THE HANDBOOK OF VIRTUE ETHICS

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ACUMEN

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Stoic virtue ethics

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Today's return to neo-Aristotelian forms of virtue ethics within moral philosophy is contemporary with a wide renewal of interest in Stoic philosophy, inside and outside the academy. Stoic ethics shares many features which advocates of neo-Aristotelianism identify as reasons recommending virtue ethics over modern deontological and utilitarian positions. The famous Stoic claim that virtue is the only good marks it off in one way as *the* definitive ancient "virtue ethics". Stoic virtue ethics, like Aristotle's, places a premium on the cultivation of the character or *ethos* of agents, as an ethical pursuit in the light of which questions concerning the rightness of actions are then framed. The Stoics' frequent discussions of the figure of the *sophos* or sage, a kind of heroic ethical exemplar *à la* Socrates or the younger Cato, reflect this ethical preoccupation and the cognate observation that virtue is taught best by particular concrete examples, rather than learning universal rules or decision procedures (Kerford 1978; Stephens 1996; Brouwer 2002; Hadot 2010a,b). The Stoics, moreover, were like Aristotle's eudaimonists. They maintained that the aim of virtue ethics was less duty for its own sake than human flourishing, excellence (*arête*) and happiness. Like Aristotle, the Stoic conception of the virtues was capacious enough to accommodate many non-moral virtues deeply out of alignment with our modern moralistic bite, to invoke Anscombe's famous phrase (Anscombe 1958: 2). Indeed, in the ancient world, Stoics from Zeno of Kition and Chrissipus of Silo onwards were notorious for their unusual claims that physics, logic and rhetoric are virtues, alongside different species of Plato's four cardinal excellences: wisdom or *phronēsis*, courage (*andreia*), justice (*dikaiosyne*) and moderation (*sophrosyne*) (Stob. II 60).[1]

Yet from its inception, Stoic virtue ethics distinguished itself from its peripatetic forebear, just as it differentiated its claims from the cynical, Epicurean, academic and sceptical traditions. Many of its central commitments, including to the exclusive beneficence of virtue, seem alien to the more urbane moderation of Aristotle's more typically inclusive positions. The Stoic claim that external goods are fundamentally indifferent to a good human life seems to anticipate later Christian and Kantian preoccupations with sainthood

or a perfectly good will. The Stoics' fundamental disagreement with Aristotle concerning the *pathē*, or emotions, and their claim that these should be removed rather than moderated, again looks extreme, unrealistic or even ascetic. The Stoics' articulation of the first conception of natural law seemingly places their philosophy at the inception of the long trajectory leading to the characteristic legalism of modern moral thought. Finally, in all but Julia Annas's heterodox reading of their thought (Annas 1993, 2007), the Stoics were robust philosophical and ethical naturalists. Their theoretical conception of the good life as one "in harmony with nature (*homologoumenōs tē physei zēn*)" or "the experience of what happens in nature (*empeirian tōn phusei symbainantōn*)" (DL VII 87–8) is based on the "external reasons" of an unashamed philosophical physics. Indeed, the sources suggest that the Stoics agreed that an individual could only live well, practically, if they had a shaping theoretical understanding (*physika theoria;* Plut. *Sto. Rep.* 1035d) of their place in the natural world.

This chapter offers an introduction to the key claims of Stoic virtue ethics. The claims of Aristotle and contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists will be used as a dialogic foil to highlight the distinct features of Stoic virtue, and the Stoics' conception of the good life. Commentators have long noted, sometimes in frustration, what Cicero's Stoic spokesperson in *De Finibus* boasts: the close interconnection between all the claims and parts of Stoic philosophy (Cic. *Fin.* III 74; DL VII 39-41; Ierodiakonou 1993). This logical interconnectedness can make it difficult to know where to begin. It has been suggested by unsympathetic commentators that there is a circularity which is not virtuous (cf. Striker 1986: 185; Long 1996: 134). We will proceed, in what follows, successively through the key Stoic claims that a life well lived is one characterized by what Zeno termed a "smooth flow", that virtue is the only good, so that external "goods" are in fact not goods but "indifferents" (*adiaphora, mesa*), and that virtue consists in a "stochastic *technē*" or "*technē* of living", characterized by a sage reservation (*hypoexairēsis*) concerning our attachments to external things.

On the basis of these theoretical foundations, we will examine the Stoic table of virtues, noting its contrast with Aristotle's comparable table in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Particular attention will be paid to the transformed Stoic emphasis on courage (*andreia*) and *megalopsychia* or great-souledness, and their strange claims that logic and physics are virtues. Our closing remarks recall recurrent criticisms of Stoic virtue ethics, and flag the shapes of Stoic responses to these critical charges.

THE GOAL OR HIGHEST GOOD, EUDAIMONIA AS *EUROIA BIOU* (GOOD FLOW OF LIFE)

However austere we may find Stoicism, it remains a eudaimonistic philosophy. As in all of the other ancient philosophical schools, the goal of human life for the Stoics is happiness, *makaria* or eudaimonia (Stob. II 77, 16–27). This goal, as A. A. Long and Terence Irwin have analysed, condenses for all the Greek philosophers a number of agreed features. Eudaimonia is what every human being desires; it is the ultimate, if often unformulated, goal of all our various particular pursuits; it will be the complete good for us as humans, so the addition of any other things could not improve it; it will ideally involve a person's whole life; it involves living or faring well (*eu prattein*); and it is intrinsically

rewarding or beneficial, the highest good (Irwin 1986: 206–7; Long 1996: 182–3). In line with what Aristotle's famous "function argument" of *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 is usually taken to suggest, for the Stoa, eudaimonia is taken to involve the fulfilment or perfection of our distinctly human nature as rational animals (DL VII 90). The good life for the Stoa, if not for Aristotle, is the life lived in harmony (*homologia*) with nature (*physis*) (DL 87).[2] And this, given human beings' specific, rational capabilities, means a life lived according to reason, wherein our *logos* "supervenes upon" (*epiginetai*: *DL* VII 86) and redirects our first, animal impulses (see below).

