https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

STOIC COMMUNITARIANISM AND NORMATIVE CITIZENSHIP

By Anthony A. Long

I. Introduction

Of all the mainstream ancient philosophies, Stoicism, it may seem, has the least to offer a contemporary student of political thought.[1] Set against the massive contributions of Plato and Aristotle, or the self-consciously antinomian stance of the Cynics, or even the emphatic political disengagement of the Epicureans, Stoicism invites assessment as a philosophy quite indifferent to the actualities of power and social organization. The question "Who should rule?"—the paramount political question raised by Plato and Aristotle—appears to receive an evasive, or at least thoroughly unhelpful, answer from the founding fathers of Stoicism: the only authentic ruler or monarch is the so-called "wise man" (*sophos*), while everyone else, of whatever social status and rank, is a slave.[2] As to the wise man's domain, it is no body politic, but self-mastery, signifying a mind-set that would give this paragon internal freedom even when shackled and awaiting torture or execution.[3] Supposing that such a conception of freedom—not freedom to act, it should be noted, but freedom from subjection to another's will—supposing that such freedom had institutional or practical value, it remains, according to Stoic authorities themselves, a mere ideal, not fully exampled as yet by any actual human being. Neither life nor liberty nor even the pursuit of happiness (as that slogan from the United States founding fathers is typically construed) falls within the strict Stoic formulation of authentic goodness. That condition is reserved for excellence of mind and character, meaning the perfection of the ratio-

[1] Because my focus in this essay is philosophical rather than historical, I do not attempt to address the influence of Stoic or neo-Stoic ideas on early modern political thinkers and leaders, which is a very large subject to itself. Many of its aspects are well treated in the following works: Hans W. Blom, ed., *Grotius and the Stoa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003); Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Carl W. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[2] *SVF* 3.332, 355, 617. The "slavery" of the non-wise is not an irremediable condition like Aristotle's concept of "natural slavery" (*Pol.* I.5.1254b16–1255a3). It is the early Stoics' way of saying that slavery is the state of mind of persons who, to any degree, lack the internal freedom that accompanies adherence to the rule of reason.

[3] *SVF* 3.589–91.

© 2007 Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation. Printed in the USA.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nality that is supposedly distinctive of normative human nature. Everything else, except a faulty character, is indifferent—neither good nor bad.[4]

The seeming irrelevance of Stoicism to political thought, or at least political realities and interventions, might also seem to be essential to its vaunted capacity to serve as the only way of life suitable to every possible set of circumstances. At the limit, when you can literally do nothing, Stoicism may serve you as the appropriate fortress mentality. As a Hungarian journalist once said to me during the Cold War, Stoicism is the "philosophy for our time." What he meant, of course, was not that Stoicism mandates an activist political stance. He found Stoicism relevant, under his country's then-authoritarian government, because the virtues of a Stoic mind-set (especially its internalist focus on mental and emotional autonomy) could help to make the absence of external freedom partway endurable. To be sure, some Roman Stoics risked or forfeited their lives in opposing imperial autocracy; and the ex-slave and renowned Stoic teacher Epictetus (c. 55–c. 135 A.D.) tells his students that no Roman emperor could force him to shave his philosopher's beard (*Discourses* 1.2.29). Yet in these cases, what was at stake was individualistic resistance to threatened compliance rather than action undertaken with an eye to the common good or anything prescribed by Stoic theory as such.

In this essay, I propose to argue that Stoicism, contrary to this seeming irrelevance, is actually the ancient philosophy that offers us moderns the most challenging food for political thought. To make this argument, I shall largely set aside the earliest Stoic theorizing about what a community of completely wise persons would be like.[5] Such speculations, which Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, formulated in his lost work *Republic* (composed in about 300 B.C.), continue to resonate in later Stoicism in the school's concept of a universally valid natural law. I shall presume, however, that this concept is discussible and applicable independently of the utopian contexts where it seems to have originated. The Stoicism I take as my topic is that of the late Roman Republic and early Roman Empire, drawn chiefly from the works of the Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.), Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from 161 to 180 A.D.

To guide the progress of my argument, I shall now lay it out in a series of steps, postponing the justificatory details at this stage.

(1) Stoicism is the only ancient philosophy that provides a sufficiently egalitarian concept of human beings to suit a liberal ideology.
(2) Stoicism vests citizenship in each person's normative nature as an essentially rational being.

