover the views to which Cicero believes the Stoics are committed by their conception of the *ars vitae*, we must consider the views to which they are committed by their conception of knowledge in general. This is described in a passage from *De Academica* already quoted:

But whatever character belongs to these objects, which we say are perceived by the senses, must belong to that following set of objects which are said to be perceived not by actual sensation, but by a sort of sensation, as for example, ‘Yonder thing is white, this thing is sweet, that one is melodious, that fragrant, that rough.’ This class is grasped by the mind and not by the senses. Then, ‘Yonder object is a horse, yonder a dog.’ Next follows the rest of the chain linking on a series of larger precepts, for instance the following, which embrace it as though it were a fully completed grasp of the objects: ‘If it is a human being, it is a rational, mortal animal.’ From this class are impressed upon us our notions of things (*quo e genere nobis notitiae rerum imprimuntur*), without which all understanding and all investigation and discussion are impossible. (*Ac. II.vii.21*)

The Academics charge that the Stoics give no clear account of how the mind moves from external impressions to internal perceptions. This is the passage that comes closest to giving such an account. Lucullus argues that howsoever incapable we may be of knowing with certainty that we correctly move from an external to an associated internal impression, we have to have a preliminary faith in our ability to do so, because to become an ethical Skeptic and to refuse to associate the external with the internal would be to throw away whatever capability for knowledge we might have, and to allow the Sceptics to “rob us of the very instruments or tools of life” (x.31). The crux of the Academics’ argument is that we can know nothing without knowing *the source* of our impressions, since without knowing their source, we can never be sure the further impressions are correctly associated with those we receive from the external world.³¹

The Academic charge is specifically the following: “So it’s plausible that the mind can also be moved in such a way that it can’t discriminate whether such impressions are true or false—and even that there’s no difference between such impressions.” That is to say, there is no way of telling the difference between a true and a false impression. “If so,” they say, “when people tremble or grow pale, there would be no way to distinguish whether this was brought about by a mental motion induced by themselves or because something terrible was presented from without” (xv.48).³² Thus, if one reacts to certain impressions with fear, one can never be sure that the impressions in which these reactions are based derive from the mind rather than the object itself. This is all the more the case, they say, because things in nature are easy to

³¹ The Stoics respond: “What sort of memory can there be of false contents? Can anyone remember anything he hasn’t apprehended and doesn’t retain in the mind?” Much of their argument hinges upon the idea that all externally-imprinted impressions are true impressions; it is only the false association of some impressions with others that causes error, and they think we can avoid this by refusing to add more to external impressions than is contained within them, while the Academics argue that it is impossible to know when we are doing this (*Ac. II. vii.22*).

³² Lucullus asks, “And how are we going to say that such perceptions are perspicuous or accurately stamped when it’s unclear whether the mind is moved in response to something truthfully or vacuously?” (*Ac. II. xi.34*). This question is directed at those Academics who distinguish between merely perspicuous and properly apprehensible presentations, but the same question is directed back at the Stoics who claim to distinguish between assent-worthy and non-assent-worthy impressions.

confuse with other things. Their stock examples are the following: You can mistake one bee for a nearly identical bee. You can see someone from a distance and mistake them for someone they are not. You can take one egg for another, confusing the eggs of one chicken with those of another (xvii.54; xxvi.82).³³

“Well if our conceptions were false or stamped on our minds from [true] impressions that couldn’t be distinguished from false impressions, then how could we put them to use?” (vii.22). The Stoics argue that it is the practical arts that demonstrate the existence of knowledge, and this, as we shall see, despite the fact that artisans know with little certainty from whence the impressions they “use” arise. For the sheer fact that they have these impressions, and can make use of them, is not undermined by the mere fact that people with technical talents have a poor reputation for pinpointing the exact causes of the things about which their impressions tell them something. The Academics follow Plato in denying to technicians real knowledge, but for the Stoics the arts are the proof that knowledge exists:

But what science can there be that is not made up of not one or two but many grasped impressions of the mind (*animi perceptionibus*)? How, if you take it that way, will you distinguish between the craftsman and the ignoramus (*artificem ab inscio*)? For we shall not pronounce the one man to be a craftsman, and the other not, just casually, but when we see the one retain what he has perceived and grasped, and the other not. And as one class of sciences (*atrium*) is of such a nature as only to envisage facts mentally, and another such as to do or to make something, how can the geometrician envisage things that are either non-existent or indistinguishable from fictitious things, or the player on the harp round out his rhythms and round off his verses? And the same result will also occur in the other crafts of the same class which are solely exercised in making and doing, for what can be effected by a craft unless its intending practitioner has accumulated many impressions. (*Ac. II. vii.22*)

We distinguish between those people who are skilled artists and those who are not. The fact that we do so can only be explained by the fact that the one has something the other lacks, and *without* asserting that one knows the sources of his impressions better than the other, Lucullus says we can still distinguish between the two. One has more knowledge than the other, if not because of his knowledge of the sources of his impressions, then because he has more complete store of “accumulated impressions.”

When the Academics say that not even technicians have knowledge, the Stoics respond by saying that if they “abolish the practical sciences” they will face a lot of angry disagreement from craftsmen. To this apparently poor argument, Cicero responds, “what is the object of your complaint unless it aims at stirring of the craftsmen?” (xlvii.14). Nevertheless, the Stoics’ point is that the existence of practical knowledge is beyond doubt since we find evidence of its existence in practice. Its ability to reliably produce results is all the proof we need of knowledge’s existence.

³³ The Academics assume that things in nature are so similar that they can all make the same impression upon us, whereas the Stoic argue that no two things in nature are identical, and that each individual thing has its own distinctive mark: “Why do you go on to maintain something the nature of things does not permit, by denying that each thing is its own kind and just as it is, i.e., that there aren’t shared features that don’t differ at all between two or more things. Take it as granted that eggs are very similar to eggs, and bees to bees: what are you fighting for? What are you driving at with your twins? That they are similar—the point with which you could have been satisfied—is conceded; but your idea is that they aren’t similar but absolutely identical, which simply cannot happen” (*Ac. II. xvii.54*).

For the Stoics, to possess *scientia*, it is simply important that one has *fides* or ‘reliable,’ ‘trustworthy’ impressions. This is essentially what a kataleptic impression is. What Lucullus means by trustworthiness of sense impressions is evidently not their grasp of all of a thing’s *archê*, since none of his arguments attempt to refute the claim that this is beyond knowledge’s reach; it is “the fact that they do not omit or leave behind any aspect of a thing that might fall out and make an appearance in the future” (*Ac. I. xi.42*). This is what he means by “a fully completed grasp of an object” that sets the standard for knowledge. In essence, what he means is that the senses must take in those aspects of a thing that, if not taken in, might reveal themselves at a later date, surprising us, and possibly causing an emotional upset. For though we don’t know when we receive an impression, if it has come from the thing we think it has, we will know if we eventually have a contradictory impression about it. In this way, the measure of the truthfulness of impressions is less to be found in their origins than in their results.

Cicero suggests that it is by enlarging and expanding upon the technical proficiencies we already possess that we become virtuous. In *De Natura Deorum* he writes, “by comparing and conjoining these experiences we develop the techniques essential for practical living and recreation” (II.148). And in *De Academica* Lucullus says, “Since the mind is wholly adapted for scientific knowledge and for constancy of life, it welcomes knowledge beyond all else.” He continues, “It uses the senses, produces the systematic arts as almost second senses, and strengthens philosophy to such a pitch that it creates virtue, the one thing that makes our whole lives coherent” (II.x.31).³⁴

Seneca, meanwhile, documents the Stoic tradition of incorporating several arts into wisdom itself, making them the very stuff of which wisdom itself is made.³⁵ Seneca speaks in *Epistle* 90 of how the arts were invented. We were driven by nature to seek shelter, so nature also led us to discover the ways in which shelter may be constructed. We naturally sought our own health, so nature also led us to discover the means of promoting our own health. The first men to discover these arts were sages, according to Posidonius. For as we shall see in coming chapters, it was only those who knew the specific use of objects also knew how they might contribute to the human *telos*, and vice versa. Only with time did craftsmen cease to be wise, after they taught their protégés *how* to use certain objects but failed to teach them what contribution their use made to human life as whole.³⁶ But even though it became possible through the course of history for craftsmen to be other than sages, sages necessarily remained expert craftsmen in many fields. If anyone wanted to achieve sagehood, according to Posidonius, he would first have to become an expert in every technical field. Seneca is doubtful,

³⁴ Translation by Brittain. Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, trans. Charles Brittain (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006).

³⁵ A prolonged diatribe of Seneca against the liberal arts for their short-sighted ends, their narrowness, their insufficiency by themselves to bring wisdom, nevertheless confirms that they were, if not part of wisdom itself, then indeed essential to it. Without equating the arts with wisdom, Seneca allows that they are *rudimenta* not *opera*, ‘trials’ or ‘attempts’ at wisdom not the ‘work’ of wisdom itself (*Ep.* xcvi.1). Seneca denies that they lay the firm foundation upon which the study of philosophy rests, for if anything, the other disciplines take their foundations from philosophy. But the other arts and disciplines do lay the ground (*locum parat*) for the acquisition of virtue in one sense. Virtue *uses* them to attain its end. Indeed, they are so essential to wisdom that Seneca wishes to deny what Posidonius argues, that they belong to wisdom as its *parts*, because if they were already *part* of it, we could not say they were useful to it. Here, in *Epistle* xxviii, he attacks the idea that *liberalia studia* like mathematics *belong* to wisdom: “Food is an aid to the body, but is not a part of it. We get some help from the service which mathematics renders; and mathematics is as indispensable to philosophy as the carpenter is to the mathematician. But carpentering is not a part of mathematics, nor is mathematics a part of philosophy” (*Ep.* xxviii.25).

³⁶ For a complete discussion, see Bénatouil, *Faire usage*, 175-198.

but he does not ever contest the idea that wisdom relies upon and makes use of the arts to attain its own end.

It is true that, by themselves, the arts fall short helping us to attain of our *telos*. They *non perducunt animum ad virtutem, sed expediunt*, ‘set the soul going in the right direction’—toward provisional ends—but ‘do not lead it all the way to virtue’ (*Ep.* xxcviii.20). That is to say, they lead us only toward certain ends, though not the final *telos*. But art itself does not fall of short being *the kind of knowledge* we would need to attain our *telos*. *For the only knowledge one needs to attain one’s telos is the same one that makes one an expert in every art and craft.*³⁷

If we, by attaining provisional ends through the technical proficiency we already possess, make modest steps toward our final end in life, then at what point do we cease merely attaining these ends and begin to attain our final end? At what point does an art become the art *of life*? As we shall see, the technical mindset must not become a differently-functioning sort of knowledge before it becomes properly ethical. This is clear from the complete absence in any of Cicero’s works of an attempt to distinguish between different kinds of knowledge. Thus any transformation technical reason undergoes on the way to becoming ethical reason is not a substantive change from one mode of knowledge to another. That leaves us to infer that in Stoicism, unlike in Aristotle or in Plato, *technê* was not such that it had to become other than itself in order to become ethical.³⁸ In short, the Stoics must have had their own conception of *technê* that allowed technical knowledge to serve as the basis for ethical knowledge. And indeed, we know this is so because Cicero tells us the most significant change the Stoics made to Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, which they otherwise left largely unchanged, was to completely revise its understanding of *scientia* or ‘knowledge.’ What then was the Stoic conception of *scientia* or *ars*?

DIVINATION AS THE FIRST OF ARTS

For Plato and for many other Greeks, philosophical knowledge was the knowledge of the unseen causes of natural phenomena; under the heading of technical knowledge fell any form of knowledge possessed by any “knower” who knew just enough to accomplish some practical task, but not enough to cite the causes of what he had brought about. This much-maligned form of knowledge, which was hardly even considered as such by Plato, served the Stoics well as an example of a kind of knowledge that did not have to be a knowledge of unseen causes to count as such.

Regarding the Stoics’ very strong views about *technê*, the unlikely source of most of the information we have about them is Cicero’s *De Divinatione*, which he writes at a time when the boundaries of what counted as knowledge were not yet fixed. Philosophical knowledge had

³⁷ In his article entitled, “What Does the Wise Man Know?,” Kerferd argues that the Stoic sage cannot be omniscient. When it is claimed that he is ignorant of nothing (*mêden agnoein*), this can only mean that the kind of knowledge he has excludes the possibility of being ignorant of relevant facts (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.111, 18-112, 8; *LS* 44G). This seems to resolve the dispute between Seneca and Posidonius: The wise man does not have to know every art, but he does have to know enough about each art such that he would never choose a course of action divergent with the path of virtue. One must know just enough about sailing, never to sail immorally. George Kerferd, “What Does the Wise Man Know?,” in *The Stoics*, ed. John Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 125–136.

³⁸ The main difference between the craftsman’s *technê* and the sage’s *epistêmê* seems to be one of *degree* and not of *kind*: that the latter is said to be secure and unshakeable by reason (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.73, 16 - 74, 3). *Technê* does not have the same kind of stability as *epistêmê* (*Fin.* III. 50).

hardly been distinguished from science, much less the hard sciences from the soft, and there was a great deal of debate about where the boundaries demarcating possession of true knowledge should be drawn. In late antiquity, the arts of divination found themselves crossed many times by the boundary line that separated *scientia* from pretenders to the title. Today, we all know that that debate finally ended with the drawing of a line that definitively excluded the arts of divination from the whole ambit of science, which is why we today think of them as “occult” practices, the last resort of people who need help in areas of life where the applicability of “real” science reaches its limits.

Perhaps it was Aristotle who passed down to us the belief that *techné* is only fully *techné* when its practitioner understands the causes that produce certain effects.³⁹ The ancients were generally of the same opinion as Aristotle in thinking that a technician, in order to count as such, had to know the cause of the things with which he dealt. For this reason, diviners were seldom considered technicians. But the Stoics acquired a reputation for defending the maligned practitioners of all those arts—including augury and astrology—that did not meet this specification and, as Olympiodorus attests in his commentary on the dialogue, they even rushed to the defense of those arts—like rhetoric—attacked by Plato in his *Gorgias*:

Let us investigate so that we may know in what sense rhetoric is a craft and in what sense it is not. For there are arguments in favor of the view that it is a craft, and arguments against it. Those in favor of it are these: we must state the definitions of a craft, and if they fit rhetoric then it will be clear that it is a craft. Cleanthes says a craft is ‘A disposition to accomplish methodically all it tackles.’ But this definition is incomplete, for nature is also a disposition to do methodically all it tackles. Accordingly Chrysippus, adding ‘with impressions’, said ‘a craft is a disposition *to proceed methodically together with impressions*’. Rhetoric, then, comes under this definition, for it is a disposition and it proceeds with method and order. Surely that is why an orator first presents an introduction, then the preliminary plea, then the establishment of the case and so on, delighting in order. But Zeno says, ‘A craft is a systematic set (*sustéma*) of cognitive acts, coordinated with a view toward some useful goal in life’.⁴⁰ So rhetoric also falls within this definition too, for it involves system, cognition, and coordination, and it aims at some useful goal: for orators go on embassies for cities and the like, such as Demosthenes, Python, Aeschines, and so on. Hence it is a craft. We say that if crafts are characterized by these principles, then rhetoric is a craft. But if we add that a craft will also involve knowledge of its subject-matter, and supply calculations and cause for what it does, then rhetoric is not a craft. For it neither knows what is just, nor does it supply causes.⁴¹

Here we see that while Plato makes it requisite for all technicians to know the *causes* of the effects they produce in order for them to have technical expertise, the Stoics make it necessary

³⁹ “But yet we think knowledge and understanding belong to art rather than to experience, which implies that wisdom depends in all cases rather on knowledge; and this because the former know the cause but the latter do not. For men of experience know that a thing is so, but do not know why, while the others know the ‘why’ and the cause” (*Met.* 980a30).

⁴⁰ The same definition is quoted by Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* II.10, and Quintillian, II.xvn.41.

⁴¹ Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato’s Gorgias*, trans. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant (Leiden-Boston- Köln: Brill; 1998), ad 462b6, p. 121; *LS* 42A. Reference to knowledge as a *systéma* or ‘system’ of interlocking perceptions is also found in Epictetus and in Galen (*Dis.* I.20; Galen, *PHP* V.3.1).

only that the technician be familiar with *the starting point* from which his action sets out before leading to its desired result. In order to qualify as technically skilled, an action must proceed “methodically.” Literally what is meant here is that it must proceed along a certain “path,” one that is like all paths in leading from a starting-point to an endpoint. But the tendency of the action to proceed, one step at a time, along a certain “path” from its starting point to its endpoint is, we are then told, the result of a similar path which is travelled in thought—a *path paved with impressions*. So for the Stoics, craftsmanship moves from a first, to a second, and then a third step, as the craftsman moves from a first, to a second, to a third impression. It exists where those impressions are ordered in the right way. The order of impressions in the mind determines the order in which practical steps taken—so that they will eventually lead to the attainment of some desirable goal.⁴²

The Stoic technician, according to Olympiodorus, is at an utter loss as to how to give what Plato would consider a valid account of his actions; for the account given would have to point to the *causes* for the changes the craftsman was instrumental in bringing about, and of causes, he has no knowledge. If he had these we could also more easily attribute to him a set of rules.⁴³ But in place of having a set of clearly established rules such as always ‘bring about this cause if you want that effect,’ he is rather more like cook who succeeds by *gropingly* calling to mind, in just the order in which they come to mind, the steps he recalls having previously performed. Groping is exactly the right word because the Stoics do not seem to think the technician has any knowledge except that which he accesses while running through a series of impressions so tightly interwoven into a “system”⁴⁴ that each cues the next, which follows it in rapid succession. What makes the whole thing indistinguishable from groping in the dark is the fact that the “impressions” referred to here, and through which he must pass, may need to be initiated by external cues, for it is indeed possible that the cook may not have the impression of the next step he should take until he sees the color of the sauce change; he will be reminded of one further step if it is dark, or yet another step in another direction if it is light. The point is that the Stoics seem to reserve the distinct possibility that bodily perceptions themselves are stored the memory triggers which lead us in the right direction. This means that it would be as impossible to ask the technician to isolate the series’ furthestmost point of origin as it would be to ask him to arrest the flow of his mental impressions.

But a technician does have *some* form of knowledge, if not of the causes of past and future events *per se*, then at least of past events. The human being is a creature of the past that accumulates it and stores it up within itself. The future is, however, that which we do not

⁴² See also Quintillian: “That rhetoric is an art, however, may be proved by a very few words. For if Cleanthes’ definition be accepted that ‘Art is a power reaching its ends by a definite path, that is, by ordered methods,’ no one can doubt that there is such method and order in good speaking: while if, on the other hand, we accept the definition which meets with almost universal approval that art consists in perceptions agreeing and cooperating to the achievement of some useful end, we shall be able to show that rhetoric lacks none of these characteristics” (Quintillian II.xvn.41).

⁴³ Olympiodorus is usually taken to describe an art as consisting of a set of rational principles. This misleads right from the start, insofar as it implies that there is a set of preexisting general rules that can reliably be applied toward the attainment of a practical end. We must resist Sellars’ occasional way of describing arts as a set of “empirically derived principles” and Striker’s as a set of “rules.” For it is especially untrue of the art of life that it consists of a set of clearly defined rules. John Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 69; Striker, “The Art of Living,” 197-198.

⁴⁴ Aside from the fact already mentioned is the fact that “*technê* is a putting together (*sustêma*) from out of graspings exercised together (*suggëgumnasênôn*) for some *telos* easily made use of in life” (LS 42A), the significance of *sustêma* shows itself in several other places. The cosmos is described as “a system of heaven and earth and the natures in them” (DL 7.138). *To pan* is also described as a *sustêma* out of the *kosmos* (DL 7.143).

possess, except in our capacity to *predict* it. Our continual urge to divine, to prophecy, to know the future has, in the modern world, become the province of science, and the ability to predict future events has become the necessary hallmark of anything bearing the name ‘knowledge.’ Interestingly, the ability to predict events, which was an ability ascribed to diviners, was one kind of knowledge which did not, to the ancient mind, automatically betoken *real* knowledge, and it always had to be argued, as for example in Cicero’s *De Divinatione*, that those who could predict events *knew* anything at all.

Of course, for the Stoics, who in many ways adopted a modern scientific approach in rejecting the search for ultimate causes in favor of reliable knowledge of future events, knowledge needed reside in *nothing but* this very ability. In *De Divinatione*—and in the centuries that follow, this account was echoed by countless others—the role of impressions becomes that of signs. The craftsman knows impressions in their capacity as signs or predictors of things still to come.⁴⁵ *Technê* is for the Stoics always a knowledge of the future based on the ability to interpret signs or signals that make their appearance in the present. There are certain things in the world that act as signs of others, and here Cicero shows interest in the word that his Latin ancestors have coined to describe their denotative functions. They are said to *ostendere* or ‘make manifest,’ to *portendere* or ‘portend,’ to *monstrare* or ‘intimate,’ to *predicer* or ‘predict’ (I.lxii.93). Of events, diviners “may not discern the causes themselves, and may only discern the *signa* and *nota*,” or the ‘signs and tokens,’ “of those causes” (I.lvi.127), but in that respect the medical doctor is possessed of no more refined knowledge himself. Here, for example, Cicero’s spokesperson for Stoicism defends divination not by bringing divination up to the standards set by medicine, but by dragging medicine down to the level of divination, until at last, there is nothing to distinguish the one from the other. He writes:

Such signs as these have been observed for an unlimited time, and the results have been checked and recorded. Moreover, there is nothing which any length of time cannot accomplish and attain when aided by memory to receive and records to preserve. We may wonder at the variety of herbs that have been observed by physicians, of roots that are good for the bites of wild beasts, for eye affections, and for wounds, and though reason has never explained their force and nature, yet through their usefulness they have won approval for the medical art and for their discoverer. But let us consider instances which although outside the category of divination resemble it closely... (I.vii.13)

A list of examples is given. The heaving of the sea that warns of a coming storm, scattering herons of an impending downpour, and the oxen that sniff the air when moisture begins accumulating, are among those signs for which no satisfactory explanation can be given. “Hardly ever do we see such signs deceive us,” says Quintus speaking on behalf of the Stoics, “and yet we do not see why it is so.” And so it is the case, he says, that most things that we know follow each other in orderly succession without our ever knowing *why* they do so. We never inquire why one thing causes another, nor, for that matter

do I inquire why this tree alone blooms three times, or why it makes the appearance of its blossoms accord with the proper time for ploughing. I am content with my

⁴⁵ Philodemus, in his work *On Signs*, gives special attention to the role of signs in Stoic epistemology (see 1.2-4.13; 6.1-14; 7.26-38).

knowledge that it does, although I may not know why. Therefore, as regards all kinds of divination I will give the same answer that I gave in the cases just mentioned. I see the purgative effect of the scammony root and I see an antidote for snakebite in the aristolochia plant—which, by the way, derives its name from its discoverer who learned of it in a dream—I see their power and that is enough; why they have it I do not know. Thus as to the cause of those premonitory signs of winds and rains already mentioned I am not quite clear, but their force and effect I recognize, understand, and vouch for. Likewise as to the cleft or thread in the entrails: I accept their meaning; I do not know their cause. (I.x.16)

We may gain knowledge by knowing that it is the yeast in bread that makes it rise, but we never know *what* it is in yeast that produces this effect. To be sure, we may isolate the responsible molecules, but we are again faced with the question, difficult to evade, of what it is in the composition of those same molecules that makes them produce their effect. To the Stoics, whether we say that there is a spirit in the yeast causing it to rise or whether we say that there are molecules at work makes little difference at all, as long as we can treat yeast as a sign or indicator, which when present, foretells the rising of a loaf of bread. It is therefore immaterial whether the cause underlying a chain of events can be isolated or not, so long as we know that one thing can be treated as a sign or predictor of another thing's coming.

*The implications are that, for the Stoics, no knowledge is knowledge of causes, which in turn means that we cannot know nature by her causes.*⁴⁶ As the old saying goes, “*phusis* loves to hide itself.”⁴⁷ But to repeat this Heraclitean commonplace is to be very far from asserting that nature absolutely cannot be known, and that the only attitude we can take toward it is one of resigned skepticism and disbelief, since we *can* know nature, if not by its *causes*, then by its *effects* in their relationship to the things that appear before they do, and that appear before the gaze of one and all. Philosophers quite stubbornly insist on knowing the causes of things. “As if it was permissible for a philosopher to not to ask why anything happened!” scoffs Cicero in one of his less skeptical moods (II.xx.46); but as Quintus explains, things’ effects with which we have most immediate contact, the existence of which we are helpless to deny:

⁴⁶ We should not be deterred in our conclusions by the fact that Cicero speaks of wisdom, *sapientia* as the *scientia* of “things human and divine and of the causes by which those things are controlled” (*De Off.* II.ii5). Cicero uses the term *sapientia* in several senses, sometimes describing it as the *scientia* of “the beginnings and causes of every phenomenon” (*Tusc.* V.7), about whose attainability Cicero is notoriously doubtful. That does not prevent him from using the word *sapientia* in another sense, to refer to the health of the soul, (*Tusc.* III.10), or an art comparable to navigation or medicine (*Fin.* III.24). Here it seems to be equated with philosophy defined as the “art of life” (*Fin.* II.27), “the mother of all arts” (*Tusc.* I.64), and “the cultivation of the soul” (*Tusc.* II.4). Many sources seem to distinguish between *sophia* and *philosophia* as “the exercise of a useful art (*askêsîn epitédeiou technês*)” (Aetius I, Preface II, *SVF* III.35). But sometimes they are so closely connected that both terms are used interchangeably. In fact, Seneca explains why Cicero uses them this way: Romans were accustomed to using the word *sapientia* in the sense in which they are now apt to use *philosophia* also (*Ep.* lxxxix.7), in reference to the *studium sapientiae* ‘the pursuit of wisdom’ (*De Off.* II.ii.5), with *sapientia* strictly defined as complete and perfect wisdom (*Ac.* I.16). Wherever they are connected, however, philosophy is merely the pursuit or devotion (*epitédeusis*) to *sophia*, “the science of gods and men,” not, as it is sometimes erroneously translated, the *application* of it (*Sextus, Adv. Math.* IX.13, *SVF* II.37). As Seneca says in distinguishing between philosophy and wisdom, “wisdom is the good of the human mind brought to perfection. Philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom; it strives for the goal which wisdom has achieved” (*Ep.* xxix.4). But only the Stoics’ enemies suggest that we must arrive at all-knowing wisdom, which would if anything render the search for practical knowledge superfluous, *before* other forms of knowledge are attainable, whether they be the knowledge of ethical philosophy or practical knowledge. See Sellars, *The Art of Life*, 81-85.

⁴⁷ *DK* B123.

You ask why everything happens. You have a perfect right to ask, but that is not the point at issue now. The question is, ‘Does it happen or does it not?’ For example, if I were to say that the magnet attracted iron and drew it to itself, and I could not tell you why, then I suppose you would deny that the magnet had any such power. (I.xxxix.86)

As Quintus goes on to point out, divination and the prediction of the future from present signs is an older art than philosophy, which seeks the causes of things. “Why,” he says, “even before the dawn of philosophy, which is of recent discovery, the average man had no doubt about divination, and, since its development, no philosopher of any sort of reputation has had any different view” (xxxix.86.87).

But if this is the art that diviners practice, it is not an art that is any more or any less complicated than that of doctors. The Stoics assert that the very practitioners of divination who admit their total ignorance of the causes on account of which the things they predict occur, can, on Stoic grounds, stake equal claim to having “knowledge” since according to the Stoics even the most advanced of arts or sciences never achieve an any less paltry grasp than the diviner of the causes why certain personalities are born under certain star signs. The most rigorously-trained scientists and the handiest craftsmen all read off of present states-of-affairs the signs of future events. In this sense, the Stoics say, there is no way of distinguishing between physicians, herbalists, astrologers, meteorologists, palm-readers, or prophets. None of these personalities has knowledge of the “true” causes of things that the others lack. The doctor observes the effects of the herbs that “predict” sickness or health, the prophet observes the effects of birds that “forebode” good or ill fortune.

FROM *TECHNÉ* TO ETHICAL KNOWLEDGE

In his most mature work, *De Officiis*, the one he wrote on the eve of his death, Cicero explains how this same technical skill is put to use in ethical life. It is a book devoted to the subject of deliberation that takes as its starting point what has already been established about the way the mind works. The way that the mind is supposed to work is now cited as lying behind our powers of ethical deliberation:

From the beginning, nature has assigned to every type of creature the tendency to preserve itself, its life and body, and to reject anything that seems likely to harm them, seeking and procuring everything necessary for life, such as nourishment, shelter and so on. Common also to animals is the impulse to unite for the purpose of procreation, and a certain care for those that are born. The great difference between man and beast, however, is this: The latter adapts itself only moved by sense alone, and only to something that is present in place and time, scarcely aware of the past or future. Man, however, is a sharer in reason, this enables him to perceive consequences, to see the causes of things, to understand the rise and progress of events, so to speak; to compare similarities and to link and combine future with present events; *and by seeing with ease the whole course of life*, to prepare whatever is necessary for living it. This same nature, by the power of reason, unites one man to another for the fellowship of common speech and of life, creating above all a particular love for his offspring. It drives him to desire that men should meet together and congregate, and that he should join them himself; and for the

same reason to devote himself to providing whatever may contribute to the comfort and sustenance not only of himself, but also his wife, his children, and others whom he holds dear and ought to protect. (*De Off.* I.ii.11-12)

Human beings can deliberate about that which belongs to them, and that in which their good resides because they, unlike animals, are moved not just by the impressions of present things, but also by the impressions they have of the non-present future events with which they mentally associate present things. As a sharer in reason, man “perceives consequences.” Cicero says that we have the ability to see the relationship between cause and effect, but what must be understood here, as he quickly goes on to clarify, is that the causes we perceive are little more than the antecedents of events, with which our minds link their associated effects. *There is no suggestion here that this very technical kind of knowledge undergoes a qualitative change on the way to becoming ethical knowledge. So far, ethical knowledge is indistinguishable from technical.*

Nonetheless, the fact that the sage is nowhere referred to as having a knowledge different in shape and kind than art, only a more complete art raises the question: what does the sage *know* that the craftsmen does not? For surely knowledge is added to technical expertise before it becomes ethical wisdom, so that the sage has something the craftsman lacks. The question is whether the expert of the *ars vitae* has greater insight into the *universal good* pursued in *all* situations, the ultimate *telos* it chases. The craftsman and the sage undoubtedly have the same *telos*, for Cicero says, “since the end of every art is some essential natural requirement, the same must be affirmed as to the art of life as a whole” (*Fin.* IV.viii.19). But perhaps the possessor of the *ars vitae* “has” this *telos* in a different way. If so, he or she cannot have it in any form different than nature, than master craftsman, has its *telos*.

NATURE AS TECHNICAL, *TECHNÉ* AS NATURAL

One might well debate whether nature or artisans are done the greater disservice when Aristotle compares the works of one with those of the other. Perhaps, however, it is beside the point to debate whether a flower is truly like a clay pot, for Aristotle himself sufficiently distinguished between the two, calling one a work of nature and the other a work of *techné* because one had its *arché* inside it and the other did not (*Physics* 192b15). Having made this distinction between the products of *techné* and nature, he nonetheless went on to draw analogies between natural and humanly-inspired creative processes, and where he did so it was not to suggest that flowers are like pots, but to suggest that that the activity of pot makers is, in certain respects, like the activity of flowers in emerging into mature form.

The main point of comparison between the making of a pot and the growth of flower is that both processes present themselves to us as end-directed, and this end-directedness becomes clear in the unfailing regularity of natural processes and skilled activity. Just as certain forms repeat themselves again and again in the arts, so the same forms crop up again and again in the natural world.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The following are the other Stoic definitions of *phusis* that have come down to us from Sextus: He defines it as *hē kinousa tēn hulēn dunamis kai tetagenōs autēn eis genesis kai metabolas agousa*, ‘the power moving matter arrangerly and leading it into being and change’ (*Adv. Math.* I.76); as *tēs tou periexontos diakosmēseōs*, or ‘the thoroughly-ordering of the encircling’ (I.75); and also *to kinoun autēn [hulēn] kai polueidōs morphoun aition* or ‘the moving matter and shaping-many-form-ed-ly cause’ (I.74); finally, he defines it as *tēn tōn holōn hulēn kinoumenēn kai en morphē te kai diakosmēsei tuxanousan*, or ‘the matter of the wholes being moved for itself and having changed into form and in orderly arrangement’ (I.74).

Sarah Broadie explains it well.⁴⁹ When Aristotle compares natural objects to the products of a workshop, he is saying that the materials of which they are composed can be observed to assume the same forms over and over again. It is as though the universe was a craftsman and the materials at his disposal were molded time and time again into the same familiar shapes and forms. The fact that the Stoics, insofar as they were Aristotelian, shared this interpretation is evidenced in *De Natura Deorum*:

It is undeniable that in each and every compartment of life there is some ultimate perfection. Take as examples the vine and cattle: unless it meets some obstructive force nature follows its own route to reach its final perfection. Or again, the arts of painting, architecture, and the other crafts seek their goal of consummate workmanship. Similarly, and indeed, to a much greater degree the whole of nature is the scene of such achievement and perfection. (II.35)

Here, the Stoics remain thoroughly Aristotelian⁵⁰ in their belief that nature moves towards certain endpoints, but do not find it necessary to invoke the language of the forms, with all the Platonic baggage they bring along with them, especially the idea that things are moving toward fixed ends comprehensible by reason; it is only necessary to point out that things contain within themselves something that impels them to unfold themselves in a way that is intelligible to reason. Notice that it is the *process* and not the *product* of growth that the Stoics consider intelligible.⁵¹

The Stoic god is specifically a gardener who has scattered varieties of “seed” far and wide, all over the cosmos. Having implanted in the material that composes the seed the tendency to develop with *logos*, he permits the seed to develop in a way that presents itself as intelligible to human understanding. In this way, all matter is a wound up coil ready to be unleashed with the right provocation, and with the tendency to spring forth into a commonly recognizable shape.⁵²

If the Stoics had an interpretation of Aristotle it would certainly have been Broadie’s; the universe she is describing is a Stoic one in which, instilled in matter itself, is a potential to

⁴⁹ Sarah Broadie, “Nature, Craft and Phronêsis in Aristotle,” *Philosophical Topics* 15 (1987): 35-50.

⁵⁰ The fact that the Stoics were considered to have *generally* agreed with Aristotle even in physical and metaphysical matters seems attested to by the absence of a Peripatetic in *De Natura Deorum*. When the absence of Piso is regretted, Cotta says, “But there is no need to regret the absence of your friend Piso, if the book of our good friend Antiochus which he recently sent to Balbus here tells the truth. He maintains that the Stoics are at one with the Peripatetics in substance, and that they differ merely in the terms they use” (I.16).

⁵¹ There is evidence that the Stoics explicitly critiqued the idea of the forms, and in Chapter Five, I will discuss the respects in which they dispensed with the Platonic forms. But for the time being we shall discuss just those uncontroversial respects in which Stoic like Seneca found it perfectly consistent to speak of the forms within a certain limited scope.

⁵² Referred to here are the *logoi spermatikoi*. Each of these is a *dunamis* that is capable of realizing itself by appropriating matter for its own ends, and using matter to actualize its own potential. It is to be distinguished from the merely physical seed or seminal fluid in which it is housed, although it is frequently equated with the same. Hierocles, for example, claims that the energized seed, when implanted in the mother’s body, “draws matter from the pregnant body, and fashions the embryo in accord with inescapable patterns (*aparabatos taxeis*)” (LS 53B). Meanwhile, Diogenes claims that, “as in the seed (*gonê*), the *sperma* is embraced (*perixetai*), so the *spermal logos* of the cosmos, being of such a sort, stays behind (*hupoleipesthai*) in the fluid making useful (*euergon*) with respect to itself the matter towards (*pros*) the coming to be of the next (*exês*)” (DL 7.136). Since the soul of the world is described as “growing until it has used up matter on itself,” we may be justified in assuming that this happens on the macro as well as the micro level (*Adv. Math.* 1.102).

develop in particular directions that can be activated by external triggers; all we can say about the inherent potentials of different things is that they interact with each other in such a way as to always eventually embody certain unmistakable forms that we all recognize as commonly reproduced.

Of course, the Stoics can also be interpreted in the same manner as Aristotle, as having believed in the brute imposition of form upon matter but this would not explain the many instances in which matter is described precisely not as being imprinted, but as being “led” or “guided” by a something which the Stoics prefer to call, rather than form, an active or divine principle. *Deus ista temperat, quae circumfusa rectorem secuntur est*, says Seneca. ‘God controls matter, which encompasses him and follows him as its guide and leader’ (*Ep.* lxv.13). The Stoics were much less susceptible than we are to the interpretation of Aristotle that holds that natural objects impose their own form on their recalcitrant matter.⁵³

Does something happen when a human being takes clay, makes a pot, and is furthered along the way to its *telos* that doesn’t occur when a plant takes in air and sunlight, and bursts into flower? A plant is made of matter that, triggered by the right external stimuli, responds in such a way as though it had always intrinsically harbored the potential to become the thing that it eventually does become *when* it responds to those stimuli. In Aristotle, it could perhaps be said that human beings are made of their own substance that, triggered by external stimuli, responds in such a way as though it had always harbored the potential to become whatever it becomes in response.

From the Stoic point of view, however, the analogy between art and nature seems to hold good not primarily or solely because activity is guided and directed by a rationally grasped *telos*, but because both involve the following of a set path. This is assumed throughout Cicero’s *oeuvre*. Of Zeno, for example, who defines nature as “the creative fire advancing on its path toward generation,” Balbus says, “His thesis is that it is the particular role of any art to create and generate, and that nature performs much more creatively all that our handiwork achieves in the works of art we perform. Nature, as I have said, is the creative art which teaches all other arts. On this reasoning, every aspect of nature is creative because it has what we may call a prescribed path to follow” (II.57). This is crucial for understanding the idea, to be explained in what follows, that the art of life knows neither beginnings nor endings, but the path that lies between them.

⁵³ To this end, Seneca even draws a distinction between the idea, the pattern which guides and directs an artistic process, and the form that is imposed upon and incarnated in the work itself, evincing doubt about the necessity of taking it as separate cause: “And this ‘idea,’ or rather, Plato’s conception of it, is as follows: ‘The ‘idea’ is the everlasting pattern of those things which are created by nature.’ I shall explain this definition, in order to set the subject before you in a clearer light: Suppose that I wish to make a likeness of you; I possess in your own person the pattern of this picture, wherefrom my mind receives a certain outline, which it is to embody in its own handiwork. That outward appearance, then, *which gives me instruction and guidance*, this pattern for me to imitate, is the ‘idea.’ Such patterns, therefore, nature possesses in infinite number—of men, fish, trees, according to whose model everything that nature has to create is worked out. In the fourth place we shall put ‘form.’ And if you would know what ‘form’ means, you must pay close attention, calling Plato, and not me, to account for the difficulty of the subject...” (*Ep.* lviii.19-20).

One can gather from the aforementioned that the Stoics had a conception of *technê* that made ‘knowledge’ neither a question of knowing *archai* nor *telê*. Likewise, the *technê tou biou* demanded knowledge neither of the ‘starting points’ nor of the ‘ends’ of lived existence. Just as was demanded in the other arts, one had need only of the knowledge of that lying *between* an *archê* and a *telos*.

Though this can be inferred from the Stoic account of *technê*, it is also exemplified in *De Finibus*, to which we now return seeking confirmation of this hypothesis. We have already seen in what sense the comparison of *sapientia* with an ‘art’ created the potential for misunderstanding. Now, by arriving at a clearer understanding of the Stoic art of life, we can better understand the obstacles the Stoics encountered in seeking to compare *sapientia* to an ‘art.’ The meaning of the word *ars* for the Stoics was lost on their interlocutors, who insisted upon interpreting ‘art’ in either one of two traditional ways—either as the knowledge of *archai* or of a *telê*. Let us return then to the way in which the following passages misinterpret the Stoic art:

We esteem the art of medicine not for its interest as a science but for its conduciveness to health; the art of navigation is commended for its practical and not its scientific value, because it conveys the rules for sailing a ship with success. So also *sapientia*, which must be considered the art of living, if it effected no result would not be desired; but as it is, it is desired, because it is the artificer that produces pleasure. (I.xiii.42)

We see immediately the potential for misinterpretation that is created when the *technê* analogy falls into the wrong hands. Here, in the hands of the Epicureans, the analogy serves to illustrate that every art proves itself through its ability to attain an end known in advance. There is no art where there is no knowledge of an end, so that we can find a reliable means to its attainment again and again. Yet even in Peripatetic hands, the analogy between *sapientia* and art slips into potential misuse:

A Pheidias can start to make a statue from the beginning and carry it to completion, or he can take one rough-hewn by another and finish that (*ab alio inchoatum accipere et absolvere*). The latter case typifies the work of *sapientia*. She did not create man herself, but took him over in the rough form from nature (*sed accipit a natura inchoatum*); her business is to keeping her eyes on nature meanwhile, finish the statue that nature began (*intuens debet institutum illud quasi signum absolvere*). What sort of thing then is man rough-hewn by nature? And what is the function and the task of wisdom? What is it that needs to be consummated by her finishing touch (*quid est quod ab ea absolvi et perfici debeat*)? (IV.xiii.34)

The parallel drawn between action and craft-making is meant to suggest that ethical life is directed at certain pre-established ends, and thus that ethical life simply is a matter of turning individual situations to our profit, so that they may help us, whenever they are serviceable in some regard, to attain the end we already know we seek. If this does not imply that we have a firm grasp of our final *telos*, it at least implies that we grasp it well enough to recognize the things that will help us to attain it. Contrast this with Cato’s account of the *technê* analogy:

But in the other arts when we speak of an ‘artistic’ performance, this quality must be considered in a certain sense subsequent to and a result of the action; it is what the Stoics term *epigennēmatikon*. Whereas in conduct, when we think of an act as ‘wise’ the term is applied with full correctness to the first inception of the act. For whatever is initiated by the wise man (*quidquid enim a sapiente proficiscitur*) must necessarily be complete forthwith in all its parts; for in it is said to be that which is to be sought...thus those that have their origins in virtue are to be judged right from their first inception, and not from their being carried to completion (*ea quae proficiscuntur a virtute, susceptione prima, non perfectione*). (III.ix.32)

At first, it seems the difference between the Peripatetics and the Stoics may be profitably construed as one of beginnings and endings. The Peripatetic cares where his action leads, the Stoic from whence it springs. The goal-oriented Peripatetic keeps his or her eyes squarely on the *telos*, or unthinkingly that which most readily presents itself as *pros to telos*. Thus, the art of life turns its gaze on man in search of that *in tota eius natura quid sit effectum*, that ‘in the whole of his nature that is its completion’ (IV.xiii.36). Meanwhile, Cato says that the Stoic art of life, once acquired, takes its direction not from its *telē* but from the literal source of its potency. For Cato, the chief good consists in *vivere scientiam adhibentem earum rerum quae natura eveniat*, in ‘calling on the knowledge of the working of natural causes’ in order to live in accord with nature (III.ix.32). Stoic action therefore seems to ground itself in a knowledge of *archai*—if not the *archai* of natural phenomena in general, then at least the *archai* of one’s own action. These spurs to action, and the knowledge and perception of them, then appear to become the subject of the Stoic’s attention so that what becomes well-nigh irrelevant is the direction in which they may lead, the practical results of the action they effect in possible life.¹

So according to one interpretation Peripatetic action is *telos* oriented, while that of the Stoics springs from an *archē*. And yet, while the Stoics may be merely construed as occupying one extreme of a spectrum of opinion, and the Peripatetics another, Cicero also clearly sees that the possibility of a happy medium between the two *is* to be found in Stoicism. So, before making too hastily the claim that Stoicism conceives the *technē tou biou* in terms of its *archē* in contrast with its *telos*, let us look at the passage in Book III:

The *initia* therefore being established so that those things that follow nature are for their own sakes to be taken, and their opposites to be rejected, first is the fitting act (*officium*) (for so I call the *kathēkon*) so that one preserves oneself in one’s natural state, the next to get hold those things that might follow nature (*secundam nature sit*) and fend off their opposites, at which point this selection and rejection is discovered, selection with fittingness follows (*cum officio selectio*) then, it is uninterrupted (*perpetua*); then finally, (*ad extremum*) constant and in accord with nature (*constans consentaneaue naturae*), in which, for the first time, there begins to be discerned that which might be able to be called the true

¹ A modern day version of this debate unfolds between MacIntyre and Long when MacIntyre remarks that with the Stoics went a way of conceiving ethical life as determined by the desired end that it strives to attain. Like Kant, according to MacIntyre, they “severed all connection between what is good (morally good, as modern writers would say) and human desires.” In Stoicism, ethical life derives its legitimacy from being grounded in the right principles or starting-points. Long, for his part, attempts to show that all the Stoics desire virtue for the sake of happiness, since “just as archers make hitting the target their highest end...so all the virtues make being happy their aim” (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* II.65.6-12). Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 158; Anthony Long, “Greek Ethics after MacIntyre,” in *Stoic Studies*, 160.

good. First is the inclination (*concilatio*) of man towards those things following after nature (*ad ea quae secundum naturam*); but as soon as he begins to be capable of discernment (*intelligentiam*), or rather, of conception (*notio*)—in Stoic phraseology *ennoia*—and has seen the order of things to be done (*ordinem rerum agendarum*), and so to speak, *concordia*, he thereupon esteems this far more highly than all the things that he first loved (*omnia illa quae prima delixerat*), and he gathers (*colligere*), by means of cognition and reason (*cognitione et ratione*), that herein is fixed (*statuaret*) the highest human good and the thing praiseworthy in itself, that while it is located in that which the Stoics term *homologia*, and which we may call *convenientia*—while in it lies that good to which all things are to be brought back (*a quo omnia referenda sunt*), all fitting deeds (*honesta facta*) and *the honestum itself*, which alone is considered good, although it arises afterwards, is nevertheless the sole thing that is for its own power and value (*vi sua et dignitate*) to be striven after; whereas none of those things which are first of nature is to be striven after for itself. But since those things which I have termed *officia* set out from the starting points of nature (*proficiscantur ab initiis naturae*), it is necessary they are brought back (*necesse est ea ad haec referrī*). Hence it may be correctly said that all *officia* are brought back to nature (*omnia officia eo referrī*), so that we may arrive at the starting-points of nature (*ut adipiscamur principia naturae*). Not that this is, however, the ultimate of goods, as *the honestum* is not in the first counsels of nature (*primis naturae consillationibus*), for it follows (*consequens est*), and arises thereafter, as I have said. At the same time, it is following alongside nature (*secundum naturam*), and it is far more to be sought and instigates (*hortatur*) us more than all the preceding (*superiora omnia*). (III.vi.21)

Beginnings and endings are conspicuous in this itself ubiquitous passage. For, so far, Cato has only discussed the *principia naturae*, or the ‘origin points’ of nature, but will now presumably proceed to the ends of nature, the starting-points being those with which ‘those that follow must *congruere*’ (III.vi.20). At its most literal the word *congruere* means ‘to align and come together,’ or even ‘to run together with something,’ as a runner might *meet* another *en route* and run alongside him for as long as their paths coincided. The word *congruere* also has a secondary sense, which Cicero fully exploits to lend extra significance to his pronouncement that the first *principia* must *congruere* with what follows *from*, or *upon* them. This word that literally means ‘converging with’ or ‘following alongside the path of,’ also means ‘to be fitted, adapted, or suited to something,’ just as a bird’s wing is fitted, suited, and adapted to serve the end of flying. The word denotes (1) the relationship of a thing to that with which its path coincides in time and space, and (2), its relationship to something for which it can serve as a means. We can see that the two meanings are not unrelated in the sense that a thing following a trajectory of its own that leads where we are already going has its own potential to tend toward certain ends, which if they are not the ones toward which we are ourselves moving, may at least tend in that direction, and therefore, if taken advantage of correctly, further us down the path to that end. In saying, then, as he does, that certain things are chosen because they are *secundum naturam*²—that is, they follow alongside nature—Cicero is implying that they are chosen as serviceable to our ends because they have a teleological nature that makes them align nicely with our own.

² Cicero’s translation of *ta kata phusin* or *ta proégoumenon kata phusin* referenced in Diogenes and Antipater, those things in short, exciting natural impulses and having *axia*, ‘value,’ but not making any contribution to *eudaimonia*, ‘happiness.’ Long, “Carneades and the Stoic *Telos*,” 65.

As we become more adept at selection, selection with fittingness follows (*cum officio selectio*). This means that we become adept at selecting as among available objects only those that serve to promote our *telos*. The choosing itself becomes increasingly *constans consentaneaue naturae*, ‘concordant with nature,’ which it is to say that we restrict our choice to just what serves our *telos*, and thus what keeps us on the path to that *telos*. Cicero is trying to render in Latin that *eklogê* is *diênêkôs* and *aparabatôs*, ‘constant and unwavering,’ in seeking out *ta kata phusin*, those things, according to nature.’ This is carried on consistently and uninterruptedly, *perpetua*, until we are capable of perceiving the *concordia* between what we select and our teleology, as we can only once we have attained it.³

It cannot be stressed enough that we do not, as most scholars argue,⁴ arrive by reason at the conclusion that we should love *concordia*, and then put what we intellect into practice. To be sure, we perceive and come to love this *concordia* once it has come into existence, and then, as an afterthought, reach the conscious conclusion that it is our highest end. For Cicero explicitly states that it is as a *consequence* of perceiving (in Greek, *ennoia*)⁵ that there is a *concordia* between the things we select and our *telos*, that we draw the inference that there is a higher good than externals. But this is a good that we are *already* pursuing. The nature of the *concordia* perceived and loved is yet more specific. Cicero tells us that the precise *concordia* of which we become aware is that of the sequence of things to be done. Now, what makes something a part of a sequence is the fact that it falls between an origin point from which it proceeds and an endpoint towards which it strives. Cato has already supplied for us the *initia* or ‘starting point’ from which our actions arise. The endpoint is our final *telos*.

Those actions ‘in accord with nature,’ thus arise from our nature and lead toward our natural *telos*. They have an origin and an endpoint in nature in the sense that the reason for choosing them can be traced backwards to the natural impulses from which they arise and forward to the ultimate *telos* toward which we ultimately strive. Thus when Cicero speaks of the *ordinem rerum agendarum*, it lies in the way certain actions follow sequentially from these *archai* and lead to an end, forming a natural “link” between the origin points and the endpoints of our nature. In other words, actions must appear to us as both arising from the things that provoke them and as tending towards the end we seek.

Cato must explain why the endpoints toward which our nature *appears* to strive are not our *telos*, and why *homologia* or *convenientia* are instead. Most scholars think that by this point

³ Here Cicero seems to allude to the consistent disposition (*diathesis homologoumenê*) in which all Stoics believed virtue to consist (*DL* 7.89). If so, this consistent disposition, and virtue itself, are attained before and without first having need of intellectual understanding. See further Appendix Three.

⁴ See Appendix Three.

⁵ Confusingly, the term *ennoia* is used by the Stoics in two different senses, which could imply that this notion of the good is attained naturally or by conscious intellectual effort. This is because it is used as the more general term for all conception, and as a particular species of conception that contrasts with *prolēpseis* or ‘preconception.’ Aetius writes: “When a man is born, the Stoics say, he has the commanding-part of his soul like a sheet of paper ready for writing upon... Some *ennoiai* arise naturally in the aforesaid ways and undesignedly, others through our own instruction and attention. The latter are called just by the name *ennoiai*, the former are also called *prolēpseis*” (Aetius 4.11.1: *LS* 39E). And these *prolēpseis* undoubtedly are the same class of *ennoiai* described by Diogenes Laertius as arising *kata periptôsin*, or ‘through direct experience’ (*DL* 7.52). Thus, the distinguishing feature of *prolēpsis*, ‘preconception,’ is its largely natural origin. Jackson-McCabe argues that the term *prolēpsis* was used in reference specifically to ideas developed in the course of *oikeiôsis*, these being ethical ideas. The kind of *ennoia* described by Cicero must be a *prolēpsis* because he doesn’t mention any special effort or instruction needed to reach it. It is a naturally occurring *prolēpsis*, which we are led to over the course of our moral development. See Matt Jackson-McCabe, “The Stoic Theory of Implanted Preconceptions,” *Phronesis* 49 (2004): 323-347.

Cato has already given his best answer to this question: we arrive by intellection at this conclusion. Further down the page, however, Cato appeals to our intuition that externals are not an end in themselves, saying “none of those things which are first of nature is to be striven after for itself.” There is a good *a quo omnia referenda sunt*, ‘to which all goods are referred.’ But he says more literally that this is a good ‘to which all goods are brought back.’ Cicero chooses his words carefully to indicate that there is an apparent circularity to our desire: *we desire external goods as a means to continue choosing them in the way we do.*⁶

He speaks repeatedly of *id bonum omnia referenda sunt*, of ‘the good to which the goodness of all other good things come back.’ *Officia* or ‘fitting’ deeds *proficiscantur ab initiis naturae*, ‘set out from the starting points of nature.’ We are impelled to them by the *intiis naturae*, the *archai* of nature. So *necesse est ea ad haec referri*, ‘it is necessary that they be brought back to these *archai*.’ That is to say, it is necessary that we think of the reasons for their performance as coming back ultimately to nature and our natural impulses.