More novel to Stoicism is Zeno's enigmatic claim that eudaimonia consists in a "smooth flow of life" or *euroia biou* (DL VII 88; Stob. II 7; cf. Epi. *Ench.* V). Attention to the great Roman Stoics Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius – whose texts alone we have in their complete forms – confirms the Stoic schools' emphasis on a kind of unruffled tranquillity of soul (*tranquilitas* or *apatheia*) as characterizing the best lives (Aur. *Med.* IV 3; Sen. *Tra.*). Epictetus very often describes happiness not in terms of the most complete flourishing of human potentials, as Aristotle had, but as a state (*diathēsis*) rather than an activity as in Aristotle. This state is characterized by a person's having satisfied all their desires, and avoided all one wishes to avoid (e.g. Epi. *Dis.* I 4; Irwin 1986: 225–6). Such a state, as we will see, pre-eminently involves the absence of all fear or anxiety and in a contented conviction that nature has given us all we need to achieve our highest goal (e.g. Epi. *Dis.* I 6; Aur. *Med.* II 6, II 11).

If such *apatheia* or *tranquilitas* is taken to be an adequate description of eudaimonia, however, the same problem seems to arise for Stoicism that the Stoics were wont to charge against Epicurus' praise of *ataraxia* (the absence of anxiety or worry) as a sufficient goal in life. If some such *tranquilitas* is all we desire, will not any means, virtuous or vicious, be justifiable which lead to the goal? Will not virtues like justice become mere instruments to this external, supra-ethical goal, to be disregarded or bypassed if a "short cut" emerges (Irwin 1986: 226)? The Stoics nevertheless maintained, in sharp contrast to Epicurus, that virtue just *is* the only good for human beings, and a good whose attainment will as such, by itself, deliver happiness, the highest of goods.

It is to these famously counterintuitive claims that we now turn.

STOIC EXCLUSIVITY: VIRTUE AS THE ONLY GOOD

Following Striker, Long and others, perhaps the best way to make sense of these strong Stoic claims is by referring to their Socratic precedents (Striker 1986; Long 1996: 23–32). Philodemus tells us that the early Stoics wanted to be known as *Socratikoi* (Long 1996: 3 n. 3). Diogenes Laertius reports that Zeno was converted to philosophy by chancing upon Xenophon's *Memorabilia of Socrates* after being shipwrecked outside Athens (DL VII 2). Socrates' fearless nobility in the face of his unjust execution made him a kind of ideal exemplification of the sage or *Sophos* for all the Stoics (Long 1996: 2 & n. 2; 2002: 67–96). Yet the Stoics also modelled their positions on several of Socrates' ethical opinions, including the claims that it is better to be wronged than to do wrong, that the good man cannot be truly harmed, that people do evil only through ignorance or error, and that we should seek out virtue before all else, since true wealth comes from the cultivation of good character, rather than vice versa (*Apo.* 30b).

The key Stoic argument concerning virtue and its relationship to the good is drawn directly from Plato's Socratic dialogue *Euthydemus* (*Euth.* 278e–281e). For the Stoics, again in common with Socrates and the other Greek schools, the good is defined as whatever benefits or is useful to us (DL VII 94; Stob. II 69, 11–14). In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates asks his interlocutors to reflect on external things usually taken to be great goods by human beings, like health, good repute and money. If these things were truly goods, Socrates contends, they would benefit us always, not only sometimes; and by themselves, without need of anything further to produce their beneficial effects. Yet, Socrates notes, it is possible to think of and to observe people who have attained one or other of these things, and have not benefited or flourished. People can and have been destroyed by their fortunes, just as today's popular magazines are full of tales of the famous and infelicitous.

It seems, then, that, in order for these things to *become* "good" or beneficial for us, we need to know how to use and enjoy them when fortune places them at our disposal. Not sufficient by themselves for happiness, something prior to these external things – namely, the kind of *epistēmē* a virtuous person has about how to turn such external things to benefit – is first of all necessary in our eudaimonistic pursuit.

Indeed, Socrates suggests – and the Stoics take up this thought – that this *epistēmē* with which Socrates typically identifies virtue (*aretē*) must be the only truly good thing for us, since it alone is always and only beneficial, never capable of harming its possessor. We can and do say that sometimes people are spoiled by their wealth, fame or arrogance about their beauty or other possessions. No one is ever spoiled by their virtue. It is thus possible to conceive of and observe people who are poor but happy, since they know how to contentedly make the best of what resources they have, the Stoics observe. By contrast, a person can be as wealthy as Croesus, but if they lack the virtue or practical *epistēmē* about how to benefit from externals, their many possessions can become so many instruments promoting their discontent, and means for visiting their unhappiness upon others.

This simple and powerful argument is the heart of Stoic virtue ethics. It is to the immediate corollary of this position – the Stoics' other, famously counterintuitive claim that in effect the very phrase "external goods" is an oxymoron, since all things other than virtue can and are put to harmful use in the absence of virtue – that we now turn.

LIVING ACCORDING TO NATURE: *AXIA* AND PREFERRED INDIFFERENTS, *OIKEŌISIS* AND THE *KATHĒKONTA* (APPROPRIATE ACTIONS)

At the end of the architectonic first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that virtue is necessary for a flourishing life: indeed, it is the principal part of eudaimonia. But it is not sufficient for it. In line with the majority of human opinion, he suggests that desirable external goods like fame, wealth and good fortune are also necessary (*NE* I 1098b26, 1099a32–b8; *Rhe.* 1360b3–4). This has the consequence, which Aristotle accepts, that the highest, most honourable (*timion*) good for us is something not wholly within our control. *Contra* Socrates and *pace* the tragedians, the good man may be harmed (*NE* I 1100a31–b12, 1101a6–9). The Stoics resist this implication, insisting that external things are neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness. Happiness, as our most prized goal, is and ought to be under our own control. This is indeed an alleged fact about the human

condition which the Stoics believe bespeaks Nature's or Zeus's providential beneficence (e.g. Epi *Dis.* III 24; Aur. *Med.* IX 1; Irwin 1986: 221–2).