[4] For evidence on the Stoic concepts of value and indifference, see LS, chap. 58.
[5] See Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

(3) Stoicism grounds justice and law not in institutions but in the realization of one's identity as an essentially rational being.
(4) Our shared citizenship as rational beings is not for the sake of our economic and physical well-being (which ultimately is a matter of indifference) but to do everything in our power to live mutually beneficial lives as adjudicated by good reasoning.
(5) The "common interest" implications of natural law, combined with the doctrine of "preferred indifferents," favor an equitable distribution of goods and services.
(6) The Stoic distinction between the goodness of correctly aimed actions and the ultimate indifference of their outcomes is both reasonable and appropriate to our living in a world we cannot fully control.

II. Stoicism and Liberal Ideology

By "liberal ideology" I do not necessarily mean a society with a constitutional democracy as its system of government. Antiquity knew nothing of the kind of democracy and universal suffrage current in Western Europe and North America. For any realistic comparison between modern liberalism and ancient thought, the relevant bases of comparison have to do not with legally granted political rights but with assessments of human beings and their deserts that exclude reference to people's gender, ethnicity, and social status. By these criteria, Stoicism emerges as the most overtly liberal, if not the only liberal, ancient philosophy. This is not to say that Stoic philosophers or Stoic adherents, in virtue of their belief system, advocated political action to reform the rampant prejudices and inegalitarian practices of their societies. My point is, rather, that Stoic conceptions of the common identity of human beings in virtue of rationality exclude any grounds for ranking men's innate aptitudes ahead of women's, or for positing natural slavery, or for treating anyone as ethically superior to another on the basis of wealth or social position or race.

The explicit evidence for all these points, though not extensive, is sufficient for me to assert them as clear and uncontroversial.[6] Likewise, I forbear to labor the obvious differences between Stoic beliefs and Platonic and Aristotelian preconceptions concerning gender, ethnicity, and social position. Within the ancient economic context, the Stoic insistence on the undifferentiated humanity of all people is as momentous a corrective to the dominant ideology as St. Paul's claim that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no male and no female (*Letter to the Galatians* 3.28); indeed, it may be the case that Paul's riveting statements

[6] For the denial of natural slavery, see *SVF* 3.350–52; and for the equivalence of men's and women's nature and aptitudes, see A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xii–xiii.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were more informed by the diffusion of Stoicism than by anything he heard from those who had actually encountered Jesus. Yet the liberal ideology I find in Stoicism invites much more positive definition than is captured by these statements of what it excludes or negates. In effect, Stoicism proposes with Kant that all human beings are *ends in themselves*, and I think it goes beyond Kant in exalting the potential and equal worth of all human beings as such.[7]

One way Stoic philosophers do this, especially Epictetus and Marcus, is by insisting on our human kinship with divinity. Notwithstanding Jesus' injunction "be ye perfect" (*Matthew* 5.48), the Church itself, perhaps for dubious political reasons, has preferred to emphasize innate human imperfection and ethical helplessness apart from divine grace. In Christian circles, Stoicism has often been stigmatized for pride and arrogance, but what its critics regularly fail to register is not only the human dignity and worth Stoics sought to emphasize through insisting on everyone's likeness to the divine but also, and more particularly, the social implications of this exalted relationship.[8]

Here, for instance, is a characteristic statement of these points from Epictetus:

> Are you not willing to seek the essence of goodness in that quality which, in its absence from other creatures, makes you reluctant to apply the word good to them? You . . . [unlike them] are a principal portion of the divine: you are a fragment of god; you contain a part of god in yourself. Why, then, are you so ignorant of your relationship? Why do you not know whence you came? Why do you not remember, when you are eating, who you are that eat, and whom you are feeding? When you have sex, who it is that is doing so? When you are socializing, when you are exercising, when you are conversing, do you not know that you are feeding god, and exercising god? You carry god about with you, poor fellow, and you don't know it. (*Discourses* 2.8.10–12)

Anyone ignorant of Stoic theology and committed to the separation of religion from politics would no doubt balk at my citing this passage as support for my proposition concerning the Stoics' liberal egalitarianism. "Hold on," I respond. For Epictetus as a Stoic, and similarly for Plato and Aristotle, *theos* (divinity) in such contexts does not refer to a supernatural being with the denotations of Judaic, Christian, or Islamic monotheism and religiosity. *Theos* here certainly connotes divinity in one of the senses

[7] Immanuel Kant was influenced in his ethics by his reading of Cicero's Stoic treatise, *On Duties;* see Andrew R. Dyck, *A Commentary on Cicero, De Officiis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 47–48.