Rather than craft a new argument in favor of Stoicism, Cato merely reminds us of what we should already know, that externals are chosen for no other reason than because they elicit from us a certain natural response. These externals are chosen *because* the actions by means of which they are pursued are ‘led out from our nature’ (*proficiscantur ab initiis naturae*). The externals are fitting to our nature, and so are our responses to them. Thus, and not otherwise, does Cato conclude that all ‘fitting’ deeds and the ‘fitting’ itself is “the sole thing that is for its own power and value to be striven after.” He simply shows that externals are chosen on account of the natural response they elicit from us and not because they have value independent of that natural response.

But if every art has its external end, then Cato must explain what, if not the externals toward which it appears to strive, is the end of the art of life. He has no better reply than to invoke the analogy of the spear-thrower or archer that Antipater used in just such situations,⁷ saying, *ut enim si cui propositum sit collineare hastam aliquo aut sagittam sicut nos ultimum in bonis dicimus*—‘for suppose a man were to set himself to take aim at a mark with a spear or arrow’ (III.vi.22). That *propositum* is literally that which he has ‘set out’ and ‘placed before’ himself as a target at which to aim. In this analogy, the provisional aim we adopt is our target in a given situation; this is to say that there is always a particular object at which our impulses find themselves directed at a given place and time. But in aiming at these particular targets, these *skopoi*, we also appear to aim beyond them toward a higher goal, or *telos*. Though the *skopoi* are sought for the sake of a higher *telos*, and this *telos* is, as Aristotle would say, that for the sake of which the *skopoi* are desired, the *skopoi* themselves do not form a necessary and constituent part of the *telos*. In failing to hit them, we can still attain our *telos*.

⁶ We can find this charge of circularity voiced loudly by Plutarch (*Comm. Not.* 1072e-f). We appear to desire externals as a means to selecting them, and selecting them as a means to externals. Striker suggests that the appearance of circularity can be overcome if the Stoics deny that externals have value for the moral life. But the value of externals indeed lies in the fact that they act as material upon which selection can exercise itself, if not to furnish one with the material of life needed to continue selecting them. What has to be shown then is that it is not absurd to say “man does everything in his power to attain the natural things, in order to do everything in his power to attain the natural things.” Striker shows that it is not absurd because, while externals are always a means to a further end, selection is not a means to a further end, but an end in itself. Striker, “The Art of Living,” 191-193.

⁷ Cicero tells us here at *Fin.* III.22 that in his debate with Carneades, Antipater called upon the analogy of the archer to illustrate that the Stoic life was aimed at only one goal and not two. In his rendition of the debate, Plutarch explains that the Stoics were caught between two equally paradoxical ways of conceiving the end: they had either to say that the goal of life was something different than that at which all our actions aimed, or that we had two goals, the act of aiming and its external aim (*Comm. Not.* 1070, 1072e-f) See also Striker, “The Art of Living.”

Striker explains with reference to sport how we come to realize that the *skopoi* are merely *skopoi*. Sport exists to exercise the body and to strengthen it, not merely for winning matches or setting records. Even if most athletes believe these to be their aims, some eventually realize that these more immediate goals serve the ultimate end of exercising the body, and not vice versa.⁸ They might realize that what they had been striving after all along was a more final end. Attaining their immediate end might then pale in importance to their own growth as athletes. In a similar manner, we are capable of realizing that, although our acts have, our lives long, been directed at particular ends, they have ultimately been aimed at a more final end—the exercise of the one faculty that helps us to sight them and attain them.

Thus must Cato contend with the old Carneadean plaint that the Stoic art of life does not have a clear and desirable external *telos*. Cato admits that like every art, the art of life has external *skopoi*, but he never thinks to conceive the art as having an external *telos*, in the sense of a future endpoint, lying outside and beyond the present action it performs. Such would not just be a *telos*, but an *eidos* too—an endpoint of action determined in advance of action, and therefore graspable before action is underway. Because the good of action in Stoicism does not lie completely outside of it in an external end, it is not an art with an *eidos*.⁹

What is retained of the idea that all action directed at an external end, is the idea that, insofar as we are aware of it at all, our true *telos* appears to us disguised in the form of the particular ends that appear to constitute it. But while we can at first, no more than Aristotle imagine an end that is not inclusive of these goods, they remain conditional, the apparent means by which to attain our *telos*, at a particular time and place, but not an unconditional constituent to the *telos* itself. These are our *provisional ends*, not our final and universal end. And so, every end that we can name is a provisional one, and is more deservingly referred to as a ‘target.’¹⁰ One’s aim in life, however, is to become adept at sighting and aiming at the target one has before him or herself at a particular time and place. *Aside from the fact that every target is a potentially false target, the ultimate prize, happiness, can never be delivered with the hitting of one target, or even a few targets. For Stoicism pries apart the human good from its association with a target that one could hit once and for all.*

If these are merely *skopoi*, what then deserves the name of our true *telos*? Here the archer analogy becomes more than just an analogy. Cato would have the archer do everything so that he might *collineare* or ‘aim correctly’ (II.vi.22). His arrow must correctly leave the bow and head in the right direction. The path it travels must stretch straight from the point of origin to its destination, just as action must spring from the right source and move in the right direction. Like archery, the art of life attains its good when, rather than aiming randomly, it comes into perfect alignment with the path or trajectory it must travel toward its proper destination. “And if a gust of wind should divert his arrow from its path,” as Striker puts it, this does not concern the practitioner.¹¹

⁸ Striker, “The Art of Living,” 187.

⁹ This point will be made at greater length in Chapter Five.

¹⁰ The change in the Stoics’ vocabulary was to emphasize that the *skopos* at which we appear to aim in our actions is *eudaimonia*, a material state identical with a virtue, but the true *telos* of human action was rather an activity, i.e. becoming happy (*tuxein eudaimonia*). According to Endberg-Penderson, the import of this doctrine relative to Aristotle’s was to emphasize that action did not just aim at an external, materially existing thing subsisting independently of action. It emphasized that, although we strove toward such a state, our true *telos* was an activity (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* II.76, 16-27W, *SVF* III.16, LS 63A). See Endberg-Penderson, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis*, 27-32.

¹¹ Striker, “The Art of Living,” 193.

Because the springs of this action are themselves as unknown to us as the ultimate end it seeks, our action lies suspended between an *archê* and a *telos*, each beyond the reach of the human intellect.¹² This is what makes Stoicism distinct as an ethical philosophy. Most others attempt to spell out in what the highest good consists such that we are then be able to deduce the relative priority to be placed on provisional goods. Two conflicting goods in a certain situation are decided between with reference to a third and higher good. In short, two competing courses of action are subjected to adjudication with reference to a higher rational principle. Moral judgment, then, becomes a matter of arriving at universal principles and subsuming particular cases under them. But in Stoicism it is only partly true that the final end is fixed in advance and the relative importance of provisional ends is adjudicated on this basis.¹³

Remove, as Stoicism does, the ability to conceive this final end or *telos* intellectually and in advance of action, and it is left to the moral actor to respond to worldly goods without recourse to a universal good, to which they can be effortlessly subordinated. The *telos* lies solely in responding to particular goods that offer themselves at distinct places and times as worthy of pursuit. Every individual situation in life retains its individuality in that each and every one has to be viewed as a unique situation with a unique good. Thus, in every situation the good is different, and cannot be subsumed under general rules. *Instead of a single fixed and ultimate end, we have a plurality of changing, shifting, and individualized goods specific to each situation.*¹⁴

Therefore, the truth one needs to know in order to act cannot be encapsulated in universal truths that remain the same, no matter the time, no matter the place. They cannot simply be learned and mastered, and then communicated to the untaught. Knowledge is not passed, like other arts, from accomplished experts to willing apprentices. The Stoics may have found plenty of reasons to collapse the Socratic distinction between *technê* and the art of life, but in this one sense, Socrates was right to distinguish the two. If this feature of the philosophy is already there to be seen, then it deservedly catches Foucault's eye.

¹² One must then say of Stoic action what Sean Kirkland says of Aristotle's, that it arises from an uncertain origin and travels toward an unknown destination because, in Kirkland's words, "it is temporally positioned between two regions of obscurity, the past and the future." Bounded on both sides by what it cannot know, its whence and wherefore, "judgment itself is situated between a pre-reflective past and an indeterminable future." *What it must discern, therefore, can be no more than the means by which one may bring oneself into line with an archê that recedes into the distance and a telos that stretches out before oneself and fades into the horizon.* Kirkland, "The Temporality of *Phronêsis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," 134.

¹³ If this is our conclusion then our epigram may appear poorly chosen, for in it Cicero appears to assert just the opposite, in affirming that, while the knowledge of other arts requires neither the knowledge of their starting points nor their ultimate ends, the art of virtue does. One could also cite Seneca: "The carpenter does not need to inquire of carpentry what its starting point or its function might be any more than the dancer of the art of dancing; if these arts understand themselves, they lack nothing; for they do not extend to all life. But virtue is the knowledge of itself and other things. We must learn *of* it, so that *it* may be learned" (*Ep.* xcv.56). This does not imply, however, that the art of virtue is synonymous with knowledge of the *archê* and *telos* of virtuous action, just that, since the art of virtue is unlike other arts in extending not just to a small portion, but to the whole of life, it takes a wider perspective on where we are coming from and where we are going. We must postpone until the next chapter an account of why Seneca thinks we must take a long view of life as whole (*Ep.* xcv.56).

¹⁴ Compare Aristotle's claim that ethical knowledge is not an *epistêmê* of universals and is concerned with the *eschaton*, the 'particular,' that to be done in a particular situation (*Nic. Eth.* 1142a23).

THE RETURN OF THE SOCRATIC THEME

In a world that was like our own, increasingly overrun by the forces of philosophical skepticism, the late Stoics found themselves making increasingly significant concessions to their unbelieving critics.¹⁵ Some of them began to admit that they sought knowledge of that with respect to which certainty was an impossible—nature. Seneca was not alone in remarking *involuta veritas in alto latet*, ‘truth lies hidden in the abyss.’ But if he admitted that knowledge of nature was unattainable, he also believed it to be immaterial:

You need not know what is the system of the ocean tides, why each seventh year leaves its mark upon the human body, why the more distant parts of a long portico do not keep their true proportion, but seem to approach one another until at last the spaces between the columns disappear, how it can be that twins are conceived separately, though they are born together, whether both result from one, or each from a separate act, why those whose birth was the same should have such different fates in life, and dwell at the greatest possible distance from one another, although they were born touching one another; it will not do you much harm to pass over matters which we are not permitted to know, and which we should not profit by knowing. *Truths so obscure may be neglected with impunity.* (*De Ben.* VII.i)

Socrates deemed practical matters too important to wait upon the attainment of absolute certainty about the nature of the universe. That certainty would be a long time coming, such a long time coming, in fact, that Socrates had to shirk the philosophical task of inquiring into nature in order to fully concentrate on *ta ethika*, the ethical matters that were, to his mind, deserving of urgent and undivided attention. As Cicero explains it, the significance of Socrates was that in summoning us away from the study of nature, he summoned us away from something intrinsically unknowable:

Socrates was the first person who summoned philosophy away from the mysteries veiled in concealment by nature herself (*ab ipsa natura involutis*), upon which all philosophers before him had been engaged, and led it to the subject of ordinary life (*avocavisse philosophiam et ad vitam communem adduxisse*), in order to investigate the virtues and vices, and good and evil generally, and to realize that heavenly matters are either remote from our knowledge or else, however fully known, have nothing to do with the good life. (*Ac.* I.iv.15)

This is the story that Cicero himself tells about the birth of ethical philosophy. It is an interesting one because ethical philosophy itself seems to be predicated upon the setting apart

¹⁵ The debate between Stoics and Sceptics goes back almost as far as the founding of their two schools of thought, and as Ioppolo’s work on the subject shows, the Zeno could no sooner articulate the principles of his epistemology before they were subjected to a thoroughgoing critique by Arcesilaus, the first of Plato’s heirs to turn the Academy in the direction of Skepticism. The Stoics developed differing means of response to the scrutiny under which they came, but they never attempted to establish a secure basis for knowledge in anything but the particular sensory impressions that forced themselves on the mind of particular individuals at particular places and times. Ioppolo, Anna Maria. *Opinione e scienza: il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel III e nel II secolo a. C.* Naples: Bibliopolis, 1986.

of a field of inquiry investigating things unknowable by definition. However, the Stoics will not rest entirely content with the Socratic solution, finding spiritual nourishment in an ethical philosophy that stands detached from nature. Stoicism is nothing if not a back to nature movement, and nothing if not a call to once again put nature at the center of ethical life. For the Stoics, it is primarily from nature that we seek ethical guidance,¹⁶ but this only at first appears to mean that ethics can no longer be treated as an independent field of inquiry, standing upon its own two feet, and that it must remain dependent upon the study of nature for its premises. Whether or not this is true for the *study* of ethics, ethical *life* can certainly take its directive from nature *without* in any way depending upon the study of natural philosophy.¹⁷ Hence we must not assume that it is primarily upon the study of nature that ethics must rest.

Zeno defined the end of life as *homologoumenós zen*, by which he meant living in accordance with a single harmonious *logos* since he believed that those who live *machomenós*, or ‘in conflict,’ are unhappy.¹⁸ Zeno could not have intended that his words be interpreted to mean that we remain in harmony with our own internal *logos*, though this was not the only interpretation they permitted. Having already come to understand why, for the Roman Stoics, this interpretation may have sufficed, we should ask “why the Stoics might have thought that consistency or harmony in one’s life is the same as following nature.”¹⁹ For Zeno’s followers interpreted *homologoumenós zen* to imply living in agreement *tei phusei*, ‘with nature.’²⁰

THE TRAGIC LIMITS OF OUR KNOWLEDGE

The Stoics seem to want contradictory things.²¹ If the Stoics want to deny the comprehensibility of nature, and yet found their ethical system on nature, then they want something incomprehensible from the perspective of the modern ethicist, who hopes to found his or her system on solidly established premises about that of which it is possible to have knowledge. In order to be so founded, a system must take as its fundamental premises the kind of truths that are openly apparent to all, present and unwavering in the sense that they can be

¹⁶ “And for the first of these sections [ethics], the one dealing with right conduct of life, they went for a starting-point to nature, and declared that her orders must be followed and that the chief good, which is the aim of all things, is to be sought in nature and in nature only; and they laid it down that to have attained complete accordance with nature in mind, body, and estate is the limit of things desirable and the end of goods.” (I.v.19)

¹⁷ This is why according to some, Chrysippus, in every account we have of him, far from treating ethics as an autonomous field of study, proscribes the study of physics as a primer to ethics. He is supposed to have said, “There is no other or more appropriate way to approach the study of good and bad things or the virtues or happiness than from universal nature and the administration of the whole” (Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 11035c; *LS* 60A). For Sellars, however, he did not mean that ethics rest upon physics for its premises, just that physics should come before ethics in the series of topics addressed through formal instruction. Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 78-81.

¹⁸ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* II.75.11.3, *LS* 63B

¹⁹ Striker, “Following Nature,” 4.

²⁰ *DL* 7.88, *LS* 63C.

²¹ The contradiction to be resolved here is that which Reydam-Schils illustrates in Epictetus. He says, one the hand that our actions ought to conform to nature, even to the will of god, and on the other that knowledge of nature as a whole is beyond our grasp, and the little that is attainable is useful only for reminding us that human beings are social by nature (*Dis.* 4.1.204, 3.5.10). See also the fragment from Epictetus preserved in Stobaeus (*Ecl.* 80.14; II.1.18a). The contradiction is resolved by Reydam-Schils by interpreting Epictetus to mean that we must postpone embarking upon the study of natural philosophy until we understand human sociability. Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 38-42.

accessed by the rational mind at all times and places. But nature is something about which definite pronouncements cannot always be made. Its ways are so shadowy and mysterious that, for Cicero and Seneca, no universal proclamations can be issued about them, much less the kind that are sufficiently well-established to bear the weight of a whole edifice of thought. And yet if Sean Kirkland is right, then they would not have been alone among the ancients in acknowledging that ethical life is based on and around something unknowable at root.

Kirkland has termed this the tragic side of ancient ethics. The good after which we strive, upon which ethical life is based, and around which ethical thought gravitates, is something of which we have essentially an irremediably limited knowledge. Thus, it is possible that the good after which we strive could turn out to be, as it does in Greek tragedies, something wholly other than what we first thought.²² Nor did this sense of the tragic completely disappear from Greek ethical thought when it reached Rome. Seneca serves as an example:

We also know that we possess souls, but we do not know the essence, the place, the quality, or the source, of the soul. Such as is the consciousness of our souls which we possess, ignorant as we are of their nature and position, even so all animals possess a consciousness of their own constitutions. For they must necessarily feel this, because it is the same agency by which they feel other things also; they must necessarily have a feeling of the principle which they obey and by which they are controlled. Every one of us understands that there is something which stirs his impulses, but he does not know what it is. *He knows that he has a sense of striving, although he does not know what it is or its source.* Thus even children and animals have a consciousness of their primary element, but it is not very clearly outlined or portrayed. (*Ep.* cxxi.11)

Seneca is clear. Our constitution is unclear to us. He says it is known “confusedly, cursorily, and darkly.” We have at best, the faintest of ideas about the form we are striving to embody. That the Stoics were even less sure that the end toward which nature ultimately led them existed in the form of an outline or blueprint clear enough to be imprinted upon the mind, could explain why they discarded all mention of form in relation to ethics. They attributed to humans, not a clear cognitive grasp of the form of a human being that individuals strive to embody, but at best an inchoate idea of that in which the ‘fitting action’ consists.²³

Thus, “Every one of us understands that there is something which stirs his impulses, but he does not know what it is.” We have impulsive reactions to things that are constitutive means to our *telos*. But aside from these desires, we have no better clue as to the final *telos* toward which we strive. This is not to say that we do not *have* a *telos*, but it is to say that knowledge of that end can be attained in no clear form *in advance* of action. For we don’t even know, in advance of a given situation, what provisional ends our action should aim to achieve, and it is unwise to think that the Stoics could be so naïve as to seek a solution for this problem in the knowledge of future events. Although it has been maintained with seriousness that the Stoics

²² Kirkland, “The Tragic Foundation of Aristotle’s Ethics,” 2.

²³ Diogenes Laertius says that *phusikôs de noitai disakaion ti kai agathon*, that ‘the good and the just are conceived naturally,’ but this is the closest the early Stoics appear to come to saying we have a conception of the *telos*. If it is a conception of the *telos* we have naturally, then it is not one of the human *eidôs*. What is less clear, however, is whether talk of an innate conception of the good resulted from the influence of Platonism upon later Stoics. Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung* (Göttingen, 1964), 90; F. Sandbach, “*Ennoia* and *Prolepsis* in the Stoic Theory of Knowledge,” *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. Anthony Long (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1971), 28.

needed foreknowledge of events in order to adapt to them, this is false.²⁴ One *doesn't* need to know what nature's plans are in order to accommodate oneself to them.

If the good is simply acting well under *different* circumstances, then as we shall see at greater length, we cannot easily generalize about what is to be done in situations that resemble each other. Nor, knowing full well that the particular ends at which we aim are variable and shifting, can we arrive at any knowledge of the *telos* for the sake of which these always subsidiary and provisional ends are pursued. Except perhaps to issue the abstract and contentless judgment that our *telos* consists in greater harmony with nature, we cannot say anything substantial about this *telos*. We cannot give our conception of the *telos* definite content. This is to say that we cannot say anything substantial enough about it to *apply* it under particular circumstances.

The *telos* exists for us in a form that is much too vague and abstract for it to serve as knowledge that can be *applied*. *This* is what we mean when we say there can be no *theoretical* knowledge of the *telos*. Ethical knowledge, if it is attainable at all, is a knowledge of how exactly to go about embodying a form whose shape we can't make out. In other words, it must be a way of knowing the means to an end of which we are ultimately uncertain.

The Stoics, we have seen, assign to the human mind a special ability to see events in relation to their immediate causes and consequences, which is to them the ability upon which we rely in ethical life. Significantly, this ability allows us to grasp any sequence of events in nature, and not where this series of events *ultimately* begins and ends. The same applies to ourselves. We cannot see whence we have come or where we are going, but we can see the order of events an action can take, from what cues in the environment it might immediately arise and toward what conclusions it might tend. But from whence these impulses spring nor where they ultimately will lead us in life, we do not have knowledge. What we have then is knowledge of how to come into harmony with nature, a knowledge that which makes no pretensions to present itself as a knowledge of nature's *archai* and *telé*. Thus, it is an ethical knowledge of how to behave in relation to nature, but not a knowledge of nature *per se*, not a physical science or a natural philosophy.

The Stoics thus sought knowledge that was neither too technical, nor too theoretical. Of course, the truth of this statement depends upon the meaning of the words in it. If one means by "technical," a knowledge that consists of charting a well-worn path to a fixed destination, then the knowledge the Stoics sought was *not* technical. Nor was it "theoretical" in the sense of being an intellectual activity whose sole value lies in the contact it makes with natural *archai*. Yet, while cleared of the charge of being either too "technical" or too "theoretical" in the limited sense in which we have used those terms, the Stoic practical intellect is not altogether cleared of its reputation for being too "theoretical" in the sense of being removed from the shared world of human activity. It spans the gap between an *arché* and a *telos*. But it may still fail to form a bridge between intellectual and practical life, between philosophical and political life.

²⁴ "It is the job of a rational agent to fit himself smoothly into the sequence of events," according to Inwood. "And this requires long-term planning and projection," for the sake of which, the Stoics, in Inwood's view, had frequent recourse to astrology. In other words, in order to harmonize oneself with nature, it was considered necessary to gain clear knowledge of how and when events would unfold. Long has even argued that the study of logic was prized by the Stoics so that they might correctly infer the course of events *in advance*. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, 111; Anthony Long, "Language and Thought in Stoicism," in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. Anthony Long (London: Althone Press, 197), 95-96, 102-4; Anthony Long, "Dialectic and the Stoic Sage," in *The Stoics*, ed. John Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 108-110, 113-118.

Book V begins with a symbolic return to the grounds of Plato's academy in Athens where anywhere we go, says Lucius, *in aliqua historia vestigium ponimus*, 'we leave our footprints in historic ground' (V.ii.5). More than just for the sake of antiquarian curiosity, Piso says that this return to historic ground will benefit Lucius immensely, and the return to the site of the Academy coincides with Lucius' lauded return to the philosophic tradition of the Old Academy. Cicero says, "You know that I agree with you about that, Piso...but you have raised the point most opportunely; for my cousin is eager to hear what the doctrine of the *finibus bonorum* of the Old Academy of which you speak, and of the Peripatetics" (V.iii.7). With this, Piso tries to do what Cicero's own teacher, Antiochus,²⁵ had attempted before him—to explain the continuities making the philosophic tradition stretching back to Plato one that continues up through Stoicism.

Piso's speech harkens back to previous ones. He explains how we proceed from a Peripatetic to a Stoic art of life. He should be able to show that this transition is smooth if Stoics do not depart from Peripateticism too radically. Piso then begins to discuss the mind, with whose development comes the perfection of virtue (V.xi). But when it comes to explaining how this virtue sits in relation to our self-preservative instincts, Piso finds it difficult to trace virtue to our impulses in such a way that it could be seen to arise naturally from them.²⁶ The impulse toward virtue is not to be found fully-developed in us; but there is in us a "germ" of virtue that is capable of developing itself under the right circumstances (V.xxi.59). As for the inherent worth of virtue, most people do not learn to see it as an intrinsic good (V.xxiv.69), although many of us eventually come to realize that the mind's good-functioning is an end in itself (V.xvi.42).

This leads Piso to flatly contradict what he said earlier, so that he now asserts that the cultivation of the mind takes complete precedence—even over the demands of the body. Before, he adamantly insisted that nothing could cause a human being to act with indifference to external goods and the health of the body. Now, he says of children, "how they covet praise! What toils do they not undergo to stand first among their companions!" (V.xxii.61). There follows a list of those who would rather perish like Lucretia than allow their virtue to be tarnished (V.xxii.64). "Who is there who cannot see," Piso asks, "that all these deeds were done by men who were inspired by the splendor of moral greatness to forget *utilitatum suarum*, and are praised by us from no other consideration but the *honestum*" (V.xxii.64).²⁷

The question concerns the art of life. Piso began his speech with a Peripatetic conception of the art of life,²⁸ and ended it with a Stoic one. For, Piso continues, "this is much

²⁵ For more on Antiochus and the way his views are portrayed see Appendix Two.

²⁶ He admits that it is difficult to find the beginnings of virtue in our natural impulses, but he says *omnium enim rerum principia parva sunt*—'all things are small in their beginnings.' At the moment of inception there is in things *temeritas ac mollitia quaedam*, 'a certain weakness and softness,' so these things can neither see the best thing nor do it (V.xxi.58).

²⁷ Put your faith in virtue, says Piso and "all the vicissitudes of fortune, the ebb and flow of time and circumstance, will be trifling and feeble if brought into conflict with virtue. The things we reckon as bodily goods do, it is true, form a factor in supreme happiness but yet happiness is possible without them" (V.xxiv.71).

²⁸ "He [Carneades, following in the Peripatetic tradition] denied that any art could be its own starting point (*ullam esse artem quae ipsa a se proficisceretur*); there is always something outside the art that it embraces (*quod arte comprehenditur*). There

more valuable and intrinsically desirable than either the senses or the endowments of the body above alluded to; since those are surpassed in a way that can hardly be conceived by the perfection of the intellect” (V.xxi.60). It thus seems that our art of life is transformed so that its end becomes the perfection of the intellect valued for its own sake, and it no longer seeks its end outside itself in something that arouses impulse. What this all shows Cicero is that this attempt to assimilate Stoic to Peripatetic philosophy results in a situation in which one embraces two different goods: externals and virtue. From the beginning Piso has spoken of *two* kinds of goods—the goods of the *mind* and the goods of the *body*—and by the end of his speech, he still hasn’t decided which of the two is more valuable. The result is that he has two mutually contradictory accounts of the art of life. *On the one hand, it is a technê whose use lies in its serviceability to external ends. On the other hand, it is theôria, an intrinsically valuable way of developing the mind to its fullest potential.*

Cicero slowly but deftly points out to Piso that his problem is not with the specifics of what he has said, but with *quid constanter dicitur, quid ipsum a se dissentiat*, with ‘what can be consistently said and what disagrees with itself’ (V.xxvii.79). If virtue *ad beate vivendum se ipsa contenta est*—if virtue ‘is content with itself for happiness,’ then it should have no need of externals (V.xxxvi.78). After several false starts Cicero seemingly defends the Stoics for “breaking” with this tradition by denying externals value:

And in fact I must confess what I think: with them the connection of things is marvelous (*mirabilis est apud illos contextus rerum*). The ends fit the beginnings (*respondet extrema primis*), the middle things with both (*media utrisque*), and all things with all things (*omnia omnibus*). They see what follows, what opposes (*quid sequatur, quid repugnet, vident*). Like in geometry, if you give the first things, all things are given (*prima si dederis, danda sunt omnia*). Concede that nothing might be good but the *honestum* and it is to be conceded that the blessed life is to be placed in virtue. See the same thing backwards again (*vide rursus retro*). Once this is given, that is given (*dato hoc, dandum est illud*). Not so with yours (*quod vestri non item*). (V.xxviii.83)

He does not deny that Zeno might be wrong; he only confesses that *ea quae praeclare inter se cohaerere*, that ‘the things he says are admirably consistent’ (V.xxvii.79). But Cicero does not just mean that the Stoics are more consistent in theory. Because they take a consistent, if implausible, theoretical stand, they are more consistent in practice. They do not assert the existence of two different goods—externals and virtue. *Thus, they do not vacillate between the two.*

The situation is exactly the opposite with Piso. Not only is his *discourse* in contradiction with itself, we can also assume that his *actions* are too. By the time he comes to the end of his speech we understand why his philosophy has produced doctrinal rifts among its adherents. Different philosophical schools eventually came to disagree about how to put this self-

is no need to enlarge upon or to illustrate this point; for it is evident that no art is occupied with itself (*ipsam in se versari*); but that there is something else with which it is concerned (*quod propositum sit arti*). Since medicine is the art of health, navigation the art of sailing, and thus *prudentia* the art of living (*ars vivendi*), it is necessary that art too have something as its base and point of departure (*ab aliqua re esse constitutam et profectam*). Now practically all have agreed that the subject with which prudence is occupied and the end which it desires to attain (*in quo prudentia verseretur et quod assequi vellet*) is bound to be something intimately adapted to our nature (*aptum et accomodatum naturae esse oportere*); it must be capable of directly arousing and awakening an impulse, what in Greek is called *hormê*.” (*Fin.* V.vi.16)

contradictory theory into practice.²⁹ Piso is in same position as all Peripatetics who assert the value of externals *and* of virtue. At any moment he could find himself pulled in two opposing directions at once: the mind demands one thing, the body another. The Peripatetic is hopelessly divided against him- or herself with no means of mediating between two courses of action. And as we have seen with reference to *De Officiis*, it is out of this conflict that another conflict emerges. We are conflicted because we feel forced to choose between the path of virtue, and a course of action leading toward a desired end. *This occasions the false dichotomy between “the efficient” and “the ethical,” between technical and ethical modes of being.*

The real question around which discussion now turns is whether the Stoics, specifically, can be assimilated to this philosophical tradition. Piso obviously assumes that the Stoic is in precisely the same position as the Peripatetic. He will, according to Piso, find himself torn between two different goods, and therefore, two competing conceptions of the art of life. Cicero, however, more keenly intuits that Stoicism represents the possibility of resolving the internal conflict to which the Peripatetic is subject. Thus, if the Stoic art of life has any practical or political value at all, it will reside in its power to do just this.

STOIC PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE AS PRAGMATIC AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

There is, however, something strangely apolitical about Stoic virtue. It seems to make us unfit for political action insofar as it appears to turn its back on the everyday world of practice. By the “practical world” is meant: (1) external goods, among which other people are counted (2) everyday ways of speaking, and (3) *endoxa*, or the pre-reflective way things “seem” to many people. Thus, as soon as Cicero points out to Piso that what the Stoics say is remarkably *consistent* with itself, Piso points out to him that it is remarkably *inconsistent* with the way we must speak and act in everyday life:

Pain is an evil: then a man undergoing crucifixion cannot be happy. Children are a good: then childlessness is miserable; one’s country is a good: then exile is miserable; health is a good: then sickness is miserable; soundness of body is a good: then infirmity is miserable; good eyesight is a good: then blindness is miserable. (V.xxviii.84)

The great sin that Zeno committed according to Piso was contradicting popular belief. “Zeno dared to say that a wise beggar was not only happy but also wealthy” (V.xxvii.i.84). He did not hesitate to go to all extremes when it came to violating common sense: “Suppose a man to be at once blind, infirm afflicted by disease, in exile, childless, destitute, and tortured on the rack; what is your name, Zeno, for him? ‘A happy man,’ says Zeno” (V.xxviii.84).

What Piso then claims with respect to the *inconstantiae crimen*, ‘the charge of inconsistency’ is that it is actually the Stoic who can be accused of contradiction: *Nam illud vehementer repugnant, eundem beatum esse et multis malis oppressum*—‘For it is violently inconsistent to call a man happy and at the same time say that he is oppressed by many evils’ (V.xxix.88;

²⁹ Some, says Piso, were drawn back to extolling externals goods. Some tended more toward an emphasis on virtue (V.xxiv.73). It all shows Cicero not just that a philosophy capable of spawning so many disagreements is internally inconsistent *with itself*, but that Antiochus was perhaps foolish to try to gather so many potentially contradictory approaches under the aegis of a “single” philosophical tradition.

xxx.90). How these things *convenient*, or ‘accord,’ Cato says he finds impossible to understand (V.xxvi.77).³⁰ Piso’s critique of Stoicism is that it forces one to deny what appears to everyone else to be desirable, and this forces one into contradiction with the world and the people in it.

Thus, Piso thinks that this state of contradiction with *endoxa* is the one *real* state of contradiction to be avoided.³¹ Of course, Piso thinks the Stoics are in the same situation of seeing some goods as more valuable to others in everyday life, and thus, they are susceptible to the charge of contradiction too, insofar as they recognize virtue as an inherent good and at the same time recognize the value of externals. *They would even be susceptible to the same difficulties as the Peripatetics—the tendency to be torn in two directions at once.*

Piso believes it is simply that the Stoics craftily evade suspicion of inconsistency by changing the names of things (V.xxix.88). Take Zeno: “He denies the life of Metellus was happier than that of Regulus, yet calls it ‘preferable’; not more desirable but ‘more worthy of adoption’; and given the choice, that of Metellus is ‘to be selected’ and that of Regulus ‘to be rejected’” (V.xxix.88). The Stoics deny that health is a good, and so, on the surface of things remain consistent with themselves when they say that a sick man is happy. *Thus, they achieve consistency in theory, but not in practice.*

From this point of view, the Stoic art of life seems especially unfit for a political life. For one cannot minister to the needs of society at large while one denies value to externals, and rejects common opinion. The political implications of the impasse at which the dialogue now arrives are all important. For the specific charge that is brought against the Stoics is that they have made of a perfectly adequate philosophy, “a version that could not possibly be produced in public life, in the law courts, in the senate!” (IV.ix.21).

But it will be recalled that in whatever limited respect Cicero sided with the Stoics against their adversaries, he did so because he found the belief in virtue’s inherent worth a *political* necessity. The Stoic art of life, then, seems to prove its usefulness in the political realm. Virtue obviously had its political use in the fact that it allowed one to maintain *constantia*. Deriving from the verb *constare*, which meant to stand firm, to stay the same, to be unaltered, the participle *constans* denoted anything steady, firm, unchanging, constant, consistent, or resolute.³² To possess *constantia* was therefore to be unaffected, imperturbable, unflappable, fixed, steady, unmoved. The quality of *constantia* itself always had political connotations in such a way that the *constantia* the Stoics exemplify takes on increased significance as the quality that allows them to “stand firm” against the seductive enticements of apparent goods and the threats of apparent evils, and thus to perform the legendary acts of heroism with which Cicero, throughout *De Finibus*, credits the rise of the Roman Republic.³³

³⁰ “I call whatever is in accordance with nature good and what is contrary to nature bad; nor am I alone in this: you, Chrysippus, do so too in the forum, at home; but you stop at school. What then? Do you think that human beings should speak one way and philosophers another?” (V.xxix.89). He continues: “If they were human beings, they would speak as language is used” (V.xxiv.89).

³¹ With regard to the charge of inconsistency, Piso says, *quam tu ponis in verbis ego positam in re putabam*, ‘you put it in words whereas I thought it to be placed in the matter itself’ (V.xxx.90).

³² The import of the Roman virtue of *constantia* to Cicero has been well noted, and Catherine Tracy even argues that most of Cicero’s failings in political life were owing to his refusal to adapt to changing circumstances. This, she says, resulted from an obstinate desire to always appear *constans* in the eyes of the public. Catherine Tracy, “Cicero’s *Constantia* in Theory and Practice,” in *Cicero’s Practical Philosophy*, ed. Walter Nicgorski (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 58-79.79.

³³ The significance of the Stoic virtue of *constantia* has been well described by Gretchen Reydams-Schils. Its political import is twofold: “First these attitudes give the politician the courage to continue performing his duties in a political

The fact that such individuals often have to deny what seems apparent to everyone else works to their advantage insofar as it allows them to resist the rhetorical ploys that play havoc with the emotions of the masses. In order to deny what everyone else asserts, however, they need to develop an alternative inner discourse to counter the external discourse that would otherwise tear them in two.

But the genius of Cicero is that he also sees that, while the drive for this inner *constantia* has its political use, it also has its limitations in the political sphere. For one thing, this *constantia* can only be achieved by placing one's faith in an intellectual truth that can only be maintained, *while* one denies the validity of the everyday appearances they may contradict. What this means is that the "philosopher" must, at his or her own peril, deny what presents itself most immediately to him- or herself and to everyone else as true. And this, as we have seen, causes a different kind of "rift in the soul," another kind of *inconstantia* that comes with asserting a theoretical position. If the philosopher finds him- or herself denying that bribery is a good, and pain an evil, then a Caesar, a Nero, or a rowdy mob can force the philosopher into a situation in which he or she begins to admit that bribery is a good or that pain is an evil. In other words, the external world can force the philosopher into recognizing that the truth he or she maintains is one that brings them into contradiction with a part of themselves that recognizes pain to be an evil and bribery to be a good—but only to the extent to which the philosopher is willing to recognize that this contradiction exists *for them*.

The Stoic philosopher, however, may not be well adapted to deal with the common people. Since their good is not the philosopher's good, the philosopher's truth finds itself ill-adapted to this realm, and as a consequence, the actions of the philosopher may be completely inefficacious. This is because of the people he or she finds him- or herself surrounded by. There are principled philosophers at court who, like Cato, will not stoop to making emotional appeals, "for fear, no doubt," Cicero mockingly remarks, of being reported to the Stoics" (*De Orat.* 1.227).³⁴ But at the hands of a Caesar, a Nero, or a rowdy mob, one may suffer as Socrates did, and to absolutely no political effect.

And this, of course, is unavoidable because Stoic philosophers do not weigh the utility of actions into their decision. At the very least, what makes them Stoics to begin with is their refusal to see their knowledge as a *means* to something they already take as an end. If they were to extricate themselves from difficulties because they believed it was efficient, they would fall back into the habit of subordinating action to apparent goods. In other words, their art of life would become merely a form of technical expertise, merely something used to achieve pre-given ends. The Peripatetic's art of life always aims at an end that appears as good. And this, of course, makes it much better suited to the political life in some ways. Those things that appear as good to most people in everyday life become the object of the Peripatetic's striving. The striving of the Peripatetic is therefore consonant with that of the masses. The Peripatetic also speaks the same language as the populous at large. He or she can therefore communicate in the political realm in exactly the way in which, in Book IV, Cicero said the Stoics could not.

context that has become very dangerous and unpredictable." "Second, and even more fundamentally according to Cicero, detachment would have prevented the degeneration of the *res publica* in the first place, because only the politician who is indifferent to personal advantages, or to the advantages of a single group of people, can truly serve the common good." To these insights we can add another: the virtue of *constantia* is the special possession of the person who sees "truth" more clearly than others, so the political significance of *constantia* lies in the fact that anyone who possesses it possesses the truth. Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 96-97. See also *De Off.* I.xxi72; I.xx71; I.xxiv.85.

³⁴ Cicero is sometimes critical of Cato in this regard, for his uncompromising and austere public persona. But he seems also to credit him with being the first Stoic to adapt his discourses to the taste of the masses (*Parad.* 3).

It is thus that both approaches have their political efficacy and inefficacy. The Stoic art of life risks bringing us into ever-greater discord with the political realm. Meanwhile the more “technical” approach of the Peripatetic, though it places almost the same value on intellectual life, tries to maintain a relationship to the world of appearances, even though this relationship comes under severe strain every time an apparent good appears to conflict with the path of virtue, and the Peripatetic is forced to serve two masters at once.

To put it in the language of *harmonia*: the Stoic tries to remain in *harmony with his or her own inner truth*, even if it means being in *disharmony with the world*. Meanwhile, the Peripatetic tries harder to maintain *harmony with the world*, but is always at the risk of coming into *discord with him- or herself*.

THE AESTHETICS OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

It can now be seen that Cicero does not presume that there is a universal truth to be grasped by all rational subjects independently of the particular lives they happen to lead. The truth appears differently to the Peripatetic than to the Stoic because each lives in a different way. The life that each one leads brings him to hold a different set of beliefs. At no point does Cicero countenance the possibility that we could discover an abstract and universal truth comprehensible to all rational subjects independently of the ethical and political choices each makes with respect to his own life. One’s relationship to the political order and to oneself are therefore not irrelevant factors in deciding whether one is, in Foucault’s words, “a subject capable of the truth.”

This raises the important question of how, if there is no universal standard of truth, we can be sure that a person is practically intelligent. There must be some criteria by which a person can be judged to possess practical knowledge, and indeed, we will not have fully understood practical intelligence until we have understood how it manifests itself in a particular kind of action. For practical knowledge exists in its relationship to praxis and is nothing without its practical results.

In fact, in answering the question of how practical intelligence manifests itself, we shall find further evidence of what we already suspected—that there is no universal standard of truth for Cicero. For if there were a universal truth, then one could decide whether people had practical intelligence or not based on whether their actions conformed to abstract truths or universally binding moral principles. But Cicero never assumes that anyone’s intelligence can be assessed by these means. On the contrary, knowledge exists insofar as it has certain consequences. But this does not mean that a person can be judged according to whether he or she succeeds at attaining determined ends.

What Foucault rightly sees is that practical knowledge is almost inseparable from its political effects. It is important that one have practical intelligence, and that one be seen to have it, because this “enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships whether as a magistrate or a friend.”³⁵ If one has practical intelligence, then one is fit to be invested with political power:

³⁵ “The Concern for the Self as Practice of Freedom,” 287.

In the abuse of power, one exceeds the legitimate exercise and imposes one's fantasies, one's appetites, and desires on others. Here we have the image of the tyrant, or simply of the rich and powerful man who uses wealth and power to abuse others, to impose an unwarranted power on them. But one can see—in any case, this is what the Greek philosophers say—that such a man is a slave of his appetites. And the good ruler is precisely the one who exercises his power as it ought to be exercised, that is, simultaneously exercising his power over himself. And it is the power over oneself that thus regulates the power over others.³⁶

Like Cicero, Foucault sees it as a political necessity that the social sphere be under the direction of particular individuals—only those individuals who have a kind of *constantia*.³⁷ This kind of *constantia*, Foucault also sees, would not be possible if the individual did not have a special “mode of knowing.” For “if you know...” he explains, “what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death—if you know all this you cannot abuse your power over others.”³⁸

In *The Government of Oneself and of Others*, Foucault begins to grasp the extent to which a kind of knowledge like this, which must mold the souls of the powerful, also finds its limitations in the political sphere.³⁹ Philosophy's relative powerlessness is explained by the rhetorical discourses that already dominate the political sphere. These rhetorical discourses form a close alliance with power because they not only *can*, but also *must* function by exploiting beliefs people already have. There is certainly a demand that philosophy somehow intervene in the political sphere, but as yet no expectation that it should be able to do so directly, for there is of yet nothing like the expectation that philosophical and political discourse can be made to agree.⁴⁰ Under such conditions, philosophy can only provide some limited resistance to

³⁶ Ibid., 288.

³⁷ Ibid., 207. True wisdom consists “in never allowing ourselves to be induced to make an involuntary movement at the behest of or through the instigation of an external impulse. Rather, we must seek the point at the center of ourselves to which we will be fixed and in relation to which we will remain immobile.” Wisdom will “enable one both to achieve one's aim and to remain stable, settled on this aim, not letting oneself be swayed by anything” (240). And what the sage has is the kind of steadfastness that we have referred to as *constantia* that enables him to stand firm not only against the many beliefs that others wish to impose on him, “but also against life's dangers and the authority of those who want to lay down the law” (240).

³⁸ Ibid., 288.

³⁹ Michel Foucault. *The Government of Self and of Other: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-1983*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁴⁰ From one perspective the Stoics may surely be understood as the inheritors of the Platonic idea that there is conflict between philosophical and political life. Hence Marcus Aurelius' sobering words of warning: “don't hope for Plato's Republic” (*Med.* 9.29). If Reydam-Schils shows us anything by lingering on this and similar remarks, it is that the Stoic philosophers were painfully aware of the bitter disappointment political life was sure to bring (86). She also illustrates that if this gap between philosophy and politics can be closed in Platonism, it will only occur in the extremely unlikely event that the *polis* is transformed into a *kallipolis* or ‘beautiful city.’ “Only in the transformed state, which has come as close as possible to desired perfection, will the philosopher, if reluctantly, accept the burden of rule and be king.” Socrates claims that otherwise, philosophers are without incentive to enter politics (520e). The gap between philosophy and politics remains unabridged; philosophers “stay aloof from the political scene because they have acquired their knowledge in spite of, and in opposition to, a corrupting environment” (84); the source of the gulf resides, as Reydam-Schils suggests, in the nature of philosophical knowledge itself. But the nature of philosophical knowledge changes with Stoicism. Philosophical knowledge is transformed under Stoicism into the knowledge of the political role one ought to

rhetorical discourses dominating the political sphere, and this it can only do by approaching the political sphere indirectly via the king. Philosophers can attempt to reform the soul of the king, and to bring a temperance and harmony to reign in his soul—a *constantia*, in other words—that will be reflected in his kingdom.

It is, however, not difficult to decide whether someone has practical intelligence and thus, ought to be allowed to hold political office. Cicero would not be lacking a means of evaluating a person's character even if he did not know the *telos* or the *archê* of his action. If there is a mismatch between these *archê* and the action that follows from it, this is an important indicator. If a person is subject to false beliefs, then we should expect to find him or her engaging in action in which the *telos*, apparently striven for, does not seem consistent with the *archai* prompting action. The action appears immoderate, disproportionate to its cause, unprovoked. This is another way of saying the action exhibits *inconstantia*.

In a life in which every action responds *inappropriately* to these *archai*, every action will appear to deviate from the path of the last. One action will appear to move in one direction, and another a different one. Thus, action will not move consistently in one direction—that of the final *telos*—over the course of a life. What we can expect to see in a life lived in proper reaction to the *archai* is a steady, reliable, unswerving movement in the direction of a single *telos*.

This is why we find in many a passage in Cicero that great stress is placed on the *constantia* that we observe in each others' actions. In passages like the following, that *constantia* that Cicero finds betrayed in even the minutest and seemingly most insignificant of actions retains an unparalleled importance when it comes to deciding who is worthy of respect and trust:

Again is there nothing in the movements and postures of the body which nature herself judges to be of importance? A man's mode of walking and sitting, his particular cast of features and expression—is there nothing in these things that we consider worthy or unworthy of a free man? Do we not often think people deserving of dislike who, by some movement or posture, appear to have violated a law of nature? (*Fin.* V.xii.47)

What one reveals in his or her “mode of walking and sitting, his particular cast of features and expression” is whether one is in tune with nature. Notice, however, what Cicero could say but does not: He could say that our own knowledge of nature affords us such a secure grasp of nature, that nature then becomes the known standard by which another person's actions could be measured. But in Cicero, there is absolutely no sense in which nature is first known, and then used as a mental measure or standard to which individual actions are held up and then compared.⁴¹ And this reluctance on the part of Cicero and the Stoics to pretend that nature

play in the social environment (90). Philosophical knowledge spurs us to action in the political realm, and gives us no less incentive to act when conditions are less than ideal. This means that, from a certain perspective, the degree of conflict between philosophy and politics is diminished in Stoicism. But I aver this is also because the Stoic's knowledge only permits him or her to make “indirect” use of it in politics. See Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, Chapter Three, 83-113.

⁴¹ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 261. Stoics do not seek to discover how far and in what manner they have deviated from a course of action or development it is in their nature to follow. “This is a curious aspect of Stoicism, one that appears all the more curious because of the Stoics' constant appeals to nature and their demand for action that conforms to it: The Stoics very rarely carry to modern extremes our own habit of harshly judging as ‘deviants’ those whose behavior seems aberrant in comparison with a clearly defined standard of ‘naturalness’ and ‘normalcy.’ There is no question of knowing nature in such a way that one could use one's understanding of what is ‘natural’ to judge

gives us a model that can be grasped mentally with enough lucidity to be held up to the actions as the single standard of their comparison explains the fact that the only standard by which actions are judged seems undeniably aesthetic, as can be seen in all the following passages:

Let our standing, our walking, our sitting, our reclining, our countenances, and our eyes and the movements of our hands all maintain what I have called seemliness. (*De Off.* I.xxv.128)

Just as it is unseemly to act beneath what a role commands (or to do something unworthy of the part one is playing), it is also unseemly to overdo it. In this, in dress, and in most things, a mediate course is best. (*De Off.* I.xxvi.130)

There are two types of beauty (*pulchritudinis*), one includes gracefulness (*venustas*) and the other dignity (*dignitas*). We ought to think of grace as a feminine quality and dignity as a masculine one. Therefore, a person should remove from his person every unworthy adornment, and also be aware of comparable faults in his gestures and movements. For the movements taught in the palestra are often somewhat distasteful (*odiosiores*), and some of the gestures used by actors are not free from affectation (*ineptiis non vacant*). In either case what is *upright* (*recta*) and *straightforward* (*simplicia*) is praised. (*De Off.* I.xxxvi.130)

We must be aware of adopting too feminine a languidness in our gait, so that we look like carriages in solemn procession, or of making excessive haste when we are in a hurry. If we do that, we begin to puff and pant, and our expressions change, and we distort our faces. Such things are strong signs that we do not possess constancy. (*De Off.* I.xxxvi.131)

And Cicero is not alone. Seneca mentions among tertiary goods “a decorous gait, an expression which is sedate and proper, and a posture which is suitable for a man of good sense” (*Ep.* lxvi.5). The fact that the considerations at play here seem to be more aesthetic than moral is hard to explain from a modern point of view that takes moral actions to be judged by their adherence to a standard grasped intellectually. According to the modern point of view, actions are only valuable insofar as they conform to a rational principle, or insofar as they are subsumable under a universal rule. But we have already seen in what sense Stoic philosophy revolts against this ethical model by treating every situation, every action, as one unique, as one demanding a unique response, so we already understand why an action would, for Cicero, be impossibly evaluated in terms of its conformity with a universal standard applying to all situations.

Absent any overarching standard or external measure, which any single person could claim to know and by which they could measure the truth or goodness of another’s actions, the actions cannot be evaluated by their conformity with an external principle—only in terms of their conformity with each other. Thus, Cicero’s expectation is that even the smallest movements exhibit a kind of orderliness and regularity that betrays the constancy of the actor. The fact that they are in harmony with each other means that the actor is in harmony with

another ‘unnatural.’ But here the Stoics are simply in line with the rest of ancient culture, which did not turn ethical matters into a question of normalcy or deviance, even where things like sex were concerned directly.”

him- or herself. Thus, one could say with some justice that the only remaining criterion by which actions can be judged appears to be aesthetic.⁴²

Foucault would therefore be right to say that the project of fashioning the self⁴³ has an aesthetic character, not just, as he seems to imply, because we are all artists who creatively incorporate into our lives the things of which we want to see it composed. However, we shall see in the following chapter that there is some truth to Foucault's claim. Rather, to say that self-formation takes on an aesthetic cast is simply to contrast it with a kind of self-formation that is judged by the conformity of the finished product to an external standard, whether it be an *eidōs* or any fixed standard. The aesthetic is that which, since it cannot be judged by its relationship to an external standard, can only be judged by an internal one—more specifically, that of the relationship of the parts to themselves. According to such a definition of the aesthetic, the self and its activities are indeed an artwork that is only judged by the harmony of its parts with each other.

And yet it must not be forgotten that this internal consistency, though it is valuable in itself, indicates to the onlooker that an actor has attained a consistency with nature. This guarantees that action arises from the perception of the truth as nature has revealed it to the actor. The actor's accord with an externally existing reality is what makes possible his or her ability to remain in accord with him- or herself:

The power of nature and reason is not insignificant in this too, that this one animal alone perceives what order there is, what seemliness, and what limits to words and deeds. No other animal, therefore, perceives the beauty, the loveliness, and the congruence of the parts, of the things that sight perceives. Nature and reason transfer this by analogy from the eyes to the mind, thinking that beauty, constancy, and order should be preserved, and much more so, in one's decisions and in one's deeds. (*De Off.* I.ii14)

Here, Cicero explains the Stoic's valuation of his own internal harmony with his anterior grasp of the harmony he sees in nature. Once he has seen that nature possesses a certain regularity and consistency, he comes to expect that his own actions, insofar as they are guided by nature, will form an extension of it and manifest this same consistency.

If we become aware of ourselves as craftsmen it is because we realize we are more like true *artists*—like dancers and musicians in being aware of the necessary order and sequence of their component parts that make up their performance. The new level of moral awareness to which we are catapulted by the awareness that our actions have this sequential order to them is

⁴² “What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something specialized and done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?” Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 261.