It is important, however, to stress that this position follows from the Stoics' Socratic conception of the good. It is not the single, motivating premise for their virtue ethics. Contrary to how they are very often presented, the Stoics do not fearfully start with the assumption that virtue, whose cultivation we can undertake only with difficulty, better be the only and highest good – since otherwise we will, unacceptably, be the slaves of fortune. Instead, as we have seen, they present independent Socratic reasons supporting this ethical contention. In addition, they argue that their positions are rooted in deep-set preconceptions (*prolēpseis*) all human beings share concerning *ta ethika*, whose rationality they can with reflection appreciate (Sandbach 1971; Irwin 1986: 208–9; Long 1996: 183). External things are devalued for the Stoics only in so far as they can always either benefit or harm different individuals. It all depends on who that person is, in what circumstances they find themselves, how many or much of these things they select, and what value they assign to them – all considerations germane to Aristotle's doctrine of the ethical mean.

The Stoic claim that external things as basic as bodily health are meaningfully "indifferent" to our ethical goal of eudaimonia nevertheless decisively breaks with Aristotelian ethics. It brings the Stoa into inescapable proximity with the ancient Cynics. Having read of Socrates, Zeno is said by Diogenes Laertius to have become a long-time follower of the Cynic Crates, before founding the Stoic school (DL VII 3–4). Diogenes and Crates remain ethical paradigms for Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius (Long 2002; Aur. *Med.* VI 12).[3] Yet Zeno's founding break with the Cynics' philosophy turned principally on the idea that, although all externals – from bodily health to disease and death – are by themselves neither good nor evil, we nevertheless can rationally select (*eklogē*) between them (DL VII 105–9; White 2010). Indeed, the Stoics note, these external goods provide the "material for virtue", with which all our actions are concerned, as soon as we venture to do anything in the world (Chrisippus at Sandbach 1994: 46). Those external things like fame, good birth, wealth or power, which Aristotle and most people call "goods", the Stoics after Zeno rebadge as preferred indifferents (*proēgmena*). They assign to them a relative value or *axia* (as against "good" or *agathon*) in the pursuit of eudaimonia, and argue that it is rational to select them, absent some overriding exceptional considerations. Contrarily, those external things like poverty, illness, ugliness, death and ignominy, which people for the most part strive to avoid, are labelled "dispreferred indifferents" (*apoproēgmena*). For the most part, it is natural for the virtuous person to avoid these things, although if virtue and circumstance demand their selection, this should still be undertaken (DL VII 105–107; Stob. II 79–85; Cic. *Fin.* III 20, 52–6).

Aristo of Chios and later the sceptical academician Carneades claimed that Zeno was being absurd by identifying virtue as the only good, yet assigning *axia* to the preferred indifferents (c.f. Striker 1991: 14–20, 26–7). Yet here again, the Stoic position follows Socrates' position in the *Euthydemus*, and is far from obviously nugatory. Having argued that knowledge of how to use externals is the only unfailing good, Socrates adds in the *Euthydemus* that the situation of a person who has this virtue *and* health is in some manner to be preferred to a physically ailing, but virtuous, man (Long 1996: 26–27, 32). It is preferable to be the healthy virtuous man when we can, the Stoics agree; yet we cannot rightly say that he is an ethically better person than his less fortune-favoured fellow. And we ought never trade virtue for the sake of health, money or like externals (Sen. *Ep.* 92: 11–13).[4]

The basis for the Stoics' key distinction between preferred and non-preferred indifferent things lay in their central, naturalistic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* (Cic. *Fin.* 20–21, 63, 67–9; DL VII 107; Stob. II 79).[5] This doctrine is the most ethically salient aspect of their wider physics. *Oikeiōsis* is a strictly untranslatable word (its opposite is *allotriōsis*: making something or someone alien). It names for the Stoics the process whereby all things in the natural world are adapted to, or belong in, their particular environs. According to the Stoics, nature instils in each animal, and in each of us as children, an inalienable instinct for self-preservation, rooted in a feeling of affinity with ourselves. Similarly, she instils in animals impulses whose pursuit allows them to "obtain what is properly theirs (*oikeion*)". Human beings also have such impulses towards obtaining food, drink, shelter and reproduction (DL VII 85–6). These are the preferred indifferents which it is for the most part natural for us to select, as the kind of animals we are.

Yet, as we have already commented, the Stoics agree with Aristotle and Plato that man's distinct nature is that of a rational animal. Accordingly, as Cicero's Cato explains at length in *De Finibus* III (20–21, 51), from around age fourteen, in humans "reason supervenes as a craftsman to control impulse" (DL VII 86), a natural fact which makes virtue possible and desirable for us.

At least two things change for human beings as we attain this age of reason. First, we become capable of rationally seeing and admiring the very pattern of *oikeiōsis* that we have hitherto been unconsciously following, and which directs us towards those preferred indifferents which are *oikeion* for us. From choosing these objects alone as ends for our actions, we can as rational come to recognize (and to admire) this larger *pattern itself* as what sustains us, making us the creatures we are. From here on, it becomes possible for us to consciously choose to try to live in accordance with this wider pattern. Notably, this will often require that we give up on some objects we had hitherto naturally, prereflectively, pursued: the ability to withhold gratification is, for the Stoics as for the peripatetics, a large part of the work of *ethismos* (see the section "Non-moral, external reasons, and logic and physics as virtues" below).