[8] For the charge of arrogance, see A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 261–64.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that an adherent of such religious faiths would understand (i.e., as that which is objectively the best and greatest power in the world), but what *theos* primarily denotes is rationality because, according to Stoic doctrine, rationality is the one great attribute that divine and human have in common.

This is not to say that Epictetus's remarkable statements about "carrying god" and so forth amount to his saying nothing more than: "You are a rational being." His way of saying that is theologically supercharged, in order to highlight his interlocutor's unacknowledged but exalted status, and especially what is incumbent on every human being as a privileged sharer in rationality. The implicit thought is that, because we humans are *essentially* rational beings, that fact about us immediately implies a series of "oughts." For Epictetus, as for Stoics in general, *anthropos* is not simply a species denominator; it is also a normative concept, or, as he frequently likes to say, "a profession." For instance:

> Merely to fulfil the profession of being human [as distinct from the much more demanding profession of philosopher] is no ordinary thing. What is a human being? *A rational, mortal creature.* From what, then, are we distinguished by rationality? *From wild beasts.* And from what else? *From sheep and the like.* Take care, then, never to act like wild beasts. Otherwise you have destroyed your humanity, you have not fulfilled your profession. Take care, too, not to act like sheep. Otherwise, your humanity is ruined in this way too. *When do we act like sheep?* Whenever we act for the sake of the stomach or the genitals, whenever we act in a random, dirty, or unconsidered way, to what level have we sunk? *To sheep.* What have we ruined? *Rationality.* Whenever we act competitively, injuriously, angrily, and aggressively, to what level have we sunk? *To wild beasts.* . . . Through all of these the profession of being human is destroyed. (*Discourses* 2.9.1–7)

If I may quote myself, "Epictetus treats family relationships, public office, and stages of life as quasi professions—*normative* identifications that specify the conduct appropriate to each designation. To be a real son, one must be filial, to be a real brother, one must be fraternal; the blood relationship by itself is insufficient to identify one in these ways."[9]

In this way of looking at one's human identity, one can never opt out of the ethical, which is also (and more challengingly) to say that one can never opt out of the political. Why the move from the ethical to the political follows is the next step of my argument; but for the moment I want to anticipate the validity of that step in order to make a connection with some shortcomings of our modern, highly restricted concept of the political.

[9] Ibid., 236.

If the officially political realm virtually stops at each individual's front door, as is largely the case in our modern theory and practice, we face the obvious problem that much of what may be flagrantly wrong and unjust in social relationships—mindless cruelty, discrimination, abuse, and other types of nastiness—if it is not demonstrably illegal, is tolerated in the interests of privacy, liberty, and noninterference. The point has been taken by contemporary thinkers, especially feminists, who have argued that insofar as human relationships frequently involve coercive power, politics is not confined to the ballot box and the council chamber. Certainly, a strong case can be made for distinguishing sharply between public and private; we do not want routine policing of the kids' room or the marital bedroom. But if the basic unit of society is the household, as Aristotle cogently argued (and the Stoics followed suit), then there is something to be said for an ideology that leaves the boundaries between the ethical and the political fuzzy, or even declines to treat the two realms as categorically distinct.

If that thought troubles the modern liberal, I need to say that Stoics such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius are as adamantly on the side of noninterference, within the limits of statutory law, as any libertarian could want. Their philosophy steers a fine but completely clear line between emphasizing, on the one hand, the mutual dependence, kinship, interconnectedness, and mutual obligations of human beings, and, on the other hand, the right, however misguided, of individuals to reject Stoic principles and to be tolerated for that rejection. Stoicism presents itself both as an unequivocally true and cogent set of doctrines, and as a system that persons, however misguidedly, are quite free to reject. The two Stoic thinkers I have been citing constantly advise against criticizing or passing judgment on anyone other than oneself. Marcus writes:

> To my volition the volition of my neighbor is as indifferent as are his vital spirit and his flesh. For even though we were primarily born for the sake of one another, yet each of our minds has its own sovereignty.
>
> Otherwise my neighbor's failings would impinge on me, which was not god's intention, lest my faring badly should depend on someone other than myself. (*Meditations* 8.56)

What Marcus implies here (and what we need to add, to supplement his reasoning) is that the only human being who can strictly do one benefit or harm is oneself. No one, on this view, can be harmed by another person's shortcomings or opinions, and therefore the Stoic has no reason to be intolerant or censorious.