⁴³ Here there is great potential for misunderstanding Foucault's occasional claims that it is the “self” that is worked upon, shaped, molded, and given a particular form. Foucault actually claims that it was originally not as a *technê* of the self, but as a *technê tou biou*, as a *technê* of ‘how to live’ that Stoicism began. And he himself says that it is “the idea of the *bios* as material for an aesthetic piece of art” that fascinates him (*Ibid.*, 260). This way of speaking more accurately captures the sense in which Stoic life was centered upon actively selecting the actions and behaviors of which living was to consist, and doing so in such a way as to reflect some aesthetic values. Of course, choosing what to do and how to live also amounts to choosing the self that one is on the way to becoming. Thus, Foucault observes the way in which, quite expectedly with late Stoicism, the *technê tou biou* began to be thought of as a *technê of the self*.

precisely the awareness that it is this order that counts, and not the endpoints toward which we formerly strived; it is the moment at which we become aware that we can give up being menial laborers enslaved to certain ends and embrace our own life's performance as though we were dancers following a series of steps, musicians playing a series of notes, or actors reciting scripted lines:

For just as an actor or dancer has assigned to him not any but a certain particular part or dance, so life has to be conducted in a certain fixed way, and not in any way we like. This fixed way we speak of as conformable and suitable (*conveniēns consentaneumque*). In fact, we do not consider wisdom (*sapientiam*) to be like seamanship, or medicine, but rather like the areas of acting or dancing just mentioned; its end being the actual exercise of the art, is contained within the art itself, and is not something extraneous to it. (*Fin.* III.viii.24)⁴⁴

The distinctions made between ethical choice and artistic knowledge are made, never with the aim of distinguishing the first as a separate kind of activity than art, nor even with the aim of classing it among a species of artistic endeavor hardly recognizable as such.⁴⁵ The aim is to show how certain arts acquire a value of their own independent of their products. Thus, for Cicero, ethical thinking remains continuous with technical thinking, though like many arts it can and does take on artistic qualities, becoming estimable not just because of its products—but because of the fact that it seems to follow a pattern from an *arché* to a *telos*, though in the art of life, both the *arché* and also the *telos* are unknown.

It might be thought that Cicero is doing something unusual by bringing aesthetic concerns into ethical matters. But the word for the honorable or praiseworthy, *honestum*, is his own translation of the Greek *to kalon*, 'the fine' or 'the beautiful' (*Fin.* II.xvi.47). What place does beauty occupy in the pantheon of the classical virtues? If we were to continue to dissect virtue into the many faces it shows us, we would find that one of the aspects it presented to us could be described as *decorum*.⁴⁶ Wisdom, justice, and courage, subsumed under the larger category of greatness of soul, are all accounted for in Cicero. They are the different faces that virtue shows us when it is viewed from different perspectives. But *decorum* is his word for the outward aspect virtue shows us when physically viewed from the outside. As a philosophical

⁴⁴ We should, however, resist the urge to say that the Stoic art is *praxis* rather than *poiēsis* for reasons that will become clear in Chapter Five. That is because the Stoics also challenged the very distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, which Cicero exploits here for rhetorical effect. He places the Stoic art of life on a continuum, with the Epicurean art of life being the most *poietic* and the Stoic most like *praxis*.

⁴⁵ It is important to recall that Cicero at no point appeals to the idea of a stochastic art here. Alexander of Aphrodisias, who also struggled to understand the paradoxical nature of such arts, identified as stochastic all which perform their *ergon* even though they may fail to attain their *telos*. But importantly, he did not mention the Stoics in connection with this idea. Cicero will never have recourse to the class of stochastic arts in order to describe the art of life, and with good reason. For the Stoics, the *telos* of the art of life is *eudaimonia*, and the attainment of this *telos* is solely dependent upon the correct performance of the art. The Stoics would never say that it was possible for the art of life to correctly perform its *ergon* but not to bring about *eudaimonia*, its *telos*. See Sellars, *The Art of Life*, p. 73; Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quest.* 61-1-28, *SVF* 3.19.

⁴⁶ For Cicero, all virtues are grasped under the Latin term *decorum*. *Decorum* is a single word applied to anyone who respects limits, and for the Stoics it is precisely the limits set by reason that a person must respect if he or she wishes to respect all the others. All lesser virtues associated with *decorum* spring from the reason's ability to set limits on impulse (*De Off.* I.xxv.26-I.il.146). See Malcolm Schofield, "The Fourth Virtue," in *Cicero's Practical Philosophy*, ed. Walter Nicgorski (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 58-79.

term of art, *decorum* embraces a whole range of meanings that no single English word can capture at once, least of all the word ‘seemliness,’ by which it is usually translated, since it can be used to denote everything from grace and beauty at its most literal, to gloriousness and nobility, and by extension, to suitability and propriety. Cicero describes it in a long but important passage that deserves quoting *in extenso*:

Next we must discuss the one remaining element of honorableness (*parte honestatis*). Under this appears a sense of shame and what one might call the ordered beauty of a life (*ornatus vitae*), restraint and modesty, a calming of all the agitations of the spirit, and due measure in all things. Under this heading is what in Latin may be called *decorum* [seemliness; the Greek word for it is *prepon*]. The essence of this is that it cannot be separated from what is honorable: for what is seemly is honorable, and what is honorable is seemly. It is easier to grasp than to explain what the difference is between what is *seemly* (*quod deceat*). For whatever it may be, what is seemly is manifested then when the honorable proceeds it. For this reason, what is seemly appears not only in the part of the honorable that we must discuss here, but also in the first three parts: it is seemly to use reason and speech sensibly, to do what one does with forethought, in everything, to see and to gaze on what is true. On the other hand, mistakes, errors, lapses, misjudgments are as unseemly as delirious insanity. Seemly, too, is everything that is just, being dishonorable, is unseemly. There is a similar story to tell about courage: what is done in a great and manly spirit seems worthy of a human being and seemly, as for the opposite, being dishonorable, it is unseemly. Therefore, this seemliness of which I speak relates to the whole of honorableness; and it is related in such a way that it is not seen by esoteric reasoning, but springs ready into view (*ut non recondite quadam ratione cernatur, sed sit in promptu*). For there is indeed such a thing as the seemly, and one grasps that it is in every virtue. It is, however, more easily separated from virtue in thought than in fact. Just as bodily loveliness cannot be separated from healthiness, similarly, the seemliness that we are discussing is indeed completely blended (*confusum*) with virtue, but is distinguished by thought and reflection. But furthermore, this has two senses: first, we understand a seemliness of a general kind, involved with honorable behavior as a whole. And secondly, something subordinate to this, which relates to an individual element of what is honorable. The former is customarily defined as something like this: what is seemly is that which agrees with the excellence of man just where his nature differs from that of other creatures. Their definition of the part subordinate to this takes the seemly to be that which agrees with nature, in such a way that moderation and restraint appear in it, along with the appearance of a gentleman. We are able to infer that it is grasped in this way from that seemliness to which poets aspire. We say that poets ‘observe what is seemly’ when what is said and done is worthy of the role. If Aeacus or Minos were to say, ‘Let them hate provided that they fear,’ or ‘The father himself is the children’s tomb,’ it would seem unseemly because we believe them to have been just men. When Atreus says it, however, there is loud applause: the words are worthy of his role. The poets, though, will judge what is seemly for each by his role; but nature has imposed upon us a role that greatly excels and surpasses that of other creatures. Poets, therefore, will look to what is suitable and seemly for a huge variety of roles, even wicked ones, but our parts have been given to us by nature: since they are ones of constancy, of moderation, and of restraint, of a sense of shame, and since the same nature teaches us to be mindful of how we act toward other men, we see

how apparent is not only that seemliness which extends over all that is honorable, but also that which is seen in one part of virtue. For just as the eye is aroused by the beauty of the body, because of the appropriate arrangement of the limbs (*apta compositione membrorum*), and is delighted just because all its parts are in graceful harmony, so this seemliness, shining out in one's life (*elucet in vita*), arouses the approval of one's fellows (*movet approbationem eorum*), because of the order and constancy and moderation of every word and action. (*De Off.* I.xxvii.93-xxviii.98)

In this passage we see how close is the association between the temperance or moderation of which we spoke in the previous chapter, and the appearance of proportion and harmony it gives when viewed by onlookers. The lack of impulse leading to behavior that appears “excessive,” either because it appears a disproportionate response to events, or because it seems to conflict with other impulses—this is what creates *decorum*. Thus, Greek *sophrosunê* or ‘temperance’—that all-important Stoic virtue—takes on a new life in Cicero where it becomes all but indistinguishable from the Roman *decorum*.⁴⁷

This visible aspect that virtue shows spectators, and which Cicero often describes as radiating a light for all to see, would be less important from a Foucauldian point of view if it were not for the important fact that *the gaze of the other* becomes all-important. Far from being excluded from ethical life, others retain a decisive role. They never claim to know the truth and to transmit it to us as though it were one of the ordinary *technê*. Nevertheless, the other has a role to play insofar as he or she has just as much the potential for knowing us as we retain for knowing ourselves. The other has an authority to be trusted, and then his advice is sought because he can perceive our failings, not because they fail to meet a standard of his or her own, but because they can perceive our failure to remain internally inconsistent:

Painters and makers of statues, and even poets indeed, each want the public to inspect their work, so that they may correct anything that most people criticize; they ask not only themselves, but others too, what is wrong with it. In the same way, there are very many occasions on which we ought to rely on the judgment of others in choosing or rejecting, altering or correcting, our actions. (*De Off.* I.xii.147)

Here we see how important it is that virtue be conceived as a *performance or display* that is there for the other to inspect, and in this sense Foucault finds the impulse towards self-disclosure, self-display to resemble and yet differ from that found in early Christianity. The Stoic puts himself on display for reasons other than to expose secrets lurking in the depths of his soul. The Stoic puts himself on display because the “artwork” he is creating needs the discriminating eyes of others to be seen correctly.

What's more, it is not simply by upholding the views of the majority that one gains the expertise that qualifies one as a competent judge of character. Nor is it that everyone is born with the equal capacity to judge the artwork. In Stoicism, there is nothing definite to recommend a person as an expert, except his or her own seeming consistency with him- or herself. Others have the right to judge the artwork that is the self only if they have

⁴⁷ Since the question is not one of conformity or nonconformity to a pre-established, fixed standard, but of curbing impulses that are excessive and disproportionate in relation to each other, Foucault observes rightly of the practice of ethics, “The problem is not one of deviancy, but of excess and moderation.” Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 261.

demonstrated a relationship with themselves of harmony and self-mastery. If they have not established mastery over themselves, then they are powerless to critique the mastery of others. Cicero even says that, because their own actions are all in tune with each other, they are more keenly aware and sensitive to dissonances in the actions of others than other spectators would be:

However, greater care is required to avoid failings that seem minor and cannot be recognized by most people. If a lyre or a flute is only slightly out of tune a knowledgeable person will still usually notice it. We ought to see that nothing in our lives happens to be discordant (*discrepent*), in just the same way—or rather, as much more as the harmony of actions is greater than that of sounds. The ears of musicians can perceive that lyres are even the smallest bit out of tune; similarly, if we are ourselves willing to notice faults keenly and carefully, we shall often grasp important things from small indications. We shall readily be able to judge what is done fittingly (*apte*), and what discords (*discrepet*) with duty and nature, for a glance of the eyes, for the relaxation or contraction of an eyebrow, for sadness, cheerfulness or laughter, from speech or from silence, from a raising or lowering of the voice, and so on. (*De Off.* I.xl.145-xli.146)

We are not able to impose regulation on things, but are able to regulate our minds. If an actor makes a movement that is a little out of time with the music, or recites a verse that is one syllable too short or too long, he is hissed and hooted off the stage: in real life, will you, whose conduct ought to be more controlled (*moderatio*) than any stage gesture, more accurately proportioned (*aptior*) than any verse of poetry, say that you transgress by only a single syllable. I will not listen to a poet when he transgresses in trifles. (Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* II.26)

How could they appear small in size, when every transgression is a transgression caused by the dislocation of system and order (*perturbation peccetur rationis atque ordinis*), but when system and order have once been dislocated, nothing can be added to make a greater degree of transgression appear possible? (Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* II.26)

Thus it is that even the slightest of movements can be subjected to the inspection of a keen observer. For Foucault, this would reflect the lack in the ancient world of the modern belief that one's rational capacities alone would suffice to provide one knowledge of the truth, if we could just be sure they were used properly. In the modern epoch, "knowledge and knowledge alone gives access to the truth."⁴⁸ But as we can clearly see, one's knowledge of the truth in Cicero cannot be weighed apart from the judgment of experts who have themselves undertaken the art of self-transformation.

Virtue has its outward aspect and it manifests a beauty insofar as it evinces an internal harmony. But it cannot be forgotten that virtue is the outwardly beautiful manifestation of a harmony *with nature*. Herein lies the difficulty. A question always arises as to whether it is more the internal consistency of an actor with himself that should be favored or the consistency of an actor with an external "reality" that the onlooker takes for granted. But to presume that the choice is, in any given situation, as straightforward as this is to presume that one is certain

⁴⁸ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 17.

enough about the “objective” truth to know when one is choosing between it and one’s self-consistency. This is the question with which we, as commentators, have tried to decide for the Stoics, and yet a Stoic, assuming that he or she will be in harmony with himself or herself when he or she is in harmony with nature, will only have to make such a choice when the truth is unclear. In a world in which we can neither be sure if our grasp of reality is correct, we either have to demand of ourselves that we emulate Socrates in remaining consistent with ourselves, hoping that this consistency shows our superior grasp of a truth that may otherwise be invisible to onlookers—or we sacrifice this consistency so as to remain in harmony with a reality that we and the rest of humanity may experience as such, but which may prove false. The question is then *not* whether to choose objective truth or self-consistency. The question is whether, in our search for truth and self-consistency, we should, when faced with the inevitable limitations of our human knowledge, and with a situation in which, either because the *world* is false or *we* are, there is a choice which is forced between self-consistency and an apparent truth. In other words, the question is whether we should err on the side of self-consistency or the appearing world. The fact that Cicero’s *De Finibus* ends with the a symbolic choice which must be made between the Stoic who remains consistent with himself at the expense of appearances, and the Peripatetic who remains consistent with the appearing world at the cost of self-consistency—this shows Cicero does not presume to resolve the problem once and for all.

- CHAPTER FOUR -

THE MEANING OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISE
AND ASCETIC PRACTICE IN STOICISM

Virtutes discere vitia dediscere est.

‘Learning virtue is unlearning vices.’

- Seneca, *Ep.* 1.7

Hadot broke new ground when he insisted that, for the Stoics, the path to greater enlightenment lay through a regime of training and exercise. But with the notable exception of John Sellars, who has gone further than anyone else in attempting to understand the role *askêsis* or ‘exercise’ and its bearing upon *logos*, one does not find a broad consensus among scholars that Stoic philosophy “involves not just logos but *askêsis*.”¹ One occasionally finds scholars occupied with the question of what the Stoic has to learn, to know, in order to become virtuous. But all mention of *how* the Stoic learns something new by any means but the usual ones—reasoned argument and tutelary instruction—is conspicuously absent from this literature. For most, the training and exercise Stoics undergo seems peripheral, incidental to the search for truth.

This is indicative of the general presumption that we have already begun to cast into doubt—the presumption that Stoics like Cicero and Seneca seek a knowledge resting upon universal moral foundations. On the contrary, they seek a knowledge of how to act in concrete situations that does not take its directive from universal principles or other theoretical abstractions. What follows should serve to reinforce the point that the Stoics seek to instill in themselves a way of perceiving and responding to the world that remains imminent to the situation in which they find themselves and make minimal appeal to philosophic and scientific truth. The same point that was made in the last chapter can be made in a different way, by understanding why Cicero and Seneca put praxis before theory, and—when they do have recourse to theory—when theory subordinates itself to practical ends.

Why, for example, might they have placed increased importance on daily practice and repeated exercise as a means of discovering truth? This will undoubtedly strike most trained philosophers as strange. Philosophy, in fact, takes it as its task to explain in what way our rational faculties suffice to allow us to grasp the truth. To quote Foucault’s definition of philosophy:

We will call ‘philosophy’ the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of

¹ Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 10.

the subject's access to the truth. If we call this 'philosophy,' then I think we would call 'spirituality' the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth.²

We philosophers have grown accustomed to the idea that if we can gain access to the truth at all it is because we are rational subjects who possess one or another rational faculty. Despite what they say about our human inherent rationality, according to the Stoics, there is nothing about the condition in which we as rational subjects presently find ourselves that will, on its own, allow us to perceive the truth. Like other "spiritualists," the Stoics believe we have to take active steps toward personal self-transformation as "the price to be paid for access to the truth."³ It is with justice then that Foucault classes them not among philosophers, but among "spiritualists," who believe one must transform oneself to see the truth. These practices, I argue, are the very heart and soul of Stoicism. Stoicism, it will be argued, may have its own doctrines, but it *is* first and foremost *a set of practices*—not, as even Sellars claims, a body of doctrine to be first learned and *then* applied.⁴

Stoicism it seems, is not to be identified as a body of doctrine that must be learned and applied, in a top-down manner. It is rather, much more centrally, a series of daily exercises for dislodging and extricating false beliefs—from the ground up. I argue that the goal is to liberate the mind from false beliefs, *not* as most commentators argue, as a step on the path to the attainment of a higher, more philosophical knowledge, but to remove false beliefs purely and simply in order to allow the mind to function as it *naturally* does, once these *unnatural* impediments to its functioning are removed.

² Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 15.

³ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.

⁴ Sellars, *The Art of Life*, Ch.2, 33-53. Sellars argues that the place of *praxis* in Stoic philosophy is best understood in view of Socrates' claim that virtue is a *technê* concerned with transforming one's *bios* in which *askêsis* is assigned a prominent place alongside *logos*. But the same criticism Sellars directs at Nussbaum could be directed at Sellars himself: "she is herself far from clear concerning how one should understand the relationship between rational arguments and the philosophical techniques which she also acknowledges to be vital" (117). The analogy with Socrates surely equips Sellars to deflect those objections raised against the art of life by Sextus Empiricus. The claim that the Stoics seem to have an art which is not teachable can be met by pointing out that Socrates has a virtue that he communicates to students, not because he had a *logos* about virtue, but because he could lead by example and expose the inconsistencies in everyone else's account of virtue (Chapter Four, 103). But the precise nature of the relationship between *logos* and *askêsis*, which is ambiguous in Plato, is not much clarified when Sellars turns for inspiration to the *Gorgias*, where he learns that, "It is not enough for the apprentice shoemaker to grasp the theoretical principles (*logoi*) behind his chosen craft; he must also train (*askêô*) in order to translate that theoretical understanding into practical ability." What this means is that, for all his efforts to show that, among the Stoics, practice was paramount, Sellars still holds fast to the idea that theory is our primary means of attaining knowledge and practice is the mere "putting-into-practice" of knowledge that must be attained *by other means* (84). Simply put, "Philosophical exercises cannot replace theory" (110). So the essential, but ultimately secondary role that Sellars assigns to *praxis*, does not prevent him from seeing the relationship between theory and *praxis* as a simple one of "application" in which theory maintains the preeminent place. His claim is this: "despite the central role of practical training (*askêsis*) in philosophy conceived as art (*technê*), this does not imply any rejection or devaluation of philosophical discourse as theory (*logos*). Rather, philosophical exercise should be understood as a supplement to such theory" (108). This secondary role that Sellars assigns to *praxis*, and that he consistently refers to as "supplementary" explains why even Epictetus is interpreted to "draw attention to the need for theoretical education before one attempts such actions" (109).

VESTIGES OF PLATONISM

But the question of how one attains the truth through spiritual exercise and to what end, and more importantly the *kind* of truth it is, one finds bound up with the question of Platonism. The Stoics, scholars seem ready to admit, are not Platonic in any conventional sense,⁵ and they are, therefore, clearly not dualists. But while it is denied that the Stoics' own metaphysics would ever involve passing from a lower to a higher plane of existence, material reality giving way to disembodied truth, what lingers unchallenged is an assumption that has less to do with a correct understanding of Stoic metaphysics than with the nature of truth itself, and what is required in order to pass from an imperfect to a more perfect grasp of it.

What persists among readers of the Stoics, in various forms, is the assumption that the very nature of the search for truth requires a more perfect grasp of those of the world's features that are universal, timeless, and unchanging. Nobody is quite agreed upon what these features of the world might be, but everyone agrees that, in order to grasp the truth at all, the human intellect must take hold of precisely what is atemporal and universal in the world. In other words, truth still exists to be grasped in the manner of a Platonic form. Although the specter of Platonic dualism has nominally been laid to rest, Platonic habits of speaking reassert themselves against authors' explicit intentions. This is because certain very Platonic assumptions remain: (1) that in order to attain the truth, we must intellect some feature of the world that is atemporal and universal, and therefore (2) that necessarily, the particular, situated character of our subjective experience is an obstacle to be overcome. It is precisely because these assumptions persist that, along with them, persists the tendency to assume that truth cannot be attained from a perspective that is always incorrectly taken to be *purely and solely* subjective, and that in fact subjectivity is something to always be "risen above" or "transcended" if truth is to be attained.⁶

There is, no doubt, an arresting resemblance between Stoicism and the Platonic-Christian tradition. Both philosophies strive to free the soul from external encumbrances that impede its free functioning and prevent it from perceiving the truth. Both do so by making an appeal to a truth expanding beyond the confines of our limited, first-person perspective. These similarities between Stoicism and Platonism, which Foucault left to the side, we emphasize here in order to foreground the real differences between the two. For the Stoic approach to ethical life is, after all, very different from the Platonic one of which we are all the heirs. The differences include Stoicism's (1) refusal to assign universal and atemporal truth supreme importance in ethical life, (2) its refusal of any robust sense of an "inner self," and (3) its undertaking a search for truth that does not involve turning away from the world toward the inner self.

The difference goes much deeper to what the search for the truth requires. For to seek truth, we shall assume, always requires some *work* on the part of the subject. The ancients called this *askêsis*, and in the word itself lies the problem, a problem indicated by our derived term 'asceticism.' It suggests that attaining truth *requires* putting aside or casting off the subjective self and its various beliefs and desires. This in turn, implies that we can distinguish two parts of the

⁵ See Appendix Four.

⁶ Even Gill, who could find in Foucault a sympathetic compatriot in his crusade to liberate Stoicism from its association with modern subjectivity, ultimately repeats without criticism the assumption that he leaves us with a subjectivist's approach to truth that must ultimately be transcended in the pursuit of objectivity. Gill, *The Structured Self*, 328-335.

self, one that can perceive the truth and another that cannot. Perhaps then, it is not just our residual Platonism, which always distinguishes between what Hadot calls a “partial self” and a “higher self,” but *askêsis itself* that seems to entail Platonic dualism. It is Cicero, however, who raises the question of whether it is possible to have Stoicism without Platonic dualism, and it is to his way of posing the question that we now turn.

CICERO’S *PHAEDO*

The following addresses a very old question, the question of precisely what kind of asceticism the Stoics endorsed. This question is especially pressing because, almost as long as Stoics have walked the earth, there has existed, in the popular imagination, a kind of caricature of the Stoic. He is unmoved by personal attachments, unperturbed by his emotions, unflinching in the face of pain.

Indeed, this caricature has been long applied to philosophy itself, something Plato observes when his Socrates acknowledges that in order to be reborn as a philosopher one must, it seems, die to the world. The *Phaedo* is Plato’s response to the way people had already begun to satirize the life of the philosopher as so remote and withdrawn as to hardly be any life at all—the life of an already dead man. In that dialogue, Socrates not only embraced the stereotype, but he affirmed that the philosopher must strive to remain as unaffected by the physical world as possible.

In Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* what is presumed necessary is a certain amount of detachment because all of the conversations revolve around the question of how to cure oneself of the fear of death, grief at another’s death, the lust for external goods, and the emotions generally. I say “detachment” because that word probably captures better than any other the way in which some people sever the affective links binding them to the world so that things in it no longer provoke the same response in them.

The question of whether this detachment is to take as extreme a form as that portrayed in the *Phaedo* is raised immediately. In a scene deliberately evocative of that dialogue, it is asked how one inures oneself against the fear of death. Cicero then sets about giving some explicitly Platonic arguments for the immortality of the soul, as the easiest and most direct way to cure his friend of his fear of death. One can only remain unaffected by the loss of the physical world, it would seem, if one already imagines oneself capable of living independently of it. What is much more interesting, however, is the fact that, once Cicero is done making this argument, he begins to reflect with skepticism on the whole idea that emotional detachment from the world may be purchased only at the cost of metaphysical dualism, i.e. the belief that we are *already detached* from it, in a sense, as potentially disembodied spirits. Confessing his skepticism about the ability of the soul to live, much less to thrive, independently of the physical world, he says, “I am not without hopes that such may be our fate. But admit what they assert—that the soul does not continue to exist after death” (I.xxxiv).

At this crucial juncture, a challenge is issued that is interesting insofar as the Stoics claimed Socrates as their philosophic forbearer. The challenge is to see whether Cicero can instill Stoic emotional detachment in his friend without relying on the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Of course, Cicero immediately confesses the difficulty of the challenge. He knows not how to stake his asceticism on anything but the claim that the things that we usually regard as a help to us in worldly life are actually a hindrance to the immortal soul:

What makes us uneasy, or rather, gives us pain, is the leaving of all the good things of life. But just consider if I might not more properly say, leaving the evils of life; only there is no reason for my now occupying myself in bewailing the life of man, and yet I might, with very good reason. But what occasion is there, when what I am laboring to prove is that no one is miserable after death, to make life more miserable by lamenting over it. (I.xxxiv.45)

What a poor job Cicero would do of convincing us to peaceably leave our worldly home behind if he could only do so by convincing us that we never should have wanted to be caged here to begin with. Fortunately, he does not conceive it as his task to cure us of our attachments to the world by needlessly disparaging it. Rather, he sees it as his task to show us that we can bear the loss of the world because there is a part of us that loses nothing in losing it.

But is there even a single part of us that remains perfect and intact and lacking nothing after the body, the senses, and the material conditions needed for its survival have been stripped away? Wouldn't that mean believing in something capable of slipping away from the body intact upon death—something like the Platonic soul?

Cicero says that the goods of which we feel most deprived by an early death are the future goods we think are yet to come in life (I.xl.52). But we would not fear even the loss of these potential goods, if we knew that we could take comfort in something remaining after death, from which death would subtract nothing:

But death truly is then met with the greatest tranquility when the dying man can comfort himself with his own praise. No one dies too soon who has finished the course of perfect virtue. I myself have known many occasions when I have seemed in danger of immediate death; oh! How I wish it had come to me! For I have gained nothing by the delay. I had gone over and over again the duties of life; nothing remained but to contend with fortune. If reason, then, cannot sufficiently fortify us to enable us to feel a contempt for death, at all events let our past life prove that we have lived long enough, and even longer than was necessary; for notwithstanding the deprivation of sense, the dead are not without that good which particularly belongs to them, namely, the praise and glory they have acquired, even though they are not sensible of it. For although there be nothing in glory to make it desirable, yet it follows virtue as its shadow. (I.xlv.58)

In order to bear the loss of the world, we must believe in something that we never lose, even in death, and while it might be absurd to find such a thing in a part of the self whose ability to perform as usual is never lost, even when the world itself is, there is another possibility. Our own activity, if it is virtuous, has an inherent value that, once it has been attained, can neither be diminished nor in any way lost.

It is of course a strange and paradoxical thing to assert that the value of an activity is unaffected by the very thing that brings it to a final and decisive stop. The material preconditions—the body, its sustenance and health—that are needed for that activity are removed and the activity stops. And yet to say that the activity has an inherent value is to say that it is valuable from the moment it begins, and that, being an end in itself, it does not need to attain some further in order to have attained its value. Arresting the activity does not mean that the activity is cut off before it can attain some end without which it is valueless. That is why “no one dies too soon who has finished the course of perfect virtue” (I.xlv.58). So while virtue needs

a stage for its performance as long as it lasts, the loss of that stage does nothing to effect the merit of the actions performed there, or the memory of them, which endure much longer than the material conditions that set the stage for them.

And so it is by this logic that Cicero is gradually led to think that Plato's Socrates was right after all to think that there was something that was deprived of nothing by death. Soon he finds himself quoting with approval those famous lines from the *Apology*: "And even you, my judges, you, I mean, who have voted for my acquittal, do not you fear death, for nothing bad can befall a good man, whether he be alive or dead" (xli.53). Strangely, we discover that it is only by trying to evade Platonism that Cicero eventually stumbles upon the grain of truth he long suspected it to contain. The attempt to set the conversation on non-Platonic footing only means that it winds its way back to Platonic ideas, and herein lies the real beauty of the dialogue.

If I begin by noting this, it is because it demonstrates how true it is to say that Stoic asceticism continues to raise and to consciously reflect upon a question first raised in the *Phaedo*. The question is, how we can free ourselves from the external world when it seems to hinder our activity, without simply asserting a dualism between two parts of the self, and without simply asserting that one of these two parts is more valuable than the other, and that it can exist independently of the other.

ASCETICISM AND THE SHEDDING OF FALSE BELIEFS

Ascetic practices always involve, in whole or in part, a search for truth. This crucial ingredient, which both kinds of ascetic practice share, makes it difficult to distinguish between them: they help us to become, in some sense, more enlightened than we presently are. The trouble is that if we think engaging in these practices helps us become more enlightened it is because we presume that there is a part of us that can perceive the truth, but that in order to actualize its potential, we must rid it of whatever prevents it from doing so. What prevents it from seeing the truth can be nothing other than some aspect of our present condition—our present way of perceiving the world—and that part of us must be gotten rid of in order for things to appear to us as they truly are.

Like all ascetics, the Stoics are worried about the fact that we cannot see the truth in our present condition, and the problem for them is specifically that our heads are full of falsities and half-truths that color our perception of things and obstruct our perspective on the world. In this, they displayed a common trait possessed by all ascetics—the belief that we are so corrupted in our present condition that we will not be able to see the truth *until we have undergone some personal transformation*.⁷

⁷ If it seems for even one moment that this problem is particular to the Stoics, it should be recalled that a parallel story could be told about the Aristotelians. Even though the specific source of the affliction lies, for Aristotle, in bad habits, the corrupted mind is still similarly afflicted with inability to perceive the truth. It is like a body so diseased that it no longer knows what is healthy for itself; "as in the case of bodies also, the things which are in truth wholesome are wholesome for bodies in a good condition, while for those that are diseased, other things are wholesome" (*Nic. Eth.* 1113a27). Acting toward ends but with no way to tell whether they are the right or the wrong ones, the Aristotelian finds him or herself in exactly the same position as the Stoic. If he or she is oriented toward the right ends, then good ends will appear as such; but if toward bad ones, then the bad will appear good (*Nic. Eth.* 1113a27). See Pierre Aubenque, *La prudence chez Aristote* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 46-47.

On the other hand, we cannot presume that self-transformation is undertaken in service to the attainment of a philosophic or religious truth if what we mean thereby is a timeless universal truth about the nature of reality taken as a whole. This is the first possibility to be eliminated by means of a glance at the second book of the *Tusculan Disputations*. Cicero opens by describing philosophy as the ‘gardening of the soul,’ what he calls the *cultura animi*. Philosophic practice then has the task of “weeding” the mind of false beliefs, a task which he at first claims not to require the ambitious search for higher, philosophic truths. He claims that “even that limited degree of philosophy must be of great use, and may yield fruit; not so thorough perhaps a knowledge of philosophy, but yet such as may at times deliver us from the dominion of our desires, our sorrows, and our fears” (II.ii.2).

But he immediately concedes that philosophy taken in this sense, that of ridding ourselves of the false beliefs that stir up our emotions, is not unrelated to philosophy defined as the search for knowledge of things human and divine. For Cicero, philosophy of any kind instills in us the impulse to seek the truth not just about *some* things, but about *all* things. “For,” he says, “it is difficult to have a little knowledge in philosophy without having either a great deal or all that there is: for neither can a little be selected except from much, nor, when a man has learnt a little, will he not go on with the same eagerness to master all that remains” (II.ii.2).

Cicero’s rather ambivalent feelings about this disconcerting impulse of philosophy’s to limit itself to removing error and then to turn around and seek the truth about *all* things is given expression when he observes that these two impulses that complement each other also compete with each other. Some philosophers who philosophize too much, establish too many positive beliefs, and become obsessed with the self-coherence of their own philosophic system, a system in which each of their beliefs receives support and validation from other beliefs. This means that if there is anyone from whom it is difficult to dislodge false beliefs, it is a philosopher, since as far as one can see, his or her every belief is perfectly consistent with the rest. Some philosophers, says Cicero—and here he is certainly thinking of the Stoics, famous for the internal coherence of their system—“are bound and devoted to certain predetermined opinions, and are under such an obligation to maintain them that they are forced, for the sake of consistency, to adhere to them even though they themselves do not wholly approve of them” (II.ii.5). *It all shows that the two mutually-dependent imperatives philosophy heeds come into conflict with each other: the imperative to build up belief and to destroy it. False beliefs must be exposed as false by contrast with the other beliefs with which they conflict, but the more positive beliefs one has, the less likely that one belief will appear falsely reinforced by a host of others.*

Cicero feels ambivalently about the role of the search for philosophic truth in the removal of the errors that cause *perturbationes* or ‘emotions.’ Nothing is to be learned about how he resolved the problem of uprooting error by assuming that he follows the same procedure as modern philosophers. In imitation of certain ascetics with whom they share a common lineage, modern philosophers try to put aside that part of themselves they *already* assume is corrupted with subjected biases and truth-distorting opinions, all the while presuming that, the part of them that is left over to perceive the truth *will be* the part of themselves that has the intrinsic capacity to do so. Let’s not assume from the start that Cicero shares this approach.⁸

Cicero *shows* us—rather than *tells* us—how false beliefs are uprooted. At the beginning of Book Two Cicero’s interlocutor suddenly professes to feeling less fear about his own death.

⁸ Recall that the attainment of rational desires does not correspond to the setting aside of animalistic desires (72); that a subjective perspective does not exclude an objective one (44); and that there is no self other than the embodied one. Reydams-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 35-44.

How the offending opinions—that the things of which death deprives one are needful—are rooted out and excised is an interesting question, especially in light of the fact that the preceding dialogue established nothing. But Brutus no longer believes that the things one is deprived of by death are valuable ones. This can only be explained, according to Cicero, by the fact that Brutus’ nature has predisposed him to readily accept the contrasting view that virtue is the only thing that is valuable in life. Cicero has only appealed to a part of him that already knew this to be true:

I am not at all surprised at that; it is the effect of philosophy, medicine of souls; it pulls away empty troubles, frees us from desires, and drives away fears; but its force is not the same for all; it is very powerful when it falls in with a disposition well adapted to it. For not only does Fortune, as the old proverb says, assist the bold, but *ratio* does so in a still greater degree; for it, by certain *praecepta*, as it were, lends strength to the force of strength itself. Nature gave you at birth an elevated and lofty spirit looking down on earthly things, therefore a discourse against death easily settled in a strong soul. (*Tusc.* II.iv.11)

Cicero, for one, is not surprised by the positive effect of his discourse on his friend. Those who start with false beliefs are unlikely to receive true ones with an open mind. In order to receive the truth, one has to be predisposed to accept it. Brutus’ mind seems open to the right suggestions, but as Cicero goes on to explain, this is not the case with everyone:

In the same way not all cultivated minds bear fruit; and to go on with the comparison, as a field, although it may be naturally fruitful, cannot be productive without cultivation, so neither can the mind without teaching; so is the one without the other weak. For philosophy is the cultivation of the mind: it pulls out vices by the roots; prepares the mind for the receiving of seeds; commits them to it, or, as I may say, sows them, in the hope that, when come to maturity, they may produce a plentiful harvest. (*Tusc.* II.iv.13)

The difficulty is that even while some people are receptive to philosophical truth some people are not. Indeed, despite their training, some philosophers, like fields in which seeds cannot take root, lack minds in which the truth can take hold. Education is of little avail in changing a mind full of falsehoods, and even the philosophical training by which the mind may be “weeded” of false beliefs sometimes fails when confronted with soil that is so corrupted that truth does not even have the ability to take hold there. And we are back to the problem of how one ever comes to see the truth of what one doesn’t already believe.

Let us then turn to Seneca in search of further insight. Here, Seneca sheds light on the matter by helping to clarify the way in which truth is attained through philosophic practice, relying all the while upon the same assumptions as Cicero: (1) that one of the major if not primary objectives of philosophy is to remove error, (2) that not every kind truth, especially universal or philosophic truth, suffices to rid one of error, (3) that the power of philosophic discourse to persuade largely depends upon the state or condition of the listener, (4) that if anything appears to the listener as true, it is because he or she already, in some sense, knows it to be true, and finally, (5) that there is a complicated interplay between the positive and negative function of philosophy, establishing truth and removing error.

In the pertinent letters of Seneca, he begins from an assumption that is shared by all Stoics, even if it is made especially explicit by Cicero: “Just as the sicknesses and infirmities of the body come into being when the blood is impure or when there is an excess of phlegm or bile, so also the confusion of crooked opinions and the conflict of one with another robs the mind of health and disturbs it with sickness.” At this point, Cicero says, “the Stoics, especially Chrysippus, expend a great deal of effort working out the analogy between the sicknesses of the body and those of the mind.” (*Tusc.* 3.23). Indeed, it has been established beyond any doubt that the analogy between sickness and false belief on the one hand, and philosophy and medical treatment on the other, stretches far back in the history of Stoicism.⁹ In the letters to which we shall presently turn, Seneca is also interested in philosophy as medicinal art.

But he can tell us perhaps something more than Cicero about the problem with which they were both concerned. Seneca describes this problem in these letters as that of how we should understand the relationship between the treatments that philosophy applies to the soul, truth in its various forms, and the deep-rooted illness it attempts to cure, false beliefs. For, like Cicero, he is especially concerned with the fact that, in an age of widespread disease, these treatments “are applied in vain, when wrong opinions obsess the soul” (*Ep.* xcv.4). There are certain distinctions to be made, however, that Cicero only hints at, and Seneca can tell more than Cicero himself about the finer distinctions the Stoics were accustomed to making between different *kinds* of truth, and the respective role and function of each kind of truth in curing the diseased soul.

PRAECEPTA AND DECRETA

Anyone who seeks a general ethical theory from which to deduce the means of correct deportment in particular circumstances will be disappointed with the Stoics. What they will find in Stoic texts instead are many *praecepta* or ‘precepts’—maxims to invoke in particular circumstances such as “give without expectation of return,” “do no harm,” and “be faithful to your wife.” Thus, they have more the air of commands to be slavishly followed than rules founded on rational principles. Kidd, observing that Seneca seemed to refer just as much through his use of the term *praecepta* to imperatives as to what he considered to be legitimate moral “rules”¹⁰ found it necessary to excuse what he described as “the muddled conflation” of the two.¹¹

Philosophers have looked upon *praecepta* with dissatisfaction, and with reason. We are all taught that there is nothing philosophically profound about pithy platitudes such as “be faithful to your wife.” Part of the problem is that such platitudes are so easily exposed as lacking universality, and thus not genuinely philosophical. They do not apply broadly at all times and

⁹ For the well-documented provenance of the analogy between medicine and the art of life see Sellars, *The Art of Life*, 67-68; See also Galen, *PHP* 5.2.3, *SVF* III.465.

¹⁰ It should be pointed out right way, what will become increasingly clear, that the identification of both *praecepta* and *decreta* with “rules” is fraught with difficulties. *Praecepta* and *decreta* were wrongly identified as “rules” by Kidd, who thereafter influenced many readers. *Decreta* meanwhile, are more in the order of general physical and ethical theses than, as Mitsis suggests, substantive rules. Ian Kidd, “Moral Actions and Rules in Stoic Ethics,” in *The Stoics*. Edited by John Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 247-258; Phillip Mitsis, “Moral Rules and the Aims of Stoic Ethics,” *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 556-7.

¹¹ Kidd, “Moral Actions and Rules in Stoic Ethics,” 253.

all places to all people, and what was Socrates searching for if not the good in precisely this sense, not just as it appeared at some places at some moments, but as it appeared in all places at all times?¹² But neither were the Stoics so naïve as to place all their faith in *praecepta*. As Seneca explains:

It will be of no avail to give precepts unless you remove the obstacles to precepts; it will do no more good than to place weapons by your side and bring yourself closer to the foe without having your arms free to use those weapons. The soul, in order to deal with the precepts we offer, must first be set free. (*Ep.* xcv.83)

As with any belief, even the best precepts will encounter obstacles in the falsehood ridden mind. To memorize a precept telling you how to behave towards your wife does not mean that it will “sink in,” as Seneca says elsewhere. The part of you that still accepts opposing beliefs will never leave your mind free enough to grasp hold of the truth, and as a result, when next confronted with a something you have long considered desirable, you will continue to act on those thoughts—until you mind is set free of them.

But this is then crucial: How is the mind set free? This is where something like general ethical theories have a role to play, though not the role we might expect. General ethical theories are the best a way of rendering what the Stoics call *dogmata* in Greek or *decreta* in Latin. These are perhaps best thought of as overarching beliefs, for they do not function as the foundational premises of an ethical theory from which conclusions could be directly deduced about how to conduct oneself in particular circumstances. Rather, each is best thought of as *persuasio ad totam pertinens vitam*, that is as ‘a belief pertaining to the whole of life’ (*Ep.* xcv.44).

While we depend upon the *praecepta* that pertain only in particular contexts, *praecepta* alone do not suffice, for as Seneca says, “precepts by themselves are weak and rootless” (*Ep.* xcv.12). And here is where *decreta* come in:

As leaves cannot flourish by their own efforts, but need a branch to which they may cling and from which they may draw sap, so your precepts, when taken alone, wither away; they must be grafted on a school of philosophy. (*Ep.* xcv.60)

What Seneca means is that nobody can begin to take to heart the precept “do not hunger after riches” if their general outlook on life is not Stoic. Only to a person who already has a sense that virtue alone is valuable will the idea that money is worthless make any sense, and only in the mind of such a person can the precept take root. Thusly, *decreta* provide us with a general philosophic outlook on the world in the context of which individual *praecepta* make sense, the backdrop against which they appear intelligible.

DISCORD IN THE SOUL

¹² It is generally acknowledged that the Stoics at least differ from Plato’s Socrates in that they wish to be guided not *just* by a conception of the universal good, but also by their sense of where the good lies in particular circumstances. What is less clear is how the Stoics propose to follow rules that are not derived from universal rules. Specifically, how did they hope to avoid the difficulties into which Aristotle is supposed to have fallen in attempting something similar. Inwood puts it best: “If the Stoics similarly recognize a similar need for situational sensitivity, and combine this with a developed interest in systematic moral injunctions (either called ‘rules’ or ‘natural law’), how can they escape dealing with the dilemma that Aristotle evaded only be leaving his theory of rules vague.” (Inwood, “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” p. 104).

All this must be placed in the context of a broader view of Stoicism, so that we may see why ridding the soul of the false beliefs that cause passions become the aim of spiritual exercise, though in fact, it would in no way be surprising if this had *always* been its primary function. For the very term ‘spiritual exercise,’ *exercitiorum spiritualium*, as it was used by St. Ignatius de Loyola himself, denoted nothing more than “every way of preparing and disposing one’s soul to rid it of every disordered feeling” (*praeperandi et disponendi animum ad expellendos omnes inordinatos affectus*).¹³

We shall then return once again to the simple truism that Stoicism is a philosophy dedicated to purging oneself of *perturbationes animi*—or to put it crudely, emotions. All we need to understand about the further reasons these *perturbationes* need to be eliminated is contained in the idea that they arise from false beliefs. They are, by their very nature, to be avoided because they lead one to act under false premises, mistaking an apparent for a real good.

But there is a deeper reason to be gleaned from Cicero’s assertion that *perturbationes autem nulla naturae vi commoventur*. What this means is first and foremost, that *perturbationes*, by definition, ‘arise from no natural force’ (*Fin. III.x.35*). This second point means that we wish always to be moved by natural forces, both by what is proper to our own nature, and by the way it is destined to interact with the natural world. Stoicism posits that acting in virtuous accord with nature’s plans for us, never forces us to act counter to our inner nature. For nature is beneficent, and *omnem naturam esse servitricem sui idque habere propositum quasi finem et extremum, se ut custodiat quam in optimo sui generis statu*—‘all nature is self-preserving and has before it the end and aim of maintaining itself in the best possible condition after its kind’ (*Fin.V.ix.27*). Ergo, *omni animali illud quod appetit positum est in eo quod naturae est accomodatum*—‘every living creature therefore finds its proper object of appetite in the things suited to its nature’ (*Fin.V.ix.25*). Humans are therefore to seek out things naturally conducive to the attainment of the *telos* toward which their inner nature unfailingly strives (*V.vii.18*).

Perturbationes are reactions provoked in us just like the rest, but *they* cannot be fully explained as natural responses to triggers in the external environment, and that is why we so frequently describe them as inappropriate reactions or as *over*-reactions. They are not *completely natural* responses because they have a source, not in the appearing world itself, but in our haste to assent to them, which springs both from false belief and from society at large.¹⁴

To understand why these emotional responses are so despised and why the false opinions in which they are rooted must be rooted out, one must understand these opinions to be externally-derived—*not natural*—opinions that drive us from the path our inner nature wants to travel to its own end. But these false beliefs are also, and at the same time, to be avoided

¹³ See *Ingatius of Loyola: The Spritual Exercises and Selected Works*, edited by George Ganss (Mahwah: Pauline Press, 1991), 121. Hadot took the term from Rabbow, who found it in Loyola. Hadot, *Spiritual Exercises*, 59; Rabbow, Paul, *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitieren in der Antiker* (Munich: Kösel, 1954), 56-80.

¹⁴ As we mentioned previously, the two sources of moral perversion given by Diogenes Laertius are: “A rational human being is corrupted sometimes by the persuasiveness of external things, and sometimes but the influence of associates, since the starting points which nature provides are uncorrupted” (*DL* 7.89). Graver argues that this two-fold account of moral error was included in Chrysippus *On the Emotions*, where Cicero was sure to have encountered it. Cicero, she reasons, must have drawn everything in his account of the sources of emotion in *Tusc.* 3.2-4 faithfully from this source (5). Again, even Cicero’s diatribes against the societal causes of false belief were, we know, directly influenced by Chrysippus. Cicero’s references to wet-nurses, parents, poetry books as corrupting influences are all echoed by Calcidius, who must have read of Chrysippus’ ideas. (Calcidius, *On the Timaeus of Plato*, 165-66, *SVF* III.229-236). Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*, 5.

because they can give rise to an impulse to do something diverging sharply from the course of action recommended to us by that part of us that is still there, struggling to respond to events in a natural way. This produces the conflict in a person of which we speak when we say that they are “at war with themselves” or “pulled in two different directions at once.” For the Stoics, this was the disharmony of the soul with itself.

But the problem with false beliefs is not that we *already* know they are false, but because we can hold them up to a truth that we already *possess*, in comparison with which they appear as false. Although Cicero and Seneca agree that false beliefs are undesirable insofar as they lead to the pursuit of false rather than true goods, it is not just because our beliefs fail to conform to some preexisting external standard of truth that we seek to be rid of them, but it is because they cause *internal* discord. We remove false beliefs then in order to attain the *harmonia* or *concordia*, the ‘harmony’ or ‘concord,’ of the soul with itself. *Thus, attaining truth appears as a provisional aim subordinated to that of removing falsity, and removing falsity of attaining a harmony with oneself.* But it cannot be underemphasized that what one attains along with a harmonious relationship to oneself is a *truthful relationship* to the outside world, and thus no merely subjective truth.

In essence this is Stoicism: A false belief gives rise to emotion that tears us away from the better part of ourselves, and thus tears us in two. This is an important point, first, because it means that Stoic practice is not aimed at maintenance of a restful state of tranquility, nor one of unmovedness in the face of external events, but with a state of harmony in the soul.

We can now begin to assess, secondly, the likeness or unlikeness that Stoicism might bear to other forms of asceticism. For in Stoicism, unlike many other forms of ascetic life, the problem is not with the world or the effect it has on one. That would only be the case if the world were composed of good and bad things, and one had to ally oneself with the good and protect oneself from the bad. There is not a conflict in the world between good and bad in the middle of which one is caught. So one does not need to protect oneself from the world or any of the bad things in it, nor even to “pass over” from the good to the bad. One needs simply to react to the world in such a way as to prevent from arising inside oneself a conflict between good and bad that does not exist in the world, and which the world bears no blame for creating.

UNIFYING THE SELF

Now we can see that Seneca’s approach to truth was Cicero’s all along. To return to the *Disputations*, we observe that, in seeking to rid Brutus of the beliefs that unsettle him and put him at variance with himself, Cicero has followed Seneca’s recommendation by extolling the unparalleled good of virtue in comparison with other goods. He has thus introduced Brutus to the most important *decretum* of the Stoic school. But notice how this came to appear true to Brutus. It didn’t come to appear true to him *because* he set aside his own subjectivity. It was neither the case that, after setting aside his preconceptions, the truth appeared to him in a flash of light, nor that by setting aside his preconceptions, he then was able to discover it founded on self-evident premises.

On the contrary, this philosophic truth “took root” in Brutus’ soul because it already accorded well with many of his instinctive and pre-reflective intuitions. Now, since it was able to derive support from many of Brutus’ pre-reflective beliefs about particular things, the truth “took hold” in his soul like a plant is able to put down roots in fertile soil. As Cicero attests, he is able to rely upon Brutus’ inner nature to speed the process along, especially because his mind

has not been as thoroughly corrupted as others'. And Seneca even goes so far as to say that a relatively unspoiled mind should have no need of *decreta* at all. A few simple precepts sufficed for the ancestors, when life was simple and people had not yet begun to corrupt their pre-reflective instincts by living unnatural lives. Then, "it did not take a mighty effort to bring the spirit back to the simplicity from which it had departed only slightly...Now, in order to root out a deep-seated belief in wrong ideas, conduct must be regulated by doctrines" (*Ep.*xcv.34).

Ever so gradually, the individual beliefs that Brutus once held about money, fame, fortune, family, and friends that were inconsistent with the Stoic worldview fell away. If these larger beliefs bring unity to the mind by helping to cultivate the common soil in which many beliefs about particulars grow—by being the branch from which true beliefs may derive their strength and flourish—then they perform this function all the more by providing a branch from which false beliefs cannot suck sap, and for that reason, wither and die. Thus, they contribute powerfully to the process of "weeding" the soul of false beliefs before they can cause emotions, and with them, the disharmony of the soul with itself:

Peace of mind is only attained by those who have fixed and unchanging judgment; the rest of mankind continually ebb and flow in their decisions, floating in a condition where they alternately seek things and reject them. And what is the reason for this tossing to and fro? It is because nothing is clear to them, because they make use of a most unsure criterion—rumor. If you would always desire the same things, you must desire the truth. (*si vis eandem semper velle, verum oportet veis*). But one cannot attain the truth without doctrines; for doctrines embrace the whole of life. (*Ep.* xcv.57)

Seneca also writes:

We must set before our eyes the goal of the supreme good, towards which we may strive, and to which all our acts and our words may have reference—just as sailors must guide their course according to a certain star. Life without ideals is erratic: as soon as an ideal is to be set up, doctrines begin to be necessary (*vida sine proposito vaga est; quod si utique proponendum est, incipiunt necessaria esse decreta*). (*Ep.* xcv.46)

In this last passage Seneca explains that we need the more expansive, totalizing view of the whole that philosophical *decreta* supply to keep ourselves from behaving erratically. *Praecepta* concern the worth we assign to particular objects, but our *praecepta* may lead us to value different things at different times, if not different things at the same time, and if we want to consistently pursue our ultimate aim in life, we must have an abiding sense of what it is—and our only sense of our *telos* is supplied to us by philosophers in the form of *decreta*.

But this broader philosophical perspective on the ultimate good in life is interesting for what it is *not*. It is *not* supposed to receive its final justification from anything but the many particular beliefs that accord with it. This is true despite passages like the following:

Suppose that a man is acting as he should; he cannot do it constantly or consistently since he will not know why he does it. Some of his conduct will result rightly because of luck or practice; but there will be no standard (*regula*) in his hand to which they may be held, by means of which he may believe to be right what he does. One who is good on accident will not promise to be so forever. (*Ep.* xcv.39)

Here Seneca comes closest to suggesting that we need a general account of the good that can find universal application. The person who does their prescribed duty in the bedroom, and at the baths, and in the senate is well served by precepts, but because they will follow any and all precepts, they may occasionally employ the wrong ones. If they are to consistently follow the right ones, and thus achieve a stable character, they must have a *regula*,¹⁵ a ‘measure’ or ‘standard,’ something against which to measure their *precepts*, and *decreta* perform this function adequately by simply remaining that with which *praecepta* must accord and not explicitly contradict. *Decreta* are not the measure of *praecepta* in the sense of being that from which *praecepta* must be deducible if they are to be valid at all.

To put the question in the language of theory and praxis—does one need to have a theoretical outlook on the world that is independently established on its own rational bases? No, *decreta* are not universal truths we need to establish in order to infer how we should act in particular circumstances,¹⁶ and they are not even independently established by reason independently of our pre-reflective attitudes and preconceptions. They actually appeal for their support to these attitudes and preconceptions.