Second, the innate human impulse to perceive carers and loved ones as *oikeion* to ourselves, and hence worthy of our care, is transformed in the light of the advent of adult reason. With observation and reflection, we become increasingly aware of how first our fellow citizens, then those of neighbouring communities, and ultimately all human beings rightfully deserve our respect, since they share in the same rational nature as our own (Cic. *Fin.* III 63–9). This is a process of expanding ethical awareness which the second-century CE Stoic Hierocles depicted as a series of expanding concentric circles, growing outwards from the individual and her family at its centre (Striker 1991: 40–43; Sandbach 1994: 34). The argued naturalness for us of this universal concern for others as rational animals is at the basis of Stoic cosmopolitanism, and the Stoic conception of justice and natural law (Schofield 1991; Mitsis 1999).

The name the Stoics give to actions which follow rationality, selecting preferred indifferents and respecting others, is *kathēkonta* (DL 108–10). Often, this is misleadingly translated as "duties". But Zeno's neologism was supposed to reflect the quite different, not necessarily "legalistic", thought of *kata tines hēkei*, "what falls to certain persons" (DL 108). The *kathēkonta* are acts which are "appropriate" for people to perform in specific circumstances. They can as such be provided with a "reasonable defence" in that context. Notably, even children by natural inclination will choose many such appropriate acts (DL

107), and can with adult censure and example come to perform many more (for instance, sharing with others). Yet the aim of Stoic virtue ethics, like Aristotle's before it, is not simply that one should externally do what is right (Aristotle's "continence" or *enkrateia*). *Sophrosyne* consists in acting well *from the right motive* (*orthos logos*). In doing so, our appropriate acts become what Stoics call *katorthōmata*, the acts of a virtuous person (Cic. *Fin.* III 22; Long 1996: 210–11).

We need now to examine what such good or right Stoic motives might be.

VIRTUE AS STOCHASTIC *TECHNĒ*, RESERVATION (*HYPOEXAIRĒSIS*) AND THE *PATHĒ*

We encountered above the Stoics' claim that virtue is an *epistēmē*: a claim which signals their significant break with Aristotle's delineation of kinds of knowledge and intellectual virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. In Aristotle's account, *epistēmē* (which is theoretical or "intellectual") is opposed to practical wisdom or *phronēsis* (*NE* VI 3). Similarly, Aristotle argues that virtue concerns actions or *praxes*, whose goal is importantly internal to the acts themselves (*NE* VI 1). It is not a *technē*. Aristotle aligns the *technai* (arts, crafts) with productive arts whose "proof lies in the pudding" of what is produced, as distinguished from the artisan's actions themselves (*NE* VI 4–5). As Martha Nussbaum has noted, such *technai* also are standardly characterized by codifiable bodies of knowledge, with rules whose repetitive observance guarantee a good result (Nussbaum 2001: 89–99). Yet *phronēsis* is circumstantial, concerning singular situations and complex, often unforeseeable contingencies. *Aretē* is moreover its own reward, however desirable good consequences of virtuous action may be.

The Stoics break with Aristotle in claiming the virtue is a *technē* as well as an *epistēmē*. In doing so, they invite the charge that they are breaking with Aristotle's insight into the specific nature of *phronetic* deliberation and action. Yet here again, caution is needed. For the Stoics are keen to emphasize exactly Aristotle's concerns that virtue not be subordinated to any extrinsic product whose achievement cannot be guaranteed, but is its own reward.

When the Stoics (again following Socrates) identify virtue – a knowledge of when, how and which indifferents to select – as a *technē*, they do so on the basis of a set of distinctions between kinds of *technē* Aristotle does not make in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There are performative or *praktikē technē* like dance, in which the goal just is the action itself. This is a reflection which has encouraged John Sellars to locate Stoic virtue with this species of *technē*, a kind of performative art of living (Sellars 2003: 70–75; cf. Cic. *Fin.* III 27). Yet, at least after Antipater (second century BCE), the Stoic position seems to have been to identify virtue with a third species of *technē* (alongside performative and productive): the so-called "stochastic *technē*". Stochastic *technē* (from *stochazomai*, to aim at or guess) include skills like navigation, or – the most widely used example – archery (Cic. *Fin.* III 22). When we consider what it is to learn to be a good archer, the Stoics observe, we can distinguish between the end (*telos*) of one's training, and the outcome of one's archery (*skopos*). The desirable *outcome* of shooting an arrow well will be to hit the target. The *telos* of training in archery will evidently be to achieve this outcome as often as possible, by developing every possible skill: sensitivity to conditions, to the tension of the bow, weight of the arrow and so on. Yet however adroitly even a Robin Hood develops his skill with

arrow and bow (thus achieving the *telos* of the art), this skill cannot prevent conditions out of his control from preventing his achieving the outcome in any given case: wind, rain, someone pushing him, and so on may always interfere between intention and outcome. Likewise, even the best navigator can never guarantee that he will bring his ship to berth. No ship is unsinkable. Unforeseen contingencies wholly outside of any navigator's control or reasonable aforethought may always befall us (Cic. *Fin.* V 16–20; Inwood 1986; Striker 1991: 24–35).

What does this conception of the stochastic *technai* say concerning Stoic virtue, and in particular our concern with the motives that make an appropriate action what the Stoics call a *katorthōma*? The goal of virtue, the Stoics argue, is not the same as the outcome of any of our particular actions. The outcomes or consequences of these actions, and of our best laid plans, are always out of our control. In the Stoics' characteristic language, outcomes always lie partly in the hands of others, nature, providence or Zeus. All we can therefore rationally concern ourselves with is the cultivation of a state of character deftly able to best respond to any and all such circumstances. Absent external hindrances, the virtuous person will act efficaciously and perform appropriate actions well. Stoicism is not a celebration of inefficacity. Yet in the face of uncontrollable obstacles, if we cultivate virtue, we will be able to act as nobly as is possible for a creature with our limitations, and with a maximum of composed responsiveness to the emerging circumstances.