III. Citizenship as Everyone's Normative Nature as a Rational Being

Early Stoic doctrine held that the world as a whole was a "quasi city, consisting of gods and human beings, with the gods serving as rulers and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

human beings as their subjects. They are members of a community because of their participation in rationality, which is natural law" (LS 67L). Here again we find the Stoics using the term "gods" or "divinity" as a stand-in for "perfect rationality." The crucial point at this stage of my argument is the inference that our normative nature as rational beings confers citizenship or community membership upon us.

Is this anything more than Aristotle's famous doctrine that human beings are political animals by nature (*Politics* I.2.1253a2–3)? The answer is surely that it is much more. For Aristotle, the doctrine means that you cannot fulfill your human nature unless you are a participating member of a specifically organized polis, and thus able to engage in the cooperative activities and just practices that such membership betokens. Aristotle does not envision your being a *citizen of the world,* so to speak, but that is precisely the primary connotation of Stoic citizenship.

Thus Epictetus writes:

> Don't you know that, just as a foot, when detached, is no longer a foot, so too you (in such a case) would no longer be a human being. For, what is a human being? A part of a polis, first that of gods and humans, and secondly that designated closest to it, viz., a tiny copy of the universal one. (*Discourses* 2.5.26)

What does Epictetus mean by not allowing the detached person to be recognized as an authentic human being? We might suppose Epictetus, notwithstanding his allusion to world citizenship as that in which one primarily participates, to be making an Aristotelian point both about the unconditional need for engagement in appropriate social activities, and also about one's need for citizenship in the conventional sense in order to make up for one's lack of self-sufficiency if living in isolation. Actually, such rather obvious interpretations would considerably understate the challenge of Epictetus's context. His analogy between the attached foot and the attached human being registers the thought that either one of these, viewed functionally, has to be seen as a part of a whole. A functioning foot, as an organic part, must sometimes get muddy or hurt or even require amputation for the body's sake. To remain always clean and intact, it would have to be detached, and hence not a real foot. By analogy, authentic human beings, as citizens of the world, must acknowledge that their attachment to the social world (including their human relatedness to the divine) may require their discomfort, illness, risk taking, or even untimely death.[10]

According to this view, not only can you not opt out of the exigencies and obligations of your social context and still fully merit the designation human being, you cannot reasonably expect that your life as a citizen will

[10] Compare Marcus, *Meditations* 4.29, 8.34, 11.8.

always run smoothly or free of discomfort. To be a world citizen is not to be a member of a world state in an organized political sense. It is, primarily, the acknowledgment that you are socially and ethically related to your fellow human beings, wherever in the world you happen to be; and it is, secondarily, the understanding that the conditions of human life, wherever you are living, necessarily involve aging and dying, probably illness and serious losses, and possibly many other circumstances, including social isolation, that one would much prefer to do without.[11] That which confers citizenship is not, in the first instance, a legal right or residential entitlement or actual capacity to participate in government or judicial practice, but simply one's commitment to the principle that community life is the most essential implication of what it means to be a rational being. What does community life, at its most basic, require of us? Not economic productivity, useful though that is (if you do not already have the wherewithal), nor physical soundness of limb, but at the limit, what Epictetus calls "integrity," implying decency, truthfulness, and a sense of shame (*Encheiridion* 24).

At this juncture, Epictetus's recommended outlook will probably seem disquietingly distant from anything a modern Western civilian can readily relate to under normal conditions of peacetime existence. Can we be attached citizens in Epictetus's sense if we have not volunteered for military service or some other potentially dangerous profession? Unfortunately, recent experience, whether as a result of terrorism, natural disaster, or epidemic, shows that our modern predicaments may include both a civic unpreparedness for unforeseen catastrophes and also, when catastrophes occur, precisely the loss of the truthfulness and shame in our elected leaders that Epictetus underscores as the essential ingredients of normative citizenship. (Without endorsing Stoic fatalism or resignation, we need to educate our citizens into balancing the reasonableness of wanting life-enhancing material goods and security against an ethically sound appreciation of human vulnerability, unpredictable disaster, and communal dependence, and an understanding that nothing can justify the forfeiture of integrity.)

Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations* 4.1.4), in one of his rare versions of a formal argument, connects the concepts of rationality, and of the world as a kind of community, with law, in this chain of inferences:

> If intelligence is something we share, so too is the rationality that makes us rational beings. If so, we also share the reasoning that

[11] The Stoic wise man is not diminished as a human being if circumstances require his social isolation. Should such an eventuality occur (which he would much prefer otherwise), he "reposes in himself, given over to his thoughts" (Seneca, *Ep.* 9.16). In disallowing the detached person to be an authentic human being, Epictetus does not envision involuntary detachment from an existing community, such as Philoctetes was made to endure, but a deliberately asocial or solipsistic mentality.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> prescribes what should or should not be done. If so, we also share law.
>
> If so, we are citizens. If so, we participate in a commonwealth. If so, the world is a kind of community; for in what other shared commonwealth could one say that the entire human race participates? It is thence, then, from this shared community that we derive our intelligence and rationality and legality.

He repeatedly underlines his conviction that rational beings are constituted for one another's sake, and that *therefore* sociability is a human being's principal function (e.g., *Meditations* 7.55). As Roman emperor, Marcus occupied a very different position or "profession" (as Stoics would say) from that of the ex-slave, Epictetus. Yet each of them (and the same holds true of Cicero) constantly derives social/political/ethical implications from such concepts as I have been adumbrating: i.e., divinity/rationality, law, community, human nature, and attachment to (world) citizenship.

Taken at face value and out of context, Marcus's premises concerning shared reasoning and shared law may appear to be hopelessly naive if not vapidly rhetorical. Yet you have only to sample a few pages of his *Meditations* to recognize his melancholy, resignation, pessimism, and brutally low expectations of persons he encounters in daily life. Can we reconcile this sober tone with his optimistic talk about shared rationality and world citizenship?

I think we must try to do so, because I see little point in presently engaging in political theory unless we hold onto something like Marcus's faith in the possibility and prospects for shared reason and community, while acknowledging, as he did, that every day brings fresh evidence of assaults upon these values. "Don't hope for Plato's *Republic*," he wrote, "but be content to advance a tiny extent, and reflect that its outcome is not something trivial" (*Meditations* 9.29). The seductive voices of cultural relativism are difficult to hold at a distance when one reads ancient philosophical appeals to reason, as if such a supposedly dispassionate and shared faculty could settle the entrenched hostilities that generate daily acts of barbarism. Very likely, reason will not be efficacious, but to settle for the belief that it cannot be, is not the Stoic way, and it had better not be our way. In what follows, then, I ask my readers to take propositions that make reference to human beings' shared community, not as statements that Stoics thought people in general endorsed but as ideals whose force they thought normal persons, however approximately and limitedly, have some capacity to acknowledge and live by. (What this might mean for us, in terms of education and public policy, is a question I shall briefly address in the conclusion of this essay.)

To conclude the present section, I offer a further commentary on the Stoic investment of citizenship in everyone's *normative nature as a rational*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

being, amplifying my previous comparison between Stoic and Aristotelian presuppositions concerning the foundations of human sociability.

Aristotle (*Politics* I.2.1253a8) recognizes that we human beings are not the only social animals by nature. Yet we are so, preeminently, he argues, thanks to our linguistic powers (*logos*), which extend well beyond voicing pleasure and pain, as other creatures also do:

> Speech, on the other hand, serves to make clear what is beneficial and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust. For by contrast with the other animals the human being is the only creature who has a sense of good and bad, just and unjust, and so forth. The association of beings who have this sense makes for a household and a community.[12]

Starting with *logos* meaning the capacity for speech, Aristotle appears to slide into the term's more extended meaning of "rationality," as manifested in the human being's having a moral sense. Stoics would agree with all of this, but they would also find Aristotle omitting their own distinctive contribution to the naturalness, and hence rationality, of human sociability and citizenship. I refer to the concept they called *oikeiosis.*[13] What this involves is probably the most salient and seminal contribution the Stoic school made to ethical and social thought, a contribution, moreover, without any clear antecedents in Plato or Aristotle.[14]

Oikeiosis is a Stoic term of art which lacks a standard translation, so I shall leave it transliterated here. The root of the word connects it with the things or persons of the household (*oikos*) and with ownership and what belongs to oneself. At its most basic, *oikeiosis* signifies every animal's instinctual propensity to love and seek to preserve itself in accordance with (what we would call) its genetic programming. Animals, the Stoics presume, are natural owners of themselves, and, no less naturally, animals have an affectionate and protective regard for their offspring, treating these as an extension of their self-ownership. The Stoics justified these two manifestations of *oikeiosis* by the evidence of animals' behavior, but they also took them to be normative principles, manifesting capitalized Nature's (that is to say, cosmic Reason's or God's) indwelling way of organizing all life-forms with excellent purposiveness. In the case of the human animal, *oikeiosis*, as Cicero expresses it, is both the basis of one's self-development from infancy to maturity (*Fin.* 3.16–20) and "the source

[12] For discussion, see Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32–35.