This is not to say that our attitudes and preconceptions cannot lead us astray, but it is to say that we cannot hope to set them aside all at once and then, by the sheer force of reason attain some more universal truth. Or, that setting them aside, we can attain some universal truth from which we can then infer which of our preconceptions are right and which are wrong. Nor as we have said, is our possession of an external stand against which to hold up individual beliefs what sets the process of self-transformation in motion. We are now prepared prepared to assess the degree to which Stoicism remains “Platonic” in at least the way all *askēsis*, or ascetic practice, ostensibly must.

SELFISHNESS AND SELF-RENUNCIATION

There are two ways of defining asceticism—broadly and narrowly. Broadly defined, asceticism can be found wherever one finds self-discipline, self-cultivation, self-transformation. More narrowly defined, however, it encompasses only acts of self-renunciation, self-abnegation, and self-denial. Anyone who likes the sound of ascetic self-transformation, but who dislikes the Christian connotations it has always carried of self-mortification, will have to wonder if it is

¹⁵ Inwood would like to identify *formae and regulae* as rules “which link up their moral principles with concrete actions and decision contexts” (109). Given the evidence that rules like “always return a deposit” and “never commit suicide” are acknowledged to have many exceptions, this leads Inwood to conclude that expertly following rules means knowing when they don’t apply—that is, knowing when to break them (111). Thus, having need of something that “mediates between situational sensitivity and the need for stable general principles,” they invented another category of rules, “general rules of thumb,” that mediate between *decreta* and *praecepta*, “allowing us to find the balance between abstract theory and the rules of a particular context” (110). But easier than positing the existence of another category of rules besides *decreta* and *praecepta* in order to explain how one informs the other would be to deny that this is the case. For one only has need of some way to derive precepts from *decreta*, if one still believes that *praecepta* must be, if not directly deduced from *decreta*, then at least directly derived from them. Inwood “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” 126.

¹⁶ Even when interpreters are not explicitly arguing that it is from universal truths we infer how to act in particular situations, they betray their belief that this is so. Sellars, for example, dwells upon Epictetus’ demand that *ta theōemata*, or ‘philosophic principles,’ be “digested,” as if to imply that it were simply a matter of internalizing principles with limitless applicability, his assumption being that once these universal truths are learned, they can be applied again and again in different times and places (Epictetus, *Ench.* 46). Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 121-123.

possible to have one without the other. Foucault shall be our example of someone who wants precisely this.

His is a version of Stoicism in which its practitioners are more interested in the work of self-transformation than attaining a higher truth for its own sake, which also makes it seem that theirs lack the selfless acts of self-renunciation by which most ascetic practice is characterized. Whether the Stoics endorse selfishness or self-renunciation is the question to which we now turn because Foucault's version of Stoic asceticism is objectionable to Hadot because it tends to describe self-transformation as performed *in the service of the self*, when in fact, Hadot says, it must be seen as a process of *renouncing* the self for the sake of something more important—namely a fresh perspective on the world. His case against an asceticism of “egoism” is as follows:

Philosophers have always, in Plato no less than in the Stoics, (let us leave the Epicureans aside for the moment), made an effort to undo themselves from the partial self (*moi*). In fact, we have already discussed this in relation to dialogue as spiritual exercise; it consists precisely in the recognition of the rights of the other in discussion, especially in the recognition of a superior norm to which the self must elevate itself in order simply to dialogue—a superior norm that is reason. It is fundamentally simple: from the moment one attempts to subject oneself to reason, one is almost necessarily obliged to renounce egoism.¹⁷

Hadot says that even when we participate in as simple an ascetic exercise as philosophic dialogue, we are striving after a higher truth to which we cannot attain until we have undone ourselves from a part of ourselves. Since that part of the self's grasp on the truth is only partial he dubs it the “partial self,” and says that it has been variously identified with the body, the senses, and for Socrates with “the lower and empirical” self that knows only what the senses tell it:

It was a matter of finding a mode of knowledge other than sensible knowledge. It is also worth pointing out that one had to pass from the empirical and lower self, destined to die, to the transcendental self. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates clearly distinguishes the self that will soon become a cadaver after having drunk the hemlock and the self who dialogues and acts spiritually. It is not at all a matter of preparing for death; but because Plato was always ironic, he appealed to the representation that non-philosophers had of philosophers—as folks who are all pale and look like the dying. What he meant is simply that one had to detach oneself from sensible life.¹⁸

Hadot is indeed right to think that there is a certain sense in which asceticism means the relinquishing of the self with a limited perspective on truth and the embrace a broader perspective on it. In Stoicism, release from a misguided, and limited perspective that we have on worldly particulars indeed demands the embrace of a much more expansive outlook on life—one gained through philosophical *decreta*.

But Hadot reasons that a “higher” part of the self overcomes the other in order to participate in a higher-order reality that a “lower” part of the self cannot. While, to be sure, the

¹⁷ Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, 107.

¹⁸ Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, 105.

Stoics agree that there is a more enlightened part of ourselves that has a broader outlook on life, this is not because there is a part of ourselves with a greater inherent capacity for any kind of truth that another part of the self lacks. If there is a “higher” self it contrasts with the other, not because it has an ability to grasp a different kind of truth that the other cannot. It contrasts merely with a part of the self that harbors erroneous beliefs instilled by society. The two parts of the self can only be distinguished from each other in the first place because the beliefs of each conflict with those of the other.

As for Foucault’s own views, which are not “selfless” enough for Hadot, recall that we want the self to actualize its potential in a way that won’t leave it divided against itself. This imperative to keep the self from being at variance with or divided against itself may be what Foucault was attempting to describe when he spoke of the maintenance of a kind of relationship to oneself, the establishing of a kind of rapport with oneself.

He was right about one thing, and that was that the Stoics made this accord of the soul with itself their highest aim. Thus, he was right to speak of this as an end to which everything else was subordinated, even the search for truth. This has the result of leading Foucault to claim that the truth is an instrument in the hands of the subject, to be used like a tool for his or her own self formation, but this seems to imply no more than what we have already explained, namely that *decreta* were a kind of tool for bringing harmony to the soul, which is to say that the aim of bringing harmony to the soul was never one that would be subordinated to the attainment of a higher truth.

Returning now to Socrates, I would like to propose that, far from being radical, Foucault’s claim that truth is a tool for self-harmonization can be found already in those Platonic dialogues where the Stoics seem to find their forerunner, Socrates. In many passages Socrates says, “It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord (*anarmostein kai te kai diaphorein*), and that multitudes of men should disagree (*mê homologein*) with me than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself (*eme emautô asumphônnon einai*) and contradict myself (*enantia legein*)” (*Gorgias* 474b; 483b).¹⁹ The Stoics, it seems, are the inheritors of one strain of Socratic thought that sees a self-consistent philosophic account of the good as secondary in importance to the ethical aim of attaining harmony with oneself.²⁰

Cicero’s question about how the critical function of philosophy could be reconciled with its positive functions now receives an answer. That the Stoics primarily embraced philosophy’s negative function in order to “weed” themselves of discordant beliefs did not mean that they did not rely on philosophy’s positive function. It is just that the theoretical function of establishing truth was subordinated to the practical function of removing falsity.²¹

¹⁹ This is such a recurrent theme in the Platonic dialogues that many similar passages could be mentioned. For example, Socrates says that though it is bad living with a corrupted body it is far worse to live with a corrupted soul (*diaphtheroumenên*) (*Crito* 47a6).

²⁰ Cicero seems to identify with the Academic Skeptics whom he believes to be the true inheritors of this Platonic tradition when he says at many points that of all the distinct philosophic traditions to which Plato’s literary works gave rise, “I have chosen to follow particularly that one which I find agreeable to the practice of Socrates, in trying to conceal my own private opinion, to relieve others from deception and in every discussion to look for the most probable solution” (*Tusc.* V.iv.10).

²¹ A clear precedent for Stoicism is found in the *Sophist*. Here debate turns around the search for the character of the sophist, classed among those whose art is to “purify” the soul of a kind of disease. All disease is explained as arising from a kind of discord, for “discord is just dissention among things that are naturally of the same kind, and arises out of some kind of corruption” (*Soph.* 228a). The kind of discord particular to the soul is explained when the visitor says, “Well then;

Finally, to the question of whether Stoicism is egoistic or non-egoistic, one might respond that while there is a partial need to take one's directive in life from something greater than oneself, and thus to "transcend" the self that one once was, as Hadot would say, this need is subordinated to the much more important need to be true to one's self, and one's natural impulses. Where the question of egoism is concerned, while Hadot might be right to say that shedding a part of the self is part of the process, Foucault is right to think that the self is ultimately that for the sake of which the whole process is undertaken.

DETACHING FROM EXTERNALS, FREEING ONESELF OF IMPEDIMENTS

In attempting to show that the few good ideas the Stoics have are ones they robbed from Aristotle, Piso reflects on one the most important of the two schools' shared assumptions, which is that happiness is attained with the full actualization of one's faculties. The Stoics were also preceded by Aristotle in believing that the path to *full* self-actualization would lie not just in the actualization of the body's comparatively limited faculties—its ability to eat, breathe, sleep or perceive—but in the *full* actualization of the powers of the mind. It is to be expected that animals will be happy actualizing only their bodily faculties, and to a certain degree we must actualize these faculties as well. "In man, however," he continues, "the whole importance belongs to the mind, which is the source of virtue; and virtue is defined as the perfection of reason" (*Fin.* V.xiv.38). Thus it is that the key to happiness resides in the full actualization of the latent powers of the human mind, since "the most desirable excellences are of the noblest part of us" (*Fin.* V.xiii.38).

One apparent difference between Aristotle and the Stoics that is elided in the course of the conversation is that the Aristotle of the *Nicomachean Ethics* finds the highest faculties of the mind actualized in disinterested *contemplation* divorced from all practical utility. But if this is the activity in which Aristotle thought our highest mental faculties were employed, then it is completely lost on Piso who, speaking for the Peripatetics, says that, "it seems at all events manifest that we were designed by nature for activity" (V.xx.60-xxi.61). He seems to have forgotten that it was the Stoics who insisted that the highest powers of the mind were actualized in *deliberation*.

Deliberation automatically results in activity, but neither the deliberation nor the activity in which it results derive its worth from the actual attainment of a sought end. From the moment the mind has been employed, the mind has been actualized, and virtue actualized is valuable in itself whatever else happens after its actualization. This accounts for the low regard in which the attainment of externals is held in Stoicism, what is for most, the least palatable aspect of the philosophy. In *De Finibus* Cicero asks Cato at what point the importance placed

do we not see that in the souls of worthless men opinions are opposed to desires, anger to pleasures, reason to pain, and all such things to one another?" (228b). The conclusion "that wickedness is a discord and disease of the soul" (228c), leads to the further conclusion that it is especially "an ignorant soul that is ugly and out of proportion" (228d). Just as in Stoicism, the emphasis is placed on the removal of false beliefs, since it is observed that "Doctors who work on the body think that it can't benefit from any food that's offered to it until what's interfering with it from inside is removed. The people who cleanse the soul, my young friend, likewise think the soul, too, won't get any advantage from any learning that's offered to it until someone shames it by refuting it, removes the opinions that interfere with learning, and exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more" (230c). We see why it may pay the sophist too high an honor to compare him to the philosopher when we discover that any strides a sophist makes in this direction are undermined by the fact that he imitates reality in words but by distorting the true proportions of his model (236a).

upon this mental activity of choosing becomes so great that suddenly nothing else seems to matter anymore besides choosing—not even the things our bodies need, the very things our nature calls us most to choose. And in a passage worthy of Nietzsche he asks:

How came it about that, of all the existing species, mankind alone should relinquish man's nature, relinquish the body, and find its chief good not in the whole man but in a part of man? (IV.xiii.33)

What kind of creatures would we be, he asks, if we were possibly able to concentrate solely on the functioning of our own minds, imagining our sole good to lie in it, completely disregarding the bodily goods our minds functioned to procure?

Even if we were not seeking the chief good of man, but of some other creature that consisted solely of mind (let us allow ourselves to imagine such a creature, in order to facilitate our discovery of the truth), even so that mind would not accept this end of yours. For such a being would ask for health and for freedom from pain, and would also desire its own preservation, and security for the goods just specified; and it would set up its end to live according to nature, which means, as I said, to possess either all or most of the important things which are in accordance with nature. (IV.xi.27)

If nature only wants us to preserve the best part of ourselves, then why do we have bodies? This is a question anyone who upholds the value of the mind over the body has to ask. It is possible that nature has fashioned us on the same pattern as corn. “With the growing of corn, no doubt, her way is to guide the development from blade to ear, and then to discard the blade as of no value” (*Fin.* IV.xiv.37). But we cannot believe that she similarly gives us our bodies in order to give birth to the mind, at which point the mind becomes so much more important than the body that sustains it, that the needs of body can be neglected completely, even as the body withers away and dies.

It is odder for the Stoics than for Aristotle to treat the whole organism as the roots and stem merely providing conditions for the flowering of the intellect. But this is not the analogy they would choose, if it implies that the flower of the intellect can flourish detached from the stem that gives it nutriment. The Stoics identify the activity of the highest part of us with its active perception and pursuit of certain things, an activity which, since it always leads to activity directed at physical objects that *servare* or ‘sustain and preserve’ the physical organism, cannot be easily be valued apart from the contribution they make to the sustenance of the whole organism. The plant analogy is favored because “we see that the vegetable species secure by means of their bark and roots,” just as humans do by means of their minds, “that that support and protection which animals derive from the distribution of their sensory organs and from the well-knit framework of their limbs” (*Fin.* V.xi.33).

An even better analogy may be the following: we are like amoebas that expand the boundaries of our own organism to take in elements of the environment. What is actually important is the activity of expanding ourselves to take in things from the environment that sustain us from within, and this is much more important than the actual things that end up sustaining us. This is so because the activity itself is what we are; while we perform this activity we are alive and when we cease to perform it we are dead.

We cannot do anything that would compromise this activity, even if the only alternative somehow foreshortened the duration of the activity in the long run, or brought it to a

premature end. Since the activity is intrinsically valuable once begun, it has already attained its end from that moment on, and so, it can never actually be brought to a premature end, technically speaking. The activity itself is better simply performed and cut off in its prime than suspended in favor of an external that is merely expected to sustain it in the long term.

And yet, the Stoics think this is what we do every time we pursue an external that causes an emotional reaction in us. The way we react to the externals can interrupt the activity we naturally perform and the one that makes us what we are. By suspending this activity, we literally cease to be as nature intended, and to this calamity, is added the bitter truth that we have suspended our natural activity because of some external, an ironic fact because it is to sustain this activity that externals are sought in the first place.

But an important addendum is this: We usually think of an end as that for the sake of which an activity is undertaken and that upon the attainment of which the activity can stop, it finally having attained its purpose, though it may only be a temporary stopping point along the path to a higher end. But for the Stoics, externals are not the literal end of activity in the sense that they are not that at which our activity, having completed itself, *can stop*, nor are they a stepping stone to a further goal *at which* our activity can stop.

We don't understand the Stoics when they say that externals are a means to our final end, but unimportant, since we think this makes as much sense as thinking that one can abandon the path to a destination and still arrive there. But even for Aristotle, the things we desire as a means to our final end are not necessary constituents of it.²² Strictly speaking, all the things Stoics desire can be considered a means to their *telos*, but only because they are the "means" by which virtue may be exercised, the things upon which it is practiced—not because these things are necessary stepping stones on the path to the attainment of virtue.

For our only end is activity itself, and the externals we strive after are "that for the sake of which we act" only in the sense that striving after them is the way in which most of us perform our activity. This can be seen when Cicero claims that, "we maintain these external goods by those acts of duty that spring from the particular class of virtue connected with each" (V.xxiv.69). Externals like friends and family are sought "for the sake of virtue," our *telos*, in the sense that serving them provides us the opportunity to exercise our virtue.

This is crucial because otherwise we regard our internal activity as worthwhile only for the externals it attains, and if we see action as pointless unless it attains those externals, then when we have to choose between our own activity and the attainment of an external, we will be willing to suspend our own activity for some external. But we cannot ever think that even the most pleasurable of externals is more important than the activity that defines us, and for which that external merely gives us an opportunity. As Cicero says, "it is for ourselves that we care for pleasure, and not for pleasure that that we care for ourselves" (V.xi.31).

This helps us to understand why externals must be treated with indifference. Although externals provide an opportunity for us to perform the activity that makes us what we are, and although every external is an opportunity for us to exercise our activity, the paradoxical result is that no *single* external should ever exert enough pull on us that we ever give up our own activity for *its* sake.

What kind of asceticism does this leave us with? Externals are something we have to practice disregarding, not because they are not important enough to respond to them, but

²² "And so, if there is some end for all actions, this would be the good that belongs to action..." Aristotle does not say, however, that the ends these actions pursue are necessary for the attainment of the final end (*Nic. Eth.* 1097a24).

because we must be ever wary of attaching a value to them that would make it possible for them to become the occasion for the interruption of our own activity.

Here is one respect in which Stoic *askēsis* has much in common with every other variety of ascetic self-transformation. Every transformative act involves an active agent and a passive recipient, and since the process of ascetic self-transformation is no exception, we are bound to find, in every instance of it, a part of the self that *transforms* and a self that is left *transformed*. There is the “self” that does the work of transforming and the “self” that is transformed in the process. The part of the self that is a passive object to the transformative process must undergo it because the other part of the self’s activity is stifled or hindered by it. That “transforming” part of the self must find a way to escape the other’s hindering influence, which it may do in either one of two ways—either by mustering the strength to somehow leave it transformed, a hindrance no more, or by severing ties with it and leaving it behind completely.²³

And the same occurs in Stoicism: that false beliefs keep us beholden to externals and lend them the power to disrupt our own activity means that the part of us that hinders us and from which we must indeed “escape” is the part of us that responds to certain externals in a certain way. Plato may have wondered whether these reflexes could be gotten rid of without getting rid of the body in which they were provoked, and without getting rid of the world that provoked them.²⁴ But the Stoics said that the problem was not with the world or with our physical circumstances, but with us; it was not our external ties with which we had to dispense wholesale, but merely our own beliefs about them.

Fundamentally, Foucault is right. Stoicism is egoistic. It is about consistently putting your activity above all else, and taking active steps to ensure that nothing in the external world is allowed to interfere with that activity. In this sense, Stoicism is a philosophy of freedom placing emphasis on freeing oneself of what is interruptive or determining of one’s own activity. But as Foucault correctly observed this freedom is to be attained by attaining freedom from false beliefs. He illustrates this by means of an examination of the *stultus*, someone who is not free:

Basing ourselves on this text from the beginning of *De Tranquillitate* in particular, we can say that the *stultus* is first of all someone who is blown by the wind and open to the external world, that is to say someone who lets all the representations from the outside world into his mind. He accepts the representations without examining them, without knowing how to analyze what they represent. The *stultus* is open to the external world inasmuch as he allows these representations to get mixed up in his own mind with his passions, desires, ambition, mental habits, illusions, etcetera, so that the *stultus* is someone who is prey to the winds of external representations and who, once they have entered his mind, cannot make the *discriminatio*, cannot separate the content of these

²³ The precise question with which Foucault seems to wrestle, especially in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, is whether self-renunciation is exhaustive of all forms of asceticism, some variants of which involve only the slow transformation of the self over time. It seems difficult to distinguish *askēsis* as a gradual way of transforming the self when the self cannot be changed without the removal at least of one part of it. Thus, self-discipline, self-transformation, and self-cultivation seem inextricably intertwined with self-renunciation, self-abnegation, and self-sacrifice.

²⁴ In this same interview, Hadot says that Foucault “does not sufficiently valorize the process of becoming aware of the cosmic Whole, a process that also corresponds to an overcoming of oneself.” Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, 136.

representations from what we will call, if you like, the subjective elements, which are combined in him.²⁵

The two characteristics of the *stultus* are first, according to Foucault, that he is susceptible to the influence of things outside himself, and particularly to the way things represent themselves to the mind. As a second consequence, the *stultus*' will is not free insofar as, having false beliefs, his choice can easily be determined by externals. What he wills at a particular time and place is therefore conditional upon external circumstances. Foucault describes this in Kantian terms:

The will of the *stultus* is not free. It is a will that is not an absolute will. It is a will that does not always will. What does it mean to will freely? It means willing without what it is that one wills being determined by this or that event, this or that representation, this or that inclination. To will freely is to will without any determination, and the *stultus* is determined by what comes from the outside and inside.²⁶

What we will always changes depending upon circumstances. It might therefore seem incorrect to speak as though the virtuous man willed always the same thing, while the *stultus*' will changed, depending upon circumstances. But the *stultus*' will is somehow more conditional upon circumstances and determined "by this or that event" than that of the virtuous man. Foucault's insight can nevertheless be explained by the fact that the *stultus*, in being more vulnerable to false impressions, is more likely to respond to externals *in excess* of what they demand, and thus to be more forcefully *moved* by them. *So what one aims to free oneself from are the beliefs that lead us to respond to externals in such a way that it is interruptive of our self-actualizing activity.*

As Foucault observes, the *stultus* wills contradictorily, and exists in something like a state of contradiction with himself, without this being precisely the state of self-contradiction described by Kant:

That is to say, the *stultus* wants several things at once, and these are divergent without being contradictory. So he does not want one and only one thing absolutely. The *stultus* wants something and at the same time regrets it. The *stultus* wants glory, and at the same time, regrets not living a peaceful, voluptuous life, etcetera.²⁷

It is not, as in Kant, that one wants two mutually *contradictory* things. It is that, because of false representations, one may want something other than the one thing one really wants. Thus, *at any given time*, one may want something and want something different. In this way, one becomes incapable of willing *absolutely*.

The political implications are as follows. Every time Nero threatens Seneca he will feel that his bodily needs are under threat, and whereas his own impulses would have naturally led him in one direction, these fears force him from the path his action would naturally take. If Nero threatens to strip him of his wealth, his honor, his life, he must strip these things of their social value so that he is not moved from his path, and so that his activity is not impeded by these social forces.

²⁵ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 131.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

Now consider a member the modern-day world whose drives call them to follow a certain path in life. They may equally be diverted from this path by the overweening influence of social forces, which have inculcated in them certain beliefs that, when internalized, lead them to seek out socially valued goods. Society in fact, has them regard many things as inherently pleasurable, and conversely, others as simply repellant. Society will have its way so long as one does not withdrawal from society like Seneca, and practice stripping these externals of their social connotations. In order to find that special kind of freedom that can be attained through the actualization of this otherwise slumbering potential, it is necessary, to strip ourselves of the social encumbrances that would foreclose our ability to do so in an unhindered fashion.

THE ROLE OF *PRAECEPTA* CLARIFIED

We should now inquire further into the specific way that *praecepta* functioned *in themselves* as a perfectly sound source of truth and direction in moral life, without needing to be grounded upon a firmer theoretical foundation than they alone could provide. This is important to stress since even when it is occasionally doubted, by thinkers like Brad Inwood,²⁸ that the learning of more or less universal truths gives us rational principles from which to directly “deduce” how to act in concrete circumstances, it is still more or less assumed that *praecepta* are not enough on their own to provide a “foundation” for moral life. The assumption goes that they are baseless unless they have some foundation in *decreta*.

We have already seen in what sense *decreta* are not adequate to form what we would consider a strong foundation for *praecepta*. Stoicism’s *decreta* include truths of a general nature—‘the cosmos is an organism,’ ‘each nature seeks what belongs to it,’ ‘virtue is the only good’—these statements are difficult to interpret much less to apply to different situations. They were, of course, not intended to serve as all-purpose rules.²⁹ But the assumption goes that, while they could not *themselves* serve as moral rules, they could serve as the rational basis from which other rules derived their legitimacy. But the result of this assumption has, again, been to suppose that *praecepta* need to derive legitimacy from something outside themselves.

What we have said so far about the necessary function of *decreta* could be merely taken to support this hypothesis. To repeat, their purpose was to drive out false opinions, and to do so by giving true ideas a basic prop from which they could gain support and thus override bad opinions. Universal truths served as the fertile soil in which right opinions could grow strong enough to overpower the weeds of false opinion. In order to act well we do not have need of

²⁸ Inwood is the first to point out that we find nowhere in the Stoic literature any explicit mention of such a universally binding moral rules, and he argues that Stoic moral reasoning is not the “straightforward application of rules to particular cases” (97-98). He asserts most adamantly that the Stoics’ abstract doctrines do not allow them to directly deduce how we should act in specific situations, but he does still maintain that “some sort of formal moral theory which has to be presupposed in the agent,” some moral theory from which prescriptions somehow “flow.” Inwood, “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” 119.

²⁹ Mitsis would interpret every *decretum* as a universally-binding moral rule. Inwood writes that “though the actions enjoined by the *praecepta* follow directly from it, there is very little injunction in what Seneca says—it is (as we would expect from Seneca’s introduction of *decreta*) an assertion of Stoic physical principles (holism, rational theology, a part-whole understanding of the cosmos) and of the natural foundation of human sociability. It is not a universal rule or law enjoining these behaviors in all particular cases. Rather, the *praecepta* which enjoin more specific type-actions of mutual respect flow from it.” Inwood, “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” 119.

universal truth, for its function is merely negative; its role is to free the mind of false beliefs, and thus not to *replace* but to *free* everyday modes of thought.

This could, of course, still be taken to mean that ethical life takes its bearings from *decreta* because every way of living must base itself in truths of a more universal kind, which is established in advance of action. But contra Inwood, though universal truths supply us with what we would consider a more properly “philosophical” framework, it is not directly from it that action “flows,” as Inwood would say—not even in any indirect way.

The Stoics were acutely aware that *decreta* had no direct relationship to particular situations, and could not help anyone navigate the maze of possibilities presented by everyday life. If moral action were to “flow” from anything like a truth in propositional form, then it would have to issue truths pointing one in the right direction at the right time and the right place. That is precisely why the Stoics resorted to fitter tools for the purpose which they seem to have found in what is to us today the most embarrassing of places.³⁰ They found their salvation in *praecepta* or ‘precepts,’ though again, we might just as well call them what they were—pithy sayings, old adages, truisms, clichés. Our first indication that these *praecepta* were not derived by logical inference, or indeed, even indirectly deduced from *decreta*, is that they seem in many cases to be freely invented without reference to them.³¹

We are talking now about a whole part of philosophy, which Seneca says, “gives precepts in each specific personae,” or ‘role,’ “a person plays, and does not give rules for the *universum hominem*,” or the ‘universal man.’ “It advises how a husband should conduct himself towards his wife, or how a father should bring up his children, or how a master should rule his slaves” (*Ep.*xciv.1). If any testimony were needed as to the express and sustained attention the Stoics devoted to *praecepta*, which indeed, some regarded as the only significant part of philosophy, it could be amply supplied by Seneca alone, who as we have noted, devotes two of his longest letters to the subject (xciv; xcv). The letters plunge us into a debate between the Stoic Cleanthes and one of Stoicism’s philosophical offshoots, represented in the person of Aristo, who cares only for *decreta* and not *praecepta*. So when Seneca takes up the case up the defense of *praecepta* as the main constituents of philosophy, we learn why *decreta* alone never suffice.

First, *praecepta* were not in short supply. There was one for every time, every place, every person, every conceivable situation, and the profusion of them could easily be taken as sign of the anti-philosophical nature of these individuals, who seemingly preferred a confusing array of advice to the elegant concision of philosophical theories. The reader will perhaps note that his

³⁰ As Inwood says of Cicero, with regard to the embarrassing way he seems to invent precepts only loosely inspired by Stoic doctrine, “The kind of flexibility we see in his work, and in Panaetius, Seneca, and Epictetus, is not a sign that the Stoics fell away from the pure rigor of some hopelessly abstract moral theory. It is, I think, a central feature of Stoic theory which was present from the very beginning of the school’s history.” Inwood, “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” 127.

³¹ Even those who invest the greatest importance *praecepta* find it difficult to let go the assumption that *decreta* come first in importance, that in Sellars words, “*decreta* retain a certain priority over *praecepta*” (78, n.125) This assumption, difficult to dislodge, leads Sellars to surmise that, when Seneca says that precepts do not teach, he means that they “reinforce teaching already received” in the form of doctrines. Unfortunately the great strides that Sellars makes toward challenging prevailing opinion are undermined and rendered ineffectual by the fact that he leaves untouched one very important assumption of ours—the assumption that *praecepta* only ever put into practice something we have already grasped theoretically in the form of a philosophical doctrine. When he writes that precepts, while “an often useful complement to doctrines,” he betrays his assumption that precepts derive their only significance from their ability to *secondarily* “translate into practice” the knowledge that doctrines have *first* revealed (77). Doctrines are the “hidden foundation” of precepts (78). Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 77-78.

or her own expectations dictate that these universal truths come in the form of universal rules. “Don’t lie.” “Always go with your first instincts.” “Act so as to increase the general welfare.” Precisely because these moral truths are rules, they find direct application in life. What is wanted then are moral truths that are general enough that they speak to the whole of life, but specific enough that they can clearly and directly dictate action, and can be automatically, almost unthinkingly, applied to life. That way every single situation can be viewed in light of a larger truth, and with maximum efficiency the greatest number of situations can fall under the fewest number of general truths. The Stoics broadest and most universal truths, however, are freely acknowledged to be the least applicable to life in a direct way. And those truths most applicable to life—they are the least universal, being most specific to individual circumstances.³²

Because they believed that the appropriate action was unique to every situation, the Stoics were probably more skeptical than most,³³ but the dream of *one* kind of knowledge capable of finding application in *many* circumstances was not unknown to the ancients. It was certainly the dream of Aristo,³⁴ who speaks of it in the following manner:

When a man has gained a complete understanding of this definition of the supreme good and has thoroughly learned it, he can frame for himself a precept directing what is to be done in a particular case. Just as the student of javelin-throwing keeps aiming at a fixed target, and thus trains the hand to give direction to the missile, and when, by instruction in patience, he has gained the desired ability, he can then employ it against any target he wishes (having learned not to strike any random object, but precisely the object at which he has aimed)—so he who has equipped himself for the whole of life, does not need to be advised concerning each separate item, because he is now trained to meet his problem as a whole. (xciv.3)

The metaphor Seneca credits Aristo with employing seems to suggest that ethics is a skill that once mastered, can be applied in different contexts. This is undoubtedly true, according to Seneca himself. Philosophy restores our natural powers of sight and allows us to see what contributes to our self-fulfillment in different contexts, and Aristo is right to say that a student should eventually arrive at the point at which he is able to decide, wherever he finds himself,

³² Mitsis, among others, takes the view that natural law consisted of a set of universal prescriptions definite to prescribe specific actions in specific situations. Phillip Mitsis, “Natural Law and Natural Right in Post-Aristotelian Philosophy: The Stoics and Their Critics,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2.36.7 (1994): 4812-50. For similar views see Gisela Striker, “Origins of the Concept of Natural Law,” *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.12 n. 5; Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 107. Inwood argues that if the Stoics referred to themselves as following natural law at all, it was because they thought law could be followed without appeal to deductive forms of legal reasoning. Inwood, “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” 97-98.

³³ *Kathékonta* or ‘fitting actions’ vary with circumstances. If Diogenes also writes that some do not, it is because “looking after one’s health” and “protecting one’s sense organs” are rare examples of actions that are universally required of us at all times. But he is clear that the wise man “will even feed off human flesh if circumstances make that appropriate”(vii.109). Long himself calls upon *kathékonta* in order to definitively refute that all too common claim, espoused by MacIntyre, that Stoicism requires complete submission to a universal and implacable moral law. Long, “Ethics After MacIntyre,” 161.

³⁴ Kidd sides, as do other interpreters, with Aristo in decrying the usefulness of many *praecepta*: “as Aristo pointed out, they cannot take all cases into account, and therefore cannot hold good for all. *Proégmena* precepts in other words are more like maxims or guides, and so inaccurate, and their inherent vagueness brings uncertainty of result.” Kidd, “Moral Actions and Rules in Stoic Ethics,” 253.

for himself, so that “he will not need a monitor for every separate action, to say to him: ‘Walk thus and so, eat thus and so. This is the conduct appropriate for a man and that for a woman; this for a married man and that for a bachelor’” (xciv.8). Yet, the metaphor suggests that without concrete practical advice for concrete situations, we can learn to aim at our final good, and having mastered this skill, aim at it just as well in whatever situation we find ourselves.

The problem is, however, that one can vaguely understand the end of one’s path without perceiving the ways to reach it. *Haec non statis perpicit*; ‘one does not sufficiently perceive these.’ (xciv.31). For this reason, no general pronouncements about the final good would do absent particular advice about how to recognize the means to it in particular circumstances. What we need are guidelines forever tapered to fit different situations.³⁵ But what good were these, it was asked, if one needed a different rule for every situation? What would happen when one eventually ran into a situation too specific to be covered by even one of the hundreds of different rules?

Besides, if we give tasks to each individual, the task is stupendous, for one class of advice should be given to the financier, another to the farmer, another to the business man, another to who cultivates the good graces of royalty, another to him who will seek the good friendship of his equals, another to him who will court those of lower rank. In the case of marriage, you will advise one man how he should conduct himself with a wife who before her marriage was a maiden, and another with a woman who had previously been wedded to another; how the husband of a rich woman should act, or another man with a dowerless spouse. Or do you not think that there is some difference between a barren woman and one who bears children, between one advanced in years and a mere girl, between a mother and a step-mother? We cannot include all the types, and yet each type requires special treatment. (xciv.15)

These arguments are reminiscent of Socrates’ gripe against Meno that he has produced a “swarm” of virtues by dictating rules for every time and place and every situation in life. But such gripes did not in the least deter Seneca, for one, from arguing that despite their tendency to multiply themselves, and their inability to cover all cases, precepts were still an indispensable part of moral education for which no general definition of “the good” and no blanket definition of “virtue” was an adequate substitute.

The mistaken assumption here is that each piece of practical advice is a rule we need to learn, and that we need to have learned the rules covering every life circumstance in which we find ourselves to perform well in them. Seneca attacks the mistaken assumption that precepts “teach” a person what they need to know, and that without them, we have no ethical knowledge. For Seneca, it is not the function of *praecepta* to teach us what we need to know. *Non docet admonitio, sed advertit*, he says, ‘Advice does not teach, it draws the attention’:

³⁵ “Since the most important part of advice depends on the circumstances, it must follow that on certain matters, my opinion reaches you when the opposite advice has already become preferable. For advice is adjusted to situations; our situations are in movement, or rather in flux. Therefore, advice should be generated immediately beforehand. And even this is too late.” (*Ep.* lxxi.1, trans. Inwood).

We pass over much that is placed before our eyes. Advice, in fact, is a kind of incitement (*adhortandi*). The mind often conceals the apparent. We must press upon it the knowledge of what is most known.

Saepe animus aperta dissimulat, ‘sometimes the mind conceals the apparent.’ Visual metaphors abound in Seneca. Here, he places in *praecepta* the power to improve our vision and allow us to perceive more acutely what our minds tend to pass over and leave obscured or in darkness. He insists that the function of precepts is to allow us to see more clearly what we should already have perceived. Because those things that present themselves most vividly as the means to our *telos* are the ones that incite us to action automatically, advice, insofar as it calls our attention to certain things, rouses us to action. But because these things should be the very ones that are naturally most apparent to us, Seneca is at his most poetic when he says that precepts only make clear what should already be most apparent.

One objection that could obviously be raised by the modern reader is that Stoic precepts do not seem to be directly deducible from the Stoics’ general theories. They are not the clear and logical conclusions derived from those premises. But this objection is to be met by pointing out that the Stoics neither expected that they should have clear and logical conclusions, nor that they should have any justification whatsoever. In fact, Seneca is quite unabashed in his feeling that they need no justification:³⁶

Such need no special pleader; they touch our disposition and serve nature to exercise her power. The soul carries within itself the seed of everything that is honorable, and this seed is excited as a spark that is fanned by a gentle breeze unfolds its fire. Virtue is aroused by a touch or an incitement. Moreover, there are certain things which, though in the mind, are not ready to hand but begin to be put into operation when they are said. Certain things lie scattered about in various places that an unpracticed mind cannot draw together. Therefore, they are to be brought together in one and joined, so that they may be more powerful and lift the soul up. Or if precepts do not animate the soul, all means of education should be taken away, and we should be content with nature. (xciv.29)

Advice either succeeds in placing before the mind something serving as the incitement to striving, and striving’s object, or it fails to. It either rouses us to action taken for its sake, or it does not. If the object with which it presents the mind does not call out to our natural impulses, if they are not summoned to action by the “touch” of something to which they are naturally responsive, then their failure to speak to us is proof enough that they are false facts in the sense that they do not truly represent as desirable those things which *are* truly desirable to our inner nature. They have strayed from reality to present as desirable that which may appear so, but only to a soul already overstuffed. If advice is true to facts then it will present as desirable that

³⁶ The apparent unorthodoxy of this claim is diminished if we recall the following words of Aristotle: “Therefore, we ought to attend to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of experienced and older people or of people of practical wisdom, not less than to demonstrations: for because experience has given them an eye, they see aright” (*Nic. Eth.* 1143b10).

which we know to be desirable precisely because, having just heard that piece of advice, we will begin to desire it.³⁷

The function of advice seems to be to put scattered sensations and disjointed memories into connection with one another in such a way that they arouse feelings they otherwise might not. We all know, of course, that it is one thing to have a memory of past friends and a vague recollection of the benefits they brought us, and another entirely to be able to say, friends make one more virtuous. Then, the mind is able to see clearly and distinctly, a friend as a means to virtue, and having seen this, the natural feelings of friendship's desirability will be aroused. What Seneca contributes to the long acknowledged truth that we need to see things in clear relation to their subsequent effects is the additional insight that it is the function of language to lay these relationships of cause and effect before the mind so that they can be more clearly perceived. For he says that it is once something is said that the mind gathers before itself those facts of its consciousness that were previously dislocated and hard even associated in thought. Here, it may be remarked how correctly Hadot characterizes the whole effort as an attempt to reorganize one's inner discourse. It might also be added that this whole process is necessary because unless the self collects its thought and orders them in some way, it will remain more susceptible to outside influences, to the opinions of the many. Infiltrated by these false beliefs from external sources, the self will be sown with the seeds of an internal division—that is, unless internal discourse is used to incite desires for the things our nature should already find desirable. Hence, it may be necessary temper Hadot's enthusiasm for the tailoring of one's own inner discourse with the qualification that it was subservient to the end of making the self even more susceptible to those natural triggers to which it is already ready to respond.

Hence Seneca's claim that precepts are not in need of philosophical justification.³⁸ This is quite a claim, and it does nothing less than shatter the modern philosopher's vision of moral philosophy. What Seneca is saying is that philosophy's reach is limited in a few regards. First, we saw that it immerses us in the general worldview in which we need steeping for further beliefs to take hold. Now, we see that it pens precepts designed to further arouse feelings of desire for what is naturally desirable. In brief, it gives us general *decreta* and specific *praecepta*. But the general theories are not established on what we would today consider solid

³⁷ Veyne observes that for Seneca it suffices that "morality works as a kind of spark." And yet, acknowledging that "When someone instructs us and reminds our senses of a duty otherwise unknown, the spark 'becomes aflame with the breath of speech.'" Veyne assumes that their incitement will coincide with the formation, in the mind, of a universal conception of virtue. Acknowledging that "we form our idea of it by analogy alone because virtue is an extremely broad notion," he still thinks that this broad conception of virtue will be attained in sufficient form to serve as the "principle from which are derived the many varieties of virtuous acts, such as not eating or drinking too much or helping the victims of disaster." Indeed, he even implies that by attaining this universal conception of virtue, we will be enabled to rise above the impulses, from that point on rendered dispensable, when he says, "The very general idea of virtue allows us to rise above sense impressions, among them the welcome and the painful. It also allows us to respond according to a principle, not at the whim of circumstance." Paul Veyne, *Seneca: The Life of a Stoic*, trans. David Sullivan (New York & London: Routledge), 2003.

³⁸ This, despite Sellars' attempts to show that the precepts comprising Epictetus' *Handbook* are only for those who already understand the doctrines in which they are grounded: "In light of this, we might conceive the *Handbook* as a text for relatively advanced students, for those who have already mastered philosophical doctrines in the classroom, and are now ready to attempt to put those doctrines into practice via a series of spiritual exercises. The *Handbook* would thus function as a text for the second stage of philosophical education, just as the theoretical treatise would have functioned as text for the next stage. As such, it would not present any philosophical content with which the student would not already be familiar, but rather would repeat familiar material in a form specifically directed towards its digestion (*pepsis*)." Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 133.

philosophical grounds, nor are the *praecepta* derived from them, having, in fact, no “philosophical justification” of their own.

It is acknowledged that these statements may fail to convince those with a set of opposing opinions, ones the Stoics take for granted to be bad opinions. How are these supposedly “true” insights to gain any weight, or any leverage over other opinions? It may be difficult for us to distinguish between true and false beliefs when our natural impulse is so distorted by false beliefs. “Even so,” says Seneca, “it goes on endeavoring to rise again, struggling against influences that make for evil; but when it wins support and receives the aid of precepts, it grows stronger, provided only that the chronic trouble has not corrupted or annihilated the natural man” (xciv.31).

Here, the tendency of Stoicism is simply to develop the necessary strategies by which truth can gain a foothold over falsity without appeal to anything but a general view of the world—itsself without any justification except for its ability to make sense of the very beliefs for which we are seeking justification. If this sounds circular, it is. But it is less a vicious circle than it is a virtuous cycle from which the Stoics do not pretend to attain release through anything so course as an appeal to “indubitable” truths. There is, for them, no question of treating *all* their beliefs with doubtful uncertainty until at least a few of them can be established fully, laying down Cartesian premises upon which further conclusions may rest and then gradually building up to further and further insights. This is not philosophy’s function for the Stoics, but merely to incite the natural impulses and to provide the theoretical framework in which they will be more readily incited.

Part of the necessity of precepts also derives from the negative function of philosophy that we have already discussed. While the destructive function of philosophy is perfectly well performed by *decreta*, which help break down false beliefs, the restorative function of philosophy must, to some extent, be performed by practical advice. But the destructive never gives way automatically to the restorative, as Seneca’s adversaries might say: “do away with error and your precepts become unnecessary.” That is wrong; for suppose that avarice is slackened, that luxury is confined, that rashness is reigned in, and that laziness is pricked by the spur; even after vices are removed, we must continue to learn what we ought to do, and how we ought to do it” (xciv.23). Here is what Seneca concludes from the fact that philosophy largely helps removes impediments to clear vision:

For it is nature that gives us our eyesight; and he who removes obstacles restores to nature her proper function. But nature does not teach us our duty in every case. Again, if a man’s cataract is cured, he cannot, immediately after his recovery, give back their eyesight to other men also; but when we are freed from evil we can free others also. There is no need of encouragement, or of counsels, for the eye will be able to distinguish different colors; black and white can be differentiated without prompting from another. The mind, on the other hand, needs many precepts in order to see what it should do in life; although in eye-treatment the physician not only accomplishes the cure, but gives advice into the bargain. He says: “there is no reason why you should at once expose your weak vision to a dangerous glare; begin with darkness, and then go into half-lights, and finally be more bold, accustoming yourself to the bright light of day. There is no reason why you should study immediately after eating; there is no reason why you should impose hard tasks upon your eyes while they are swollen and inflamed; avoid winds and strong blasts of cold air that blow in your face,”—and other

suggestions of the same sort, which are just as valuable as drugs themselves. The physicians arts supplements remedies by advice. (xciv.19)

Here we must be careful not to misinterpret the metaphor. Seneca is not saying that our *praecepta* are, as Foucault implies, internalized commands,³⁹ which once memorized, become so deeply-internalized that at the appropriate moment an internal guide, a voice speaks from within, “telling us what we must do, or rather, actually making us do what we must do.”⁴⁰ If this were the function of *praecepta*, then Foucault would be right to compare ethical training to athletic by virtue of the fact that what would be needed would be “training in some elementary moves which are sufficient and general and effective for them to be adapted to every circumstance.”⁴¹ But then these moves would be truths “necessary and sufficient for every possible circumstance,” and by that point we would have made a renewed appeal to universal truth.⁴²

Here, the function of precepts is still to keep our eyesight from being ruined. For just as we would re-damage freshly cured eyes if we were to try and use them too quickly, we would use our perceptive powers wrongly the first time out if we were not to rely, as upon a crutch, on precepts that will get us seeing the good in certain things and the bad in others. This does not mean that the ability to discern good and bad does not exist as a potential that resides within ourselves. It means that, just as sight must be directed toward the objects upon which it will eventually be able to exercise itself, our faculty of discerning good and evil must be trained *upon*, in the sense of “directed toward” its objects. The objects we perceive become clearer the more we focus on them. But again, it is a matter of simply directing our *attention* in a particular direction. Once something has been pointed out to us, we can see and discern its shape, its outline by our own power of vision. But first our *attention* must be drawn toward the objects upon which vision, otherwise unaided, exercises itself.⁴³

INVENTING ONE’S OWN MAXIMS

If what we want is to shed greater light on the role of certain kinds of truth in Stoicism, we would, finally, do well to examine Seneca’s reaction in *Epistle 33*, to Lucilius’ entreaties that he be supplied with more *sententia* or ‘maxims.’ Seizing this an opportunity to explain the difference between Stoicism and other philosophic systems, Seneca tells Lucilius that whereas

³⁹ It is difficult to escape the impression that Foucault falls back into describing Stoicism as involving the possession of an ever-present, always-at-hand truth. In the insistence that we must always have *logoi* or *praecepta* ready *ad manum*, or always ‘at hand,’ Foucault claims to find evidence that we must have and possess the truth “in such a way that we can reactualize it immediately and without delay, automatically.” Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 326.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 321.

⁴³ Veyne would add that the focus of attention on its proper objects is not just a means of preventing oneself from being lured from the path to the *telos* by the prospect of an uncertain destination; the heightened state of attention that keeps our focus on the path immediately before us and prevents us from swerving off this path is inseparable from the *telos* of Stoicism itself: “The Stoic is like a driver who must never take his eyes off the road for a single instant because at any moment a signal may appear or an accident may occur endangering his safety. The driver must never let his attention lapse for a single instant; he must continually focus his attention.” Veyne, *Seneca*, 73.

poetry and inferior philosophies are distinguished by the single statements they make that stand out against a background of less significant ones, Stoicism is composed of many truths, none of which is more significant than the rest, just as “a single tree is not remarkable if the whole forest rises to the same height” (*Ep.* xxxiii.2). It would be easy to confuse what Seneca is saying with a superficial boast about the quality of the Stoics’ writings, not their philosophical methodology. Seneca is telling Lucilius that one cannot learn Stoicism by just picking up a few of the most important and most attractive tenets of the school, and learning nothing else. He writes: “Hence we have no ‘show-window goods’ (*ocliſeria*), nor do we deceive the purchaser in such a way that if he enters he will find nothing but what is displayed in the window” (xxxiii.3). Becoming a Stoic means more than just adopting the most important of their tenets, there is a world of truth to be discovered once one becomes a Stoic, and far from it being the case that, initiated into the school of philosophy, one “buys into” its major tenets, Seneca says, “we allow them,” our purchasers, “to take their *exemplaria* from where they wish.” *Exemplaria* are samples, models, precedents, or patterns. The word is deftly chosen because, in this analogy, the purchaser wants “samples” of the whole philosophy. But what the purchaser wants is an *eidōs*, something that can serve as a general form on which to pattern action. If what we want is a single model or standard for action, Seneca tells us that each of us must go through life taking up many different models or standards *ourselves*, depending upon the time and place.

Non sumus sub rege; sibi quisque se vindicate, ‘We are not under a king,’ writes Seneca, ‘each person frees himself for himself’ (xxxiii.4). Aside from harkening back to the first lines of the epistles, *vindica te tibi*, this statement of Seneca’s draws attention to the fact that the Stoics adopt a methodology that makes it impossible for anyone to devise for us the *sententia*, or ‘maxims’ by which we are liberated. The Stoics are distinguished from their contemporaries in terms of the comparative lack of slavish devotion they show the founders of their school, a fact that Seneca explains with reference to the Epicureans tendency to assume that “everything that any man utters is spoken under the leadership and commanding authority of one alone” so that *quicquid Hermarchus dixit, quicquid Metrodorus, ad unum refertur*, so that ‘everything that Hermarchus says, everything that Metrodorus says, can be referred to one source’ (xxxiii.4).

For the Stoics, it is not so simple, because even if they wished to, they could not begin by extracting or drawing away from a multitude of *sententia* a few that stand out against the background of the rest, much less a few from which the rest seems to be derived, a few to which the rest could be reduced. Besides, this is to miss the objective of Stoic life, which is to draw upon a web of interrelated truths:

For this reason, give over hoping that you can skim, by means of epitomes, the wisdom of distinguished men. Look into their wisdom as a whole. They are working out a plan, and weaving together, line upon line, a masterpiece, from which nothing can be taken away without injury to the whole. Examine the separate parts, if you like, provided you examine them as parts of the man as whole. She is not a beautiful woman whose ankle or arm is praised, but she whose general appearance makes you forget to admire her separate parts. (xxxiii.5)

This idea, that like a beautiful woman who is not praised because of the beauty of her parts, but because of the way that none stands out against the background of the rest, invokes a very Stoic idea of beauty in which the whole derives its beauty from the relationship of its parts. Truth works in the same manner. The truth of one statement is derived not from its qualities, but from the relationship it bears to a multitude of other truths. But this has profound implications

for the way truths are to be learned. *Non enim excidunt, sed fluunt*—‘they do not drip, they flow.’ *Perpetua et inter se context sunt*—‘they are unbroken interwoven’ (xxxiii.6). Thus, to attain the truth, one should not count on memorizing a few maxims. *Dicat ista, non teneat*—‘let him speak them, not hold them’ (xxxiii.7).

To memorize is different than to know, writes Seneca, and most of us rest content merely with memorizing another’s words. “Remembering is merely safeguarding something entrusted to memory; knowing, however, means making everything your own; it means not depending upon the exemplum and not all the time glancing back at the master.” There is simply, says Seneca, truth to be discovered on one’s own:

However, the truth will never be discovered if we rest content with discoveries already made. Besides, he who follows another not only discovers nothing, but is not even investigating. What then? Shall I not follow in the footsteps of my predecessors? I shall indeed use the old road, but if I find one that makes a shorter cut and is smoother to travel, I shall open the new road. Men who have made these discoveries before us are not our masters, but our guides. Truth lies open for all; it has not yet been monopolized, and there is plenty left over for prosperity to discover. (xxiii.11)

Seneca closes this letter by reminding Lucilius that truth is not something that is attained once and for all. It requires the repeated efforts of those who follow in the footsteps of others to bring to light new truths. Therefore, we should never use the truths that others have discovered as our exemplum, as a fixed model by which we should steer the course of all our actions. So far from blindly doing what we are taught, we must become the authors of our own truths.⁴⁴

Lucilius’ desire for universal maxims is closely connected to the desire for thought to arrive at a point that would make all further thought unnecessary. It is as though one could arrive at a conception of the truth that could hold once and for all and render unnecessary, not only all further attempts to cure oneself of untruth, but that could by the force of their “applicability” to all circumstances render unnecessary the very need that Seneca identifies as that of creating one’s own maxims as situations arise. Deeply significant here is the Stoic claim that sagehood is a nearly unattainable ideal, one that, even if it could be attained would mean not the possession of a universal truth, but the perfect consistency of all one’s thoughts with each other. Lucilius still hopes that those Stoics who have purged themselves of false beliefs will have arrived finally at general truths that will obviate the need for him to do the same. Seneca must remind him that he cannot simply learn what others have established. *Quosque discas?*, he retorts, *Iam et praecipe*— ‘How long will you learn? Be a teacher’ (xxxiii.9).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Even compelling students to memorize *praecepta* should not be considered a form of brainwashing in the order of shock therapy, as Brennan remarks: “It is perhaps not too shocking that Epictetus tells us to recite the same piece of school doctrine over to ourselves repeatedly...On the other hand, some methods envisioned by Epictetean *askēsis* should prompt us to ask the general question: Can cognitive theorists help themselves to any possible means of behavior modification, while still claiming that they are attempting to reshape beliefs? What if they claim that our actions are the result of a belief that we do not avow and are unaware of having, and further claim that we cannot rid ourselves of this putative belief, even in principle, except by the use of electric shocks?...We should at least be disappointed when the bright Socratic hope of rationally arguing our way to virtue is replaced by the grim Epictetean tedium of catechetical pushups.” Tad Brennan, “Stoic Moral Psychology,” 278-79.