So, in another seemingly paradoxical position, the Stoics place a premium on a specific inner attitude of reserve or *hypoexairēsis* in explaining the nature of virtue (Brennan 2000; Sorabj 2011). It is an attitude which, again, has no parallel in Aristotelian ethics. For the Stoics, we should aim at the preferred external outcomes of the actions we pursue, and do everything in our power to attain them. At the same time, we should maintain a reserve towards the outcomes we pursue: a reserve nourished by a constant, clear-sighted recollection that desired outcomes – however preferable – can never be guaranteed by our agency alone (Epi. *Ench.* II; Aur. *Med.* XI 37, IV 1, V 20, VI 50).

Problems emerge when we prioritize achieving some external outcome over practising virtue, as if this external were a good necessary to our happiness, so that we become willing to compromise virtue in order to achieve this external outcome. The Stoics' famous opposition to the *pathē* or passions – seemingly their greatest break with Aristotle – turns on the thought that passions like anger, fear, urgent desire (*epithymia*) and hatred each reflect and *embody* more or less unconditional psychological attachments to external things, as if they were necessary to our eudaimonia. The grief-stricken cuckold has assented to the thought that having his beloved's love was necessary to his happiness. Yet now she is gone, and because of her choices alone, he is convinced that all prospects of his own eudaimonia are lost (Inwood 1986; Frede 1986; Graver 2007; Inwood & Donini 2008: 699–717). The *pathē* are hence opposed by the Stoics in so far as they make our happiness dependent on factors and circumstances beyond our control. This dependency seemed to them to make our unhappiness nearly certain, and happiness actually achieved the child of fortune, rather than virtue.

THE STOIC VIRTUES OF *MEGALOPSYCHIA* AND COURAGE, CONTRASTED WITH ARISTOTLE

The Stoics' praise of reserve concerning externals gives their ethics a very different tonality to Aristotle's. Coupled with the Stoics' emphasis on the transience of all external things, it encourages comparison of Stoicism with Eastern soteriologies, notably the Buddhist virtue of detachment. Cultural historians have suggested that Stoicism, alongside scepticism, represent the importation of Eastern ideas into Western philosophy. But here again it is worth stressing that the Stoics took themselves to be working within the Greek philosophical lineage, rendering consistent the ambiguities found in prior philosophers' positions. Notably, the Stoics insisted that their identification of virtue as sufficient for happiness alone preserves Aristotle's claim that eudaimonia is the finest (*kalōtatos*) thing, as well as the best and most pleasant (*NE* 1099a24–31). For the Greeks, the *kalon* merges the aesthetic sense of something's being optimally or beautifully ordered, with the ethical sense of something's being worthy of our admiration. Yet, as Aristotle admits, only what is within an agent's control is *kalon* or praiseworthy. Accordingly, the Stoics cogently suggest that when Aristotle argues that happiness consists of virtue, which is *kalon*, plus external goods *not* wholly within an agent's voluntary control, he falls into inconsistency. Virtue is the only good, the Stoics claim: and only what is *kalon* is good (Cic. *Fin.* III 27; *Aca.* I 7, 35; DL VII 100–101). Virtue alone is praiseworthy and wholly fine, since it alone – as Epictetus constantly emphasizes – is within our volitional control to achieve (Irwin 1986: 210–13). The first rule of Stoic ethics, as Epictetus' *Encheiridion* opens by asserting (and Epictetus never tires of repeating), is that one should learn to distinguish what is inalienably within one's control – one's desires, impulses and judgements – from external things (Epi. *Ench.* I; *Dis.* I 1, etc.). The *prokoptōn* should attend to the former only, whose rational reshaping is necessary and sufficient for his happiness.

The Stoic's "intellectualist" identification of virtue with a kind of knowledge seems to open the Stoics to Aristotle's criticism of this characteristically Platonic position. Table 3.1 indeed shows how, for the Stoics, although virtue is the one "perfected" state of an individual *psychē*, this single state consists of specific forms of *epistēmē* relating to the *kathēkonta* (forms of *phronēsis*), agents' impulses or *hormai* (forms of *sophrosyne*), obstacles to be endured (forms of courage or *andreia*) and the distribution of things having value or *axia* (*dikaiosyne*). Yet it seems manifestly possible for people to know what they should do in any of these fields, and yet – akratically – to not act well. The issue is resolved, at least terminologically, when we recognize that for the Stoics *epistēmē* names not just a system of propositions or beliefs, but the "consistent state" (*diathesis homologoumenē*) internalizing such a system in the psyche of the knower (DL VII 89). Stobaeus specifies that Stoic virtue consists in "a state of the soul consonant with itself (*symphōnon autē*) for the whole of life" (Stob. II 60: 7–8). Equally, his account stipulates that for the Stoics true *epistēmē* "has firmness by itself, like the virtues". It involves "a tenor for the receptions of impressions" or even "a tension and power" in the knower's psyche (Stob. II 73). Whereas someone without wisdom might assent to something true in a way that is conditional, weak and subject to ready dissuasion, a sage's assent to the same content will be qualitatively different. Particularly, it will be "irrefutable" in the face of contrary argument, rhetoric, obstacles and appearances, short of truly persuasive evidence or counter-reasons. Indeed, the Stoics named such "irrefutability" (*analegxia*) as one of the "logical virtues",

alongside dialectical skill, carefulness (*aneikotēs*) and non-precipitancy (*aproptōsia*) in judgement (Jedan 2009: 52–65).