[13] The scholarly literature on *oikeiosis* is extensive; see the chapter "Stoic Philosophers on Persons, Property-Ownership, and Community" in my book *From Epicurus to Epictetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). For the basic Stoic sources, see LS, chaps. 57 and 59.

[14] Aristotle's observations on love of offspring among animals as well as humans, and affection for one's compatriots, may come the closest; cf. *EN* 8.1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the mutual and natural sympathy between humans, so that the very fact of being human requires that no human be considered a stranger to another" (*Fin.* 3.63).

Our lamentably few sources for the technicalities of Stoicism tell us much more about the primary aspect of *oikeiosis*—the instinct for self-preservation and (genetic) development—than they do concerning its parental, other-regarding, and social aspect. Did Stoics envision the latter as an outgrowth of the former, or did they regard it as a relatively independent instinct whereby one starts to treat other persons as an extension of oneself and one's self-ownership? The evidence does not permit any final answer to these important questions. We do know, however, that the primary *oikeiosis* was grounded in "self-perception," which the Stoics took to be the foundation for every animal's specific behavior.[15] Thus, the Stoics reasoned that animals seek to preserve themselves in their specific way because they love themselves, and that they could not love themselves unless they perceived themselves and liked what they perceived.

It is a fair guess, I think, that just as the self-preservative *oikeiosis* presupposed affectionate self-ownership in virtue of self-perception, so the other-regarding *oikeiosis* was grounded in the idea that, speaking generally, one cannot perceive one's family and other human beings without being drawn toward them and extending to them a measure of the regard one already has for oneself.

Here is a further expression of the doctrine by Cicero, which combines the Aristotelian focus on the community motivations of speech with the Stoics' other-regarding *oikeiosis*:

> Nature, by the power of reason, unites one human being with another for the fellowship both of common speech and of life, creating above all a peculiar love for their offspring. It drives them to desire to participate in gatherings, and also to devote themselves to providing whatever may contribute to the comfort and sustenance not only of themselves but also of their spouse and children and whoever else they hold dear and ought to protect. (*Off.* 1.12)

Human beings are taken to be special because in their case, when they are mature, *oikeiosis* manifests itself, as Cicero says, through reason. Citizenship and society, in this construal, are not merely instrumental to the satisfaction of a human being's self-interested desires. The social and civic outcomes of other-regarding *oikeiosis* are represented as being naturally desirable for their own sake. It is certain, moreover, that Stoics derived justice from social *oikeiosis*.[16] How that inference is to be interpreted brings us to the third step of my argument.

[15] See Long, *Stoic Studies*, chap. 11.
[16] *SVF* 1.197.

IV. Natural Law and Normative Human Nature

Stoicism is rightly identified as the philosophy that first promulgated the concept of natural law in a fully articulated fashion.[17] What its philosophers meant by the expression has already been adumbrated to some extent in my earlier remarks. We may recall especially Marcus Aurelius's chain of inferences connecting the universal attribute of human rationality with citizenship, community, and law. The classic statement of natural law is put in the mouth of the Roman statesman Laelius by Cicero (*Rep.* 3.33):

> True law is right reason, in agreement with nature, diffused over everyone, consistent, everlasting, whose nature is to advocate duty by prescription and to deter wrongdoing by prohibition. Its prescriptions and prohibitions are heeded by persons of integrity though they have no effect on the shameless. It is wrong to alter this law, nor is it permissible to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be absolved from this law by senate or people, nor need we look for any outside interpreter of it, or commentator. There will not be a different law at Rome and at Athens, nor a different law now and in the future, but one law, everlasting and immutable, will hold good for all people and at all times.