⁴⁵ “I think it should be clearly understood—and for us, this is one of the most important, and for us at least, most paradoxical features, because it will not be the same for many other cultures—that what distinguishes asceticism (*askēsis*) in the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman world, whatever the effects of austerity, renunciation, prohibition, and pernicky prescriptiveness this *askēsis* may induce, is that it is not basically and never was obedience to law. *Askēsis* is not established

This is but another way to arrive at the observation John Sellars makes when he writes that philosophy “should perhaps be approached as a series of biographies of philosophers or examples of ideal philosophical lives, rather than as a collection of theoretical systems or philosophies.” “Rather than upon ‘philosophy’ conceived as an abstract discipline or activity that could be separated from the lives of the individuals who practiced it,” Seneca seems to agree that the emphasis, for the Stoics much more than for their contemporaries, falls upon *becoming* a philosopher oneself.⁴⁶

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE AND ITS ROLE IN THE HERMENEUTIC OF THE SUBJECT

In 1984 Foucault confesses that he would like to have done with his study of the ancients “in order to return after this several years long Greco-Roman ‘trip,’ to some more contemporary problems.” It was difficult for Foucault himself to know in what direction the work of this period would take him. The political implications Foucault would have eventually drawn from what he was studying might have become clearer to himself and to us—that is, if Foucault had not suddenly abandoned the trajectory of his research when he suddenly stumbled upon the phenomenon of *parrhesia*. Foucault recognized the drawback of interrupting his train of thought, “However,” he said, “this drawback was compensated for by the fact that I drew a bit closer to a theme which, after all, has always been present in my analysis of...the relations of power and their role in the interplay between the subject and truth.”

He allowed himself to be lured away by a subject matter promising implications for power and politics. Let us return then to the very line of thought Foucault was pursuing at the time in order to see where it might have taken him if he had not abandoned it so abruptly, and how it might have led back to the subject of power.⁴⁷

What Foucault discovered soon enough was that a Stoic had no universal standard outside of experience by which the truth or falsity of individual impressions can be judged. Nevertheless, false impressions must be removed. And to this end, the subject has to take up a different perspective on the world—not a universal or binding one—but a different perspective nonetheless.

For Arendt, this “philosophic” perspective we take on the world is typified by Cicero’s “Dream of Scipio” in the final part of *De Re Publica*, in which Scipio Africanus relates a dream he had on the eve of his victory over Carthage. He floats far above the earth, from which height, he is permitted to look down upon human affairs. His empire is a mere dot, his legacy

and does not deploy its techniques by reference to an authority like the law. In reality, *askêsis* is a practice of truth. *Askêsis* is not a way of subjecting the subject to law; it is a way of binding him to the truth.” Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 317.

⁴⁶ Sellars, *The Art of Living*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ The ways and means by which a person comes to think of oneself as speaking the truth, especially about oneself, is what interests Foucault, and the role another person plays in the process of coming to learn the truth when there is indeed “this other person indispensable for me to be able to tell the truth about myself,” is what comes to interest Foucault when he discovers this other person must speak with *parrhêsia*. Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 5. But before he became interested in the procedures employed by this third party, “which are indispensable, for conveying true discourse to the person who needs it to constitute himself as a subject of sovereignty over himself and as a subject of veridiction on his own account” he seemed to have been interested in how subjects pursued the path to self-knowledge in dialogue only with themselves. It is this phenomenon whose political implications have gone unarticulated. Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 374.

soon to vanish. Things he once considered goods, now appear as vain playthings, his former judgments as false. Even the things he once considered the earthly reward for his earthly toil are suddenly deprived of their former value. “Here,” Arendt says, “thinking means following a sequence of reasoning that will lift you to a viewpoint outside the world of appearances as well as outside your own life.”⁴⁸

She and others take the Stoics to mean that things only appear evil from our perspective here on earth, and that if we could adopt a more rational, more philosophic viewpoint on the world, we would see that every evil is a necessary part of a perfectly-ordered cosmos, and thus that what is evil from our own perspective merely seems so. And yet, because there is no avoiding the fact that something seems evil, the philosopher keeps his eyes fixed on the world as he sees it from a great height and tries to close his eyes to “think away” whatever contradicts this picture of the world. She has the Stoics urging us to adopt a more rational outlook on the world, from the perspective of which our pre-philosophical preconceptions can be invalidated, voided, and annulled.

For Arendt, the Stoics have simply seized and elaborated upon the Aristotelian idea that thought is an activity that is self-contained and detached from the world.⁴⁹ Needing nothing for itself but its own exercise, thinking is an activity that is unlike every other source of pleasure, since for the rest we depend upon something or somebody else in the external world (*Pol.* 1267a12). The demands of the body and of political life impinge upon it, disrupt it, and have the power to interrupt it in only the slightest degree, so it can continue, and continue to supply us the pleasure we always derive from it even while the world recedes into the distance, and is all but completely forgotten. It can therefore free us from our former awareness of the world; it renders our concern for the world obsolete.⁵⁰

For Foucault, however, the “philosophic perspective” has to do with more than just our ability to “think away” unpleasant thoughts. It belongs to a hermeneutic in which the individual shifts his or her perspective in one, it must be noted, of *many* possible ways. The shift-in-perspective makes it possible for entrenched beliefs to lose their currency because they cannot be maintained while this shift-in-perspective takes place. It is not possible for Scipio, for example, to free himself from the impression that his actions will have a lasting influence in history, until he has looked at the world from a new perspective. But once he shifts his perspective, that impression cannot be maintained consistently.

Even Foucault comes dangerously close to asserting this perspective is a universal one when he implies that it is from this new perspective that we may see particulars in a new light. He says, for example, that we survey the world from on high and then seeing the relationship between things, view our place among them in a different way. What this cannot be interpreted

⁴⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, 160.

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that one among the many reasons Foucault would have for refuting this claim is that, for him, late Stoicism places reduced emphasis on the goodness of the parts when seen from the perspective of the whole, and instead argues that suffering is not an evil for the contrasting reason that suffering gives you an opportunity to exercise your virtue. Without undergoing suffering, you have no opportunity to practice exercising your virtue, and so, in a sense, an evil can always be turned to your benefit in the same way the tests of physical skill imposed by a trainer can always be turned to the advantage of a gymnast who uses them to practice his skill. In this sense, Stoicism does not require you to deny that you are suffering when you are suffering, or that evil is a reality; far from denying its painfulness, the Stoics consider it good precisely insofar as it is painful. Foucault even remarks that this may be one way to respond to that same criticism of Stoicism that Cicero makes in the same spirit as Arendt, that it would have us “think away” suffering. Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 442.

⁵⁰ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 162.

to mean is that the universal perspective “sheds light”⁵¹ on ourselves and our relationship to other particulars because a broad, or all-encompassing outlook on the world suffices to illuminate all we could need to know about the particulars in it, including ourselves. This would, in essence, amount to a general knowledge of the world that would give one objective knowledge of the self, as if one could treat it as one among other objects to which some general truth applied. Again, it is important to recognize that this philosophic perspective cannot be confused with a universal one, as it would be if we were to assume that it was directly from this perspective that we could deduce the knowledge of particulars and our place among them.

If Foucault sometimes implies this, then it is not in the spirit of his own work.⁵² Nor for that matter, is the related idea that this is one’s natural consequence—the idea that ethical life is simply a matter of taking truths that have their basis outside of our experience of particulars and trying to find ways to “incorporate them” into thought and action. This is essentially to say that ethical life is simply a matter of taking more “universal” truths that have their basis outside of experience and “applying” them to experience. Here “truth” is still something general that can be applied to particular cases.

Foucault is at his best, however, when he describes Seneca as needing to take up a view outside himself in order to free himself from himself.⁵³ In this sense, philosophy still remains a way of freeing oneself of false opinion. But instead of appealing to a universal perspective in relation to which individual truths can be judged false, what appears at first glance to be a “universal perspective,” is assumed only for the space of time required to loosen the grip of certain individual thoughts, so that they can give way to truer thoughts as process of substitution that is always piecemeal; the removal of one false thought creates the possibility for a true one to take its place. Everyday perspectives must withstand the test of a change of perspective if they are to hold good, and since, when this broader perspective is assumed, particular perspectives cannot be held quite as firmly, they may slip away and be discarded.

This is, of course, important insofar as it will allow us to follow Foucault’s lead and to attempt to explain the difference between self-transformation in Stoicism as opposed to self-transformation in the Platonic and Christian traditions. We all know the well-worn caricature of the Platonic philosopher who turns away from the appearing world, in order to liberate the self from the body, its prison. In Platonism, the goal is to liberate a “true self” from a “false self” that prevents it from seeing the truth; liberated from the false self, the true self can perceive the truth.

Before the process of self-transformation can begin, certain beliefs must be cast aside. The difference is that in Stoicism, the answer to the question of which must be stripped away cannot be predetermined. No easy answer can be given to the question of which part of the self must be stripped away and which “true self” will remain, because there is no “true self” to

⁵¹ The mistake would also be to place too much emphasis on vision as a metaphor for learning. As Foucault says, “We do not learn virtue by looking. It is and can only be learned through the ear: because virtue cannot be separated from the *logos*, that is to say from rational language, from language really present, expressed and articulated verbally in sounds and rationally by reason. The *logos* can only penetrate through the ear, and thanks to the sense of hearing.” Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 336.

⁵² For Foucault it is all too often presumed that we must attain a knowledge of the world that can also be applied to the self: “In the last two lectures, I wanted to show that when the question of the relationship between the subject and knowledge is posed in the culture of the self of the Hellenistic and Roman period, the question never arises of whether the subject is objectifiable (*objectivable*), whether the same mode of knowledge can be applied to the subject as is applied to things of the world and whether the subject is really one of the knowable things of the world.” *Ibid.*, 318.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 275.

speak of except a set of true opinions, which are as yet, indistinguishable from as many other false opinions. We have no standard by which to distinguish between true beliefs and false; in Stoicism we cannot therefore cast off a certain part of ourselves we already know to be constituted of false beliefs, or expect the self that remains to have its own means to access the truth.

We must emphasize the circularity of the process of self-transformation in order to bring to the fore an aspect of the process that provides the common standard of comparison,⁵⁴ by means of which Foucault himself seems to understand the differences between the Stoic, the Platonist, and the Christian. For each, one starts out to find oneself again. Starting out from the person one currently is on a journey of self-discovery that will eventually end when one returns to the person one is. Foucault asks, “What does it mean to return to the self? What is this circle, this loop, this falling back that we must carry out with regard to something that is not given to us [i.e. the self], since at best we are promised it at the end of life?”⁵⁵

For Foucault, the Platonic dynamic is merely symptomatic of a deeper and more enduring way in which we still assume one passes from self-ignorance to self-knowledge, and in the process, from darkness into light. In Platonism you must discover who you truly are, and thereby discover a deep truth that you have long since forgot. By coming to know your inner self, you come to know a deeper truth. But there is a hermeneutic at work here, and the process is cyclical: in order to know yourself, you have to know what you already know “deep down inside yourself” about the world, but you can only know this by regaining knowledge of who you have been all along. In Foucault’s words, “The soul discovers what it is by recalling what it has seen. And it is by recalling what it is, that it finds access to what it has seen.”⁵⁶

This explains the difference between the hermeneutic circle in Stoicism and Platonism: For Platonists, a personal relationship to the truth is guaranteed by a type of feedback loop between the self and the truth, in which the more one wants to know the truth in general, the more one has to know about one’s “true self.” Thus, if one wishes to regain knowledge of what one knows “deep down inside oneself,” one must try to regain knowledge of who one truly is and has been all along.

For this reason, Foucault avers, if there is a hermeneutic at work in Platonism, the point-of-entry through which Platonists pass into this circle of interpretation lies in gaining knowledge of their “true selves.” Compare this with the hermeneutic circle in Stoicism (and here is what Foucault makes less patent): Its distinguishing feature is that it is not a closed circle in which the subject’s self-conception reinforces and is reinforced by a certain conception of the truth. The very *problem* for the Stoic is that he or she already begins with a sense of the truth that is self-reinforcing. The Stoics already begin with a conception of the truth that is self-supporting, and which, if it has any relationship to the Stoics’ self-conception at all, may serve

⁵⁴ It is my view that this is necessary in order to keep from simply reducing the differences between Platonism, Christianity, and Stoicism to the fact that the first is marked by “recollection,” the second by “self-exegesis and self-renunciation,” and the third by “self-finalization” (Ibid., 258). These superficial differences emerge from the common root of a circular process in which the Platonist, Christian, and Stoic are all engaged. Even though Foucault makes explicit reference only to the fact that these dynamics were best analyzed as “circular relations” (see for example p. 255), we are justified in this belief because in no instance does the subject ever have immediate and unmediated access to him or herself; the self’s inquiry into itself must always pass through another medium, through which the subject can gain knowledge of itself.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 253.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 255.

to reinforce it. It is the rigid and intractable entanglement of Scipio's thoughts with each other that must be broken up—precisely through a shift in perspective. And if this shift in perspective has any result at all, it will not result in the reinforcing, but just as Foucault says, in the “questioning of the identity of the self.”⁵⁷

The hermeneutic at work is one in which a relationship to particulars is adjusted relative to a shift of perspective, so that our view of the part is adjusted in relationship to our view of the whole. We have here something like a vicious circle, and there is no escaping it, though as Veyne remarks, “This seemingly vicious circle troubles some Stoics greatly, but we moderns call it the hermeneutic circle and realize there is nothing vicious about it.” This vicious circle, or depending on your perspective, “virtuous cycle” means for Veyne that “The whole cannot be understood without an understanding of the precepts, but a precept cannot be understood apart from the whole.”⁵⁸

If Stoicism is then to distinguish itself from Platonism and Christianity, it is through the point-of-entry that one enters into this vicious circle, the starting-point from which it is set going. But the hermeneutic can also be considered in relationship to the external world. In Platonism, this is especially because one passes through the knowledge of one's true self to the knowledge of the truth that the self can perceive only once it has shifted its attention away from the external world and refocused it on the self. The more one focuses one's attention on the world, the more likely one is to be taken in by false appearances. So far we have seen that Stoicism is essentially of a piece with Christianity and Platonism in requiring that we divert our attention from external things that have a tendency to exert a distorting influence upon our perception of the world. “When the precept ‘care about the self’ takes on the scope, the generality, the radical and absolute character of ‘one must change one's life to turn around on oneself and seek to get back to oneself,’” Foucault asks, “does not the precept ‘convert to the self’ then entail the partial or no doubt total transfer of the gaze, of attention, of the focal point of the mind, away from things of the world and towards the oneself?”⁵⁹

It is much more than a question of simply diverting our attention away from a vision-distorting world. The influence the world has upon us takes the form of false beliefs that are socially inculcated, and it is precisely these that must be removed before we can perceive the truth. It is just as true in Stoicism as in Platonism that in order to transform oneself, one must turn away from the world, if what one means is turning away from the falsehoods that are suggested to us by society at large. However, when the Platonic philosopher turns away from the outside world, he or she also turns away from an outer world toward an inner world, an inner self, one that cannot clearly be distinguished from the self that has come under the influence of the outside world, but one that is guaranteed to “see” the truth completely independently of it.

In Stoicism the sheer impossibility of telling where an outer world of falsity ends and an inner world of truth begins changes the whole nature of the process, with significant political ramifications. Certain opinions derived from the external world must be shed before the truth can appear as such, but whereas this process receives a jump start in Platonism because one already knows which externally-derived opinions can be shed, things are never so easy in Stoicism. While it may be true, in a certain sense, that beliefs must be discarded if a new

⁵⁷ Ibid., 320.

⁵⁸ Veyne, *Seneca*, 77.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 252.

perspective is to be had, the subject cannot abandon them *all at once*. One could say that it is a matter of the relative extremes to which the Platonist and the Christian will go to cast off pre-reflective beliefs, in order to get the whole process started—and that only this distinguishes the two. That would be putting it correctly, since for the Stoic, a set of externally-derived opinions cannot be shed *en masse*, as they can for the Platonist, precisely because the Stoic does not know which opinions are false, and are only held because they have been thrust upon him or herself by the external world, and which are true and would be held whether or not the external world interfered. Therefore, the process is changed to the extent that the Stoic cannot and must not reject common opinions all at once. Seneca, for one, cautions Lucilius not to summarily reject the opinions and attitudes of the masses, writing to him, “This is the mean of which I approve; our life should observe a happy mean between the ways of a sage and the ways of the world at large; all men should admire it, but they should understand it also” (*Ep.* v.5). This could merely be a strong conservative streak in Seneca making itself apparent, but this statement should be interpreted in light of the Stoic idea that false beliefs must be removed one by one, in a process that is always halting and piecemeal.

The whole process gains its political significance from the outset, from the fact that its aim is to unfetter and unburden the self of the false opinions that have been forced upon it by society at large. But neither is it *just* a question of freedom from false opinion and truth for its own sake. It is only once one we have cast off the shackles of false opinion that we appear before others and before ourselves as free and able to perceive the truth of things. Only then can we be seen in the eyes of others and ourselves, as being worthy of being invested with political power. In this sense, the whole process is political to begin with, but it is even more politically charged to the extent that the opinions we must cast off are precisely those which hold sway in the public sphere, and that are taken readily as “commonsensical” by the populous at large.

But here is the question: Who indeed would invest political power in the person who claimed to be in possession of the truth even after they had rejected half of what passed for common sense in society at large? On what grounds did the Stoics think that a person who claimed to be in possession of a truth that flagrantly contradicted common sense come to appear as knowledgeable in the eyes of others? A Platonist could certainly not so appear in the eyes of others. For rejecting all at once, *in toto*, a vast set of widely held opinions and embracing a truth that appeared to one’s inner self at the moment when all those commonly held opinions had been rejected and discarded as “mere appearance”—that would not recommend oneself to others as a truth teller. But even though one’s opinions might jar and clash with common opinion, it was possible to appear before others as a truth teller—if one could show that one had *not* acted the part of a Platonist. In other words, only if one could show that one had *not* simply rejected the external and outside world outright, and that one had instead engaged in the labored task of divesting oneself of false opinions, bit by bit, one at a time—then, and only then, could one appear as in possession of the truth. To recapitulate, only if one started out by accepting and remaining in general agreement with conventional thinking and popular wisdom could one appear to others as having arrived by legitimate means at a more unconventional truth. This was the essential paradox: only if one started out from a position of relative conservatism could one appear as a radical political thinker.

In sum, in order to appear as a truth-teller one could not begin from the premature exclusion of a set of beliefs and the immediate appeal to a truth whose validity was supported by a conception of the self. One had first to appear as having engaged in the slowly, over a sustained period of time, in refashioning, around set of carefully chosen beliefs, a new self whose existence could not have been imagined in advance. Or, in Foucault’s words,

“the subject must not start out from a sense of himself, but must advance towards something that is himself.”⁶⁰

Thus, the Stoic does not turn inward in expectation of finding an “inner self” unveiled in its untouched state, since his or her self must not simply be rediscovered but re-created, not simply unearthed but re-fashioned. With the hope of simply rediscovering instead of wholly replacing the self, goes all incentive for hurriedly casting off world encumbrances in order to see the “truth inside oneself” the better. Nothing certain is accomplished and much is risked by casting off worldly beliefs and worldly attachment, some of which may be perfectly valid, all at once.⁶¹ This is what makes Stoicism a philosophy of gradualism *by definition*. Seneca may often be seen to compromise his rigorous Stoicism, in urging that we not throw aside our worldly attachments all at once, that we not disdainfully abjure the thoughts and feelings of the masses. But it should be argued not that he compromises his Stoicism, but that Stoicism is a philosophy of compromise.

For it were only if Stoicism were a philosophy like Platonism that the one could abandon all of one’s normal habits and all of one’s ties to the world, and turn to an inner truth, as though it would await one there once all of one’s ties to reality had been cut. Such would presuppose that one could simply abandon one’s pre-reflective judgments about the world on the supposition that, once one had discarded them, one would be able to establish, independently and only via self-knowledge, a personal relationship to the truth without their help. But an appeal to one’s true self is not introduced at any stage in the process of discovering truth. Contrary to Christianity and Platonism, in which “we must be able to say the truth about ourselves, in order to be able to establish a relationship to truth in general in which we will be able to find our salvation,”⁶² there is nothing buried deep within the Stoic’s soul to which he may appeal in order to set going the process of discovering a truth and removing falsity.

*It is in this sense that we can agree with the first of two claims that Foucault makes about Stoicism—that it takes the process of caring for the self and makes gaining knowledge of oneself an inessential part of this process.*⁶³

But can we deny that the Roman Stoic is any less interested than the Socrates of the *Alcibiades* in seeing the *divine* within himself? Does he not need to turn inward in order to cast his eyes on and recognize that which is divine within himself? It seems that every form of ascetic practice since Plato has shared in common with it the aim of helping converts to recognize the divine in themselves in order that they may become acquainted with the divinity in the cosmos as a whole so that the whole process “involves the soul knowing its own nature, and on this basis, having access to what is connatural to the soul.”⁶⁴ Even Foucault can only deny that there is a similar need in Stoicism by minimizing and diminishing its importance in Stoicism relative to Platonism and Christianity.⁶⁵ But while it is true that aligning oneself with the divine

⁶⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁶¹ Precepts that do not receive reinforcement from many other precepts will never take hold in the mind, and this apart from the fact that their limited applicability makes them useless all on their own.

⁶² Ibid., 364.

⁶³ The two points Foucault makes are that (1) the care of the self is decoupled from self-knowledge, and (2) the little self-knowledge that the care of the self demands is decoupled from recognizing the divine element in oneself (Ibid., 420).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 455.

⁶⁵ “You know the principle of *homoiōsis tō theō*, of ‘assimilation to God,’ how the necessity of recognizing oneself as participating in divine reason, or even as a substantial part of the divine reason that organizes the world is very present

is an absolute necessity, there is no question of achieving a connection to the divine by “looking” for it inside oneself. The metaphor of looking for one’s divine self is never used because it is presumed that connection to the divine comes not with literally “sighting it” as though it were always there to be seen, a kind of inner essence permanently on view to our intellectual vision, to the eye of the mind. A connection to the divine is earned through harmonizing one’s actions with the divine element that drives them in a particular direction without directly trying to gain theoretical or speculative knowledge of it. While there is *logos* inside us all, it is not to be distinguished from *logos* in the external world. Thus, there is no “true divine self” to be uncovered, only a “true divine self” to emerge in interaction with the external world.

Related to the fact that the Stoic does reject common opinion all at once is the fact that knowledge of the external world, which is at best a distraction and at worst an obstacle for the Platonist, retains its importance for the Stoic. Insofar as the Stoic sought self-knowledge at all, “this self-knowledge was definitely not an alternative to knowledge of nature. It was not a question of either knowing nature or knowing ourselves.”⁶⁶ The Stoic’s turn away from falsity seems not to demand a turn *away from the world, but toward an inner world that lays bare the path to truth*. Thus the knowledge of the outer world is never surpassed in importance by the knowledge of the inner world inside the self. Accordingly, the Stoic does not attain a self-knowledge that is sought at the cost of the world. This is evidenced by the fact that Seneca gains knowledge by turning to the world, in an attempt to gain a knowledge of it that will shed further light on himself—without, it should be added, simply allowing his situation to be used as single case exemplifying more generally about the nature of reality. Nor can the subject set the process going by an appeal to some truth behind appearances. There must be a change of perspective, which cannot imply an “escape” from one plane of existence to another—not an ontological flight, as Foucault says from one kind of being to another, in which the ascent thereto could be an easy means of “escaping” a falsity than much more easily distinguished from truth.

This then leaves us to conclude that Stoicism redefines ethical life as we know it. As Foucault explains, there are three elements common to ethical life in the modern world: The first of these is the individual’s *connaissance* or ‘knowledge’ of him or herself. The second is the individual’s obedience to universally binding laws. The third is self-renunciation as a prerequisite for perceiving the truth. Usually, one must, based on a preconception of the truth one is supposed to find at the end of the process, and based on preemptory understanding of the self that can alone know this truth, undertake a process of self-renunciation for the sake of both. To quote Foucault, we have *ascèsis qui renonce à soi en fonction d’une Parole qui a été dite par un Autre*, ‘an ascesis that renounces the self in service to a Word that has been spoken by an Other.’⁶⁷ While self-renunciation is still a necessary prerequisite for access to the truth, it is these last two aspects of ethical practice that are absent from its ancient forerunners. “In fact,” Foucault says, “neither of these two problems (of the subject’s obedience to law and of the subject’s knowledge of himself) was really fundamental or present in the thought of ancient culture.”⁶⁸

in the Stoics. However, I do not think this recognition of oneself as a divine element occupies the central place it has in Platonism and Neo-Platonism (Ibid., 420).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 259.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 327; *L’Herméneutique du sujet*, p. 313 (trans. mine).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 319.

If we then come to the relationship between theory and praxis, we see that Stoicism is indeed a series of practices. But we should be clear when we say that this reason or *logos* is not thereby assigned a diminished role. Asserting the value of praxis as a *means* to truth does nothing to diminish the importance of attaining the truth, and it does nothing to diminish the importance of reason in human life.⁶⁹ We can safely dismiss Sellars' worry that "If philosophy were simply a series of exercises for the soul, then it would be nothing more than a process of habituation that would not involve the development of a rational understanding of what was being learned."⁷⁰ It would be just as wrong to say that Stoicism is more practically concerned with *askēsis* than knowledge, if by that we mean practice over theory, and it would be to say that it was more theoretical. We cannot simply effect a reversal wherein practice becomes more important than knowledge or vice versa. Foucault comes close to insinuating as much when he says that in Stoicism the essential thing is *askēsis* rather than knowledge, but what this must be taken to mean is there is not knowledge that practice seeks, and which it can cease to seek once it has attained this end. The practice of removing falsity is an unfinished task that never simply ceases with the attainment of the knowledge it seeks.

⁶⁹ Nussbaum, in her belief that philosophy becomes indistinguishable from spirituality if we emphasize *askēsis* at the expense of *logos*, writes, "What sets philosophy apart from popular religion, dream-interpretation, and astrology is its commitment to rational argument." It should be clear that assigning reason a new role in relationship to practice does nothing to diminish "the dignity of reason," as Nussbaum fears. We can, however, accept her way of assuaging these fears, that is by redescribing "spiritual exercises" as "rational exercises." Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 353.

⁷⁰ It should not only become clear that Stoicism *is* a series of practices, but that this does *not* mean that it is any less concerned with our intellectual development (117). We must therefore reject Sellars' central claim: "The important point to note here is that one should not identify spiritual practices with the goal of life itself. As we have already seen, such exercises are merely the second, although essential stage, of philosophical education, coming after an initial stage devoted to philosophical principles (*logoi*)." Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 116.

- CHAPTER FIVE -

PHRONÉSIS AND TECHNÉ AT ROME

“The man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances, as the best general makes the best use of the army at his command and a shoemaker makes the best shoes out of the hides that are given to him; and so with all the other craftsmen (*technitas*).”

- Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1100b35-1101a6

“Do you think that he is oppressed by bad circumstances? He makes use of them. Phidias didn’t just know how to make statues out of ivory; he also made them from bronze. If you offered him marble, if you had offered him some marble cheaper than that, he would still have made the best statue he could have made from it.”

- Seneca, *Ep.* xxv.41

In attempting to discern the correct course of action, one does not necessarily need to transcend the limits placed upon one’s knowledge by one’s material situation. One can, making use of just what the situation supplies, “make do.” Rather than seek knowledge they could not attain, this is precisely what Cicero and Seneca choose to do. They teach us that we can manage with a limited amount of knowledge about our own concrete situation. They teach us to be resourceful and industriousness with regard to what little we do know about the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This can be seen even more clearly if we take seriously the claim that practical intelligence is an art or craft. If we examine the reasons for the analogy between virtue and art, we shall find further confirmation of the effort to cultivate a kind of intelligence that is like an art because it claims no more for itself than the ability to employ available resources sensibly and adaptably.

A RETURN TO THE TECHNÉ ANALOGY

Nothing seems more natural to us, or to the Greeks, than to distinguish between ‘making’ and ‘acting.’ The very fact that we have a separate word for each implies that each is distinct with respect to what it brings into the world, something made and something done, respectively. ‘Making’ can also be distinguished from ‘acting,’ in terms of the source out of which it arises. ‘Making’ seems to have its source in thinking or intending different from that out of which ‘acting’ arises. It is probably because he expects his audience to share this assumption that Aristotle brusquely announces in the sixth book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* that, “making and acting are different...so the reasoned state of capacity to act is different than the reasoned state of capacity to make” (*Nic. Eth.* 1140a1).

Aristotle allots a distinct form of *nous* to each so that the first arises from *dianoia poiêtikê* and the second from *dianoia praktikê* (1139a26). From this point on, Aristotle posits two different powers-of-mind to lie behind acting and doing, or two distinct manners of knowing and perceiving. The effect of this distinction is, however, to reinforce a common presupposition that acting finely and well amounts *not* merely to taking the manner of knowing that everyone can exercise in his or her own realm of expertise, the workshop or the marketplace, honing it, deepening it, or expanding its reach. Acting well, according to this presupposition, means acting with a completely distinct kind of knowledge.

It must nonetheless be argued that the Stoics did not share this presupposition. Herein, in fact, lies the significance of their *ars vitae*. Their espousal of an ‘art of life,’ it must be argued, amounts to the denial that acting well is a matter of seeking a kind of knowledge other than the productive, and an affirmation of the fact that acting well is merely a matter of expanding the breadth and reach of a creative, technical, productive, artistic knowledge we all already possess. This art constituted, in Seneca’s words, the *maxima omnis artes*, the ‘greatest of all arts,’ and distinguished itself from the rest simply by having its end in the human *telos*.

It is widely-known that the Stoics describe virtue as an ‘art.’ In this they would appear to relinquish the philosopher’s dream of describing a superior form of intelligence that can be distinguished from art. But if and when this historical detail is recounted, it is seldom accompanied by any serious reflection. Yet it is significant that the Stoics appear to have given up on the philosophic project of describing some wisdom or intelligence totally distinct from artistic ability, one conferring on the knower the ability to act *well*.¹

Indeed, little consideration has been given to the kind of development Stoicism represents in the history of philosophy, since the time when Socrates first asked, ‘Is virtue an art?’ Contrast the intense interest generated by Aristotle’s response to this Socratic question. Aristotle could appeal to common sense in arguing that *phronêsis* simply “cannot be...*technê*...because action and making are separate kinds of things” (1140a2). But although his answer to the question of whether *phronêsis* is a *technê* is a straightforward ‘no,’ Aristotle finds it as difficult to speak about practical knowledge, without differentiating it from *technê*, as he does to speak about it without comparing the two. As a result of this ambivalence, there are those who see Aristotle as wresting practical knowledge away, once and for all, from all association with *technê*. There are also those who, like Thomas Angier, hold that “although Aristotle rejects any understanding of full virtue as a craft, it does not follow from this that models at home in the crafts do not have a marked influence on the way he understands and explicates central features of his ethical theory.”²

¹ One exception is Annas who has already stressed the radical, and to her preferable, alternative Stoicism is for modern virtue theory if it does not: “The ancient virtue ethics tradition followed Plato and the Stoics in holding that virtue is a skill. That is, it is a kind of skill, there being other kinds as well; virtue is, as the Stoics put it, the skill of living. The claim that we should follow the ancient tradition rather than Aristotle may at first sound rather academic, but this issue of whether virtue is or is not a skill is not merely of historical interest: it raises philosophically crucial issues about the intellectual structure of virtue.” Julia Annas, “The Structure of Virtue,” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, eds. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 16-17.

² Angier, *Technê in Aristotle’s Ethics: Crafting the Moral Life* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 127. The debate about the role of the technical character of practical intelligence is encapsulated by two major works on the subject: Tom Angier’s above cited book and Dunne’s, *Back to the Rough Ground*. Dunne stresses the difference between the two in order to stress that in distinguishing *phronêsis* from it Aristotle set limits the applicability of *technê*’s in ethical life (252). Angier meanwhile is convinced that Aristotle mentions *technê* in connection with *phronêsis* not just to furnish himself with analogies and examples of virtue, but because his understanding of virtue is deeply intertwined with his understanding of *technê* (viii). “For whereas his non-ethical writings rarely make use of craft-models in more than a merely illustrative or analogizing

It is first necessary to establish how and in what specific way *phronêsis* resembles a *technê* for Aristotle, in order to answer the same question about the Stoics. If Aristotle can be seen to preserve a close association between practical knowledge and *technê* in at least one way, we can understand why the Stoics may have done the same. If at the same time he establishes that practical knowledge is something distinct from technical knowledge, then perhaps Stoicism gives us a practical knowledge that is insufficiently separated from *technê*.

It is with Aristotle's help that we can see in what ways the Stoics may have conflated *phronêsis* and *technê*, while in other ways maintained that the most philosophical of distinctions, whose very birth coincides with that of philosophy itself—is the distinction between what is *truly* virtuous, and what is simply technical. For Aristotle does much the same. We shall want to argue that even the Stoics thought of *phronêsis* as no more than *technê* carried to its highest form, they did not fail to stress the enormous distance that separated some very imperfect and rough kinds of technical expertise from that demanded by true virtue. Although it will not become fully clear until the second half of the chapter, we shall see that the Stoics' greatest contribution to the history of philosophy may have actually been to have reversed an entrenched trend in Platonic and Aristotelian tradition to suppose that virtue must share something in common with *technê* in its crudest form—*technê* striving toward the universal and repeatedly-instantiated forms.

The Stoics certainly believed, like Aristotle, in a *hexis alêthê meta logou praktikên peri ta anthrôpô agatha kai kaka*, a 'disposition for action, with reason, toward truth-perceiving concerning what is good and bad for men' (1140b7), describing it in almost identical terms. Zeno even appears to have favored using the word *phronêsis* to describe that virtuous disposition of the *hegimônikon*, which he believed concerned itself with *kathêkonta*, or 'appropriate actions.'³ The fact that subsequent Stoics appear to have referred to *phronêsis* alternately as *sapientia*, *prudencia*, an *ars vitae*, a *technê tou biou*, a *peri ton bion epistêmê*⁴—this leaves us with one of two options: either we conclude that the Stoics were simply careless with their terminology, or else, we assume they really did intend to imply that practical judgment was a kind of art. Their conflation of terms then, must be taken to indicate, not a failure to make an important distinction, but a failure to find fundamental differences between practical intelligence and art sufficient to justify differentiating the two. Since the Stoics did not distinguish between them, it remains for us to determine why, though fully aware of the reasons why one would want to distinguish the two, they preferred not to.

fashion, it is precisely in his ethics that Aristotle oversteps the limits of this approach, allowing those models to do more of the argumentative work than he acknowledges (or, for that matter, others acknowledge)" (viii). While Angier sees all the problems Aristotle creates for himself as in some way linked to the undue influence he has allowed *technê* to exercise upon his thinking, I hold that if the analogy fails in this respect, then it may succeed for others. I shall argue that if the parallels that Aristotle draws between *technê* and *phronêsis* are largely useful, and that if there is any respect in which the *technê* analogy becomes problematic, it is for the one reason to be discussed at the close of the chapter. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground*, viii.

³ *SVF* I.202; III.198; III.264. Zeno also described *phronêsis* as equivalent to *epistêmê* (*SVF* I.201). It was at once the only virtue, and that under which the other ethical virtues could subsumed. They represented, in Zeno's eyes, the various guises in which *phronêsis* presented itself, depending upon the circumstances. For example, *phronêsis* could appear in the form of courage in circumstances of danger, or in the form of moderation in circumstances of temptation. Aristotle, however, used *phronêsis* in a more limited sense than Zeno, and referred to his use of the term to one among other equally important virtues (*SVF* I.374). Kerferd, "What Does the Wise Man Know?," 133.

⁴ The last three appellations and more are given by Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Math.* VI.170; 180; 184).

NATURE IN ARISTOTLE

Omnis ars naturae imitatio est, ‘all art is an imitation of nature.’ With these words, Seneca asks that he be allowed to describe nature on analogy with the arts (*Itaque quod de universo dicebam, ad haec transfer, quae ab homine facienda sunt*). The analogy itself stands in no need of any justification. What holds for nature holds for art as well. Nature simply *is* art, and art nature (*Ep.* lvi.3).

This is first and foremost a fundamentally Aristotelian idea. But first, a few remarks about the possibility that Aristotelian physics can serve as the common basis on which to understand the relationship between *phrónesis* and *techné* in Aristotle, and consequently, in Stoicism as well. It is because it would be difficult to prove with absolute certainty that the Stoics were the inheritors of an Aristotelian tradition that the hypothesis that Stoicism must be considered an offshoot of Aristotelianism is seldom taken with any seriousness. What follows will make the hypothesis that the early Stoics were building upon an Aristotelian conception of nature a more plausible one, but it will never provide the historical evidence that would be needed to prove this hypothesis with any certainty.⁵ Nevertheless, I should like to convince the reader that *the very least* that can be said about Aristotle and the Stoics is that they were both consumed with the working-out of a common problem—how to think about nature in its relationship to practical and technical knowledge—and that the search for a solution to this problem led them each to arrive at conclusions with enough similarities as to cry out for cross-comparison.⁶

The specific problem that Aristotle sets to solving was that of how to explain natural processes of growth and change. Recall that it had been the habit of the pre-Socratics to explain all of nature and the changes its creatures underwent with reference to a single enduring substance with assigned qualities that accounted for exactly the kind of changes in need of explanation. Thales cited water as the cause of all things; the inherent qualities of water, which made it prone to condensation and evaporation, were assumed to lay behind a host of natural phenomena. The disadvantage of this approach, however, was that it sought to explain change with reference to an enduring substance.⁷ Things in motion were explained

⁵ Appendix Two provides a more detailed discussion of how the Stoics undoubtedly absorbed elements of Platonism and Aristotelianism into their own views about nature. Here we shall proceed on the points at which the Stoics diverged significantly from Aristotle are the ones described by Seneca, to be discussed below. For historical evidence of the direct influence of Aristotelians upon the Stoics, see Appendix One.

⁶ This approach avoids a certain difficulty that seems to be encountered by those studying the Stoic ‘art of life.’ Although he or she may start by explaining what the ‘art of life’ has in common with other arts, a scholar must always explain the obvious differences that distinguish them, as pointed out by critics of the idea of an art of life like Sextus Empiricus. Sellars, for example, looks upon the *ars vitae* as an art roughly analogous to that of medicine, an art whose aim appears to be the health of the soul. But he must account for the ways in which this analogy is obviously misleading. What the Stoics must have tried to accomplish by comparing practical knowledge to an art, and emphasizing the similarities between the two, is quickly lost sight of in the face of the glaring differences between virtue and art, which are left to the scholar to explain away. If we want to understand what was gained, rather than lost by comparing practical knowledge to an art, I suggest we first understand the reasons for which they were distinguished in the first place, and then attempt to explain the reasons for which the distinction could have been undone. See *The Art of Life*, especially Ch. 3, 55-54.

⁷ One might cite Heidegger here, who argues that Aristotle critiques his predecessors for understanding being with reference to beings. Walter Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), xiii.

with reference to things at rest, and change with reference to permanence. Aristotle is at his most critical when he condemns his forbearers' habit of confusing the elemental stuff of which the universe is made with what gives the cosmos its structure:

Therefore different people say that either, fire, or earth, or air, or water, or some of these ('elements'), or all of them, are *phusis* proper and thus are the being of beings as a whole. For whatever each of these people have taken antecedently up to be such as lies present in this way, whether it be one or many that he declares to be beingness as such, whereas the rest are modifications or states of what properly is, or that into which a thing is divided...[that] come to be and pass away without limit. (*Physics* 193a21-28)

Here we see Aristotle explain that, since the variable forms that matter takes, the fragments it breaks itself into, and the configurations it assumes, are considered to undergo a limitless amount of change, they are given lower ontological standing and designated as, in some sense, less real than matter itself. With Aristotle, the order of ontological priorities is reversed so that form is given, in some sense, higher standing than matter. Aristotle awards form higher ontological standing because form is what makes something, even if only from our human perspective, a distinct thing with definite limits—something more than an amorphous heap of matter.

Aristotle's desire to award form higher ontological standing than matter can, however, be seen to conflict with his desire to treat *phusei onta* or 'natural beings' as *ta kinoumena* or things 'being moved.' His desire, in other words, is to avoid the same error that his predecessors made when they explained change and variation with reference to unchanging substance. Just how much Aristotle remained determined to avoid this mistake is clear. In the *Physics* Aristotle says, "From the outset it should be for us that those beings that are by *phusis*, whether all of them or some of them are moving beings" (185a12). In this way, he sets himself the task of conducting an inquiry into nature, an inquiry that cannot be other than an investigation of things in motion and undergoing change.⁸

Earth takes the form of wood, and wood takes the form of a table, but neither would have existence independent of earth itself, the brute elemental stuff of which both are made. Yet, this is no argument in favor of crowning matter the thing that most truly *is*. For matter's being an essential component of all things endowed with being does not make it synonymous with being itself. On the other hand, the fact that it persists as an underlying substance could be some argument for its ontological priority, for that which persists through change is eternal, and 'the eternal' is, to the Greek mind, that which exists in the most "real" of ways. The question then becomes whether form has some claim to be called even "realer" than matter, that which, by definition, endures and persists through change. To make the case that form is of a higher order than matter, does Aristotle have to endorse the typically Greek view that the realest things are the most eternal, and then proceed to show that form is the most enduring of all?

An interpreter like Heidegger will show that even if Aristotle gives primacy to form it is not because it "endures" in the same way as things that remain forever themselves and persist through variation and change. Rather, Aristotle gives primacy to form because it is a configuration or an arrangement of matter that, perhaps even while changing, holds its general

⁸ What Aristotle claims his predecessors have omitted from their explanation of nature is *dunamis* or 'potentiality' (*Phys.* 191b26-a27).

shape—until the time comes when this shape is no longer recognizable as such.⁹ This occurs at the moment that the constellation, briefly formed out of bits of matter is broken up and dispersed. It is much the same for Seneca, for whom however, God holds things in their form until their matter disperses again. *Manent iam cuncta non quia aeterna sunt, sed quia defenduntur cura regis; immortalia tutore non egeret. Haec conservat artifex fragilitatem materiae vi sua vicens.* ‘For those things remain together and whole, not which are eternal, but which are protected by the care of the ruler of all things; immortal things would need no guardian. The master builder preserves them, overcome by his power, their flimsiness and breakability’ (*Ep.* lviii.28).

If this is what Aristotle has in mind, it is almost certainly the case that he gives form higher ontological priority *not* because it is eternal, but because to *be* anything at all means to take definite shape, to assume a clear form. To say that Aristotle gives ontological primacy to form would be somewhat misleading then; it would be far better to say that, for Aristotle, being *in an active sense*, is equivalent to *assuming and holding form*, than that being is equivalent to form.

Still, even if we conceive of form as the “aspect” or “appearance” into which things can be described as emerging, the *Physics* does take an unexpected and dramatic turn when Aristotle makes the forms—and with them, the intelligible appearances of things—the very causes of natural generation and growth. Aristotle makes it clear that he will now explicitly address the subject of generation, and then says, “a human being is generated from a human being, but not a bedstead from a bedstead” (193b8-9). What he thereby emphasizes is that natural beings are distinguished as such by of their way of being generated. They come into being, assume a form, and present themselves before the eye. So the process of generation that they undergo culminates in the assumption of a visible form. But from what does the process of generation itself arise? The answer to this question is undoubtedly “form,” since it is the form of a thing that sets the whole process going and guides it in a definite direction. But for the reasons just explained, Aristotle would not want to simply reduce nature to form. The Stoics give a similar answer to the question of generation; they seem only to have been more insistent than Aristotle that the fact of nature’s being generated *out of* form does not mean nature is *reducible* to form.¹⁰

Seneca was even opposed to counting form as a cause of coming-into being. *Forma dicis causa esse?*, Seneca asks—‘Is form what you say cause to be?’ *Hanc imponit artifex operi; pars causae est, non causa. Exemplar quoque non est causa, sed instrumentum causae necessarium*—‘That is what the *artifex* imposes on his work; it is a part of the cause, but not the cause. Neither is the pattern a cause but a necessary tool of the cause’ (*Ep.* lxv.13). Thus, the bringing-into-being of things is an activity that “makes use” of forms. That is to say, it *uses* forms to guide its activity. But the whole activity is much bigger and broader than the forms it employs, setting them up as

⁹ See Heidegger’s discussion of this dramatic turning point in the *Physics*. Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of the Concept of *Phusis* in Aristotle’s *Physics* B,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 221.

¹⁰ “And this ‘idea,’ or rather, Plato’s conception of it, is as follows: ‘The ‘idea’ is the everlasting pattern of those things which are created by nature.’ I shall explain this definition in order to set the subject before you in a clearer light: Suppose that I wish to make a likeness of you; I possess in your own person the pattern of this picture, wherefrom my mind receives a certain outline, which it is to embody in its own handiwork. That outward appearance, then, which gives me instruction and guidance, this pattern for me to imitate, is the ‘idea.’ Such patterns, therefore, nature possesses in infinite number—of men, fish, trees, according to whose model everything that nature has to create is worked out” (*Ep.* lviii.19).

goalposts at which to aim. In short, the process of creation cannot be reduced to the forms it creates. Nature cannot be reduced to form.¹¹

Nonetheless, this aspect of nature, its ability to assume distinct shapes, to appear to observers in particular configurations—what we shall call its formal quality—does prove exceedingly useful to us in our technical endeavors. Of course, nature is also matter, and this is an aspect of nature that is of no less importance to the technician, but since matter is nothing but something with the potential to assume a given form, then it is this of which the technician takes advantage when he “molds matter” in accord with his own purposes. To say that he “molds matter,” however, is just to say that he finds some way to harness the potential of things to assume the shape of other things by inserting himself into the chain of causes responsible for instigating such a transformation.¹² It is to the manner in which the *technitês* or the *artifex* does so that we now turn.

TECHNÊ IN ITS RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE

It is one thing to say that things can do nothing on their own except lie there inert, waiting passively for a form to be imposed on them from without. This is a view that Aristotle would reject on the basis that all matter has its own *phusis*, its own potential for self-movement (*Physics* 192b13) It is quite another to say, as Aristotle does, that things contain hidden potential that can be unleashed by a skillful artisan. The question that still remains for us concerns what it is that human know-how contributes to the process through which natural things realize their potential to become other things, becoming what they might not otherwise become.

True, the products a producer creates are to be distinguished from *ta phusika* because their *archê* lies outside themselves, in a producer that acts from without rather than within. True, the producer is the efficient cause of a process, that once set going, culminates in the creation of a final product. But the fact that human beings play a crucial role in allowing these natural objects to become what they do does not mean that humans bear *sole* responsibility for what objects subsequently become. The craftsman only makes a contribution to a process in which many factors are causally at play: There is the *hylê* or ‘matter’ of which the product is fashioned, the *telos* or ‘end’ which it is to serve, and the *eidos* or ‘form’ that the finished product is to exhibit. If a human being is to be assigned a greater share of responsibility for creating something new, it is not just because she, acting as an efficient cause, physically sets in motion a series of events, but because she has a premonition of an end that can be realized. She is then permitted to facilitate the coming together of all the distinct components which enter in to the creative process, and guide an unfolding series of events in a certain direction so that it will culminate in the concrete realization of what has existed, up until that point, only in her mind’s eye.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes that *phronêsis* is “concerned with the realm of coming to be, that is, with planning and deliberating on how something which is capable both

¹¹ For the Stoics therefore the art natural beings possess is not just a knowledge of the form toward which they strive—it is not a knowledge of their own *constitutio*, or ‘constitution,’ since they perceive this only *crasse... et summatim et obscure*, ‘crudely, cursorily, and darkly.’ The argument that their conception of nature has bearing for their conception of an art is furthered below (*Ep.* cxxi.12).

¹² Walter Brogan, “The Intractable Interrelationship of *Phusis* and *Technê*,” in *Heidegger and the Greeks: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Drew Hyland (John Panteleimon, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 43.

of being and not being may come into being” (1140a10). This much suggests that human beings contribute to a process of change whereby material is transformed into an end product, an essential ingredient that they themselves cannot supply. This, Aristotle explains, is form. But to say that craftsmen supply matter with form implies no more than that they supply the *eidé*, the perceptions or appearances in which nature and natural processes tend to result (what Dewey suggested we call “ends in experience” or “final ends”). They see the terminus of a process of change in advance; they see the future shape material will take, and this is what they can bring to bear on the whole process that the material cannot. The form is simply the projected end-in-view artisans use to guide their undertakings—or what is the same—the end in accord with which material is brought together and arranged.

The “look” of the object the craftsman wishes to create is kept in view. In this way, the artisan sees a tree, first, as a tree, then as something hard, then as something carvable, and finally, something suitable for making furniture. He sees, in a certain way, its natural potential to arrive at a certain end after undergoing a process of transmutation. In that sense alone he can be said to “supply the end.”

It would be wrong, however, to say that it was necessary for him to supply an end for the tree if what was meant thereby was that he had to view it, first and foremost, as a source of slumbering potential, a use for which needed to be found. For it is in no way his task to regard the tree as a source of unleashed energy, capable of powering chain reactions, a means to a still-to-be-determined end. As a craftsman, he is required to look forward with eagerness to the future, but not to regard present processes natural objects undergo independently of the final results in which they culminate, and then to supply a culminating end for them—as if it were this that natural processes lacked. The craftsman is one who, far from needing to superimpose an end upon natural processes, observes carefully the ends toward which natural processes tend.

There was no question for Aristotle of taking the view that objects were there for us to impose our own ends upon, as though they were passive objects, for which a human use needed to be found—as though, indeed, the craftsman could single-handedly invent ends for natural energies other than the ones they already had. The artisan’s end, as he works, is not one possible end among others that he simply selects for his work. His end is nature’s. Happily, nature shows us what it is in her nature to do. The artisan catches sight of this side of nature once or twice and keeps it in view ever after. This makes his work possible. Without an understanding of the natural potential contained in things, we would be incapable of harnessing them for our own ends. Thus, *techné* involves little more than understanding nature’s *own* ends.

Though this point is of secondary importance to the reader of Aristotle, its significance is vital for anyone who wishes to understand Stoicism. Stoicism is premised upon the idea that it is by observing the direction in which natural processes tend—and only by these means—that we may interfere in nature’s doings for the attainment of our own ends. Any intrusion into nature that does not follow this pattern goes terribly and very literally “astray.” It does not seek to guide natural processes in the direction of ends for which they are destined, but to strike out on a new path toward false and invented ends.

For the Stoics, the only goals we may pursue are nature’s. But this assertion is not a fatalistic one; it does not mean that nature unrolls fixed plans to attain fixed ends with which we must fall into line. It simply means that nature can only be used in certain ways for certain ends, and we must use nature for the ends for which it was intended. The ability to do so was apparently that possessed by the sages of old, the first men to invent the technical arts.

According to Posidonius, as characterized by Seneca, they were the first to discover the service that beasts of burden could render human beings, and the fruits that the earth would yield up if properly taken advantage of (*Ep.* xc.7) According to Bénatouïl, “They could perceive the existence of natural resources and the function assigned to them by providence, know their utility for humanity and the means of technically exploiting them.”¹³

Bénatouïl has approached the Stoics with an eye to the continuities between their conception of practical knowledge and those that can be found in the Platonic dialogues. His interpretation lights upon the Socratic idea that everything has a particular nature, which makes it adapted for a certain use. “Aren’t the virtue, beauty, and rightness of each implement, animal, and action related to nothing but the use for which each was made, or grew naturally?,” asks Socrates (*Rep.* 601d3). After Socrates, on Bénatouïl’s account, it falls to the Stoics to remind us that true wisdom consists in knowing the function and use that nature intended each thing to serve. As birds come to understand the natural use toward which their wings should be put, we must come to see the natural function of what we use.¹⁴ Here the model to be emulated is nature. Nature gives to each thing a certain art or skill, which consists in the knowledge of how to use that are things useful to them. Nature also gives human beings this art:

Each of them is nimble with regard to its own parts. An artisan handles his tools with ease, the helmsman of a ship directs the rudder with skill, the painter arranges many different pigments to help him make a likeness and applies them with great rapidity, cheerfully and efficiently moving back and forth between the palate and his canvas. An animal is comparably agile in all the ways it makes use of itself. We are regularly amazed at skilled dancers because their hands are able to represent all kinds of subjects and emotions and because their gestures are as quick as their words. What technique provides for them, nature provides for animals. No one has trouble moving its limbs; no one hesitates in using its parts. And they do so, just as soon as they are born. They arrive with this knowledge. They are born fully trained. (*Ep.* cxxi.86)¹⁵

Things practically “ask” us to use them in certain ways in Stoicism.¹⁶ And for Bénatouïl, it was of paramount concern to the Stoics that things not be used in ways contrary to their nature. Bénatouïl cites, among other examples culled from Seneca, the unnatural way in which foods are cooked, the use Hostius Quadra made of mirrors for his erotic exploits, and so on (*Ep.* xc.7;

¹³ Bénatouïl, *Faire usage*, 57. See more generally Ch. 1 and Ch.2, 19-62.

¹⁴ Here is it to be noted that, once again, natural beings do not have *techné* because they have a knowledge of the forms they embody. Seneca stresses here that they have only the vaguest sense of their own constitution. Instead their technical skill is owing to their ability to *use* the tools or materials at their disposal.