Alongside the principal place *epistēmē* has in the Stoic table of virtues, we will note here three other marked differences between the Chrisippean catalogue of virtues preserved for us by Stobaeus and Aristotle's catalogue as it emerges in *Nicomachean Ethics* II–IV. First is that the Stoics do not follow Aristotle in situating the deliberative virtues as means between extremes of deficiency and excess. The Stoics were in fact famous for rhetorically emphasising the gulf between virtue and *all* forms of its absence. One can drown equally in one foot of water or a sea of great depth.

Second, the Stoics completely transform the meaning of *megalopsychia* or great-souledness, which for Aristotle is the virtue of a man of great wealth and status, deeply concerned with the honour (*timia*) his possession and disporting of these externals deserves. The Stoics' devaluation of externals as unnecessary to eudaimonia means that they define great-souledness in an entirely different register. Far from an expansive aristocratic pride finally dependent on the admiration of others, Chrisippus defines *megalopsychia* as "the *epistēmē* which makes one be above those things whose nature it is to happen to good and bad persons alike". By itself, this sounds like a *précis* of the principal characteristic of the Stoic *sophos*, able "to despise the things that seem to cause trouble" (DL VII 128).

Megalopsychia is also, notably, situated by Chrisippus – as it was not in Aristotle – as a species of courage. This observation points towards a third notable difference between the Stoic and peripatetic catalogues of virtues: the greatly enlarged, and manifoldly transformed, place courage (*andreia*) has in Stoic virtue ethics. Christopher Jedan comments that Aristotle seems to largely restrict courage to "peak situations" like holding up in times of military conflict. For the Stoics, there is no sense that any of the species of courage – excepting perhaps *philoponia*, the love of toil – is specifically martial, although the Stoic philosophy has throughout its history been pressed into the martial training of soldiers (Jedan 2009: 165, 187). *Karteria* is a virtue in discourse; of persevering with what one knows to be correct in the face of contrary, erroneous opinion and pressures. *Eupsychia*, the *epistēmē* which recognizes the psyche as Socratically invulnerable to external harm, and *tharraleotēs*, the confidence that nothing terrible can befall us, are both forms of self-reflection. Neither has any Aristotelian equivalent, because both are rooted in the fundamental principles of Stoic philosophy we met above: that virtue is the only good, and happiness is not dependent on the possession of alienable externals. For the Stoics again, Aristotle finds himself in a difficult tension concerning *andreia*. He wants to hold that courage is a virtue, which involves a right amount of fear (and confidence) relative to real threats to valued goods (*NE* 1115b17–28). Yet Aristotle also suggests that courage involves overcoming – or mastering (without extinguishing?) – this fear and standing firm in the decisive moment. In this way, it is as if the courageous agent could only ever be continent, fighting his own valid fear, and so not truly virtuous, with motives in perfect alignment with action (*NE* 1228b9–17). Since the Stoic regards only virtue as good, and knows that with caution (*eulabeia*) the good cannot be lost, they contend that the Stoic alone can be consistently courageous, without fear (Cic. *Fin.* III 29; *Tusc.* IV 41, V 41; DL VII 92). It is rational to fear the loss of things we cannot control if we value them as necessary to our happiness, the Stoics argue. Hence, as soon as we regard externals as necessary for this flourishing, we cannot be courageously fearless in the face of external threats of their loss, confiscation or exile (Irwin 1986: 218–20).

NON-MORAL, EXTERNAL REASONS, AND LOGIC AND PHYSICS AS VIRTUES

Bernard Williams has famously pointed out the marked limitation of focus in modern moral philosophy to concerns which, for the Greeks, would have fallen under the heading of justice alone (B. Williams 2006: 6, 175, 182). Yet Aristotle's ethics largely (with justice an exception) concerns qualities of character which do not directly bear on our relations to others, or social graces like *philia* and wittiness (*eutrapelia*), which hardly seem moral at all. He moreover adds intellectual virtues, which Anscombe concurs simply do not "fit" into anything like the concerns of modern moral philosophy (Anscombe 1958: 2). To the "swarm" of species (Plut. *Mor. Vir.* 2.4) we have now surveyed (Table 3.1), the Stoics added a series of further, *wholly non-moral virtues* which seem quite foreign to our modern ears. It is the addition of these virtues, in fact, which differentiated Zeno from Aristo of

Table 3.1 The Stoic table of virtues, from Stobaeus (Jedan 2009: 158–9, 163).

	Proper actions (*ta kathekonta*)	Impulses (*hormai*)	Cases of endurance (*hypomonai*)	Distributions
Primary virtues	Practical wisdom (*phronēsis*)	Temperance (*sophrosyne*)	Courage (*andreia*)	Justice (*dikaiosyne*)
Subordinated virtues	Good judgement (*euboulia*): *epistēmē* about how to act to advantage	Good ordering (*eutaxia*): *epistēmē* of when things should be done	Perseverance (*karteria*): *epistēmē* of sticking to what is judged correctly	Piety (*eusebia*): *epistēmē* of service to the gods.
	Good practical overview (*eulogistia*): *ep.* giving purview of situation & what can be done	Propriety (*kosmiothes*): *ep.* of seemly behaviour, relative to one's social role	Confidence (*tharraleothes*): *ep.* that nothing terrible can happen to us	Kindness (*kresthotes*): *ep.* of doing good to others
	Quick moral sense (*agxinoia*): *ep.* that finds the appropriate action in the moment	Sense of honour (*aidēmosyne*): *ep.* careful to avoid just blame	Magnanimity (*megalopsychia*): *ep.* which makes us above indifferent things	Sociability (*eukoinonēsia*): *ep.* of equality in social discourse
	Discretion (*nounecheia*): *ep.* concerning what is worse and better in a situation	Self-control (*enkrateia*)	Mental stoutness (*eupsychia*): *ep.* which represents the psyche to itself as invulnerable	Good companionship (*eusunallaxia*): *ep.* of associating with others without blame
	Shrewdness (*eustochia*): *ep.* enabling us to achieve our aim in each case		Industry (*philaponia*): *ep.* of knowing to do what needs doing, undeterred by trouble or pain	
	Resourcefulness (*eumēchania*): *ep.* knowing what to do in difficulties			

Chios's conviction that the Stoic ethical premises pointed towards a kind of cynical anti-theoreticism, without need to cultivate logic, physics or theology (DL VII 160–61).