Following the last sentence of this excerpt, Cicero identifies god (in the singular) as "our one common master and ruler, and originator and judge of this law." This is the theological underpinning we have already encountered, but, like Epictetus, Cicero goes on to say that disobedience to natural law involves contempt for human nature. In other words, while the Stoics did believe that the world as a whole is under the direction of a supreme divine being, this god is also present to human beings as the voice of their own normative rationality or correct reasoning.

Now if we moderns are agnostics, we shall obviously not endorse the Stoic conviction that the world is under providential direction by a supreme and benevolent intelligence. In the absence of that conviction, Stoic natural law loses divinity as the ground of its objectivity. Yet its prescriptions and prohibitions can retain secular objectivity if (1) human beings as such are amenable to seeing the rational force of moral rules that fit the liberal requirements I outlined in Section II, and if (2) they see them not as external impositions but as principles that are implicit in our natures as interdependent social beings. And, as I observed when rebutting the objections of cultural relativism, the Stoic concept of natural law, whether

[17] See Gerard Watson, "The Natural Law and Stoicism," in A. A. Long, ed., *Problems in Stoicism* (London: Athlone Press, 1971), 216–38; and Gisela Striker, "Origins of the Concept of Natural Law," in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 209–20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

grounded theologically or secularly, has no predictive value concerning compliance. If there are objective moral rules for humanity as such, their existence is not undermined, as Cicero himself observes, by the fact that they have no effect on shameless persons.

Gisela Striker has argued that the Stoic concept of natural law originated as an attempt to ground an objective notion of justice, and that in this respect it is an answer to an old problem already addressed by Plato and Aristotle: the problem of whether justice is anything more than a set of local and variant conventions.[18] She is certainly right to emphasize the bearing of natural law on objective justice, but her comparison with Plato and Aristotle threatens to conceal the distinctiveness of the Stoics' liberal, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan ideology. By grounding natural law, and therefore objective justice, in every human being's normative reason, the Stoics take these notions to be universally accessible in ways that none of their predecessors did, and they make that accessibility part of the notions' appeal. To illustrate these points, I turn to Cicero, who gives us the most informative account of the content of Stoic natural laws.

His context (*Off.* 3.21–28) is the impossibility of conflict between what is genuinely useful and what is honorable. To put his thesis another way, injustice is not only dishonorable but also contrary to our interests, if our interests are correctly construed. Cicero formulates this principle in what I will call the first Stoic natural law (*Off.* 3.21):

> It is contrary to nature for one person to gain advantage at the cost of another's disadvantage.

How so? Because the injustice such acts involve necessarily disrupts the bonds of society. And "human society is most of all in accord with nature."

Although Cicero finds this natural law established in the statutes and penalties of particular communities (the purpose of which, he claims, is to keep relationships between citizens inviolate), he looks to "nature's reason, which is divine and human law" (*ipsa naturae ratio, quae est lex divina et humana; Off.* 3.23), as "the much more effective" grounding of the principle. He acknowledges that you cannot conduct a discussion with people who think that natural law permits them to do unprovoked injury to others. Such people are incorrigible, I take it, not simply because they are behaving criminally and unethically, but because they fail to see the force of the natural law which it is their Stoic function, as rational beings, to grasp and endorse.

Within the same context, Cicero advances the content of three further natural laws:

[18] Striker, "Origins of the Concept of Natural Law."

> Natural law permits persons to give preference to themselves in securing material resources provided they do not do so at other people's expense. (*Off.* 3.22)
>
> Natural law urges persons to be social benefactors rather than solitary pleasure lovers. (*Off.* 3.25)
>
> Natural law prescribes that one human being should want to consider the interests of another, whoever the person may be, for the very reason that he or she is a human being. (*Off.* 3.27)

It is important to see that Cicero is largely reticent concerning divine providence or the supposed goodness of nature's rational order. Striker has proposed that, on the basis of such assumptions, the Stoics "proceeded to deduce the content of nature's laws for human beings from observation of the apparent purposes nature had followed in making man the kind of creature that he is."[19] This is certainly one of the Stoics' procedures, as in the case of *oikeiosis,* the endowment of which is attributed to nature in its guise as divine providence. What Cicero shows us, however, is that Stoics could also give us a secularized understanding of natural law, according to which its appeal is not to divine providence but to our purely natural interest in one another's welfare when we view one another not as agents but as recipients of our actions and as related to one another by our common humanity.[20]

I leave it to my readers to decide whether Cicero's presumptions concerning our *natural* interests in one another's welfare are more than optimistic hand-waving. What merits closer discussion is his connecting natural law with the notion that "there is an interest that is common to everyone" (*Off.* 3.27).[21] This proposition, for all its eloquent allusion to common humanity, is so vague and general that it seems open to all kinds of construals depending on how we cash out "interest," "common," and "everyone." (Would Plato's *Republic* qualify, notwithstanding its radical class discriminations?) It is probably only in the last hundred years that we can point to any actual society that has devised policy and legislation that might come anywhere near to serving the common interests of *everyone,* as everyone might, if given a voice, agree to.