¹⁵ See also Hierocles: “The first thing that animals perceive is their body parts, both that they have them and for what purpose they have them... Therefore the first proof of every animal’s perceiving itself is its consciousness of its parts and the functions for which they are given. When bulls do battle with other bulls or animals of different species, they stick out their horns, as if these were their congenital weapons for the encounter. Every other creature has the same disposition relative to its appropriate and, so to speak, congenital weapons.” Notice that here, again, the knowledge of one’s form or constitution is no more than the knowledge of how to use the tools of self-preservation. It is not the knowledge of its own constitution that first allows the animal to use things appropriately; it is only insofar as the animal knows how to use things appropriately, that it has any sense of its own constitution (*LS* 57C).

¹⁶ “We must make the best use of things according to their nature. What is their nature then? As god may please” (*Dis.* I.i).

Quest. Nat. I.16). He arrives at the following conclusion: “The Stoics did not know certain ecological problems sparked by the industrial exploitation of nature, but they were preoccupied with the malicious use of natural resources for, for example, bloody or warlike ends, and of the putting to work of wasteful techniques to satisfy useless or vicious desires.”¹⁷

THE NECESSITY OF DISTINGUISHING *PHRONÉSIS* FROM *TECHNÉ*

Art itself seeks after “that which in itself is in accordance with nature, or which produces something else that is so” (*Fin.* III.vi). For the Stoics, then, artistic work is initiated when an actor perceives something as suitable to an end. That end may or may not arouse desire, but if it is indeed an end which the actor desires, and if it is in accord with nature then the actor will take the course of action suggesting itself as leading to that end. The Aristotelian definition of *techné* would, for the Stoics, have been sufficiently broad to capture the essence, not just of activities traditionally considered “technical,” but all others as well. If *techné* is as just described, then it is what can be seen to lie behind and account for all human action. Indeed it was precisely because he was expected to perceive things’ potential use, and employ them correctly in accord with the desirable ends to which they appeared suited, that the Stoics called the *phronimos* a *technitês*, finding the language of *techné* not just apt, but perfectly suited to capturing the very essence of *praxis*.

But this idea is not foreign to Aristotle, who also believes that practical judgment grants one the ability to respond to a given set of circumstances by making the best of them. “The virtuous act,” to quote Aubenque, “would not be what it is, or that which it must be, if the circumstances were other.” Or, as he put it more succinctly, “virtue cannot be defined without its object.”¹⁸ Making good use of what Aubenque calls “the material of action” is so much a part of what it means to be an Aristotelian *phronimos* that one must always recognize that “with those things that have a use it is possible to use them either well or badly,” and one must use them well because “for each kind of thing, the person who already has the virtue connected with it uses it best.”¹⁹ It was then perfectly reasonable that Aristotle should add to his interpreters’ cares by using technical metaphors to explain *phronésis*, and describing the *phronimos* as though he acted technically.²⁰ He could also leave undecided the question of whether doctors or ship captains avail themselves of one or the other power-of-mind.²¹

¹⁷ Bénatouïl, *Faire usage*, 58.

¹⁸ Aubenque, *La Prudence chez Aristote*, 65.

¹⁹ “Now with those things that have a use it is possible to use them either well or badly, and wealth consists of things to be used. And for each kind of thing, the person who already has the virtue connected with it uses it best; so the person who will use wealth best is the one who has the virtue connected with money, and this is the generous person. But the use of money seems to be spending and giving, while the getting and preserving of it are acquisition rather than use” (tr. Sacks, 1120a5).

²⁰ The analogies between *boulêsis* and the arts are particularly common, for example, in *Nic. Eth.* 1112b11-16.

²¹ For a doctor “to judge that it [some cure] has done good to all persons of a certain constitution marked off in one class, when they were ill of this disease, e.g., to phlegmatic or bilious people when burning with fever – this is a matter of *techné*” (*Met.* 981a5–12). Elsewhere, Aristotle writes: “And since the general discourse is of this sort, still more does the discourse that is of particulars lack precision, for it falls under no art or under any skill that has been handed down, but it is always necessary for those acting to look at the circumstances surrounding the occasion itself themselves, just as also in the case of the medical art or the art of steering a ship” (tr. Sacks 1104a3-10). The ship captain is described as a technician at 1112b5.

A clearer answer to the question why, after defining *technê* thus, Aristotle did not rest content taking *phronêsis* for a kind of *technê* is provided by an examination of the technician's procedure. If the human being is to be assigned a greater share of the responsibility for creating something new, it will not be because he, acting as an efficient cause, physically sets in motion a series of events. Rather, it will be because he has a premonition of an end that can be realized such that he is permitted to facilitate the unfolding of a series of events that will culminate in the concrete realization of what has existed, up until that point, only in the mind's eye of the producer.²² Keeping her ends in view, an artisan calls to mind the imagined result of her labors, and this idealized end, kept constantly before her eyes, can serve as a blueprint that will allow her to retrace the steps that have always led most reliably and predictably to that end.²³ *But this we must stress—that for Aristotle himself the technician does not impose on matter a form it does not already have the potential to assume, or put material to any use for which it is not itself inherently suited.*

This procedure meets with success because the producer keeps before his eyes an *eidōs*, a pattern with universal applicability that can manifest itself at many different times in many different places, and which can therefore serve as a general prototype finding concrete instantiation in many ways. Because this imagined end is one toward which others have previously striven with success—if they hadn't, it couldn't be such an end—it can be repeatedly re-instantiated by anyone following the frequently traversed path beaten by others to its attainment. In fact, the imagined end only appears as such to the craftsman who is already familiar with the series of time-tested steps that have been observed to reliably bring it into being.

For Aristotle, the addition to the process of an *eidōs* changes it sufficiently that it comes to differ significantly from practical deliberation. The craftsman who already holds an *eidōs* in mind, and who can visualize the end result of a step-by-step process, can cast about in search of materials that will allow herself to be subjected to use. With an *eidōs*, the end can be held firmly in mind while the means to it are sought. Without one, this is impossible. With the addition of an *eidōs*, then, the process is altered significantly enough that it ceases to be a suitable model for ethical action, where we do not usually possess a clear idea of the ends we seek such that we can hold the end in mind and subsequently search for the means.

Technical expertise is no different from practical intelligence aside from the fact that it is supplemented by the visualization of an oft-repeated pattern that has always found concrete instantiation for those willing to follow a time-tested recipe for success. We must consequently argue that Aristotle's attempt to distinguish *technê* from *phronêsis* is best described as an effort to

²² To quote Heidegger: "*Technê* is a mode of *alêtheueîn*. It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another. Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what it is to be brought forth...according to the perspectives of the four modes of occasioning. The revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned and completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. Thus, what is decisive in *technê* does not lie at all in the making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing." Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1982), 13.

²³ The steps that he then necessarily takes function as the causes of the effects in which his labors result. In grasping them, he grasps the *aitia* or 'causes' of things that are within his power to control, and he is permitted to think of himself as a true technician, someone defined by his *logos* or 'understanding' of the cause of the things he makes (*Met.* 1032a32).

distinguish practical intelligence with recourse to an *eidōs* from practical intelligence without the same recourse.²⁴

As long as there are some *technai* without such an *eidōs*, this distinction is less cut-and-dry. Arts such as metallurgy and shipbuilding in which there is a clear and distinct *eidōs* do stand out from other crafts as especially “technical” forms of *technē*. But to be a technician and to employ *technē* is not automatically to have a clear and distinct *eidōs*. Thus, to class practical intelligence among the *technai* is not necessarily to assert that practical knowledge always has recourse to an *eidōs*.

But Aristotle claims that all *technai* have *eidē*, and since ethical activity rarely relies on an *eidōs*, technical and ethical must be two distinct categories of action. Aristotle therefore chooses to treat under the separate heading of ‘ethical activity’ any that is undertaken without an *eidōs*. It is thusly assumed that before an action can become ethical, it must lack an *eidōs*, with the result that, where a clear end is present in the form of an *eidōs*, ethical action is presumed to be lacking—this despite Aristotle’s tendency to sometimes describe ethical action as aimed at an *eidōs*. He describes, for example, Pericles, that unrivalled *phronimos*, as though he perceived the form of the good (*ta autois agatha kai ta tois anthrōpos dunatai theōrein*) (1140b10).

By way of a return to the subject of *phusis*, if *technē* is redefined by the Stoics so that it is not identical with *eidōs*-directed action, the evidence is in the way the Stoics understood nature to be a technician. What makes nature a technician is *not* that it has recourse to *eidē* that it can impose on matter, and this, not least because the early Stoics dismissed forms as mere *phantasmata*.²⁵ Consider Cicero’s unconventional rendering into Latin of the *Timaeus*. This *Timaeus*, whose oddities can only be explained by the influence of Stoicism, features a demiurge but not intelligible forms. Plato explicitly says the demiurge wishes to create the world to be as similar as possible to the most beautiful of *tōn nooumenōn*, ‘of intelligible forms.’ Cicero translates this: *quod enim pulcherrimum in rerum natura intelligi potest*, ‘that in the nature of things which can be discerned as most beautiful’ (*Tim.* 30d; Cicero, *Tim.* 30c). At every turn, Cicero avoids reference to intelligible forms. Thus, his Stoic demiurge does not accomplish his work by taking matter and then imposing an intelligible form upon it. Rather, choosing words to describe the divine craftsman that, Lévy remarks, “are not necessarily associated with intelligence,” Cicero draws a portrait of a divine craftsman who works *just as much* from impulse as toward intelligible ends.²⁶

Nature is then *more* than just the collected, pre-established forms that can be imposed on matter. Not all that can be explained about the *artifex*’s art can be exhausted by gesturing to the forms he holds in mind, as though they were fully determinative of his action. “His pattern is as indispensable to the artist as the chisel or the file; without these, art can make no progress. But for all that,” Seneca writes, “these things are neither parts of the art, nor causes of it” (*Ep.*

²⁴ Aristotle says that, “from *technē* proceed the things of which the form is in the soul” (*Met.* 1032a32-1032b1). Sometimes he also refers to *technē* as the *eidōs* itself (1032b13, 1034a23).

²⁵ They say that concepts are neither somethings nor qualified, but figments of the soul, which are quasi-somethings and quasi-qualified. These, they say, are what the old philosophers called *eidē*. For the ideas are of things, which are classified under the concepts, such as men, horses, and in general all the animals and other things of which they say there are *eidē*. The Stoic philosopher says that there are not ideas, and that what we ‘participate in’ is the concepts, while what we ‘bear’ are those cases that they call ‘appellatives.’ (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1.136.21–137.6, *SVF* I.65, *LS* 30A; See also *DL* 7.60–61, *LS* 30C).

²⁶ Carlos Lévy, “Cicero and the *Timaeus*,” in *Plato’s Timaeus as Cultural Icon*, ed. Gretchen Reydams-Schils (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 103. Cicero’s repeated tendency to “emphasise the world over the model” has been well documented by Lévy.

lxv.13). *Seneca insists that there is more to the technician's art than just the sum total of the forms he can stamp on his materials.*

The technician has an art, but his art has its *archê*, its source or governing cause, in something other than the form it strives towards and eventually incarnates. As we have seen, the Stoics redefined *technê* as the joint exercise of impressions toward an end among those which are useful or desirable in life.²⁷ The Stoics therefore left open the possibility that individual arts consciously direct themselves towards *eidê*. But judging from the fact that reference to an *eidōs* cannot be found in Stoic definitions of *technê*, and indeed, is not so much as hinted at, we have to judge that the *edios* had no more than a subsidiary role to play in giving rise to technical activity. If what is meant by an *eidōs* is a very specific endpoint dictating a very clear and narrowly confined path of action—one that can be grasped and held in view *before* action even begins—then the Stoics appear to not to have held that this was a determining or even essential feature of technical action. Indeed, as we shall see, they seem even to have doubted that most *technai* could start from an *eidōs*, and further, that an *eidōs* should, in all cases, guide and determine artistic activity.

If, for the Stoics, there is a class of arts that always make use of *eidê*, they do not exist as a separate category of exclusively technical and non-ethical action. They seem to have doubted, as will be explained, that routine technical activity ceases to be ethical for the mere fact of employing an *eidōs*. But it is easy to understand why: even if technicians had their *eidê* in mind so that they could start out focused on their ends and then look to their means, according to the Stoics, they would not be exempted from another requirement, namely considering available means on their own terms. The command that things always be considered in relationship to their proper ends would have meant that even the most ordinary of craftsmen had to ask themselves what purpose present means could appropriately serve. Even holding an end in mind, the Stoic craftsman must let things *dictate to him* that they be used in certain ways. Even if one has in mind the *eidōs* of a bed, one can only take advantage of resources for the realization of this *eidōs* if and when available wood presents itself as a useful means to this end. As we shall see, the fact that even technical action had to heed these ethical imperatives meant there was nothing to stand in the way of counting technical acts among ethical ones and holding them to the same ethical standards.

In other words, even if they started out intent on certain ends and finding the means to them, technicians would not be exempt from also having to look at available means, and then consider them in terms of their possible ends—to tunnel from both directions at once, so to speak. This will help us to understand why, although the Stoics do not appear to find it particularly relevant to distinguish *eidōs*-guided from non-*edios*-guided activities, they do distinguish between activities working with and against nature. The latter of these two categories is the one, they might say, into which *eidōs*-guided activities have a greater tendency to fall.

THE PRESERVATION OF THE DISTINCTION IN ALTERED FORM

²⁷ Ζένων de phésin hoti 'technê esti sustêma ek katalêpseôn suggegumnasenôn pros ti telos euchrêston tôn en tô biô,' that is, 'technê is a putting together (*sustêma*) from out of graspings exercised together (*suggegumnasenôn*) for some *telos* easily made use of in life' (LS 42A).

The Stoics can provide for the possibility that action appealing to an *eidōs* ethical only because they draw from a highly Aristotelian conception of *technē* according to which, regardless of what forms the technician has in mind, what he imposes on matter is not his own form, but what matter has a potential of its own to assume. That the Stoics had this conception of *technē* to draw from could explain why they appear not to have had motive to distinguish between *technē* and *phronēsis*. If *technē* is understood in this manner, the distinction between *technē* and *phronēsis* may all but fade away. This conception of *technē* could also explain why Cicero, so far from being aware that Aristotle made a distinction between the two, actually attributes to him the idea that *prudentia* is an *ars* in *De Finibus*. Thus, we already find the seeds of the distinction's undoing in Aristotle.

And yet, if the the Stoics can slowly erase the distinction between *phronēsis* and *technē* for these reasons, perhaps it will seem to the rest of us that it can and should be preserved for others. To most of us it seems unmistakably right that we exclude from candidature for virtuous action any undertaking that is technical in the strict Aristotelian sense of having a pre-established *eidōs*. If it merely pursues the means to an end that is: (1) frequently and repeatedly pursued across time and space, and (2) almost certain of being achieved if one follows a pre-determined course of action, then it would seem to find itself wholly deprived of the very thing making it potentially worthy of admiration. What would make it praiseworthy would be: (1) the fact of its being directed toward possibilities only a person of uncommon insight could perceive as such, or (2) the fact of its having taken an untried course of action, uncertain of meeting with success.

But then again, is the fact of an *eidōs*' being pursued repeatedly, always with success, any reason for the action that pursues it to be dismissed as a candidate for virtuous action? Cannot the baking of bread, even if it follows a recipe, qualify as *eupraxia*? If it did not, could Seneca list dressing, walking, and eating as examples of virtue (*Ep.* xii.11)? Stoicism seems to directly challenge the manner in which we reserve admiration and praise only for the kind of action described above. For the Stoics, virtuous activity can be found anywhere, even where we find the most mundane of activities in progress.²⁸ Almost any activity, no matter how quotidian can qualify as virtuous *if* it is done under the appropriate circumstances, at the right moment.²⁹ And while the disquieting fact, where this democratization of virtue is concerned, is that it does not restrict praise only to the most exceptional and superhuman of activities, the advantage of this approach is that it does not reserve praise for activities only to be engaged in by noblemen. It can find cause for approbation in even the chores performed by slaves, and thus extends the potential for virtue to the very lowest ranks of society.

Still, if we want to say that Aristotle, who was no more willing than Plato to find anything to praise in the work of ship-builders and cobblers, or of extending his admiration beyond the likes of a Pericles or Solon—if we want to say that *he* laid the groundwork for the Stoic revolution in ethics—then we will have to examine the reasons why he excluded technical

²⁸ Much the same observation is made by Brennan when he remarks, “Nor is there any difference in the Sage’s motives when he eats some food and when he rescues a drowning child...And there is no aspect of the saving that qualifies it as a virtuous act any more than eating was; they are both equally virtuous, and equally virtuous in regard to their motivations.” Tad Brennan, “Stoic Moral Psychology,” 291.

²⁹ The Stoics do, however, exclude certain minor activities, “picking up a twig, holding a pen or scraper, and such like,” from belonging to the category of appropriate actions. They are cited as too trivial to count as either right or wrong. Stobaeus considers “talking, asking and answering questions, walking about, leaving town, and the like” to fall within this category of ethically neutral activities. But Diogenes Laertius explicitly cites asking and answering questions and walking about as examples of activities that can be appropriate or not (*DL* 7.108; 59e; Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.96, 18, *LS* 59M).

activities from candidature for virtue, and thus set apart ethical from merely technical activities.³⁰ The question we are considering is why the virtuous person is considered to have a power-of-mind distinct in kind from the technician, which is lacking in technical action. We shall come to understand why the Stoics disagree by taking each of Aristotle's reasons for distinguishing *technê* and *phronêsis* in turn, in order to show that each time a distinction between the two is drawn, it can be immediately undermined.

We shall not only show that every time a distinct and definite line is attempted to be drawn between the two, it becomes indistinct, and sufficiently weakened, such that the Stoics are eventually allowed to collapse the distinction entirely. We shall see that the need for this distinction arises from the need to make an even more fundamental distinction between action that is virtuous and action that is simply too "technical" in the Aristotelian sense to count as virtuous. So we shall find that, without distinguishing purely ethical on the one hand, and action that is simply and solely technical on the other, the Stoics collapse the distinction between *technê* and *phronêsis* in one way. But they retain and even reinforce it in another when they preserve this distinction in the form of a distinction between what is appropriately technical as well as virtuous, on the one hand, and what is neither virtuous nor properly technical on the other. These, then, are Aristotle's reasons for distinguishing *technê* and *phronêsis*:

(i.) *Phronêsis results in action whose end is internal to the activity.*

Phronêsis is not a *technê* according to Aristotle because action (*praxis*) and making (*poêsis*) are different in kind. "For the end of making is different than itself, but the end of action cannot be, since acting well is itself the end (*esti gar autê ê eupraxia telos*)" (1140b7). The difference between *technê* and *phronêsis* is then that while *technê* leads to instrumental activity which has its ends outside of itself, and is always just a means to an external end, *phronêsis* leads to ethical activity that is its own end, lending it an intrinsic value even when it fails to attain external ends. The activities performed by gymnasts and musicians are, however, called technical, though they do not seem to result in anything lying beyond the activities of exercising and flute-playing themselves.³¹ What this tells us is first, that even when the line between *technê* and *phronêsis* is said to correspond with the distinction between production and *praxis*, this line is never clear,

³⁰ In what follows, we can safely assume Stichter to have captured the essence of the debate as well as the ground common to the opposing sides, when he responds to Annas, who claims that, "Aristotle rejects the idea that virtue is a skill." He argues that Annas has one particular conception of a skill in mind, so that in order to qualify as such, experts with a particular skill must be able to give an account of their actions, they must possess the knowledge of unifying principles that apply to the whole of the domain over which they exercise expertise, and they must be able to teach what they know. Insofar as Aristotle shares this conception of a skill, Annas is right. But if more loosely defined, then Aristotle may yet agree that virtue is a skill. Hutchinson, for example, distinguishes a separate category of "empiricist" skills lacking a similar kind of know-how described by Polus in the *Gorgias*. To quote Stichter: "Hutchinson refers to the model of skills defended by Isocrates and other rhetoricians as 'empiricist,' because they think skills are gained by experience rather than by grasping universal principles. This alternative understanding of skills opens up the possibility, which Annas seems not to consider, that instead of just rejecting the skill model altogether, Aristotle is rejecting only the intellectualist view of skills. If Aristotle endorses the empiricist view of skills, then his use of analogies between virtues and skills seems to indicate that he does endorse the idea that virtues are structurally similar to skills, but that he is offering an account of skills and virtues different from the Socratic model." Since it has been argued that the Stoics endorse this idea, Aristotle may do the same. Matt Stichter, "Ethical Expertise: The Skill Model of Virtue," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 10 (2007): 188; Douglas Hutchinson, "Doctrines of the Mean and the Debate Concerning Skills in Fourth-Century Medicine, Rhetoric and Ethics," *Apeiron* 21 (1988): 17 - 52; see also Annas, "The Structure of Virtue," 16.

³¹ See for example 1096a35, 1097b2, 1112b; *Magna Moralia* 1.34 1197a4-11, 2.12 1211b26-13.

never distinct, and always hazy. But even if we could clearly distinguish between activities that had internal ends and activities that had external ends, as Aristotle himself does with no consistency, then all we could say was that there was a distinction to be drawn between action with internal and external ends, not that what preceded the former was a different kind of thinking than what preceded the latter, as though the kinds of goods actions produced—internal or external—were predetermined by the thought that went into them. This is also the fallacy to which many interpreters of Stoicism fall prey.³²

Our best understanding of the matter will be afforded by a glimpse at Seneca’s letter treating the question of how to respond to an objection, frequently brought against the Stoics’ conception of the *ars vitae*. It is always asked, ‘If the pilot of a ship cannot exercise his art so that it attains its good, if a squall or storm forces his ship off course, doesn’t the art of life suffer a similar fate when externals impede it from exercising itself and securing the good that is proper to it?’ Seneca responds as follows:

This would seem to be well said, if it were not for the fact that the situation of a ship-captain and that of a wise person are different. The purpose of the latter in living his life is not to carry out what he undertakes no matter what, but to do everything properly. The arts serve us and ought to carry through on their promises; wisdom is a sovereign director; the arts help with life, wisdom gives the orders.³³

We at first expect Seneca to respond by drawing an Aristotelian distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, and these expectations are briefly met when he mentions that “the situation of a ship-captain and that of a wise person are different;” while the ship-captain’s goal is to arrive at a destination, the wise man has no goal but to act well. If one were to stop reading at this point, one might go away with the impression that it is only when it is wrongly regarded as falling within the category of *poiēsis* and not *praxis* that the *ars vitae* can seem to fall short of attaining its good.³⁴ But then Seneca interrupts himself to give a second and better response to this objection, reasoning out his reply as follows, in a passage to be quoted in full:³⁵

³² One widely held assumption is that once we attain virtue and our action takes on an intrinsic value it becomes *praxis*. Before our actions have their value in external goods, so our art must have been a *poiētīc* one directed at external ends. Thus, we assume that if we pass from viewing action as *poiēsis* to appreciating it as *praxis*, we must pass one to another kind of *technē*. The assumption is rarely made explicit. Just one example can be found in one of Long’s most influential articles. Here Antipater’s conception of *technē* is judged perfectly sound. What is not so judged is the inference that action as *praxis* can be derived from natural desires. Long concludes that while it can solve many problems, the account of *technē* “cannot solve the problem of making *ta kata phusin* [the externals sought by action] the objects of instinctive...choice while switching all value in the latter from the objects to the agent’s state of mind.” Our desires are originally for external ends. The assumption is that the switch would be from mere *poiēsis* to pure *praxis*, and therefore too drastic to account for. But, although a new level of art is certainly achieved with a stable disposition that makes it possible to exercise the art more consistently, this transition does not correspond to a transition from one to another *kind* of art. What it occasions is the realization that our art was, not just *poiēsis* but *praxis* all along; we merely realize that its significance as *praxis* far outweighs its import as *poiēsis*. Long, “Carneades and the Stoic *Telos*,” 89.

³³ In fact, none of the Stoics describe the art of life as *praxis* and distinguish it from *poiēsis*: “Of goods, some are final, and some are instrumental, and others are good in both respects...but all the virtues are both instrumental and final goods” (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.71, 15, *LS* 60M). Likewise, Sextus Empiricus writes, “And in another sense, good is that of which utility is an accidental result; thus not only will the virtues be called ‘good,’ but also the actions in accordance therewith, inasmuch as utility results also from them (*kata tautas sumbainei ôpheleishthai*) (*Ad. Math* XI.ii.26).”

³⁴ It is not strictly false to say that virtue is *praxis*. Cicero does not place a falsehood in Cato’s mouth when he says “We do not consider *sapientia* to be like seamanship, or medicine, but rather like the areas of acting or dancing just mentioned;

I think that one should reply differently to the objection. The art of the ship-captain is not made worse by any storm nor is the performance of the art. The ship-captain did not promise you success, but a useful bit of work and knowledge of how to steer a ship. And this becomes more apparent as some violent chance event gets in his way. The person who can say, ‘Neptune, you will never [sink] this ship, except when it is well sailed’ is doing as his art demands. The storm did not impede the work of the ship captain but his success.

‘What then?’ is the reply, ‘does the situation which prevents the ship-captain from reaching port, which makes his efforts vain, which either carries him out to sea or detains and unmasts his ship—does this not harm him?’ Not *qua* ship-captain, but it does harm him *qua* person sailing. Otherwise <he isn’t a ship-captain at all>. So far from impeding the art of the ship-captain, it actually demonstrates it. As the saying goes, anyone can be a sea-captain when the sea is calm. Those things impeded the ship not the steersman *qua* steersman.

The ship-captain has two roles, the one shared with the all those who boarded the same ship. He too is a passenger. The other role is unique to him. He is a ship-captain. The storm harms him *qua* ship-captain, not *qua* passenger.

Next: the art of the ship-captain is someone else’s good. It relates to those whom he conveys, just as the good of a doctor relates to those whom he treats. The good <of the wise person> is shared. It both <belongs> to those with whom he lives and is proper to himself. And so perhaps there is harm done to the ship-captain whose service pledged to others is hindered by the storm.

But the wise person is not harmed by poverty, not harmed by pain, not harmed by other storms of life. For not all of his works are hindered but only those that relate to others. He is himself always in action, and has the greatest impact when fortune is ranged against him. For he is then doing the work of wisdom itself, which is both his own good and that of others.

Moreover, he is not hindered from benefitting others, when certain inevitabilities oppress him. He is hindered from teaching how the state should be managed because of his poverty, but he does teach how poverty should be managed. His work extends through his entire life. And so, no fortune and no circumstance bar the wise person from acting. For the obstacle by which he is hindered from doing things is something he is actively engaged with. He is well suited for both kinds of situation. He manages good situations and vanquishes bad ones.

He has trained himself, I claim, to display virtue just as much in favorable situations, as in adverse ones, and to consider not the raw material for virtue but virtue

its end, the actual exercise of the art, is contained within the art itself, and is not something extraneous to it” (*Fin.* III.vii.24). But Cicero omits mention of the fact that it is also *poiēsis* for rhetorical effect.

³⁵ Inwood takes the first of Seneca’s responses to be the typically Stoic one, but little is gained by presuming the second is pure heterodoxy. This second, supposedly unorthodox Stoic response, is fully compatible with the first, and only becomes incompatible if and when the first is misinterpreted to suggest that the distinction between wisdom and the other arts is that wisdom only results in *praxis*, whereas *technē* results in *poiēsis*. Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters*, 235.

itself. And so poverty does not hinder him, nor does pain nor all the other things which deter the inexperienced and drive them headlong. (*Ep.* xxv.32-40)

The strategy Seneca employs “allows him to conclude tentatively (‘perhaps’) to his interlocutor and to common sense that some part of the good of the doctor or the captain might be impaired while the good which is properly his own is not effected.”³⁶ Seneca distinguishes between the good art’s exercise secures its practitioner and the good it secures others. The ship-captain’s art has two goods, the good that is intrinsic to the exercise of the art, and a good it attains in the external world, which can also be good for others. Seneca concludes, in effect, that not all art is just *poiêsis*. It can be at the same time *praxis*. And since the exercise of an art may constitute an instance of *praxis* and *poiêsis*, if the art fails as *poiêsis*, it may yet succeed as *praxis*.

It should surprise us more that Seneca does not take what would, from our perspective, be the path of least resistance—that of disclaiming, in Aristotelian fashion, the connection between *phronêsis* and *technê*. Instead, he affirms more strongly than ever that *phronêsis* is a form of *technê*; he avers more loudly than ever that the art of life is an ‘art.’ He does not consider the differences between this art and the other arts so great that he must question whether it constitutes a whole new kind of ‘art’ distinct from all the others.³⁷

If he questions anything, it is that simplistic understanding of art that reduces it to mere *poiêsis*. What stands in need of explanation for Seneca is not why *phronêsis* is different from all the other arts in lacking an external end, but why we deny to *technê* its potential to attain ends internal to as well as external to its own functioning. *Technê* sets in motion an activity that may or may not produce effects in the external world. What has to be realized, however, is that those produced effects are not its ends, strictly speaking, but are like the marks an archer sets up and “uses” as targets. They give activity something to aim at; they focus and channel it in a certain direction.

In certain instances, as *perhaps* in the case of menial crafts, the art’s only *telos* corresponds with its *skopos*, such that it will fall short of attaining its *telos* if it does not reach its *skopos*. But the Stoics doubt that every *technê*’s work is done, complete, and *telion* when it attains an end *outside* itself. In other cases then, the very actualization and setting-to-work of an art is enough for it to attain its *telos*. In a few cases, such as that of the ship-captain, an art has two *telê*: The one *telos* corresponds to and is attained with the actualization of the art. The other *telos* corresponds to and is attained with the external *skopos*.

It is usually assumed that Stoics retained a typical view of *technê* as *poiêsis*, which, by definition, would place its sole *telos* outside itself in an *external* end. Despite this, they defiantly

³⁶ Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters*, 235.

³⁷ Many argue that the art of life can be best understood as a stochastic art. Plato used the term ‘stochastic’ for substandard and inferior arts (*Gorgias* 464c6, 465a2), which, like medicine, had only the ability to aim generally in the direction of their goal (*Philebus* 55e7). The idea of a stochastic art comes primarily from Aristotle, though only Alexander of Aphrodisias uses the term itself in commenting upon passages in Aristotle (*Topics* 101b5, *Rhet.* 1355b12; *In Topicam* 32.12, *In Analyticam Prioram* 39.30, *Questiones* 61). It is confusing and misleading to call the art of life a ‘stochastic art’ and assimilate it to a category of arts with external ends—so that it has ends that are paradoxically attained at the moment they fall short of being attained. The Stoics did not themselves classify their art in this way, or say that it succeeded even when it failed to attain its own ends, and importing this terminology only seems to obscure matters. Sellars has already made this argument most convincingly. Seneca’s solution, I argue, is much simpler: it does not create a new category for the art of life and similar arts because they do not meet our expectations for an art; it questions our assumptions about all arts (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.7.6a). Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 45-47.

claim some arts to have their end in themselves, or so it is believed. It is not observed that the Stoics think any given *technê* can be *praxis* or *poiêsis*, and that in some cases, it can even be both. But this explains why an art can have an internal *telos* and an external *skopos*. The Stoics, then, did not illogically distinguish the *telos* from the *skopos* of an art in a way that was incompatible with the standard understanding of *technê* as *poiêsis*.³⁸ They redefined *technê* itself. *It was thus because and not in spite of their conception of art that they made a distinction between an internal telos and an external skopos.*

Since for the Stoics, art already had a tendency to produce *praxis* along with *poiêsis*, *phronêsis* must have seemed comparable in exactly this respect. Long assumes, on the other hand, that it was because they were already committed to a peculiar conception of virtue, which was different from most arts, that the Stoics devised the idea of a *stochastikê technê*. What this suggests is that they belatedly invented a deviant conception of art in order to defend their equally unorthodox conception of virtue. In other words, they had an extremely nonsensical view of virtue, which they could only accommodate by resorting to an equally nonsensical view of art. It is just the reverse: *The Stoics do not give us an understanding of virtue that forces a reconceptualization of art, but a new way of understanding art that calls for reimagining what virtue is, and can be.*³⁹

For the Stoics, the solution to the problem of denying that the work of virtue lay in an external end was to not distinguish ethical activities from technical ones, or to deny that they could be judged by the same standards. The problem was with the very standard by which technical action itself was usually judged. If technical action were not presumed to be judged only by how well it attained results then the problem would never arise to begin with. In fact, this problem doesn't arise if we recognize that we rarely judge arts by these standards in the first place. "For even as trading is said to be lucrative, and farming advantageous," Cicero writes, "not because the one never meets with any loss, nor the other with any damage from inclement weather, but because they succeed in general; so life may properly be called happy, not from its being made up entirely of good things, but because it abounds with these to a great and considerable degree" (*Tusc. V.xxxi*).

In other words, we already judge arts like trading and farming by the standard, not of whether they *attain* the end at which they are directed—as though they were absolutely worthless apart from their ability to attain this end—but by their ability to *tend* toward bringing about those ends. Thus, unlike Plato's divine craftsman, Cicero's does not simply 'make;' he *motilur efficere*, he 'works or strives towards creating,' (*Timaeus* 20a; *Cic. Timaeus* 9).⁴⁰ In a similar

³⁸ Many scholars, influenced no doubt by Long, have taken the first view. Long concentrates on the distinction between *skopos* and *telos* but does not seem to believe that beneath this distinction lies a deeper challenge to the traditional dichotomy between *praxis* and *poiêsis*, even supposing that Cicero contradicts the Stoics' *poiêtic* view of *ars* by writing of it as *praxis*. Long, "Carneades and the Stoic *Telos*," 89.

³⁹ Long accordingly starts from the assumption that the Stoics needed to defend a conception of virtue which made it the highest good—then from outsiders like Carneades came the question of how this account of virtue was to be reconciled with that fact that, like every other art, the *ars vitae* had to have an external end. According to Long, "Since the distinction between *telos* and *skopos* can denote a distinction between actions and their external goal it complies with Carneades' demand that art should have an object beyond its performance." This is to say, Antipater was able to meet these objections by developing the distinction between *skopos* and *telos*, and with it, a new conception of art. Long, "Carneades and the Stoic *Telos*," 79.

⁴⁰ Rather than describe his divine craftsman as a merely *poiêtic* 'maker,' Cicero prefers to drop the word *poiêtên* altogether from his translation of the *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 28c; *Cic. Tim.* 6).

way, virtue does not have to bring about, but merely to *work toward* bringing about ends outside itself.

Thus, we may conclude that the Stoics agreed with Aristotle that it was important to draw a clear distinction between that activity which is a means to an end, and that which is an end in itself, a virtuous activity. But in order to draw this distinction *they did not need to draw a rigid distinction between praxis and poiêsis.*

(ii.) *Phronêsis gives rise to a different kind of activity that must be judged by a different standard than applies to other arts.*

Perhaps the original necessity of distinguishing between practical and productive activities first arose from the fact that practical activities had to be accorded an undeniable worth of their own despite their failure to leave an enduring mark upon the world capable of outlasting their momentary performance. Although calling gymnastics and flute-playing technical implied that they aimed at ends surviving the activity that brought them about, they left nothing behind to show for themselves, except perhaps for the impression they made upon eye-witnesses. They nevertheless seemed to retain an indisputable worth, a worth that was neither to be sought nor found in their concrete results. They could not be appraised by the same criteria as technical activities, however. For if technical work could only be deemed well-performed if it resulted in the attainment of concrete ends, then practical activities would, evaluated by the same standards, be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Whereas productive acts could always be deemed “well-performed” insofar as they attained concrete results, practical action, it must have been quickly realized, could not be appraised by an observer without the observer’s taking into account a different set of considerations. Did the action, for example, result from a “deliberate choice” and from a “firm and unchangeable disposition” (1105a28)? In other words, observers would have to evaluate the action, not by the standard of whether it attained some particular end, but by whether it had its source in a disposition generally inclining the actor toward the right ends.

Aristotle thus believed that a distinction was to be strictly enforced between ordinary technical acts needing to attain a specific end, and acts of virtue approved so long as they proceeded from a disposition generally orienting itself toward the right ends in life. Of course, the rhetorician, the end of whose art is to come as close to persuading an audience as possible, does not fail as a rhetorician if his general disposition is sound and toward the good (*Rhet.* 1355b12). Again, the distinction Aristotle is drawing between virtue and *technê* is neither hard nor fast.

It was not necessary for the Stoics to draw this distinction. The only distinction it was necessary for the Stoics to draw was between the several arts and the art of life. Each of the several arts was defined by the particular end at which it aimed. As Seneca also explains in our quote, every art helps the actor to reach toward a single end, but most arts do not confer much benefit on the actor except insofar as they help that actor attain a specific end. “The arts serve us and ought to carry through on their promises,” says Seneca. Ship-steering, whose utility is confined to one particular realm of life, is without use *unless* it sees passengers to their destination. “And so perhaps,” if it fails to reach its destination, “there is harm done to the ship captain whose service is pledged to others.”

The art of life, however, is not directed at any particular good. The practice of the art of life is aimed at an ever-elusive, ever-changing good, since the means to its attainment appear

differently in different situations. The art of life's value lies solely in keeping us "on the straight path" in the general direction of our ultimate good in life. The art of life need not therefore help us attain any particular goal. It is as if, to invoke the analogy of the ship-captain again, the person possessing the art of life were enabled to follow the setting sun, come what may, into the West. It would not matter whether he or she were able to land at one harbor or another along the way.

Thus the Stoics were able to make this distinction of Aristotle's, clearly demarcating virtuous acts—appraised by the standard of the degree to which they had their source in a disposition to pursue the good in general—from merely technical ones. These later acts, insofar as they were supposed to demonstrate the exercise of a specific art, had to attain an external end.

Yet the Stoics were able to make this distinction between the art of life and other arts without recourse to a distinction between *practical knowledge and art*. Consequently, they did not have to enforce a distinction between two distinct and mutually exclusive kinds of action, ethical and productive, to which different evaluative criteria applied, only a distinction between the art of life and the other arts: A technician can be judged now *qua* possessor of a specific art, now *qua* possessor of the art of life. The "virtuous" man can be judged, now insofar as he has a particular art, now insofar as he has the art of life.

(iii.) *Phronêsis exercises itself unlike technê where there is a high degree of chance and contingency.*

Technê, we said, always has an *eidōs*. But it is what follows as a consequence of having an *eidōs* that for Aristotle makes *technê* different from *phronêsis*, and not just the *eidōs* per se. The fact that some activity has an *eidōs* means for Aristotle that its relationship is significantly changed to an unforgiving world where human beings find themselves at sea amongst circumstances they are unable to control but over which they must gain mastery sufficient to attain their own ends. In an environment such as this, in which we have no assurance of even perceiving means to an end, much less of actually reaching our end, an *eidōs* changes everything. With an *eidōs*, human beings gain a clear idea of an end that has and still can be repeatedly sought, and at the same time, some consciousness of the road others have already traveled that leads reliably in its direction. The important thing is thus not the *eidōs* itself, but the fact that it allows us to gain some semblance of control over a world in which we are usually powerless. For if we have an *eidōs*, we can keep in the forefront of our minds an end that we know others have repeatedly striven towards and attained, and that end promises to allow itself be attained—if we would just take steps in the same direction as others, those who have succeeded at bringing themselves within reach of it time and again.

But if having an *eidōs* means having an end one can be reasonably assured of attaining in a world in which we can be assured of very little else, then through his use of the word *technê* Aristotle simply means to refer to action that usually succeeds at gaining mastery or control over an uncontrollable environment. This is why, for Aristotle and for other Greeks, if a doctor fails to cure the patient, then the doctor's proficiency as a *technitês* is seriously cast into doubt, since a *technê* is one unworthy of the name if it does not prove itself able to counteract the countervailing influence of natural forces and to establish enough control over nature sufficient to keep her from upsetting the actor's plans. Those activities that master chance are *technai* because "those occupations are most truly *technê* in which there is the least element of chance" (*Pol.* 1258b35). Thus, we can immediately understand why, for Aristotle, *technê* would seem less

virtuous. Its ends must have seemed to have been too commonly, too safely, and too easily attained for it to qualify.

Hence, for Aristotle, the necessity of distinguishing a different kind of activity that, for lack of a clear *eidos*, is less certain of recognizing the means to sought ends, and that, for lack of time-tested methods on which to rely, is less certain of obtaining them. Under the heading of *phronêsis* are subsequently included all manner of end-seeking activities in which a person does not have a reliable and dependable plan-of-action to attain a reliably producible end, so that she remains in the position of having to take advantage of opportunities which, even when seized, have uncertain results. In these instances one is always unable to predict with any certainty whether the forces of nature will carry one's efforts away from their intended goal. Not coincidentally, instances in which we exercise *phronêsis* are those that appear more virtuous for being risky, uncertain, and untested.

Phronêsis also refers to a way of responding to the world and seeking ends in it when the world does not first seem to be susceptible to human control, or to accommodate our efforts to attain certain ends. There are instances, for example, in which we are faced with a state-of-affairs that will not allow itself to be molded in accord with our predetermined "ideas" because none of the "materials" that we find at our ready disposal lend themselves to easy use under existing blueprints or archetypes. Or else, we seek certain ends, but nobody can tell us to how to simply go out and find the means to them. It is in these cases, in short, that *technê* fails us as a means of controlling the world. We must cease being technical and become phronetic because *phronêsis* is the only thing to which we have recourse when the world exceeds our control and *technê* is no use. *Phronêsis* then takes over at the point at which we have no choice but to await a momentary state-of-affairs that will, we hope, present us with a narrow window of opportunity for the attainment of a desired end. In this way the *phronimos*, Aristotle says, can somehow succeed at obtaining ends that are not those of any art.

'Chance,' *tuchê* in Greek or *fortuna* in Latin, insofar as it denotes that part of the world that exceeds the ability of human beings to predict or control, set *phronêsis* apart from *technê*. *Phronêsis* can be found wherever there is a high degree *tuchê* to be reckoned with in the surrounding environment, and whenever activity is performed, the success of which is contingent upon chance. This is not to say that *phronêsis* and *technê* are mutually exclusive, that practical activity can never lie somewhere between the two, just that as action becomes more technical, the less phronetic it becomes, and vice versa, since again, "where there is most of mind and reason (*nous kai logos*), there is least of chance (*tuchê*), and where there is least chance, there is least mind (*elachistos nous*)" (*Magna Moralia* 1027a4). Thus, distinguishing *phronêsis* and *technê* does not mean just that there is a clear distinction between the two, just that action like a doctor's becomes more phronetic the less it remains *technê*.

Often it is assumed that, like Aristotle, the Stoics defined art as an ability to control nature, and thus they needed to invent a new ability that humans could be shown to exercise where nature could not be controlled.⁴¹ But as can be seen from the aforementioned fact that their very definition of an art allowed for the fact that chance might intervene and it might not attain its external end, the Stoics did not have to invent a power-of-mind with the ability to

⁴¹ Once common misperception seems to be that it was because the Stoics believed that the ends toward which they strove in life were, unlike those of other arts, beyond their power to control, that they made them irrelevant to the art's proper functioning, and invented a new kind of art for the purpose. For example, Long writes: "It is easy enough to see why Diogenes, following on from Chrysippus, posited such a definition of the *telos*. The attainment of external goods is outside human control; therefore happiness must be made internal, a concomitant of the rational state of mind which is the natural possession of every mature human being." Long, "Carneades and the Stoic *Telos*," 89.

work in situations over which minimal control could be had; this is what all arts did, they functioned just as well amongst easily as amongst difficultly controlled circumstances.

But for the Stoics, all arts are inherently capable of missing the mark and failing to attain their goal. Some arts just tend to bring about their goal more reliably than others. Even the same arts have a high rate of success and yet fail to reliably attain their ends in all circumstances. So the art of life or practical wisdom would not be different in this regard. In fact, it would not just be an art with an end it could be reasonably sure of attaining. It would be precisely the one art that *always* attained its end, since even if it failed to bring us closer to the attainment of provisional goals, it would nevertheless bring us closer to our *telos*.

The Stoics recognize that it is important to refrain from calling “virtuous” action that never has to grapple with the uncontrollable, the unpredictable. In fact, they emphasize this much more than Aristotle. They agree that the virtuous man is not virtuous *nisi certus adversa incerta est*, ‘unless he is sure amidst what is unsure’ (*Ep.* xcvi). So the Stoics do not draw a distinction between two different kinds of knowledge, one which functions in uncertain and the other in uncertain circumstances. In its pursuit of goods, the same art, the art of life, finds itself in both sure and unsure circumstances: “the former guides fortune’s favor, the latter masters her violence. The former are equally good although one goes along a smooth and gentle path, and the latter along a difficult one” (*Ep.* lxxv.44). But in simply referring to virtue as something that increases in proportion to the uncontrollability of the circumstances with which it deals, the Stoics nevertheless preserve the most important distinction that Aristotle means to draw when he distinguishes *technê* and *phronesis*: *a distinction which is more virtuous because it occurs when and where our ability to control the environment is uncertain, and action which is, at best a mere technical proficiency at attaining desirable, but routinely achieved ends.*

(iv.) *Phronêsis unlike technê has less need of special hulê or ‘matter’ and can make do with any.*

Technê, because Aristotle defines it as the ability to produce an end external to itself, has need of a particular kind of ‘material,’ *hulê* in the proper sense of the term. It is necessary, in short, that the subject’s activity exercise itself upon material capable of persisting through change. This is so because the actor seeks to produce an enduring effect upon the external world that will outlast the activity itself, and this requires that the form in conformity with which this actor seeks to order a set of givens, be impressed upon matter, that matter receive and retain the form impressed upon it, and finally, that it continue to bear the imprint of the actor’s activity long after that activity has come to an end. More specifically, the matter must be such that it allows a particular form to be imposed upon itself in a more or less permanent way. So the artisan must have at her disposal very particular kinds of materials. The carpenter must not lack wood.

It does not take Aristotle long to realize that the work of virtue also has need of very specific materials. Generosity requires money, for example. But even though he recognizes that “there is a need of external goods since it is impossible, or not easy, to engage in beautiful actions if one is not equipped for them” (1099b)....The “being-at-work” of the soul (1098a8), if it depended upon certain very specific circumstances to exercise itself, would be something which external circumstances could either hinder or prevent, but “we all divine,” says Aristotle, “that the good is something of one’s own and hard to take away” (1095b7). Thus if we cannot easily hinder someone from the exercise of virtue by taking away their material resources, this must be because the virtue does not require such specific materials.

On the contrary, practical intelligence must be able to make due with a limited set of givens. Hence, “The man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances, as the best general makes the best use of the army at his command and a shoemaker makes the best shoes out of the hides that are given to him; and so with all the other craftsmen (*technitas*)” (1100b35-1001a6).

“Do you think,” asks Seneca with regard to the wise man, “that he is oppressed by bad circumstances? He makes use of them. Phidias didn’t just know how to make statues out of ivory; he also made them from bronze. If you offered him marble, if you had offered him some marble cheaper than that, he would still have made the best statue he could have made from it.”

The difference between Aristotle and the Stoics, of course, is that Aristotle concludes that because practical wisdom must “make use” of such a great variety of materials, it will also have to make use of materials that do not lend themselves to easy use. Among these are the particulars that he says “fall under no art or under any set of precepts (*paraggelia*) that have been handed down” (1104a10). These are, so to speak, materials that we aren’t habituated to mold in accord with a pre-given form. This makes practical intelligence fundamentally different than the other arts for Aristotle.

But for the Stoics, all arts have the ability to use a great range and variety of materials, and a person excels at an art to the same degree that they can make use of a greater range of materials. Aristotle agrees: “For it is not every method that the rhetorician will employ to persuade, or the doctor to heal: still, if he omits none of the available means, we shall say that his grasp of the science is adequate.” Every art “means the doing of that which we choose with the materials that are available” (*Top.* 101b5).⁴² So the art of life is not different from these arts in kind, but only in degree because it can *make use of a much greater range and variety of materials for its exercise and for the attainment of its end.*

Indeed, the Stoics claimed that the art of life only existed when it proved itself equal to a wide range of difficult-to-handle materials. The ‘artisan of life’ had to be “craftsman at managing misfortune” (*Ep.* xxv.41). When Seneca invokes the analogy of the ship-captain it is to point out that the excellence of his art is more clearly demonstrated in stormy seas. Of the rough weather that he has to contend with, Seneca says, “So far from impeding the art of the ship-captain, it actually demonstrates it. As the saying goes, anyone can steer a ship when the sea is calm” (*Ep.* xxv.34).

If the virtue can, by definition, “make do” with any circumstances, then we can never excuse ourselves by saying that we are hindered by difficult circumstances. As Seneca says, “the art of life cannot be forbidden by any circumstance from exercising its functions; for it shakes off complications and pierces through obstacles” (*Ep.* xcv.8). “No fortune and no circumstance bar the wise person from acting,” Seneca says. “His work extends through his entire life” (*Ep.* xxv.39).

Yet, in distinguishing art and practical knowledge, Aristotle makes an important distinction, the import of which the Stoics acknowledged in their own way. He insisted on distinguishing skill able to attain its ends only with particular materials under particular circumstances—nobody would dare call the person with that limited kind of skill virtuous—and

⁴² The same applies to dialectic and rhetoric: “It is clear, then, that rhetoric is not bound up with a single definite class of subjects, but is as universal as dialectic;” “But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects” (*Rhet.* 1355b5, b15).

one that always finds a way to attain its ends using any and all available materials. *Without asserting a difference in kind between the two, the Stoics asserted a difference of degree, since the second was marked by a greater range and a greater degree of resourcefulness, giving its possessor not just the art of this or that thing, but the art of all things.*

(v.) *Phronêsis adapts itself to nature whereas technê adapts nature to itself.*

Of course, it could be argued that insofar as every craft-like and artisanal undertaking is bound to employ an *eidōs*, it is distinct from non-technical activity. This is to overlook, however, the fact that many purportedly non-technical activities can be guided by an *eidōs* as well. Certain men and women also struggle and strain to change a certain state-of-affairs into one conforming to their ideals. Beginning from a preconceived idea about the form of some aspect of their lives should take they strive tirelessly, if futilely, toward a perfect coincidence between their present circumstances and their ideal. If we already have a form in mind, and look upon objects in the world as “material” that we can use to “fill out” and “give content to” an as yet insubstantial idea of ours, then in our eyes, it becomes matter that must let itself simply be molded in accord with preconceived ideas.

In our eyes, reality assumes the form the human mind desires to impose upon it. Now, the artisan ceases to view these things or a given material state-of-affairs as having its own potential to bring about other states-of-affair. He begins to view it only insofar as it presents itself as available “matter,” useful only for fleshing out and giving content to his ideas. In a certain sense, his gaze is almost “violent” since he only sees matter as capable of being cast in the mold of his pre-held ends.

“Violent” seems an appropriate descriptor for activity which forms materials in accord with an *eidōs* that is not their own. Non-violent activity allows matter to dictate its own *eidōs*. Here, what seems to matter less is the *eidōs* per se. An *eidōs* need not be imposed violently on certain materials. For example, the Stoics seem to find nothing particularly violent about imposing form upon matter if the matter is suitable for the form, if the means are suitable for certain ends. For them, after all, even pigs are suitable for butchering, their having been given life by the creator “as a kind of salt”⁴³ serving to keep them fresh until the time when they can be eaten.

It serves to point out that, standing in stark contrast with *technê*'s rather violent methods of bringing something of nature to assume an idealized form, is another way of grappling with nature when the only “material” with which we have to work is a *kairos* or ‘an opportune but fleeting moment’ that presents itself, at a particular time, as leading to an end all its own, a fleeting moment that must be seized or lost forever. In order to seize the right moment, one must grasp the direction in which the wind is blowing, the direction in which events are unfolding. In situations such as this nature is not expected or forced to conform to the subject’s preconceived ideas, the subject must accommodate herself to nature.

⁴³ Paradoxically, we have to use things in the way they demand to be used, even when the pig squeals, so to speak, and our materials offer us stubborn resistance. In fact, the Stoics are criticized by Plutarch on precisely the grounds that if they argue that everything in nature is completely given over to human use, then nature will not be able to act as a check on our rapacious desires to exploit it without limit. They will have no grounds on which to assert that anyone makes unnatural use of nature. According to Bénatouïl, “This problem is particularly important to the degree to which it potentially places in crisis the Stoic conception of the use of nature, according to which usage represents the practical mastery of the pre-existing natural function of the things which it appropriates” (*Faire Usage*, p. 61; Porphyry, *De Abstentia* II.20.1; Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1044c).

This brings us to the conclusion that the distinction between technê and phronêsis primarily was and is a distinction between a mode of interacting with nature that does not force nature into conformity with human plans, and a mode of interacting with nature in which we adjust our plans to nature's.