We mentioned above the Stoic claim that logic is a virtue (Cic. *Fin.* III 72). As unusual as the thought sounds, "dialectic" for the Stoics – on something like the Socratic model of the *elenchus* – is not simply an activity, but also an *aretē* individuals should cultivate. The same holds for carefulness in what judgements one assents to. This is a "logical" skill which has great, direct ethical importance when we recall that, for the Stoics, *pathē* like anger or lust represent precipitous, false assents to the idea that we imperatively *need* some external(s) in order to flourish (Long 1996: 85–106; Jedan 2009: 84–8).[6]

The place the Stoics accord to physics in their virtue ethics is perhaps of greater present interest and controversy. The enigmatic claim that physics is a virtue (Cic. *Fin.* III 72) demarcates Stoicism from Aristotle once more, for whom knowledge of unchanging things like natural processes is an intellectual virtue without practical impact, beyond the lasting pleasures its contemplative pursuit can bring (*NE* VI 7, X 7). All agree that the Stoics developed a remarkably systematic materialist account of the physical world, in which a providential active principle (differently identified as *pneuma* (spirit), creative fire (*pyr technikon*), *Logos* or Zeus) dynamically shapes all matter into always-passing forms and relations, according to an overarching providential vision (*pronoia*). Yet Chrisippus is reported to have repeatedly claimed that one cannot better begin the study of ethics than by understanding physics; and one cannot complete one's education without ascending beyond physics to theology (Plut. *Sto. Rep.* 1035c). Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* are dotted with physical reflections, analysing things into their constituent parts, or recalling their local, passing place in the greater whole of nature (e.g. *Med.* II 4, II 9, III 11, V 33, VI 13 etc.).

Yet Julia Annas has recently argued that the Stoics were wholly eudaimonists in ethics, whose ethical claims in no way depend upon their outdated, theological physics (Annas 1993: 160–79). Annas seems influenced by Williams's and McDowell's post-Humean opposition to what each differently call "external reasons": whether reasons for behaviour are drawn from outside of the agent's present motivational set (Williams), or those shaped by her present sociolinguistic community (McDowell). Yet many of the Stoics' opinions broke decisively with the "common sense" of the Greek *poleis*. We have noted their propensity to point to and try to rectify perceived inconsistencies in established philosophical positions like Aristotle's. We have seen how central the physical doctrine of *oikeiōsis* is in shaping the Stoic account of living according to nature, the differential valuation of externals and the content of the *kathēkonta*. We have noted how the Stoics maintain that our specific place in nature as rational animals shapes what *aretē* is for us, although – as in Aristotle – a difficult work of *ethismos* is required to flourish. The Stoic account of *epistēmē* as involving a certain tenor (*tonos* or *hexis*) in the psyche of the knower inescapably rests upon the Stoics' physical account that each material thing is characterized by such a greater or lesser *tonos* (Boeri 2009: 189).[7] Cicero's Cato in *De Finibus* underlines that a person cannot rightly judge good and bad, without a knowledge of the whole purpose (*ratio*) of nature (*Fin.* III 73).

The Stoic claim that virtue is *kalon* points to a further, perhaps principal, way in which Stoic ethics rests upon their physical philosophy. For the *kalon* or praiseworthy pre-eminently includes acts of heroism or sacrifice (consider as instances Socrates' or Seneca's suicides). Such acts can only *be* praiseworthy or *kathēkon* if they can be rationally defended, the Stoic position maintains (DL VII 107). But any defence of such action *can*

only refer to reasons "external" to the agent's personal interest in his own happiness, since they involve sacrificing his very life for the sake of some greater, trans-individual good. However troubling we may find it (Annas 1993: 160–62; 2007: 69–70), the Stoic claim that the cosmos is providentially ordered, but that this is a general providence unconcerned with the well-being of each individual, is exactly the kind of external reason which led the Stoics to accept the virtue of supererogatory acts, although only in unusual circumstances (Boeri 2009: 180–82, 185–6). "If I knew that it was fated for me to fall ill now", Chrisippus is reported in Epictetus to have said, "I should be bent on that" (Epi. *Dis.* II 6, 9–10). To live according to nature, for the Stoics, is to accept the great extent to which our subjective motivational set may need reform. We may accept things we cannot control as if they were fated, and cease craving many externals our present community valorizes as goods.[8]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Stoicism from its inception has been shadowed by recurrent, characteristic criticisms. Often admired for its nobility, its austere devaluation of external goods leads to the sense that its conception of eudaimonia is inescapably "impoverished" (Long 1996: 179–80). The Stoic emphasis on virtue and its cultivation seemingly purchases inner tranquillity at the price of world-withdrawal and forgoing too many things we typically do and should value. If all external things are deemed by the Stoa unnecessary for our happiness, this will include other people. Yet the affect of love, with its valuation of the other and her good as part of our own, seems to be set irremovably deep in our nature and infancy, and to be the portal to the most meaningful experiences of life: a thought underlying Aristotle's arguments concerning *philia*. The Stoic opposition to the *pathē* more widely, likewise, seems psychologically unrealistic – since passions like love and fear are so basic to our psyches – and to threaten to rob our subjective lives of too much of what gives them their colour. Finally, at a more technical level, the Stoic emphases on virtue as a *technē* or *epistēmē* seems to rob practical rationality of the subtle flexibility Aristotle's differentiation of *praxis* and *phronēsis* had won for virtue ethics, and to point forwards towards Kant's and the utilitarians' paradoxically impractical, rule-based moralities (Kant greatly admired the Stoics).

We have tried to suggest ways in which Stoic virtue ethics is more subtle and powerful than it has most often been taken to be. Its emphasis on reserve concerning externals, and on virtue as a stochastic *technē*, position Stoicism very well to accommodate the complexity and unpredictability of practical situations. Stoicism makes the great extent to which practical outcomes are beyond our pre-emptive control the very principle of a virtuous comportment towards externals. Alongside a language of *apatheia* to describe the highest good, the sources also delineate three life-affirmative *eupatheia*: joy (*chara*), gladness (*euphrosyne*) and cheerfulness (*euthymia*) as part of, or the psychological corollaries of, achieving Stoic virtue (Stob. II 58). Although the Stoics did admit of general *decreta* and more specific *precepts* in ethics, there is significant debate in the literature concerning the seemingly merely pedagogic and rhetorical functions of these rules, to enable students to progress towards virtue (Inwood 1986, 1999; Mitsis 1986, 1993, 2003; Striker 1987).

Certainly, the Stoics were not proto-Kantians in anything beyond their emphasis on the importance of cultivating a purity of inner virtue, and their opposition to consequentialism. To do what is right, for the Stoics, is to do what is appropriate in given, specific

and changing circumstances. Given the variety of situations and roles people may find themselves in, all commitments – except that of prioritizing virtue – may admit of exceptions. Finally, right action is not the highest end for the Stoics, but the expression of a good character, optimally that of the sage. The goal is rather, no less than for Aristotle, the attainment of eudaimonia, a harmony of happiness and virtue in the perfection of our natures.

NOTES

1. Abbreviations of ancient texts used in the chapter: *Apo.* = Plato, *Apology of Socrates*; Aur. *Med.* = Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* [*Ta Eis Heauton*]; Cic. *Fin.* = Cicero, *On Moral Ends* [*De Finibus*]; Cic. *Tusc.* = Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*; Cic. *Aca.* = Cicero, *De Academica*; DL = Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*; Epi. *Dis.* = Epictetus, *Discourses* [*Diatriboi*]; Epi. *Ench.* = Epictetus, *Handbook* [*Encheiridion*]; *Euth.* = Plato, *Euthydemus*; *Gor.* = Plato, *Gorgias*; *NE* = Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Plut. *Sto. Rep.* = Plutarch, *de Stoicorum Repugnantii* [*On Stoic Self-contradictions*], in the *Moralia*; Plut. *Mor. Vir.* = Plutarch, *De Virtute Morali*; *Rhe.* = Aristotle, *Rhetoric*; Sen. = Seneca, *Epistles/Letters to Lucilius*; Sen. *Tra.* = Seneca, "On Tranquility of Mind"; Stob. = Stobaeus, *Selections, Sayings and Admonitions* (volume II, the *Florigelium* [*anthology*]).
2. Zeno is said to have defined the good life initially as solely a life "in harmony" (DL VII 87). It was Cleanthes and Chrissipus who added the specification that this meant in harmony with nature (cf. Cic. *Fin.* III 26). The distinct Stoic emphasis on *homologia* or *symphōnia* in describing our ethical goal reflects the school's founders' debt to Socratic, rather than Platonic or Aristotelian philosophy. Socrates had famously protested in the *Gorgias* that he would rather be out of tune with a thousand others than out of tune (*asymphōnon einai*) with himself (*Gor.* 482b–c). Something like this internal consistency of all one's descriptive and evaluative convictions lies at the heart of the Stoic conception of living well, which connects with their valorization of logic as an *aretē* (see the section "Non-moral, external reasons, and logic and physics as virtues" below).
3. Aristo of Chios, a Stoic contemporary with Zeno who ended by breaking with the emerging Zenonian orthodoxy, insisted that all external things are equally beneath the concern of the virtuous person: the core claim underlying the Cynics' famous disregard of all inherited conventions (*anaideia*) (DL VII 160).
4. Equally, the idea that virtue should consist in a kind of knowledge about how to use things which are by themselves neither good nor evil is only superficially paradoxical. In fact, specifying that virtue was knowledge of how to use indifferents enabled the Stoics to avoid what Plato sometimes adduces as a vicious circularity in Socrates' apparent propensity to define virtue as knowledge, and then this knowledge as knowledge of virtue or goodness itself (Menn 1995).
5. There is a wide literature on *oikeiōsis*. The paragraphs which follow draw in highly condensed form from Pembroke (1971), White (1979, 1985), Engberg-Pedersen (1986), Striker (1991: 37–50), Sandbach (1994: 32–48), Inwood & Dononi (2008: 677–81).
6. The Stoics seem also to have held that skill in rhetoric was a virtue the sage would cultivate, although the sources here are scant.
7. Even the Stoic emphasis on the internal *homologia* of an agent's beliefs to each other and across the span of a life reflects the Stoic physical doctrine that all things are pervaded by a single organizing *logos*, of which our own "propositional attitudes" form a tiny, transient part (Long 1996: 101–2; Boeri 2009: 188; Cooper 2012: 170–71).
8. Stoic virtue ethics centrally involves accepting the final inescapability of our own death, on the basis of the reasoning that all things in nature pass, and we each are one part of *to holon physeōs* (DL VII 87–8). Marcus' *Meditations* for this reason refer to the immanence of his own death, which he reminds himself is as much natural as was his birth (Aur. *Med.* II 1, 3, 9, 15). There was even a significant Stoic literature defending *euthanasia*, when nature or fate seems to have decreed this to be the most noble action left to an individual (Sandbach 1994: 48–52).

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