Again, the Stoics did not need to enforce this important distinction by enforcing a distinction between *technê* and *phronêsis*. It was enough for them to point out that true technical virtuosity, and therefore true virtue, could only be found where a subject adapted his work to his materials. It was no good for Seneca to wish for materials one didn't have, for "To have whatsoever he wished is in no man's power; it is in his power not to wish for what he has not, but cheerfully to employ what comes to him" (*Ep.* cxxiii.3). And wretched is he who *emendare mavult deos quam se*, who 'would rather reform the gods than himself' (*Ep.* cviii.12).

ART, NATURE, AND VIRTUE REUNITED

It would be quite significant if we could find in Stoicism a reason for conceiving of virtue as a skill, as had been acknowledged.⁴⁴ Whether it was his intention or not, we have inherited from Aristotle the idea that in order to distinguish virtue from mere technical skill, we have to invent a distinct mental organ whose sole function it will be to illuminate matters of right and wrong, responsibility and duty, practicality and utility. This has led to the further conclusion that it is solely *to this faculty*, and not to the one that allows us to function in everyday life, that we have to appeal in order to become ethical. The further consequence has been that we do not regard it as sufficient that we expand upon and hone our ordinary means of functioning in everyday life in order to become morally good. To our habitual ways of interacting with events, we believe a different kind of knowledge must be superadded.

The Stoics urged acolytes not to gain a distinct kind of knowledge that they did not already have, but to strengthen and expand upon a kind of knowledge they already possessed. We will come to understand that they were preceded in this regard by Aristotle if we understand his effort to draw clear boundaries between *phronêsis* and *technê* for what it was—not so much an effort to draw a clear distinction between two kinds of knowledge—but an effort to distinguish between *merely* technical knowledge, and more *expertly* technical knowledge. The second was: *praxis* as well as *poiêsis*, could be judged by standards different than those applying to the other arts, coped more adeptly with chance and contingency, was unusually resourceful in its use of materials, and showed a marked degree of sensitivity and adaptability to its materials. In short, it was art taken to its highest form. It was "virtuous" because it showed *virtuosity*.

The story we have told has been one in which the Stoics took it upon themselves to reclaim *technê* as a fitting and suitable way of knowing, one that could serve as a paradigm for practical judging, even philosophical knowing. In this manner, the Stoics could reverse what had been the unfortunate consequence of disassociating knowledge with *technê*—depriving it of its connection to nature. The effort, beginning with Plato, to divorce philosophical, and finally,

⁴⁴ For Annas, however, who may be in some sense right that the Stoics conceived of virtue as a skill in a way that Aristotle did not, this implies that they succeeded in incorporating a theoretical component into virtue. She wrongly assumes that, in a way that makes it all the more agreeable for being more palatable to modern theorists, Stoicism gives us a better version of virtue ethics and "brings ancient ethics closer to other modern theories which require that the moral agent reflect on, and try to achieve a theoretically unified basis for, her individual moral judgements." We cannot agree that, "The skill analogy requires that the agent reflect and achieve by reflection a unified grasp of the general principles underlying her patterns of action and decision." Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 68.

practical knowledge of all association with the arts had, as its unfortunate result, the disassociation of practical and philosophic knowledge from what was considered to be the one most innate, instinctive, and dependable way human beings had of understanding and interacting with their world—*technê*. In the words of Carlos Lévy, the Stoics tried to close the gap between man and the gods, to assert the original unity of man and nature.⁴⁵ And we have just seen why *technê* would have served the Stoics well in this regard. *Technê* was, first a way of imitating nature, since in *technê* humans most closely approximated the action of the gods. *Technê* also put one on good terms with nature. With its perfection came a way of using nature by cooperating with it.

THE ‘GAP’ IN ARISTOTLE’S ACCOUNT OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

We turn now to the question of whether Aristotle equates virtue and art to a similar or even greater degree than the Stoics. In Aristotle, there is the sense that we are very much born with the general instinct to seek our *telos*, but we are somehow prevented from aiming straightly, directly, and unswervingly at that *telos* from birth. We all start out in life with an inchoate, unformed disposition to seek the good, and with guidance and training, we can come to seek goods further afield than those that merely appeal immediately and directly to the senses. In the process, the tendency to see these goods, that is, pleasurable ones, as unequivocally good diminishes as we eventually realize that they often come second in importance to others. Having finally become *eubolos*, a ‘good deliberator,’ one will have become *ho tou aristou anthrôpô tôn praktôn stochastikos*, ‘one aiming at the best of the goods for man attainable by action’ (1041b13-14). One will therefore have arrived at the point of aiming not just at provisional goods, but at *ta autois agatha kai ta tois anthrôpôis*, ‘the things that are good for themselves and for mankind’ (1040b9).

Aristotle’s interpreters are therefore in the right to suggest in at least one sense that there is a ‘gap’ that separates the young child and her desire from the goods at which her impulses, if they are correctly educated, will eventually aim. The addition of reason is a crucial ingredient as is the good that appears to the adult *kata ton logismon*, ‘according to reasoning’ (1041b14). But since “it is not possible to be good in the true sense without practical insight, not to have practical insight without ethical virtue” (1144b), it is ethical virtue that the child must gain. Since our impulses at birth then direct us only so far in the direction of a limited range of goods, we must extend their reach so that they direct us toward “higher goods” that—paradoxical as it may sound—we *already* in some sense have the natural tendency to seek.⁴⁶ Otherwise, without a cultivated disposition, and especially when faced with pleasure, things that should appear to us as pursuit-worthy may not.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lévy, *Cicero Academicus*, 55.

⁴⁶ See below 1144b2.

⁴⁷ See especially Book III, Chapter Five. In the face of this difficulty Aristotle entertains the Stoic view: “But the targeting of the end is not self-chosen; instead, one needs to be born having something like vision, by which to discern rightly and discern what is truly good, and one in whom this is naturally right is of a fortunate nature, for with respect to what is greatest and most beautiful, and which is impossible to get or to learn from anyone else, but which one will have

Recall that *phronêsis* is a power of perception, allowing us to see what is truly good. (1114a6). But *phronêsis* can be ‘blinded’ by the same set of impulses from which it must take direction (1114a35), so that even as we are guided by our pre-reflective impulses, they can drive us off the path toward the *telos* (1102b15). Our natural impulses are generally good ones, but Aristotle argues that they will prevent *phronêsis* from operating too effectively to perceive what is most good if they do not extend far enough in the direction of our “highest goods.”⁴⁸ In short, our moral vision will be weakened and remain comparatively sightless, unable to see more than a few feet ahead of itself. And in a situation in which we come to a fork in the road, we could easily be lead down the wrong path, not in the direction of something our inner disposition would seek, if it had developed properly, but instead, in the direction of what presents itself most immediately to the senses as pleasurable. Aristotle does not arrive immediately at the insight that moral development requires extending one’s desires further in the right direction, but he is brought to this conclusion by the end of the Book VI, in the last pages of which he finally concludes:

For all men think that each type of character belongs to its possessor in some sense by nature. For from the very moment of birth we are just or fitted for self-control or brave or have the other moral qualities; but yet we seek something else as that which is good in the strict sense—we seek for the presence of such qualities in another way. For both children and brutes have natural dispositions to these qualities, but without reason these are evidently hurtful. Only we seem to see this much, that, while one may be led astray by them, as a strong body which moves without sight may stumble badly because of its lack of sight, still, if a man once acquires reason, that makes a difference in action; and his state, while still like what it was, will then be virtue in the strict sense. (1144b2)

Our natural impulses do not see as clearly in what direction they are going. Pre-reflective impulses alone do not therefore suffice—they remain “blind” and incapable all on their own of pointing us in the right direction. We must somehow develop the right impulses with the aid of reason. That done, we will be able to “see” the direction in which we are already gropingly and blindly moving.

This makes a great difference to how we account for some people’s ability to overlook what is good for themselves. In Aristotle, we risk overlooking a good, not just, as the Stoics would say, because we fail to see it as one among those things we already naturally and instinctively desire, but because we have not yet habituated ourselves to desire it. Something may be recognized as falling in with a category of things that should be desired, but for Aristotle it is possible under some circumstances that those things might not yet have become objects of desire. The only way to improve our chances of seeing the good for what it is would be to habituate ourselves to desire certain things. The question is then, of course, how we are

in the condition one is born with—to be well and beautifully born in this respect would be the complete and true blessing of nature” (tr. Sacks, 1114b5). The Stoics would only add that we are all human beings bestowed with this blessing.

⁴⁸ This is already hinted at when Aristotle writes, “And it makes no difference whether one is young in age or immature in character, for the deficiency doesn’t come from time but from living in accord with feeling and following every impulse...For knowledge comes to such people without profit as it does to people who lack self-restraint” (tr. Sacks, 1095a5).

habituated to desire what we do not already desire.⁴⁹ It is a question that Aristotle must continually answer, but as the secondary literature on the subject testifies,⁵⁰ one to which he never gives a fully satisfactory response. This, in essence, is the problem of the ‘gap.’

But perhaps because they think like Aristotelians, interpreters have arrived at the conclusion that what presents itself as a similar ‘gap’ in Stoicism is to be overcome by moving beyond natural desires and passing on to supra-natural desires. Without reprising all the reasons why, if Cicero gives us this impression, it is a false one,⁵¹ we should remind ourselves that we cannot introduce our Aristotelian understanding of moral development where it does not belong.⁵² The question of moral development seems to have been fraught with contention among the Stoics themselves,⁵³ but both Cato in *De Finibus*⁵⁴ and Seneca in his *Letters*⁵⁵ explicitly deny that moral development demands rising above old desires to attain new ones. But even if Stoic moral development does consist of acquiring a new desire—the lust for virtue as an intrinsic good—it does not require this as a precondition for *prohairesis* and the choosing of particular goods. *Prohairesis* exercises itself and chooses particular goods well before virtue is desired as an intrinsic end.⁵⁶ In fact, it is these choices that lay the foundation for the love of virtue, our highest good. In this sense, the Stoics actually reverse the Aristotelian account of moral development in which it is the love of higher goods that preconditions the correct choice

⁴⁹ Sherman calls this the “paradox of habituation.” Nancy Sherman, *Aristotle’s Ethics: Critical Essays* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 199), 254-5.

⁵⁰ McDowell argues that when we are rewarded for good acts, the pleasure that accompanies them “crystallizes” in the idea of the *kalon*. Cooper argues that it is *thumos* and competitive desire that directs us towards the *kalon*. McDowell, John. “Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, eds. Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19-35; John Cooper, “Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value,” in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 253-280.

⁵¹ See Chapter Three, and for more detail, Appendix Three.

⁵² Only this could explain why even Inwood assumes Seneca’s objection to this view to be innovative and non-orthodox. Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters*, 340.

⁵³ I subscribe to Inwood’s view, which is that during Seneca’s life and possibly earlier, there was no clear consensus among Stoics about moral development, Inwood “Getting to Goodness,” 281; see Appendix Three for further detail.

⁵⁴ If a new desire for virtue results, it arises according to Cato, from *ennoia*. But here it is not even clear that this *ennoia* and the desire that arises from it is a precondition for virtue (*Fin.* III.17). See Appendix Three for further detail.

⁵⁵ Here, in *Letter cxxi*, Seneca responds to the objection that “every animal has a primary attachment to its own constitution, but that a human being’s constitution is rational and so that a human being is attached to himself not *qua* animal but *qua* rational.” The question: “So how can a baby be attached to a rational constitution when it is not yet rational?” (*Ep.* cxxi.14). Seneca argues that, although we become more rational so that eventually “a human being is attached to himself not *qua* animal but *qua* rational” because “a human being is dear to himself with respect to that aspect of himself which is rational” (*Ep.* cxxi.15), this is more a change in constitution than desire. Our constitution and nature become more rational as the desire to preserve our nature remains the same. In Seneca’s words, “A baby, a boy, a teenager, an old man: these are different stages of life. Yet I am the same human as was also a baby and a boy and a teenager. Thus, although everyone has one different constitution after another, the attachment to one’s own constitution is the same” (*Ep.* cxxi.16). In this sense, our moral development follows much the same pattern as all that undergone by other things in nature: “For even the plant which will one day grow and ripen into grain and has its one constitution when it is a tender shoot just barely emerging from the furrow, another when it has gotten stronger and has a stem which though tender is able to carry its own weight, and yet another when it is ripening, getting ready for harvest and has a firm head: but whatever constitution it has reached, it protects and settles into it” (*Ep.* cxxi.15).

⁵⁶ Plants and animals, for example, are capable of choosing the *kathêkon* (*DL* 7.107; *LS* 59C).

of particular goods. For them, the correct choice of these goods paves the way for the love of a higher good.⁵⁷

It should be pointed out straight away, then, that this Aristotelian ‘gap’ does not exist for the Stoics insofar as they insist much more ardently: (1) *that the particular goods we seek are those we already naturally desire, and thus do have to learn to desire, and* (2) *that we could never succeed at learning to desire particular goods that we didn’t already desire by nature.*⁵⁸ On this basis alone, we can see that whatever is to be overcome over the course of moral development, it is not the lack of the right desires or a deficiency in our desires’ ability to direct themselves at the right external objects, since “a fool just as much as a wise man will take what accords with nature and reject the opposite” (*Fin.* III.59).

Hence, a different account of moral error. Whenever a particular failed to be recognized as contributing to a greater good, the problem was not with desire, since one already desired the good. All that was lacking but necessary was to realize that a particular thing promoted a sought end, that it belonged to a class of things *already* naturally desired. All one had to do was to realize that it promoted that end, or belonged to that class of things, and it would be desired. The practical result was that one could recognize the good at any given moment; the good could appear at any hour of the day *as good*. This was because one desired the good instinctively, and did not have to habituate oneself to desire the good before a particular instance of the good appeared as such.

For the Stoics, the good could always appear as good in a particular instance without its being necessary that any preconditions be laid in place in advance, and even past habituation, where it corrupted, never permanently blinded the eye of the soul to its present good. Thus, moral error could not be blamed on the subject’s own moral vision. For Aristotle, however, moral blindness could be accounted for by the fact that a person born with natural desires was still *lacking* or *deficient* in the right desires.

The fact that the Stoics’ faculty of practical judgment always remained intact and capable of actualizing itself, may have led them to indicate that even in cases of moral turpitude, when Aristotle asserted that the eye of the soul was in a certain sense “incapacitated,” it never failed—properly speaking—to actualize its capacity to see the good. Though Aristotle sometimes seems to speak of this always-open, ever-vigilant eye to the good, he must explain vice as arising from its vision somehow being blocked. It comes to be exemplified by the cowardly man who is easily “led astray” by his natural desires, and fails to see a brave deed as belonging among those things he should seek.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See *Fin.* III.17.

⁵⁸ For the Stoics, our nature cannot fail to respond to a present good: *Natura enim omnes ea, quae bona videntur, sequuntur fugiuntque contraria; quam ob rem simul obiecta species est cuiuspiam quod bonum videatur ad id adpiscendum impellit ipsa natura.* “By nature all pursue those things which seem good and flee the opposite, for which reason, as soon as the look of that which appears good is thrown in front of them, nature *itself* impels them to attain it” (*Tusc.* IV.vi.12). Epictetus affirms this in saying: “Once the good appears it immediately moves the soul towards itself. A soul will never refuse a clear impression of the good any more than it will refuse the Emperor’s coinage” (*Dis.* 3.3.4; *LS 60F*). Thus, even when we knowingly act counter to the apparent good, we must feel an impulse toward it.

⁵⁹ “Nevertheless, it would seem that the end which goes with courage is pleasant, but is blocked from sight by the things which encircle it; such a thing happens in gymnastic contests, for to boxers, the sake of which they fight is pleasant, the crown of leaves and the honors that come with it, but being hit is painful, since boxers are made of flesh, and burdensome, as is all the hard labor, and because these pains are many, that for the sake of which they are endured, since it is a small thing, appears to be nothing pleasant at all” (tr. Sacks, 1117b1).

The Stoics did not have the same need and thus those natural desires inherently deficient in their capacity to direct one toward the correct ends had to be built upon and enlarged through a concerted effort to attain ends beyond those that nature itself dictated. But it is not the case that natural desires are deficient and inadequate, and therefore as Aristotle says, in need of correction.⁶⁰

There is also the additional fact that for Aristotle “it is more characteristic of virtue...to do noble things than not to do shameful ones” (1120a15). Since doing noble things is virtually inseparable from the *phronetic* ability to perceive a possibility that the present offers us as a means to a higher end, and shameful deeds arise from the failure to do so, we must strive to see the potentiality for nobility in the situations with which we are faced. But search Stoic writings; you will find that it seems to make surprisingly little difference to the Stoics, where our moral virtue is concerned, whether we succeed or fail at seeing this-thing-here as promoting or constitutive of some long-sought-good. It is not that the Stoics do not recognize and sympathize with a certain shortsightedness in human nature, such that we fail to see something as what we should desire. It presumably happens for them as often as for Aristotle that we fail to see a particular as promoting a larger good that we seek, or as falling in with a category of things we should desire. But where we overlook a particular, and fail to see it as constitutive of some higher good, truly blameworthy action will not follow; it will result when we see something as constitutive of a good, *which is not* at the very same instant, that we clearly recognize what *is*. For the Stoics, moral failure is exemplified, not by the man who completely loses sight of the courageousness of an act when overtaken by fear, but by the man who, when he knows all along that he should serve his compatriots, puts too much stock in a competing good instead.

THE RETURN OF THE FORMS AND THE MAKING-TECHNICAL OF *PHRONÉSIS*

There is a difference between the kinds of goods the Stoics see themselves as choosing and those Aristotelians see themselves as choosing in moral deliberation. The examples the Stoics give are food, drink, shelter, friends, and in a word, “all those things necessary to life.”⁶¹ Things are chosen because they are in accordance with our nature.⁶² This is what made it possible for Cicero to assert that *prudencia* “and what it desires to obtain must be suited and appropriate to our nature and of a kind just in itself *by itself* to attract and stimulate mental impulse, which the Greeks call *hormê*” (*Fin.* V.17). These things themselves suffice to elicit a response from us. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Stoics will never describes as “to-be-chosen” anything that does not yet elicit our desire.

Aristotle, on the other hand, would have us strive toward ever more noble ends such as ‘justice,’ ‘temperance,’ and ‘friendship,’ and choose those particulars that contribute to these ends. He is still attracted, as the Stoics who are much more eager to cast off these ties to Platonism, to the universal and abstract nature of these ends. Of course, the more abstract and

⁶⁰ See Aristotle’s discussion of temperance: “for anything that has a lot of growth while stretching out toward ugly things needs to be kept back, and of this sort most of all are desire and a child. For children too live in accordance with desire, and the desire for what is pleasant is greatest in them...if desires are great and vehement, they knock the reasoning power out of commission. Hence it is necessary that desires be moderate and few” (tr. Sacks, 1119b5).

⁶¹ The examples given by Stobaeus are “health, strength, noble, well-functioning sense organs and the like.” Diogenes Laertius lists “life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, reputation” (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.79, 18: *LS* 58C; *DL* 7.101.2: *LS* 58A).

⁶² “All things in accordance with nature are to-be-taken, and all things contrary to nature are not-to-be-taken” (Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.82.21: *LS* 58C).

universal these ends are, the less likely we are to have an impulse that responds to them immediately and without delay. The instinctive desire and instantaneous desire for them does not pre-exist, and accordingly has to be created.

Why, we must ask ourselves, did Aristotle retain this Platonic reverence for the forms of justice, temperance, and courage, and for continuing to think of them, unlike the Stoics, as the external ends we are always striving for, and as the things that most of all guide and determine our deliberations?⁶³ Now, because the forms always retain an element of abstractness and universality, it seems impossible to say that anyone can have a relationship to them that is anything but intellectual. These forms must, as Plato said, be “grasped” by the intellect if they are to be grasped at all. But Aristotle has just denied the possibility of attaining *epistēmē* of the things toward which we strive, and still he wants to assert—impossibly—that the virtuous person has a relationship to these universals, but not a purely intellectual one.

In fact, Aristotle might have dispensed with all remnants of the Platonic forms, and arrived immediately at a more Stoic position, but for being beholden to Platonism. He retains the forms in the place they still occupy within ethical life—because he is motivated by that enduring Platonic concern to distinguish virtue from *technē*. Thus, just as for Plato, it was the virtuous man’s knowledge of the forms that distinguished him from the technician, so for Aristotle, the virtuous man’s relationship to the forms, even where it is not one of “knowledge” *per se*, distinguishes him from craftsmen:

Now, it is thought to be the mark of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not just in some particular respect (*ou kata meros*), e.g. about what sorts of things conduce to health and strength, but about what sorts of things conduce to a good life in general (*poia pros to eu zēn holōs*). This is shown by the fact that we credit men with practical wisdom in some particular respect when they have calculated well with a view to some good end which is one of those that is not the object of any art (*ôn mē esti technē*), so that the prudent man in general will be the man who is good in deliberating in general. (1140a25)

So the *phronimos* is never said to have a *direct* “grasp” of his final ends, but his present deliberations are influenced by what he has in some indirect manner grasped of final ends in advance. Now, for Aristotle, the grasp of these ends can only be had in the form of a character that is deposed to peruse them and which therefore makes it easier to recognize something as conducive to that end. In this way, Aristotle is still permitted to maintain, in a rather roundabout and circuitous fashion, that Plato was right all along and that, the “grasp” of the forms is still what distinguishes the *phronimos* from the technician, whose decision-making is not informed by any similar familiarity with “higher ends.” He has only a very limited awareness of “what is good and expedient for himself in some particular respect.” The *phronimos* meanwhile, has a greater consciousness of “what sort of things conduce to a good life in general.” “It is for this reason,” Aristotle closes, “we think Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom, that is, because they can see what is good for themselves and for men in general” (102610). Aristotle wanted ethical action to be more than just “technical,” in the Stoic sense, because he wanted the ends we seek to be more than just provisional and conditional. He wanted provisional ends to appear as good in the light of more ultimate and unconditional ones.

⁶³ These virtues are described less as the external ends toward which *phronēsis* strives than as the various forms in which *phronēsis* appears in varying circumstances (Plutarch, *Stoic. Rep.* 1034D).

The attempt Aristotle makes to raise phronêsis above technê and to give it higher standing by virtue of its ability to grasp higher ends means that Aristotle is importing into phronêsis an element of theôria, and associating phronêsis with the knowledge of higher, more universal ends in a way that directly recalls Plato.

But here is the point at which, despite his best efforts, Aristotle's plans may actually backfire: Because *theôria* modeled itself, from the first, on *technê*, Aristotle cannot retain this connection between ethical knowledge and *theôria*, except at the cost of maintaining a close connection between ethical knowledge and *technê*. This resemblance is apparent in the fact that ethical knowledge now necessarily involves, just like a *technê*, the grasp, in advance of any particular action, of the unvarying and universal end to which many things must appear as means.

In what sense then would we be justified in holding that Aristotle's position here actually commits him, against his own wishes, to a model of ethical life that makes it technical? The answer is that, for Aristotle, the particular can only appear as good in light of the universal. That is to say, particular things gain their worth and value as objects of moral concern only insofar as they appear as particulars exemplifying a universal value that is held in advance. Or, if we bristle at the vocabulary of particulars and universals, we must learn to see particular things as good because they are a means to an end we already hold and which we seek across time and space.

This is the first point to be made. The second concerns the reassertion of the role of the intellect, of which we recently spoke. As we mentioned, Aristotle is discontent with merely assigning the greater share of the responsibility for moral virtue to pre-reflective impulses, which predispose us to act in certain ways. He is trying desperately to show that even if epistemic knowledge is not an indispensable ingredient of ethical action, some form of *logos* is. Aristotle will deny that we have any cognitive or intellectual grasp of our "higher ends." Although he recognizes that it is in some sense our character that plays the greater part, since virtue makes the choice right and "the end appears to each man in a form answering to his character" (1114a32), intellect reasserts its importance as the means by which particulars present themselves in the light of reason in their relationship to higher ends—that is, when reason is guided by a disposition toward higher ends.

Although the role of the intellect, according to Aristotle, is a relatively limited one, its role remains that of giving individual and particular things their value by showing them in light of a universal or a universally sought end. Now insofar as ethical vice emerges from a *failure* or deficiency in a wicked man's ability to do this, it must be corrected by placing an ever greater premium on (1) extending our natural impulses beyond their natural objects, (2) desiring increasingly abstract and universal ends, and (3) using the intellect to discern the worth of particular things based on their ability either to serve these pre-established abstract universals, or these universally sought moral ends. That we do these three things is, for Aristotle, a moral imperative.

Now we can observe that the *phronimos*' action always retains something of the air of a technician's. If the technician starts out with a universal objective—the chairs she plans to make—then she will cast about and deem useful those particular materials that serve this pre-established end. Materials become good insofar as they appear as capable of being made to serve the higher end, which she demands all materials serve. Practical reasoning becomes more like a *technê* that aims at ends that are universal. Once set up, a technician's ends remain unchanged, and the material resources and the existing circumstances the individual has to work with must be molded and adapted *to them*. Somehow, mismatched resources, must also be pressed, even if brutally and forcefully, into the service of these ends, allowing themselves to be subordinated to the subject's stubborn and inflexible pursuit of his or her fixed and final aims.

When ends of this sort are set up, our attention is rigidly confined to the particular means by which existing circumstances can be pressed into the service of a pre-existing end. In short, circumstances must adapt themselves to our ends, rather than our ends to circumstances.

But we shall also see how difficult it is to specify what distinguishes *technê* as such. Still, if what is meant by proceeding “technically” is an order of operations in which one establishes, in advance of a given situation, the universal ideal or end to which particular things subsequently appear as the concrete instantiation, or the means to its realization, then the Stoics believed it was this at which the human mind excelled. As we shall see in what follows, the Stoics were not without a sense that this way of proceeding “technically” was typical of all human action, but they also thought this is what made it necessary, in the words of Epictetus, “to learn what Socrates had taught, what is the nature of each thing that exists, and that a man should not rashly adapt preconceptions to the particular existing things. For this is the cause to all men of their evils, the not being able to adapt the preconceptions to the several things (*to tas prolêpseis tas koinas mê duansthai epharmozein tois epi merous*).”⁶⁴ Unlike Aristotle, the Stoics’ had a deep suspicion of the human mind’s association of particulars with universals. For just as often as the mind correctly discerned that a particular represented is an individual instance of a more broadly sought end or ideal, it also falsely treated particulars as a means to an end that it would not necessarily attain, or viewed them as instantiations of an abstract good to which they had little or no relation. Just as often as the mind correctly associated a courageous act with courage, it also falsely associated money with riches, fame with honor, pleasure with contentment.

For the Stoics, the gift of “technical” thought lay more often at the root of human vice than human virtue. Moreover, the practical value of this kind of thought was also thrown into radical doubt. Seneca devotes pages to showing that newborn animals and freshly-hatched birds know instinctively where benefit and harm lie, “for as soon as each animal is attached to its own safety it also pursues what will help it and fears what will harm it. Its impulses toward what is useful are natural as are its avoidances of the opposite. Why is it,” Seneca asks, “that a hen does not flee from a peacock or a goose, but does flee from a hawk, though it is not so much smaller and not even familiar to them? Why then do chicks fear a cat, but not a dog? It is obvious that there is within them a knowledge of what will cause harm which has not been derived from experience...” (*Ep.* cxxi.19).⁶⁵ Human beings also come equipped with the desire and aversion toward the right objects—at least, fully equipped for the purposes of survival. Particular things appear as good or bad to us without it being necessary that reason play any further role. *Naturales ad utilia impetus, naturales a contrariis aspernationes sunt; sine ulla cogitatione, quae hoc dictet, sine consilio fit, quidquid natura praecepit.* ‘Natural are impulses toward useful things,

⁶⁴ Epictetus continues: “One man thinks he is sick: not so, however, but the fact is that he does not adapt his preconceptions right. Another thinks that he is poor; another that he has a severe father and mother; and another, again, that Caesar is not favorable to him. But all this is one and only one thing, not knowing how to adapt the preconceptions. For who has not had a preconception of that which is bad, that it is hurtful, that it ought to be avoided, that it ought in every way to be guarded against?” (*Dis.* IV.1.41).

⁶⁵ Compare Aristotle: “we think our powers correspond to our time of life, and that a particular age brings with it intuitive reason and judgment...Therefore we ought to attend to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of experienced and older people or of people of practical wisdom not less than to demonstrations; for because experience has given them an eye they see aright.” This is, of course, strange insofar as Aristotle uses this as the basis for the almost Stoic conclusion that nature and intuitive reason (*nous*) lie behind our capacity for practical judgment (*Nic. Eth.* 1143b7-14).

natural are aversions to their opposites; without any thought which might dictate it, without any advice, that which nature has prescribed, is done' (*Ep.* cxxi.21).⁶⁶

These impulses themselves constitute the art that animals practice, an art about which Seneca says, *nascita ars illa, non discitur*, 'this art is born, not learned' (*Ep.* cxxi.23). The question is this: Is anything beyond just what these impulses supply necessary to acquire the *ars vitae*? In response to this question, Seneca writes, "the sensory capacity does not form judgments about good and bad things, it doesn't know what is useful and useless. It cannot reach a verdict until it is brought to the scene of action. It can neither foresee the future nor recall the past. It has no idea of consequence" (*Ep.* lxvi.35). Hence it seems we must embrace reason as a means of forming an idea about the greater significance and consequence of particulars. But, in general, the Stoics have no reason to assert that we would be any better off associating particulars with more ultimate ends. The fact that it is useful to do so does not mean that reason always should and must see things in terms of their long-term good. In fact, where Aristotelians see an imperative to associate particulars with ever higher, ever more abstract, and ever more universal ends, the Stoics see an imperative, so far as is possible, to restrain this tendency of reason's rather than to risk a false association.

So far as the permanence and immutability of some universal ends are concerned, the Stoics would not find it especially needful to posit such ends, and indeed, find much to speak in its disfavor. The Stoics stood opposed to considering anything but virtue a good, since this would be equivalent to calling it a universal and unqualified good. Aristotle even stood opposed to calling anything a 'preferred indifferent' since "in the face of the different circumstances of the occasions (*para tas diaphorous tôn kairôn peristaseis*) neither those which are said to be preferred prove to be unconditionally (*pantôs*) preferred, nor are those said to be dispreferred of necessity dispreferred." The example given is health: "For if a healthy man had to serve a tyrant and be destroyed for this reason, while the sick had to be released from the service, and therewith also, from destruction, the wise man would rather choose sickness in this circumstance than health."⁶⁷ Health is never unconditionally preferred, nor sickness unconditionally dispreferred. Thus, there are no universal and unconditional goods—except the choosing of particular and conditional goods. If anything besides virtue were good in a universal and unconditional sense, then we might exercise virtue conditionally, that is, only in those particular circumstances in which it did not conflict with a good—like health—mistakenly considered universal and unconditional.⁶⁸

To put the same idea differently, the Stoics cautioned against the way a *skopos* posed as a fixed and universal end. They stood stridently opposed to what they considered to be the taking of any *skopos* for a *telos*. This principled stand amounted to a stand against taking any *skopos* as so universal and unqualified an end that, for its sake, we might sacrifice the very positing and striving toward ends in which our one true good—our *telos* consisted. Thus, if what Arendt means by saying that it makes ethical life technical is that Stoicism sets up certain ends

⁶⁶ Translation mine.

⁶⁷ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* XI.iii.64-7; *LS* 58F.

⁶⁸ Even in a situation in which virtue is chosen before a so-called "unconditional good," "the honorable has utterly perished." "Why? I will tell you," Seneca replies: "because nothing is honorable that is done by someone who is reluctant or compelled. Everything honorable is voluntary. Mix it with foot-dragging, complaint, hesitation, fear—it has lost what is best in itself, its contentment" (*Ep.* lxvi.17). That is to say, virtue disappears along with the motives for acting virtuously, when that course of action must be chosen at the cost of an external—one that is desired universally, despite changes of circumstance, even in circumstances when it is not good.

that are so unvaryingly sought that nothing escapes being viewed only and insofar as it can be made to serve these ends, then Stoicism represents not the ‘making technical’ of ethical life, but its opposite. It affirms that if our action is always rendered subservient to certain ends, which are taken to hold more or less universally or unqualifiedly, then we risk sacrificing the positing of many different ends which will always differ depending upon the circumstances, and vary depending upon the time and place. We sacrifice the very positing of multiple ends, in which our *techné*, consists for an end that poses as permanent and universal—one that does not adapt itself to different circumstances, but that demands that many different circumstances adapt to it.

Aristotle, on the other hand, may yet subscribe to the idea that no matter how different the circumstances, a handful of invariable and universal ends will be sought. For Aristotle wishes to distinguish Pericles from a pot-maker by virtue of his grasp of ends not just tied to particular circumstances, but ends that persist across circumstances for men “in general.” To repeat, “we think Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom, viz. because they can see what is good for themselves and for men in general.”⁶⁹ It is not without irony that it was by way of his effort to set apart a pot-maker from Pericles, a technician from a genuine *phronimos*, that Aristotle ended by affirming the essential parity of technical practice and practical knowledge.

The place that Aristotle reserves for the forms in his ethical theory is undoubtedly unexpected, given that he was supposed to have succeeded in declaring the independence of practical knowledge from the contemplation of the forms. He gives birth, in some sense, to a practical knowledge that does not have to bow before the necessity to learn of these forms. However, his newly christened power of practical knowledge does not stand autonomously on its own two legs for long before it has recourse to, if not the power of the rational intellect to perceive the forms directly, then at least some sort of power to perceive ever more final ends.⁷⁰

Of course, the way in which Aristotle took up and approached the matter of ethical life has by today become the most pervasive and widely accepted. So common is it that one questions whether it might not be the only way to approach ethics. It might now be difficult to imagine what alternatives could possibly exist if the Stoics had not furnished us with one. For although it seem far from avoidable for us today that ethics take upon itself, as its first task, inducing the individual to act toward ever more universal ends, the Stoics seem to have doubted it. For them, ethics was a matter of avoiding moral error, and moral error could be avoided easily enough if one heeded the particulars of one’s situation, if one did not hasten to

⁶⁹ The structure of Book IV is itself the best case in point. Aristotle sets about distinguishing practical knowledge from other forms of knowledge. He shows that we distinguish practical knowledge from scientific knowledge (1139b15-35), and then proceeds to show that practical knowledge is distinguished from *techné* (1140a1-b30). He considers that intellectual faculty that sets some people apart from craftsmen who are only familiar with particular ends—wisdom, which is a familiarity with the highest ends. He concludes that although these people have wisdom it is not necessarily practical wisdom (1141a10-b23). The ultimate danger of conflating practical wisdom with theoretic knowledge is then, once again, safely averted when Aristotle asserts that it does, in some sense, seem to involve the knowledge of universals because it is *also* a knowledge of particulars, which is gained with experience (1141b24-1142a30).

⁷⁰ This is evident from Aristotle’s strenuous efforts to distinguish human from animal action. Human courage must be distinguished as properly courageous because it grasps its ends. If all that were necessary for courage were that we react in accord with natural impulses to nature’s ends, then “at that rate even donkeys would be courageous when they are hungry, for being beaten will not hold them back from their food...But the kind of courage that seems to come from spiritedness seems to be the most natural, and when it includes in addition choice and something for the sake of which it acts, its seems to be courage.” Thus natural desires must be accompanied and shaped by a rational grasp of the higher ends they serve. Of those who fight for the same reasons as donkeys endure pain, Aristotle writes they “are not courageous since they do not act on account of the *kalon* or as reason determines” (tr. Sacks, 1117a1).

false conclusion, and if one paid close attention to those pangs of emotional distress which one suffered from time to time, and which provided sufficient evidence of the fact that one had fallen into moral error. Even in attempting to stave off these fits of passion and moral turpitude, the primary emphasis was not placed upon developing one's ability to steer one's life in the direction of universal moral ends.

Today it is such a commonplace that ethical life does not exist where a striving toward universal moral ends does not, that it hardly makes sense to speak of any other ethic as "ethical." But that is merely a testament to the fact that Aristotle and Plato's 'ethics' has become *synonymous* with the word itself. If one seeks any testament to the omnipresence and stubborn pervasiveness of this way of construing ethics, then it can be found in the most unlikely of places. For its influence can be felt even among Aristotle's own modern interpreters.⁷¹ But if we find it easy to believe that Aristotle wants us to see those things in which our highest end consists as a means to a yet higher end, it is because Aristotle himself makes us doubt our own capacity to succeed in life at recognizing our own ends if we do not start out with higher and more universal ends. If Aristotle repeatedly asserts that no end appears to us as such *except* as a means to an end already sought, then it can be no surprise when we grant no exceptions to this rule even in the case of our very highest ends⁷²; these we assume incapable of presenting themselves to our vision unless our eyes are already adjusted to, or our sights are already in some less obvious way "set upon" even higher ends, so that we eventually come to the conclusion that our ethical lives are incomplete until we are made more aware of our highest and most ultimate ends. In this sense Aristotle and we Aristotelians remain consummate Platonists.⁷³

⁷¹ Aristotle holds that in all practical reasoning the end is *hypothesis*, something 'laid down' in advance (1151a17; 1144a24; 1112b15). The end assumed from the outset, the means to it are sought. The specific end to be sought in life is *eudaimonia* or 'doing well,' about which we can say nothing more specific than that it consists in *eupraxia* or 'acting well' (1139a34; 1140b7). *Eupraxia* is therefore, practically speaking, our highest end in the sense of being that in which our very happiness consists, that for the sake of which we do what we do. And yet we cannot be entirely taken aback if some interpreters insist that, when engaged in decision-making, we treat an example of *eupraxia* as if it were itself a means to *eudaimonia*, as though this were our real *telos*. For what sense, they ask, would it make to say practical reason could look upon an example of *eupraxia* as if it were itself a means to a further and higher end if practical reason can only ever come to see things as ends, when it comes to see them as means to even higher ends. They thus become willing to assert that we must have some prior sense of the *telos* toward which we strive, and some are even willing to assert that we must have intellectually grasped in what this *telos* consists so that we can then automatically recognize the acts by which it is attained. To quote Broadie: "The sheer concept of *eupraxia* (which for Aristotle is nothing other than the *summum bonum* for man) suggests no practical direction to prefer above other. For (as we would say) what we must do to achieve *eupraxia* depends on what specifically, *eupraxia* is taken to consist in. It follows that in ethical reasoning the end assumed as a starting point from which to derive the means is not *eupraxia* as such, but, rather, some more specific objective or set of objectives, *S*, in which the subject holds *eupraxia* to consist... Thus, strictly speaking it is *S* that is the end, and not *eupraxia*, if with Aristotle, we insist the end is the starting point of practical reason to means." Sarah Broadie, "The Problem of Practical Intellect in Aristotle's Ethics," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1987): 231.

⁷² Clearly, the *telos* does not appear to us except in the form of the individual acts of *eupraxia* by which it is constituted. The act of *eupraxia* appears to us in a particular situation as a concrete instantiation of the very thing, we suddenly realize, without any advance knowledge, what we are ultimately striving for. Any interpretation is wrongheaded if it does not hold that particular act of *eupraxia* appears to us as the *telos* we are striving for when it appears to us at all. So there can be no question of intellectually deducing an act of *eupraxia* from the advance knowledge of that to which it can be considered a means. The two possible ends from which we reason backwards to *eupraxia* have commonly been held to be supplied either by intellect or desire. Broadie rejects both of these views.

⁷³ The danger of this not entirely misguided interpretation of *phronêsis* in Aristotle is that it no longer seems that "universals are reached from particulars," but that particulars reached through universals (1143b5).

In closing, let us return once again to the question of theory and praxis. In essence, what the technical frame of mind represents is the tyranny of thought over action. Action is separated into two phases: First the intellect establishes ends, and then action comes as an afterthought to seek their means. As a result, action slavishly does the bidding of the intellect, in whose path it must always follow. Ends conceived in advance by the intellect dictate the course of action before it even begins. This is not the case in Aristotle, but action is still separated into two temporal moments: First, a better sense of abstract, universal moral ends must be had in advance. Then, action can follow once the intellect can discern means in light of these ends. Aristotle may deny that we can have a direct cognitive grasp of the ends our praxis seeks *before* we engage in it, but ethical life still gravitates around establishing universal and abstract ends and fixing them as standards of action *before* action begins. Aristotle, then, passes down to us the legacy of an essentially Platonic approach to ethics—the one we have all inherited.

REGULA AND FORMA

If the Stoics could all but leave aside universal moral ends, then this might explain why Foucault might have observed the curious absence in their writing of one more thing—all reference to moral a *regula*, meaning a universal moral ‘standard’ or ‘measure’ to which all actions might be asked to “measure up,” to “adhere,” or in some more general way, “conform.” Even calling them “adherents” implies that there is something they “adhere to,” but if the “adherents” of a particular philosophy, do not see themselves as being held to a single *regulae* because they don’t see themselves as being held to a single ‘standard’ by which they and all other people are measured, or because they see their actions as being held to a single standard to which all similar actions are held—then even when this is not the case, we assume, they must at least view their actions as adhering to *regulae* in the plural. That is to say, they must see their actions adhering to a body of rules to which theirs and all similar actions must adhere. But Foucault goes so far as to say that we find even these *regulae* absent from Seneca’s ethic.⁷⁴

This is all the more surprising because it is a *techné tou biou*, and if there is one thing we know about *technai* it is that they do not leave much freedom to technicians to determine the course of their own action. They always entail the strict and slavish adherence to a relatively established and staid set of rules. However, Foucault will not let us forget that different *technai* entail a varying degree of conformity to set rules, and to the degree that certain *technai* require certain rules at all, the question of which rules are followed is left up to the technician. The art of life is one of these arts that can be practiced, while the technician is left free from having to adopt a single prestablished set of rules:

⁷⁴ But this distaste for rules should not surprise us, as it is no way particular the Stoics. In the *Statesman*, Socrates claims that no one who really possessed the kingly science would ever “put obstacles in his own way by writing what we call laws,” because, he says, “law could never, by determining what is most just for one and all, enjoin upon them that which is best; for the differences of men and of actions and the fact that nothing, I may say, in human life is ever at rest, forbid any science whatsoever to promulgate any simple rule for everything and for all time” (295b; 294b). Aristotle adds: “The reason is that all law is universal but about some things it is not possible to make a universal statement which shall be correct.” The inability of laws to cover all cases is not a problem for which we have any remedy, “for the error is not in the law nor in the legislator but in the nature of the thing, since the matter of practical affairs is this way from the start” (1020b14; b17).

Making one's life the object of a *technê*, making one's life a work (as everything produced by a good and reasonable *technê* should be)—necessarily entails the freedom and choice of the person employing this *technê*. If a *technê* was a body of rules to which one had to submit from start to finish, minute by minute, at every moment, if there were not precisely this freedom of the subject making use of his *technê* according to his objective, desire, and will to make a beautiful work then there would be no perfection of life.⁷⁵

What Foucault has occasion to remark upon here is that not all *technai* can involve submitting oneself “from start to finish, minute by minute, at every moment” to a prestablished set of rules. This is especially the case for *technai* that aim at beauty, since beauty is not simply achieved through conformity to a set of rules. Therefore, where beauty is the aim, a certain amount of freedom must be left to the technician. Even unbound by a definite set of rules then, which would stamp his or her work with a certain order or form that could easily be mistaken for beauty, it still seems necessary that order and form emerge from another source. This leads Foucault to make a crucial distinction between *regula* and *forma*:

The philosophical life, rather, or the life as defined and proscribed by philosophers as the life obtained thanks to *technê*, does not obey a *regula* (a rule): it submits to a form (*forma*). It is a style of life, a sort of form one gives to one's life. For example, to build a beautiful temple according to the *technê* of architects, one must of course follow some rules, some indispensable technical rules. But the good architect is one who uses enough of his liberty to give the temple a *forma*, a beautiful form. In the same way, the person who wants to make his life a work, the person who wants to employ the *technê tou biou* in the proper way, must have in his mind, not so much the framework, fabric, and thick covering regulations which he follows constantly and to which he has to submit. In the mind of a Roman or a Greek, neither obedience to the rule not obedience *tout court* can constitute [a] beautiful work. A beautiful work is one that conforms to the idea of a certain *forma* (a certain style, a certain form of life).⁷⁶

A *regula*, in short, is that “framework, fabric, and thick covering regulation” which is imposed on an action from the beginning. Contrary to what the Sextus Empiricus and the Stoics' harshest critics have always falsely asserted and used to dispute their claim to an *ars vitae*, in order to qualify as such, an art need not have a *regula*.⁷⁷ For it can lack this and still adhere to a certain *forma*. What *forma* can be such that it is distinguished from *regula* is unclear. But what

⁷⁵ Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 424.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 424.

⁷⁷ What follows without doubt gives us our best means of meeting the complaints raised against Stoic *ars vitae* by Sextus Empiricus in Chapter IV of *Against the Ethicists*, among which are numbered the objection that: (1) there is not one ruling, but many different arts of life that all proscribe different actions (174); (2) we can never be sure that art is a trustworthy judge of the others until it itself is judged by a still higher art (187). What Sextus' criticisms share in common is the false assumption that what the Stoics seek but fail to attain is a single, all-encompassing standard of measurement, or a single principle, with universal applicability across the whole of life. What the Stoics are left with then are a few standards of measure and principles vying with each other for precedence, and no reason for giving precedence to some over others. If they believed that in order to qualify as such an art had to have a single unifying principle, the Stoics almost could have agreed with Sextus that we do not have a single art of life but many competing arts of life. They would only have argued that, since an art is not defined by having a single guiding principle or universally-applicable measure, but simply by striving toward a single unified end, the art of life, having one end, qualifies as an art.

Foucault explains here is that an art can from time to time employ different rules, which is why Seneca remarks that what suffices for the pilot are simple *praecepta*, ‘precepts’ or ‘guidelines’ “which tell him thus and so to turn the tiller, set his sails, make use of a fair wind, tack, make the best of shifting and variable breezes” (*Ep.* xcv.8). What Seneca leaves unsaid but Foucault articulates is that none of these rules are universally binding and must be adopted in all cases. Nor is there, as Sextus would say, a rule dictating which rules should be implemented and when. We can as artists allow ourselves to be guided by different rules at different times without feeling that those rules are completely determinative of our artistry. For the artistry is not completely determined and dictated by set rules. In this sense, the art merely “makes use” of rules, in perhaps the same way as the creator god merely “makes use” of forms.

This is not just, as Foucault stresses, an incidental part of the art of life, but essential to the beauty it brings to be in that work of art that is our life, and the way we live it. We can now see that the conspicuous absence of universal moral ends from the Stoic ethical writings is not just coincidental. It is not just a particularity of the Stoics’ philosophy that it puts aside these universal moral ends. This was an indispensable feature of the Stoic *technê tou biou*. It had to be, if it was to create beauty.

Other ethical philosophies allow us to comfortably establish our ends in advance of action, and then confine action to what is conformable to those ends. While this has the advantage of confining the subject to a relatively safe and staid path of action, these ends also act as an external imposition on the subject’s action, determining its course in advance. Our action, according to the Stoics, already seeks after aims falsely presumed unconditional and universal. The Stoics’ goal, we have seen, was to free action from its slavish subservience to these ends. In this sense, Foucault is right to depict the art of life as a “freeing” of the individual’s activity. Far from being constrained in advance by ends, Stoics are “freed up” to interact with the environment in ways that are not pre-determined from the outset. The Stoics would agree, therefore, that a *technê tou biou* had to consist of a person’s conscious striving after spontaneously-generated ends, ends which a person felt free to adopt from moment to moment, or not—or it would lose all its meaning.

- CONCLUSION -

In the Hellenistic and early Roman era, philosophy was suspended between the twin poles of skepticism on the one hand, and cynicism on the other. But despite its skepticism about the possibility of attaining truth, it never ceased to provide its adherents with an alternative means of finding truth, and thus, a position from which to cynically critique society at large.

Everyone knew that if you wanted to “know” what the philosophers of certain persuasions claimed to, you had to *make* yourself the kind of person capable of grasping such truths. The Stoics were among the first philosophers to try and establish universal truths that others would be compelled by the force of reason to accept. But they doubted that people would ever be truly convinced by these arguments before they adopted a new way of life. Precisely because most philosophers arrived at truth, not by way of premises all rational subjects could accept, but through indoctrination, each philosophic sect assumed, in the eyes of the public, the status of a cult.

The truth that the adherents of a particular sect claimed to possess, and which they claimed had political and ethical implications, could not be demonstrated by the usual means in the public sphere. In most places and times, philosophers would have sought truth in solitude and contempt for the uncomprehending masses. But in the Hellenistic and early Roman period, philosophic debate came to center around the search for truth and its relationship to practical and public life. And so, at Rome, where philosophy was an especially unwelcome addition to public life, it was debated among philosophers themselves what they hoped to achieve in the public realm. First, philosophy posed the question of the limited place philosophic truth could have, if any, in ethical and political life. Second, it posed the question of how, if what one knew was not directly comprehensible to others, one appeared to them in the public sphere as possessing true knowledge.

Cicero, however, seems to seek philosophic knowledge of universal truth for its own sake, independently of its political ramifications. He sometimes appears to take an interest in philosophy defined as the knowledge of the causes of all things, human and divine. But as was noted by Miguel de Unamuno, this knowledge is also practically useful:

Cicero’s definition of philosophy is well known—‘the knowledge of things divine and the causes in which these things are contained,’ *rerum divinarum et humanarum, causarumque quibus hae res continentur*; but in reality these causes are for us ends. And what is the Supreme Cause, God, but the Supreme End? The ‘why’ interests us only in view of the ‘wherefore.’ We wish to know whence we came only in order the better to be able to ascertain where we are going.¹

Cicero indeed takes it as the opinion of even the most hardened skeptic that “...no man could be wise who was ignorant of either a beginning of the process of knowledge or the ends of appetite, who consequently did not know from what he was starting and where he ought to

¹ Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 37.

arrive” (*De Am.* 19). Since, as Aristotle says “the originating causes of things that are done consist in the end at which they are aimed” (1140b16), we must know, in some measure, what sets our impulses in motion and in what direction they aim. Aristotle, however, was able to convince students of virtue that their desires arose in a certain way and led them in a particular direction without speaking of the ultimate causes and ends of everything in the cosmos. He told them their ends lay in a certain direction, without giving a scientific explanation of the sources of desire, reserving this for *De Anima*, or of the unmoved mover, whom we meet in the *Metaphysics*. This is why it matters little, to quote Seneca once again that, “Every one of us understands that there is something which stirs his impulses, but he does not know what it is” (*Ep.* cxxi.11). We only need to know the immediate and proximate causes of our actions, not their ultimate origins.

As for the Stoics and Aristotle, to quote Cicero, “What difference does it make whether you call wealth, power, health ‘goods’ or ‘things preferred,’ when he who calls them goods assigns no more value to them than you who style exactly the same things ‘preferred?’” (*Fin.* IX.ix.23). Many have compared the two, but strangely, basic assumptions about the differences that must exist between Aristotle and the Stoics are fallen back on, so that the comparison cannot travel far. It is assumed that, for the Stoics, reason must establish the truth unaided by impulse or desire. Or, reason is itself supplied by the outside world, by instruction, with knowledge. Knowledge is established outside and in advance of praxis and later applied in praxis. In every case, the relationship between theory and praxis is the same: it is one of application. *An unchanging and general, that is “theoretical” truth is established in advance of practice, and only secondarily implemented in practice.*

But in Cicero and Seneca, Stoic practical knowledge seems to be Aristotelian practical knowledge in that, through it, particulars present themselves to the intellect as the appropriate objects of desire. The Stoics simply go further than Aristotle in stressing that reason has a further role to play. As the object of desire comes into relief, reason has a role in *affirming*—and ‘affirming’ is the operative word—that desire remains in proportion to that which elicits it. In this sense, what the Stoics offer is simply a much more detailed phenomenological description of how desire arises and remains proportionate to its objects. *So it is not the primary role of the intellect to independently establish general rules that impulse simply obeys.*

The Roman Stoics did not assume that reason would counsel and desire would try to disobey. They assumed that if the one part of us could recommend one course while another desired to take an opposing path, this was unnatural. More than Aristotle himself, the Stoics believed in the importance and primacy of what he called “truth in agreement with right desire” (*Nic Eth.* 1039a31). The result was a radically different approach to philosophical life, which as Foucault recognized, put the emphasis on establishing a relationship to oneself.

Further, since for the Stoics, to be in conflict with oneself was an aberration, albeit one from which most of humanity suffered, the external world was presumed to have in some way come between the self and itself. Sowing discord in the soul were false beliefs instilled by society. *Thus, I have argued that the goal of ethical life was to remove these false beliefs and restore the relationship between the self and itself.*

We can now see why Seneca would advise his fledgling, Lucilius, “see to it that all your actions and words harmonize and correspond with each other and are stamped in the same mold. If a man’s acts are out of harmony, his soul is crooked” (*Ep.* xxxiv.4). We can also now explain appeals that are occasionally made into universal truth. These appeals result from a desire to ascend to a view from nowhere, but not from the belief that one can always retain an objective perspective on the world. It is clear in the case of both Seneca and Cicero that, even if

this way of looking at the world could be obtained, it would have no direct consequences for practical life. Indeed, there is tendency for the purely theoretical perspective of life to exist in tension with the first-person perspective of everyday life. And this tendency is merely aggravated by the attempt to directly “apply” what we know theoretically in concrete situations.

The appeal to a universal truth that overcomes the limitations placed on our own first-person perspective helps to make certain beliefs less plausible. In the meantime, we may, by selecting our own *praecepta*, create our own art, an art whose rules are personalized. But these *praecepta* are no less true for being rules of our own choosing. *Praecepta* demonstrate their truth not just through their conformity to an *external* measure of truth, but also when they allow the subject to fashion him- or herself in way that exhibits *internal* consistency.

The *cura animi* was an art all its own. But it also had as its result a certain technical expertise, *the art of life*. Possessing this art allowed one to use circumstances in the most rational way possible, and thus to see the proper course of action at a particular moment. And so one developed a kind practical intelligence, which the Stoics did not distinguish from artistic knowledge or technical expertise. A large part of our study has been devoted to explaining why the Stoics felt it necessary to retain the connection between art and virtue, which it had been the custom of philosophers since Socrates to undercut.

The Stoics, and Cicero in particular, admired the analogy because of its practical implications. The art of life, that *maxima omnes artes*, was an art like any other. It had a pre-determined end, the means to which it was able to perceive. But the Stoics knew what would ensue if practical intelligence was too closely compared to other arts. To have an external end, to which one slavishly seeks the means without any further reflection, is to allow oneself to be manipulated by malevolent forces. Since these forces control our access to external ends, we must adapt ourselves to them. Instead, we should adapt our ends to changing circumstances and let other people adapt themselves to us.

The solution for the Stoics, was not to describe a power of mind different from *technê*. It was to rethink *technê*. They offered a new definition of what it meant to be an artisan or craftsman. For the Stoics, one had to have: (1) the ability to travel, starting from certain *archai*, in the direction of one or more desirable ends; (2) the ability use things in accordance with their own nature; (3) the ability to use materials to the full extent; (4) the ability to make use of even “tough” materials; and (5) the ability turn art-making into its own end, rather than *just* the means to an end. The effect of redefining art in this way was to make practical knowledge a skill, one that did not differ in essentials from other arts. It was to make practical intelligence the highest expression of art, *and to turn life itself into an art to be practiced with finesse*.

But this artful way of life has an end. Its *telos* is the *telos* of life itself. Attaining this end depends much more, in the case of the art of life than in that of other arts, upon seeing the path before one leading in the direction of that end. For in the case of the art of life, we see the path stretching before us much more clearly than we see the destination. The difficulty is that individual ends lie along this path to this end. For the Stoics, they are not ends by definition. They merely focus our activity in a particular direction, and give us something at which to aim. As Dewey says, “Men do not shoot because targets exists, but they set up targets in order that throwing and shooting may become more effective and significant.”² But even when we seem to aim at provisional ends, we must remember that what we are ultimately shooting for is our *telos*. The path to our *telos* always shifts under our feet, and if at the same time, we remain fixed

² John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922), 226.

upon these roadside targets, our arrows point in the wrong direction. The path that beckons often lies in one direction, and these unmoving targets in another. We may thus strive against our very nature in the direction of these passing signposts. The art of life alone can save us from mistaking these targets that dot the roadside for our ultimate destination in life. It alone can keep us on the straight path.

APPENDIX ONE

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARISTOTLE, THE STOICS, AND CICERO

The debate about the influence of Aristotle on the Stoics is not one that can be resolved without recourse to the historical record, which is difficult to interpret. Those who would argue that Stoic ideas were formed independently of Aristotelian influences¹ can always point out that Strabo says Aristotle's works were lost after Theophrastus' death. They can also point out that it was not until the works were published again by Andronicus of Rhodes in the first century BC in the form of an edition of 'collected works' that they came back into circulation and into vogue (Strabo 13.I.54).²

But those of us who would like to believe that the influence of Aristotle on the early Stoics was more immediate can point to the unreliability of Strabo's account, the flaws of which Jonathan Barnes has done the most to expose.³ It seems that Strabo's account exaggerates the degree to which Andronicus' publication of those texts inaugurated a new era of Aristotelianism, and revived a tradition that had lain dormant. For one thing, the account is not perfectly credible. For another, he was speaking, perhaps only of the esoteric works, compiled from his lectures, which is not to say that the exoteric works he originally disseminated himself did not remain in distribution. Finally, even though his school went into a period of decline after the death of Theophrastus around 286 BC, Aristotle's ideas were probably in the Athenian air by the time the Stoics began to congregate by the painted columns that were their haunt.

While it remains doubtful that Hellenistic philosophers had easy access to the works that have been passed down to us, and through which we know Aristotle today, they did have access to exoteric works, and increasingly to primers or handbooks. The wide circulation of lecture notes or summaries of school doctrines meant that Cicero and Seneca could have referred to these. But the practice of using these summaries was so common that neither was likely to specify whether their views of Aristotle were drawn from primary or secondary texts. This is the first reason why it is difficult to speak either of Peripatetic philosophy in its pure form, or for that matter of Stoicism.⁴

The fact that Cicero never mentions Andronicus could indicate either that Andronicus did not publish the esoteric work until after his death or that Cicero was not interested in these

¹ F. H. Sandbach, *Aristotle and the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1985).

² We know that the tradition of writing commentaries on Aristotle began with Andronicus because we have extracts from his writing on the *Categories* in Boethius' work dating from the second half of the first century BC.

³ Barnes Jonathan, "Roman Aristotle," in *Philosophia Togata II: Plato and Aristotle at Rome*, ed. by Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-69.

⁴ Jaap Mansfield and David Ruina, *Aëtiana, The Method and Intellectual Context of a Doxographer*, vol. 1: *The Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

new discoveries.⁵ Cicero speaks, however, of both the exoteric and esoteric works, referring to the works of Aristotle we know today as *commentarii*, or ‘notebooks.’ In *De Finibus*, he strongly suggests that he has read these (II.iii.10). Although he may not have read the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself, which may have either been compiled or edited by Nicomachus, Aristotle’s son, he expresses a strong preference for setting aside Theophrastus’ views and hewing to those expressed in this work that he believes to be Nicomachus’ when he says, “Let us then keep to Aristotle and to his son Nicomachus; his carefully written books are said to be by Aristotle, but I do not see why the son should not be like the father” (V.v.12). Since he refers to “his carefully written books are said to be by Aristotle” (*accurate scripti de moribus libri dicuntur illi quidem esse Aristoteli*), he surely knows, at least by reputation, the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia*, usually attributed nowadays to an unknown follower of Aristotle. Whatever the case, Cicero’s acquaintance with Aristotle was already fairly intimate. He owned the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric* (Polybius, *The Histories* VI 50-52). He may even have learned Aristotelianism from Staseas of Naples, the first Peripatetic to reside in Rome, whose views are also placed in the mouth of Piso.

During this period, philosophical schools, although they had primary texts at their disposal and took them into account, often articulated the principles of their doctrine in a form quite distinct from that in which they had been set down by the school’s founder. In Stobaeus, we find a summary of Peripatetic ideas probably deriving from Arius Didymus, a philosopher in residence at the home of Augustus in the first century BC.⁶ The last two of three parts is clearly modeled on esoteric texts, but even though these were available to the author for consultation, he *deliberately* chooses to start from Hellenistic summaries of Aristotle, what we would consider secondary source. The Peripatetics thus possessed the esoteric texts that we have today, but they usually preferred to articulate the principles of their school as they had been laid down in summary form by Hellenistic authors.⁷

What it is reasonable to assume the Stoics disagree with then is a certain *interpretation* of Aristotle given by later Peripatetics. Ironically, this interpretation of Aristotle would not have surfaced, we can be sure, if it had not been for a struggle on the part of Peripatetics to articulate the precise nature of their disagreement with the Stoics. The way they ended by interpreting Aristotle meant that a new brand of Aristotelianism was created that could serve as a counterpoint to Stoicism.⁸ In brief, they interpreted Aristotle in such a way as to create an Aristotle as distinct as possible from Stoicism. What Gill considers a process of “transformation” in Peripatetic doctrine is explained as follows:

In the later Hellenistic period, and in the post-Hellenistic period discussed here, debate within ethics tended to be shaped crucially by Stoicism. Stoics adopted, on a whole series of questions....such a ‘hard,’ or seemingly extreme, position and the views of other schools were defined in relation to their position...Stoic ideas were influential in setting the terms of philosophical debate even if other schools reacted more or less

⁵ Richard Sharples, *Peripatetic Philosophy, 200 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸ The positions Critolaus demonstrates is a seeming desire to distinguish Aristotelianism from Stoicism (Sharples, 16T, 18HIM, 20AB, 22KLO).

sharply against their theses; and this debate seems, in turn, to have helped to shape subsequent doxographical accounts.⁹

Most scholars agree that Theophrastus' formulations of Aristotelian doctrine were appropriated by later Peripatetics for the purpose of more clearly articulating what distinguished them from the Stoics.¹⁰ Critolaus then, in the early second century, became one successor of Aristotle's who took it directly upon himself to rephrase Aristotle's ideas so that they could meet Stoic objections.¹¹ In Stobaeus, therefore, we find a defense of Peripatetic philosophy that while undoubtedly Aristotelian, is articulated in Stoic phraseology,¹² and which is now clear evidence to many scholars that the Peripatetics tried to argue against Stoicism on its own terms.¹³ This occurred for Peripatetics, just as it occurred for others in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition.

We should not assume that the superficial differences between Stoicism and Peripateticism as they were articulated during this period indicate that the Stoics would have seen themselves as departing from the *spirit* of Aristotelianism. Whether or not the first Stoics attempted to resolve some of the weaknesses in Aristotle, or developed their philosophy in direct response to Aristotle, is unknown. But they certainly became increasingly aware that whatever truth was contained in Aristotle's teachings was being effaced by the Peripatetic interpretation. It would not be the first or the last time that Aristotle's disciples were blamed for departing from the spirit of Aristotle's teachings. These disciples were all accused in their turn: Theophrastus assigned far more importance to external goods than Aristotle himself had.¹⁴ Critolaus strayed from the principles of his ancestors, and his pupil Diodorus made freedom from pain essential to happiness.¹⁵ The Stoics may therefore have seen themselves as agreeing more closely with Aristotle than his successors.

The first Stoics may have formed their ideas without the influence of Aristotle. But for us, it is difficult to know what Stoicism could have looked like in its untouched form before it came into contact with and under the influence of Aristotelianism, since the dilution of Stoic doctrine and mixture with older doctrines may have begun almost as soon as the philosophy was born. As Reydam-Schils explains, "one way to salvage the project of philosophy and truth

⁹ Christopher Gill, "The Transformation of Aristotle's Ethics in Roman Philosophy" in *The Reception of Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁰ William Fortenbaugh, *Theophrastus of Eresus, Commentary*, vol.6:1, *Sources on Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 435.

¹¹ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 413-15; Sharples, *Peripatetic Philosophy*, ix.

¹² The earliest accounts of Aristotelian ethics from the Hellenistic period, particularly the one belonging to Arius Didymus transcribed by Stobaeus in his *Eclogues* (II, 116-152), start with a description of *oikeiōsis*. The attribution to Aristotle of this apparently Stoic idea has sparked debate. Von Arnim claimed that the concept had already been developed by Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor, who made use of the term *oikeiōtēs*, one the Stoics subsequently borrowed. Porphyry, in his *De Absentia*, tries to defend vegetarianism by claiming that animals are naturally akin to us, and by citing Theophrastus who argues that something is akin to us (*oikeious phusei*) if it is *to suggenes*—if we share its origins and line of descent, that is, if our birth is bound up with its own. One can also find unusually similar terminology in Aristotle. The verb *sunōikeiousthai* occurs five times in the *Ethics*. The attribution of the concept to Theophrastus has, however, been disputed by Brink and Pohlenz. For a summary of the debate, which began when von Arnim claimed that the concept of "life according to nature" was Aristotelian in origin, see Charles Brink, "Theophrastus and Zeno on Nature and Moral Theory," "Oikeiosis and Oikeiotes: Theophrastus and Zeno on Nature in Moral Theory," *Phronesis* 1 (1955-6): 123-145.

¹³ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 279-287; Gill, *The Structured Self*, 173-177.

¹⁴ *Tusc.* V.75, 23 85; *Academica Posteriora* 1.33; *Lucullus* 134.

¹⁵ Sharples, 1B; *Fin.* V.14. While these two are not even deemed to hold to Peripatetic principles, Antiochus "follows the opinion of the ancients most carefully" in such a way as to suggest that certain of Aristotle's more Stoic disciples were capable of being considered truer to Aristotle than his supposed heirs.

from the Sceptics' 'suspension of judgment' would have been to get beyond differences between different thinkers." The Stoics "might therefore have been motivated by a desire to secure the position of Stoicism as main-stream, respectable philosophy, incorporating notions from other schools of thought, particularly from Plato, as a defense against the skeptical Academy, a fierce opponent of the Stoics."¹⁶

The Stoics' Posidonius interpreted the *Timaeus*, a Platonic text, through Stoic eyes, with a view to making Stoicism more familiar and palatable to Platonists. It is likely that Posidonius was not alone in making some concessions to Platonism by couching Stoic ideas in Platonic terms, and this would have contributed both to the profound influence of Stoicism upon Platonists' interpretations of their own canonical texts, and thus to the infusion of Stoic thought into Platonism. Past a certain point it therefore becomes difficult to discern what Platonism would be apart from its Stoic interpretation, much less to separate Stoicism in its "pure" form from Stoicism expressing itself in Platonic language.¹⁷

The Stoics appear to have had much the same relationship with Aristotle. And so, it is difficult to try and draw hard and fast distinctions between different schools of thought, whose boundaries were, after all, constantly being redrawn, and whose borders were in perpetual ebb and flow.

Coming to understand one's ideas in relationship to another's always involves accepting a common philosophical framework and then isolating the points of disagreement. The Stoics and the Peripatetics eventually came to agree on certain broadly Aristotelian premises, and by the time of Antiochus the two philosophical schools had a common philosophical framework, but against the background of this shared framework, certain differences began to emerge.¹⁸ The two schools hardened their positions in response to each other, and the differences between the two schools became increasingly stark as "thinkers took firm and explicit stands on questions that Aristotle left relatively open."¹⁹

The present work shows that certain of Aristotle's texts contained within themselves certain ambiguities. It is not just that they can be interpreted in different ways. Aristotle himself seems to point in two different directions at once. Antiochus may have been too quick to say that Stoic ideas were simply stolen from Aristotle. But whether or not the very first Stoics did so, their successors understood their own ideas as sharing a common basis with Aristotle's, though different in important respects. Since these Stoics understood themselves in relationship to the Aristotelian tradition—and the differences between them and the Peripatetics emerged against the shared background of an Aristotelian framework—then if we want to understand the specificity of Stoicism as a philosophy, we have to take it in reaction to that tradition in relation to which the Stoics understood *themselves*.

We should therefore return to Aristotle in order to understand *that in relationship to which the Stoics came to define themselves*. If the Stoics saw themselves as either refuting or radicalizing certain Aristotelian theses, then there is value in taking up the Ciceronian project of returning to the conceptual roots from which the Stoics of the early imperial period saw their philosophy as emerging, and attempting to understand what they added to or subtracted from as pre-existing tradition.

Which aspects of Aristotle's methodology did the Stoics come to see themselves as sharing? Based on what they shared in common with Aristotle, how did they arrive at different

¹⁶ Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence*, 87.

¹⁷ Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence*, 89.

¹⁸ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Ch. 1 and 2.

¹⁹ Gill, "The Transformation of Aristotle's Ethics in Roman Philosophy."

conclusions? Which of Aristotle's ideas did they take to extremes? If pushed to the extreme, at what point do these Aristotelian ideas cease to be Aristotelian? Which ambiguities in Aristotelian philosophy could the Stoics claim to exploit, and by doing so, claim to adhere to the spirit, if not to the letter of Aristotelian thought? These are the questions to which the present work seeks an answer.

APPENDIX TWO

ANTIOCHUS

Barnes cautions, “we should not suppose that we are reading Antiochus in Latin translation, nor even that Cicero is paraphrasing the work of Antiochus.” But on the other hand, “Cicero was thoroughly familiar with Antiochus’ views, and he was surely capable of producing an Antiochan speech without copying it from a written text.”¹ If the views of Antiochus, a man with whom Cicero was friendly, are in any way distorted, then we should not assume that this occurs for lack of source material or through negligence, but rather because Cicero has deliberately placed Antiochus’ views in the mouth of Piso, who claims to be expounding those of Antiochus *and* Staseas the Peripatetic (V.75).² Thus, we must expect that Antiochus’ perspective is filtered through a Peripatetic lens, as we shall soon see.

Antiochus, according to Piso, discards the components of Stoicism that break with Aristotelian ethics. He is suspicious of anything in Stoicism that is innovative, and for which no supposed support can be found in Aristotelian ethics. But the dialogue does not close before the question is raised of the exact extent to which the Stoics, in going further than Aristotelianism itself, have actually come into contradiction with its philosophical basis. Another question to be answered is whether the Stoics have not actually kept the philosophy more consistent with itself.

One possibility, which is never foreclosed, is that the Stoics are truer to the spirit, if not the letter of Aristotle, than those who claim to be his heirs. But two questions preset themselves.³ The first: *is the account Cicero gives of Stoicism really the Stoic?* As usual, we leave aside the disputed question of whether Cicero’s is a one-sided Stoicism. Chapter Three has shown that, if nothing else, his account of Stoicism paints it, now in a less, now in a more nuanced light. But we should be able to see that the more flattering portrait accurately depicts the tenets of the middle, if not also early Stoicism.

This leaves a second question: *Is the Antiochean account not just Stoicism in disguise?* The historical Antiochus, a man whom Cicero described as *nobilissimus et prudissimus philosophus* after spending some six months by his side in Athens (*Brutus* 315). By that time, he had rebelled against the Philo’s Academy at Rome and, back in Athens, tried to return the school to its literal and figurative “roots.”⁴ But he obviously allowed himself to come under the influence of

¹ Jonathan Barnes, “Antiochus of Ascalon,” in *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, ed. Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 66-67.

² Cicero, however, strongly suggests that it is mainly Antiochean (*Fin.* V.8, V.75).

³ For the debate about the relationship between the Stoic and Antiochean account of moral development see White, “The Basis of Stoic Ethics,” 147-59; Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 183-7; Striker, “Following Nature,” 267.

⁴ It is unclear whether he declared himself official head of the Academy or was recognized as such. The fact that he is not said to have lectured on the actual grounds of the Academy, but at another gymnasium used for lectures, the Palaestrum, could as Dörrie supposes be because the Academy was in ruins. It could also simply be, as Barnes suggests, that he would not have been welcome there. Heinrich Dörrie, *Platonismus in der Antike, Band. I. Die geschichtlichen Wurzeln des Platonismus*. Bausteine 1-35, ed. Annemarie Dörrie, (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-holzboog, 1987), 547; Barnes, “Antiochus of Ascalon,” 57-58.

the Stoics, as is attested by the fact that he has the reputation for being a Stoic in Aristotelian and Academic clothing. Sextus Empiricus claims that “he professes Stoic doctrine in the Academy.”⁵ Likewise, Augustine accuses Antiochus of “introducing some poison or other from the ashes of Stoicism with which he violated the shrine of Plato” (*Contra Academicos*, 3,41).

Gill writes, “Antiochus sets out to recast the salient features of Stoic thinking into an idiom derived from Plato and Aristotle, with a view to providing what he sees as a more convincing account of those features.”⁶ In other words, he finds something of worth in Stoicism that is revealed and clarified by adopting a Platonic or Aristotelian perspective. But as Reydams-Schils has argued, instead of admitting the influence of Stoicism upon his own thinking and the possible influence of Stoicism on the way Academics came to understand themselves, Antiochus accuses the Stoics of having stolen their ideas from the Academy, “minimizing and hushing his debts to the Porch.”⁷

Antiochus may owe the precise articulation of these ideas to the Stoics, but as Annas remarks, Aristotelian thinkers like himself would not have adopted Stoic ways of speaking if they did not believe “the ideas were still basically Aristotelian.”⁸ This indicates, first, that Stoic ideas seemed, to Antiochus at least to be Aristotelian. Further, Antiochus would not have loudly claimed that the only good ideas the Stoics ever had were stolen from Plato and Aristotle, if he did not think it was easily observed that the Stoic ideas had a forerunner in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition. Cicero’s readers must also have thought these ideas were easily recognized as Platonic and Aristotelian. “In this respect,” according to Annas, “the later Peripatetics were not untrue to Aristotle.”⁹ Thus, most scholars now agree that Antiochus was fundamentally Aristotelian, but that the terms in which Antiochus articulated Aristotelianism was influenced by the Stoics.¹⁰

We follow Annas in challenging the idea that if what we find in “eclectic” thinkers like Antiochus, and also in Arius Didymus, “is not untainted Peripatetic material, then what we find is an unintelligent mixture”—of Stoicism and Aristotle—“that is of little or no interest for the study of Aristotelian ideas.” Other scholars have had no trouble in showing that the framework by means of which the Stoics approached ethical questions was deeply Aristotelian.¹¹ What we find in Antiochus then is, in Annas’ words, “a critical, and arguably intelligent, reinterpretation of Aristotle.”¹²

⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, vol. I, 235.

⁶ Gill, *The Structured Self*, 169.

⁷ Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence*, 127.

⁸ Annas, “The Hellenistic Version of Aristotle’s Ethics,” 81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 90. Annas concludes that later Peripatetics expanded upon ideas that were already present in Aristotle in order to argue that the best kind of self-love is the love of one’s own faculty of judgment (*Nic. Eth.* IX.8). They did so by adopting an account already developed by the Stoics of how one proceeds from self-love to virtue. According to this account, which can be found in Arius Didymus, the self develops to the point at which it learns to value its own virtue more than the externals. But although virtue surpasses externals as the most important of goods, externals remain a part of virtue insofar as virtue must use or act upon these external goods (126.12-127.2). Since these ideas were already, present in some form in Aristotle, self-love could be made the starting-point of Aristotelian ethics, and the terminology of *oikeiōsis* could be adopted by the Peripatetics as their own. Annas, “The Hellenistic Version of Aristotle’s Ethics,” 85.

¹⁰ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 180-187, 276-289, 419-23; Gill, *The Structured Self*, 166-73.

¹¹ Irwin shows how the Stoics accepted the formal conditions that Aristotle laid out for happiness, but disagrees with and criticizes the subsequent conclusions he drew from these premises. Terence Irwin, “Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness,” in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, ed. by Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 207.

¹² Annas, “The Hellenistic Version of Aristotle’s Ethics,” 80.

Not uncommon, however, is Barnes' judgment that although Antiochus promises to unify Stoic, Academic, and Peripatetic theories, "in fact he selects different ideas from different systems."¹³ But Barnes himself identifies what must have allowed Antiochus to lay them to rest on a common basis. It is most clearly articulated in *De Legibus*, after Cicero admits to sharing Antiochus' views on the matter:¹⁴

Because if, as Ariston of Chios pretended, there is no other good than the honourable, no other evil than the dishonourable; that all other things are altogether indifferent, and that their presence or absence are of no kind of consequence, then Zeno has departed very far from Xenocrates, Aristotle, and all the schools of Plato, and there is an entire difference between them respecting a principle which influences the whole course of life. But, as Antiochus observes, though the ancients assert that honour is the sovereign good, and its antagonist the sovereign evil—the one being according to Zeno and the Stoics, the only good, the other the only evil—they likewise account riches, health and beauty, among the advantages, commodities and conveniences of life; and poverty, grief, and pain, among its inconveniences. And therefore they in fact agree in opinion with Xenocrates and Aristotle, though they express it by different terms. (*Leg.* I.55)

If it be agreed that virtue is the one true good then, the difference between saying that externals are indifferent in relation to virtue and saying that they are a mere means to virtue is not great. Where Antiochus believes real differences emerge is when the Stoics deny externals all value. They do this not just by referring to them as indifferent, according to Antiochus, but also by affirming that virtue is to be chosen over external goods in all cases. But as Gill shows, this is where Antiochus differs from the Stoics and makes an assumption that they would not. He assumes that such conflicts between virtue and externals can arise. In Gill's words, Antiochus differs from the Stoics because "he acknowledges that conflict can arise between the desire to act virtuously and the desire to pursue another kind of good, for instance, to save one's life. He also acknowledges that even the ideal wise person will be affected by the fear of death, as a consequence of our natural desire for self-preservation."¹⁵ Gill reminds us that for the Stoics to choose virtue, on the one hand, and to give expression to one's natural impulses, on the other, is a false dichotomy.¹⁶ Antiochus then misjudges the Stoics to assert something radically different from, and contradictory to, the principles of Peripatetic philosophy because of his own failure to understand the fundamental differences between them. For example, Aristotle posits a bipartite should make it necessary for one to choose between the goods of the mind and those of the body. The Stoics would never make such a distinction to begin with. His criticism that they go beyond Aristotle in placing the needs of the mind above those of the body stems from a failure to understand the points upon which the Stoics and Aristotle are not agreed.¹⁷

Piso, speaking on Antiochus' behalf, would have us believe that Stoicism strayed very far from Aristotelianism. This may indeed have been the historical Antiochus' firm belief, but

¹³ Barnes, "Antiochus of Ascalon," 89.

¹⁴ See also *Nat.* 1.16; *Acad.* 37; *Fin.* V.88-89.

¹⁵ Gill, *The Structured Self*, 173.

¹⁶ Gill thinks this of course not because, as Cicero argues, the good and the useful always coincide for the Stoic, but because he believes the stage of development through which the Stoic passes on the way to sagehood is one that "brings with it a complete reshaping of motivations and emotions that eliminates this kind of conflict and emotional response." *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

perhaps Cicero means to signal to us by his choice of Piso the Peripatetic as messenger, that the Stoic ideas may appear more anti-Aristotelian than they actually are if they are viewed through the wrong eyes, that is, Peripatetic eyes. Through these Peripatetic eyes, whose vision is colored by the dualism between mind and body, technical and theoretical knowledge, contemplative and practical life, Stoicism appears in a grossly distorted light. Cicero could not have predicted that Piso's account of Stoicism would be one of the few left remaining, and that generations of readers would take away from it the impression that Stoicism was a dualistic philosophy, breaking radically Aristotle. But Cicero himself would not have wanted our perception of Stoicism to be shaped by Piso's biases.

APPENDIX THREE

THE PROCESS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

The Stoics are both naturalists and non-naturalists. In the same sense as Aristotle, they believe that we have the seeds of virtue within ourselves, but also that the full flowering of virtue is not automatic. Therefore it is necessary to describe the process of moral development as just that—a process—with its own starting-point and endpoint. It is also necessary to understand that something can interpose itself between the seed and its full growth:

Reasonably enough, the Stoics assume that virtue is not something we are born with, which in this sense we do not have by nature. It is something which we, by our own efforts, have to toil to acquire. But the Stoics also believe that there is another sense in which we are by nature virtuous. They believe that nature has constructed human beings in such a way that, if nothing went wrong, we would, in the course of our natural development, become virtuous. Hence, the Stoics have an account of how human beings develop naturally. This account, among other things, is meant to show how at some point it would come naturally to act virtuously, if our natural development had not been thwarted, in part by our own upbringing, in part by our own mistakes.¹

Frede here explains why the Stoics would have said that nature “guides us towards virtue.”² It would not have occurred to the Stoics to argue differently. Even if they did believe that having a theoretical grasp of the structure of the cosmos was a necessary step on the path to moral development, they would still have described the naturally occurring process by which this development came about. They had to argue that nature led us to develop in a certain way, and they had to show by what means this result would naturally be brought about. They would then also have to explain the failure of some human beings to develop in this way, and the obstacles that thwarted their growth. Most of what we know about how the Stoics conceived this process comes from passages, like the following in Stobaeus:

Virtue makes its entrance, as we have demonstrated, from bodily and external goods, but it turns toward itself and contemplates the fact that it is much more in accordance with nature than the bodily virtues, and is even more appropriated to itself than to the bodily virtues. So the psychic virtues are far more valuable.³

Those passages from Cicero’s *De Finibus* we quoted in Chapter Three supply the rest of what we know about the subject. Taken together, this passage from Stobaeus and a few others from Cicero, constitute the whole of what we know about how the Stoics thought development

¹ Michael Frede, “On the Stoic Conception of the Good,” in *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 71.

² *DL* 7.87.

³ Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.123.21.

should unfold itself over the course of a life. But we must join Brad Inwood in his skepticism about what these passages actually purport to argue:

What Cicero has given us, clearly, is a description of a Stoic theory and not an account of an argument underlying it. We should not, I think, expect to find the argument here, since his concern is clearly to communicate to his readers an external picture of the theory and not to present the arguments that would rationally compel acceptance of it (if there were any at his disposal) nor to present the inferential process which, according to the theory, we undergo in order to acquire the notion of the good and to transform our lives into eudaimonistic success stories. Even after looking closely at Cicero's evidence, then, we are back where we started, with an unanswered puzzle. By what rational process do the Stoics think we acquire the notion of the good?⁴

Then, there is the even more pessimistic view of Michael Frede:

The way Cicero presents the matter, one easily comes to understand the Stoic position in a way that I am tempted to think is mistaken. It may well be the case that Cicero himself misunderstood the Stoic position. And given the difficulty of the matter, I would not be surprised if some Stoics had not been confused on the issue.⁵

For Inwood, what may have remained a point of contention among Stoics was the question of how, as he puts it, one "gets to goodness." This would explain why Cicero is vague. Striker even concludes that we must go elsewhere for an argument as to how and why virtue must become our sole good, because "taken as an argument for the thesis that accordance with nature is the human good, this argument begs the question by simply assuming that accordance with nature is the standard."⁶ The interpretation we have advanced is the same as Striker's. Accordance with nature is indeed taken as the obvious standard to which everything else must be referred. Cicero does not prove this. He takes it as a given that we already regard it as good to do as often as possible what it is in our nature to do. Thus, if virtue entails no more than doing what accords with our nature more consistently, then it follows that the only good we recognize unconditionally is to do more consistently what we naturally consider good. Recall that the only practical implication of this doctrine, so far as Seneca and Cicero are concerned, is that it is not possible to sacrifice virtue for an external good when one fails to coincide with the other.

Hence, virtue is *recognized* as our highest and only good. We do not have to go outside Cicero for an account of how this conclusion is deduced by a train of reasoning from more substantive premises than Cicero himself provides. Cicero is making an assumption, which Seneca states more explicitly. This assumption is that we always strive to do what is proper to our constitution. The nature of our striving does not change as we develop, though the constitution in the service of which it strives does.

Thus in his twenty-first letter Seneca argues that, we become more rational so that eventually "a human being is attached to himself not *qua* animal but *qua* rational." Thus, "a human being is dear to himself with respect to that aspect of himself which is rational" (*Ep.*

⁴ Inwood, "Getting to Goodness," 280.

⁵ Frede, "On the Stoic Conception of the Good," 90.

⁶ Gisela Striker, "The Role of *Oikeiosis* in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 145-66.

cxxi.15). One's constitution and nature then becomes more rational as the desire to preserve this nature remains the same. In Seneca's words, "A baby, a boy, a teenager, an old man: these are different stages of life. Yet I am the same human as was also a baby and a boy and a teenager. Thus, although everyone has one different constitution after another, the attachment to one's own constitution is the same" (*Ep.* cxxi.16). In this sense, our moral development follows much the same pattern as all that undergone by all other things in nature:

For even the plant which will one day grow and ripen into grain and has its one constitution when it is a tender shoot just barely emerging from the furrow, another when it has gotten stronger and has a stem which though tender is able to carry its own weight, and yet another when it is ripening, getting ready for harvest and has a firm head: but whatever constitution it has reached, it protects and settles into it. (*Ep.* cxxi.15)

This recalls similar metaphors in Cicero. For Cicero, as well as for Seneca, one first *becomes* more rational by always correctly choosing externals that correspond with one's nature. Then, as one grows, one simply tries to preserve oneself as the kind of being one has become. As an adult, one becomes more proficient at aiming at goods in line with one's inner nature. An adult then, has a nature that a child does not. And it is this adult nature that the adult is disposed to always choose what is in accord with itself and that the mature adult wants to serve and protect. Seneca thus responds in a similar way to the possible objection that "every animal has a primary attachment to its own constitution, but that a human being's constitution is rational and so that a human being is attached to himself not *qua* animal but *qua* rational" (*Ep.* cxxi.14).

A common assumption among scholars is that virtue must have a value that derives from something besides the fact that it is in accordance with our inner nature. The source of the value it is assigned is sought in logical arguments that appear to establish or give grounds for its surpassing value. But it was also a common misconception in Seneca's own day that virtue's supreme value must not derive from its being in accordance with nature, if external goods derived their value from being in accord with nature as well. There would be no explaining, according to the critics, how virtue took on a value that external goods did not:

You say, 'You admit that what is good is according to nature. This is its characteristic feature. You admit that other things are certainly according to nature but not good. So how can that be good when these are not? How does it attain a different characteristic feature when both have that one outstanding feature in common, being according to nature?' (*Ep.* cxviii.13)

Seneca will not concede that virtue derives its value from another source than external goods do. Even virtue's surpassing value derives from the fact that, like certain externals, it is in accord with nature. It is simply that virtue is always in accord with nature, and thus more consistently in accord with nature than any external good could be. So the difference between the goodness of virtue and that of externals is one of quantity. "Some reply: 'But that which becomes greater does not necessarily become different. It matters not at all whether you pour wine into a flask or into a vat; the wine keeps its peculiar quality in both vessels. Small and large quantities of honey are not distinct in taste'" (*Ep.* cxviii.15). The question is then how, since there is only a difference of quantity and not of kind between the goodness of virtue and that of externals, virtue becomes an unconditional and supreme good. Seneca's response is that

a sufficient quantity of something can make it different in kind. Thus, virtue derives its value from the same source as external goods, but there is so much of this good that it becomes a good of an entirely different *kind*. This, Seneca explains by means of an analogy:

Certain things when made bigger do retain their own type and characteristic feature. But certain things, after many increases, are finally converted by the final addition, which imposes on them a condition different from the one they were in before. One stone makes an arch, the one which wedges against the sloping sides and binds them by being placed between them. Why does the final addition, even if it is miniscule, make such a big difference? Because it does not increase something but fills it up. (xcvii.16)

This analogy recalls the very nature of the change we undergo on the way to becoming virtuous, as it is described by Stobaeus. Previous to this transformation, we perform the right actions at intervals, but with the attainment of perfect wisdom, two primary changes occur. First, the content of our actions does not change; they are now simply performed out of practical intelligence. For “the good man’s function is not to look after his parents...but to look after them on the basis of practical intelligence” (*SVF* III.516). Second, practical intelligence occurs once “actions acquire the additional properties of firmness and tenor and their own particular fixity” (*Ecl.* 5.906,18, LS 59I). As for he who still falls short of wisdom, Long puts it this way: “What this man lacks is not a higher moral objective, but the wise man’s absolutely firm and consistently virtuous disposition.”⁷ Like Seneca’s arch this disposition is composed of individual action in conformity to nature, but it is more than the sum of its parts. It is a perfected disposition to do all the right things at all the right times. For, according to Chrysippus, he who has attained wisdom “performs all *kathêkon* in all respects and omits none” (*SVF* III.510).

But many scholars approach the question of how we become good through one question: “By what rational process do the Stoics think we acquire the notion of the good?”⁸ Even for Inwood, it is assumed that “getting to goodness” necessitates “acquitting a notion of the good.”⁹ In fact, it is to be doubted that acquiring a notion of the good, as we commonly understand it, is a crucial step on the path to goodness.

As we have seen, Cicero suggests that the moment at which one finally comprehends the intrinsic value of virtue coincides with the development of adult reason (*ennoia*). It thus, according to Cicero, precedes the attainment of sagehood (*Fin.* III.33). Possibly, for other Stoics, the realization that virtue is the only good that precedes sagehood, and is not sufficient for its attainment. But at the same time, they might have held that virtue was accepted as one’s final good in a final sense only with sagehood itself. The very question Cicero wants to raise concerns virtue’s attainability, for this determines whether it is a more or less worthy an ideal. We can presume therefore that Cicero prefers to leave it to his readers to decide whether recognizing the sole value of virtue is a natural part of growing up, or whether it is only finally obtained, in rare cases, with the attainment of sagehood.

⁷ Long, “Greek Ethics After MacIntyre,” 169.

⁸ Inwood, “Getting to Goodness,” 280.

⁹ “Given this, we readily understand why the acquisition of a notion of the good plays such a crucial role in the Stoic account of our development. The transformation of our animal soul into human reason would render us inactive if, as a part of reason, we did not also acquire a notion of the good. It is only because we judge certain things that we are motivated to act.” Frede, “On the Stoic Conception of the Good,” 75.

But if a new desire for virtue results, it arises according to Cato, from *ennoia*: “As soon as he has understanding (*intelligentiam*), or rather becomes capable of conception (*notionem*)—in Stoic phraseology *ennoia*—and has discerned the order and so to speak harmony that governs conduct, he thereupon esteems this harmony far more highly than all the things for which he originally felt an affection...” (*Fin.* III.17). Cato says that we *desire* virtue as an end in itself after attaining a conception of virtue—which is not to say we do not attain virtue before both of these events take place. We have no grounds on which to assert that consciously recognizing the good and desiring it is a necessary step on the path to, rather than the final outcome of becoming good.

A conception of the good arises through *collatione rationis*, or the ‘putting together of reason’ (usually translated as analogy) in Cicero and *per analogiam* in Seneca, where we infer from the health of the body, that there is also a health of the mind, or from the consistency of some men’s actions, that perfect virtue implies perfect consistency. There is no basis for inferring, however, that these inferences are a precondition for virtue’s attainment.¹⁰ It is not even clear in these passages that the idea of the good in question is necessary for virtue, much less that it is this idea of the good, and not a more innate sense of the good that guides us towards what accords with nature.¹¹ These passages are used to refute the more tenable hypothesis that, insofar as we require any conception of the good at all, it is innate.¹² That is to say, they are used, against all evidence to the contrary, to support the idea that *an acquired non-innate conception of the good is necessary for the attainment of virtue*. In most of our sources in which the idea of the good is discussed, it is not an idea of the Platonic good at all, but a *prolēpsis* of what is ‘appropriate.’ It is therefore described as already innate or naturally acquired before *ennoiai* are even capable of being formed. For example, Diogenes Laertius writes that, “the idea of something just and good is acquired naturally” (*DL* VII.53).

There are many complementary ways to describe the process of moral development. I have argued that since we first consider ourselves to be seeking an end external to our own action for its own intrinsic sake, development may take the form of the realization that one’s action has an aesthetic and not just instrumental value. Modern ways in which interpreters have come to understand this transition all imply anachronism of one kind or another, which the present approach avoids. There are three ways in which the transition is understood by modern scholars: (1) as a transition from acting on impulse to acting with reason, (2) as one from selfish to unselfish behavior, or (3) as one from subjectivity to objectivity.

There are many assumptions that most interpreters share, the first of which is that this change takes place suddenly, abruptly, all at once. It is usually assumed that the change brings with it such a completely different attitude toward life that there is a complete break with the past. In fact, a reliable source says exactly this: “What you would find most extraordinary is their [the Stoics] belief that having got virtue and happiness, a man does not often perceive them, but it eludes him that he has now become both prudent and supremely happy when a moment earlier he was utterly wretched and foolish.”¹³ That is to say, there is so little

¹⁰ *Ep.* cxx.3-11, *Fin.* III.33. See also Inwood, “Getting to Goodness.”

¹¹ Early on, Bonhöffer discerned that there might be a difference between the good discussed in *DL* 7.53 and that in *Fin.* 3.33. Diogenes spoke of a vague intuitive grasp of the good, and Cicero of the concept of the Good. Bonhöffer, *Epictet und die Stoa*, 214-16.

¹² Citing *Fin.* III.33 and *Ep.* cxx, Sandbach argues, “what evidence we have on the origin of ideas of good does not in any way suggest that anything inborn played any part.” Brittain, “*Ennoia* and *Prolepsis*,” 28.

¹³ Plutarch, *Comm. Not.* 1062b: *LS* 61U.

discontinuity between the non-virtuous and virtuous self, that we can attain perfect virtue without even noticing the difference.

Nevertheless, Frede writes of this transformation: “Obviously, this is only possible if, in the course of this development, one’s motivation undergoes a radical change which would explain why, though one is born with an impulse to preserve oneself, one ends up not even being inclined to make decisions which are partial to oneself, as in the case of the shipwreck.”¹⁴ But the idea that a radical reversal from selfish to selfless action is ill-founded, as Brennan explains:

There is no room in Stoic moral psychology for the thought that there are two types of motivation that would line up in the right way with the modern moralizer’s distinctions of selfish and unselfish ones, or duties and inclinations, or anything of that sort. The difference between the vicious person’s emotional desire for food and the Sage’s eupathic *boulésis* for virtue consists primarily in the fact that the Sage is pursuing what is really good for her, where the non-sage pursues something which is only apparently good for him, and that is nothing like a difference between moral and non moral considerations.¹⁵

The influence of Kant is felt in every case. For we largely assume that if morality comes about at all it is as a result of coming to act solely on the basis of reason and not upon natural impulses. We assume that we must become less partial, more objective, and less blindly self-interested. But strongly Kantian accounts of moral development have by now been disputed.¹⁶ For it seems clear that this reading rests upon the false assumption of a dualism between our self-interested nature and human reason, which the Stoics would never endorse, and the assumption that moral development brings with it the ability to, if momentarily, subtract or take off the former:

The Stoics, if I am right, have no inkling of such a dualism. In their theory, human nature is entirely unitary. As we develop from infancy to maturity, reason modifies our interests values and orientations, building upon but not discarding, what was there at the outset.¹⁷

But although this view has been ostensibly put to rest it persists in the form of a belief that we can act on something *other* than impulse once we have attained full rationality:

Once we become rational, we may have reason to continue to do what we did on animal impulse. But that animal impulse is no longer there. The discontinuity is obscured by talking, as Cicero does, as if we continued to value, to be attracted to, and to be endeared to these natural valuables, except that now we value the good much higher.¹⁸

¹⁴ Frede, “On the Stoic Conception of the Good,” 72.

¹⁵ Brennan, “Stoic Moral Psychology,” 291.

¹⁶ For one such example see Endberg-Penderson, “Discovering the Good: *Oikeiōsis* and *kathēkonta* in Stoic Ethics.”

¹⁷ Long, “Stoic Eudaimonism,” 199.

¹⁸ Frede, “On the Stoic conception of the Good,” 90.

The question of moral development was fraught with difficulties for the Stoics. It appears that the only thing about it upon which the Stoic expressed agreement was that it occurred naturally, but not by means of nature alone. The problem is that it is always assumed to be a conception for the good which nature itself cannot supply. Inwood summarizes what the result of this assumption is: “It is clearly a concept open to us through natural, empirical means. Yet at the same time it seems to transcend the realm of ordinary experience and to embody an ideal of human perfection which we neither experience in our ordinary lives, nor attain with any significant frequency.”¹⁹

The terms of this debate seem to be much obscured by classing the Stoics either as objectivists or subjectivists. That the Stoics are not subjectivists is undoubtedly true in the sense that they have no conception of a unitary consciousness, an essential or unchanging self, a Cartesian I that stands behind all our thinking and willing. They do not believe that the self stands outside of a chain of causes, and is itself the cause of action. Rightly then, Gill concludes that the Stoics do not ground their morality in the existence of such an I. To place them in this category with other “subjectivists” would clearly be anachronistic, but this should not lead one to place them in another category, that of “objectivists.” The boundaries that define this category would seem arbitrarily drawn from the Stoics’ own perspective.

This is the category into which Gill places them because he wishes to highlight the fact that, as with other ancient thinkers, the Stoics have a way of “characterizing the agent as a bearer of psychological capacities or functions, rather than as a locus of self-consciousness or unique individuality.” To be sure, for the Stoics there is no private sphere of consciousness that third party observers cannot describe; there is no inner self. The self’s action is described in exactly the same terms as other things in the universe. The difficulty comes in assuming that since the Stoics can be placed in this category, they can also be placed in another: a category of thinkers who make objective, universal, and third-person a condition for morality.

Gill emphasizes, contra Striker, that we can “give a credible account of ethical development without our needing to invoke the cosmic pattern stressed by Striker and others.”²⁰ He is sharply critical too of Endberg-Penderson’s way of implying that the Stoics are almost-proto Kantian in associating the end of this process with the realizing of the universal force of moral principles. But Gill still places the Stoics not in the “subjectivist” but in the “objectivist” category, which for him, means that the process is “conceived not as the realization of a subjective or uniquely individual vision of the world, but of objective knowledge.”²¹ Specifically, moral development depends upon the attainment of objective third-person knowledge of oneself and the place one occupies in the cosmos.

Contrary to prevailing opinion, there was no sense that with moral development came an ability to step outside oneself and survey the cosmos from a God’s-eye perspective, or even that this was an objective perspective. The Stoics are frequently contrasted with Nagel, who regards it as impossible that we can ever be lifted out of our first-person perspective in order to attain objective third-person knowledge of the world. Contra Gill, it would *not* be going too far to say that the Stoics share “Nagel’s belief that human subjectivity is an ineliminable part of human existence.”²² Our perspective remains subjective, and here Long is right. Knowledge is

¹⁹ Inwood, “Getting to Goodness,” in *Reading Seneca*, 281.

²⁰ Gill, *The Structured Self*, p. 367.

²¹ Gill, *The Structured Self*, p. 378.

²² For mention of Nagel see Endberg-Penderson, “Stoic Philosophy and the Concept of a Person,” in *The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Christopher Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 109-

highly individualized in Stoicism and never extends beyond the particular impressions that we ourselves receive in different situations.²³ This is not to say that it is not an accurate reflection of the external world. But the specific knowledge that makes ethical life possible is anything but a God`s-eye-perspective on that world.

135; *The Structured Self*, 369-370. For a full account of Gill's position on the subjective and objective self: *The Structured Self*, 328-370.

²³ Long, "Representation and the Self in Stoicism," 276.

APPENDIX FOUR

THE SPECTER OF DUALISM

Throughout, I rely upon an insight of Christopher Gill's, which is that although we find the Stoics sometimes speaking in a way that is dualistic, they do invoke mind-body dualism primarily for rhetorical effect. There is also the fact that what they take from Plato and never lose hold of are the ideas about virtue that are placed in the mouth of Socrates: virtue consists in freedom from passion, it is sufficient for happiness, and it does not require external goods. These are, in Gill's words, "hard ethical stances." Socrates takes these stances because he upholds, along with them, the kind of mind-body dualism that makes them seem worth holding.¹

While the Stoics derived these "hard ethical stances" from Socrates, and even embraced the Platonic tradition enough to occasionally speak like the "Platonists," they were not dualists. On the contrary, Gill defines theirs as an effort to buttress Socratic claims, not with mind-body dualism, but with what he calls "psychological holism." Gill describes its characteristic features as follows:

One is that psychological capacities are seen as closely integrated with one another, as functions of a coherent whole, rather than as expressions of radically distinct parts and of what is or is not the core essence of the person. Another is that psychological capacities are seen as functions of a unified psychophysical whole and not as being mental by contrast with physical.²

Though made after the Stoics developed their own theories, medical discoveries seem to have reinforced the Stoics' own way of describing human beings as physical bodies, given cohesion and form by a "soul," but not one metaphysically distinct from the body. Just as doctors argued that the body was unified and directed by a physical nervous system frayed and dispersed throughout the body, one that could barely be conceptually distinguished from the rest of the body's matter, so the Stoics argued that the psyche was dispersed throughout and blended with the material body. The Stoics identified that aspect of a material object that gave it coherence and form as its psyche, but denied that it could be considered distinct from that which it informed.³

The result is that, while in Plato and Aristotle, ethical life comes to be identified with the almost total emphasis on what is "highest and best" in a person, sometimes to the exclusion of the body, the Stoics, who never see the mind as isolated from the body, or as anything but a kind of nerve center within the body, whose movements, far from being self-initiated are continuous with the flow of sensory impressions received from the world—they cannot even assert that the mind is distinct from the body, much less that one could be favored over the

¹ See Gill, *The Structured Self*, especially chapters One and Two, 3-126.

² *Ibid.*, 75.

³ *Ibid.*, 54.

other. Far from being connected to it by a mere pituitary gland, the mind *is* the nervous system that forms a continuous whole with the body from which it receives input. To develop the mind is simply to develop the physical nervous system that responds to the environment.⁴

The claim of Antiochus in *De Finibus* that it is the Stoics who want us to value and preserve the functioning of only *one* part of ourselves to the exclusion of the rest of ourselves, is erroneous. It is based on the assumption that when the Stoics say we should develop our rational capacities, they think this will involve the development of a part of the self which is distinct from the body as a whole.

Actually, the Stoics can be blamed much less than Aristotle for wanting us to develop what is “highest” and best in ourselves to the exclusion of everything else, if indeed Aristotle can be accused of this at all. The Stoics are much clearer about emphasizing that an emphasis on virtue does not mean an emphasis on anything that can be developed in isolation from the material world. Virtue is not held in the mind that detaches itself from the world, but permeates every part of the body and is evidenced in the very practical ways the body reacts to the world.

In Stoicism, desire itself serves as the preservation of the organism and all its parts. This is again, in contrast with Aristotle and Plato, for whom the “core” or “essence” of the human organism is served by the organism as a whole. The desire of the human organism, of any organism, is and never ceases to be to preserve the *whole* organism, not just one part of itself.⁵

Though virtue is to be found in a mind that will occasionally sacrifice its bodily desires, this sacrifice is not to be construed as the sacrifice of one part of the self to another. It is to be construed as the sacrifice of a part to the whole. For virtue will obtain, not when we have severed a good part of the self from the bad, but when we have severed any part of ourselves from the whole that it corrupts. Hence the Stoics’ emphasis on attaining *eutonia*, best described as the state of ‘correct tension’ obtaining between the parts of a well-ordered whole.

Posidonius again raises the specter of dualism, for which reason he is usually considered to have abandoned Stoicism. Influenced by Galen’s account, we often think of Posidonius as having reverted to a part-based psychology in contrast to Chrysippus’. In fact, as Tieleman has pointed out, Galen says that Posidonius “attempts to bring over not only himself but also Chrysippus...to the side of the Platonists.”⁶ This suggests that he merely tried to identify common ground between Stoicism and Platonism, and not that, as Sorabji has claimed, he argued for an irrational part of the soul.⁷ As Reydams-Schils argues in Chapter Two of her *Demiurge and Providence*, Posidonius’ affinities for Platonism have been greatly exaggerated by ancient as well as modern commentators. He seems thoroughly Stoic in that, even though he reintroduces irrationality in the human soul, he does not contrast a rational part (*merê*) of the soul with a rational one,⁸ and while he may distinguish the intelligible soul and form of the universe from its matter, the world soul is for him a corporeal entity.⁹ Gill claims that Posidonius availed himself of Platonic ways of speaking about the soul, not to contradict, but to

⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁵ Ibid., 78.

⁶ Galen, *PHP* 4.4.38; *Chrysippus’ On Affections*, 207.

⁷ Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 72.

⁸ Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence*, 101.

⁹ Ibid., p. 97. Tieleman and Cooper have shown that Galen grossly exaggerates when he says that when Posidonius availed himself of Platonic ways of speaking about the soul, he broke with Chrysippean psychology.

John Cooper, “Posidonius on Emotions,” in *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. Juha Sihvola and Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 71–111; Teun Tieleman, *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul: Argument and Refutation in the De placitis, Books II-III* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), Ch. 5.

supplement Stoic ways of speaking about it, and he explains why. According to Gill, the Stoics actually found inspiration in Plato for the way they described internal conflict. And this, for Gill, is why Galen and Zeno can be shown to describe the inner conflict in a similar way.¹⁰

Several possibilities have been suggested as to why Cicero himself sometimes describes the soul as composed of parts. A proposal of Inwood and Sorabji's is that he was influenced by Posidonius to return to the bipartite soul.¹¹ Lévy contends that his use of Platonic dualism reflects his training in and allegiance to Academic thought.¹² Tieleman proposes that his attention to nuance where psychology is concerned yields to his need to communicate his ethical concerns in strong language.¹³ But Gill proposes that, at the time, Cicero was writing a clear distinction between conceiving of the soul as composed of parts and conceiving of it as unified. Nor had the question of whether the soul was composed of a few parts or unified emerged as a question meriting philosophical debate.¹⁴

¹⁰ Gill, *The Structured Self*, Ch. 4.4, p. 239.

¹¹ Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 140; Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 103.

¹² Lévy, *Récherches sur 'Les Académiques' et sur la philosophie cicéronienne*, 472.

¹³ Tieleman, *Chrysippus on Affections*, 248.

¹⁴ Gill, *The Structured Self*, 214.

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