In any case, any value we may ascribe to the concept of natural law needs to presuppose a high degree of vagueness to its prescriptions, or if not vagueness then at least generality, and hence adaptability. I agree with

[19] Ibid., 218.

[20] See Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 145.

[21] See Malcolm Schofield, "Two Stoic Approaches to Justice," in André Laks and Malcolm Schofield, eds., *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199–201.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Striker and others that the Stoics did not want their concept of natural law to underpin a set of exceptionless moral rules with highly specific content. We should interpret the concept as a "higher order" notion of law, open to interpretation with reference to a society's traditions and current circumstances, but completely invariant and mandatory in terms of the liberal principles I explored in Section II.

V. Living Mutually Beneficial Lives

In the light of antiquity's slave-based economy, the poverty and political impotence of the free masses, and the absence of any concept of natural human rights, it is understandable, though no less admirable, that an enlightened member of the male elite, such as Marcus Aurelius, should constantly emphasize the obligations of kindness, generosity, human warmth, and tolerance. *Noblesse oblige,* as we used to say. Yet in the same ancient perspective, when he and Cicero emphasize the intrinsic value of community and normative citizenship, for the reasons we have already explored, one wishes they had been as sensitive to the ills of human bondage as they were to the blessings of human bonding. The ultimate indifference of material well-being to happiness, well grounded though I shall argue it to be in the overall context of Stoic theory, sounds more convincing when we hear it from the poor Epictetus than from such affluent Stoics as Seneca and Marcus.

In this section of my argument, I propose to situate the intrinsic value of shared citizenship not in any ancient Stoic context but in that of our modern Western selves. By according community intrinsic value, as distinct from instrumental value, Stoic theorists offer thoughts that can probably resonate more strongly for ourselves than they could for persons chosen randomly in antiquity (whose material circumstances were probably at little or no more than the minimal level of subsistence).

First, I offer a sample of the ancient evidence. At the end of *de Officiis* (*On Duties*), Book 1 (152–55), Cicero argues at length that, of all the virtues, justice places the strongest demands on us. In probably deliberate disagreement with Aristotle, Cicero sets justice ahead of theoretical, nonpractical wisdom on the grounds that justice is a *productive* virtue, which *safeguards human interests:*

> The knowledge and contemplation of nature is somewhat defective and incomplete if it results in no action.[22]

[22] Cf. Aristotle, *EN* 10.6–10, for the position that Cicero rejects. Cicero does not name Aristotle in this context. We do not know whether he had complete access to our versions of Aristotle's ethical treatises, but I find it probable that he was aware of Aristotle's ranking theoretical wisdom above practical wisdom.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A virtuous scientist, though absorbed in mathematical calculations, would drop everything in order to help his country or protect a parent or a friend (*Off.* 1.154). In implicit disagreement with Plato's account of the origins of society in the *Republic* and with Epicurean anthropology, Cicero insists that human sociability is not grounded in mutual protection or individual insufficiency.[23] We seek the company of others and a shared life because solitude is naturally disagreeable to us.[24] Marcus Aurelius likewise writes: "Good will to one's fellow human being is distinctive of us" (*Meditations* 8.26), and "The leading factor in the human constitution is sociability" (7.55).

Such philanthropy and social concern are still very much alive among many individuals in our societies (as one sees in the generous responses to recent catastrophes). It has also been the case for at least the last hundred years that citizens of Western democracies have looked to government to provide the populace in general with opportunities for goods and services on a liberal and equitable scale that has no counterpart in antiquity. Hence, it seems, the following paradox arises: Ancient society in practice (notwithstanding Stoic theory) lacked political systems and dominant ideologies which gave any credence to the idea that their power structures and policies should seek to promote the well-being of the populace in general. We Westerners live in societies that have such systems and ideologies. Yet throughout our democracies, broadly speaking, governments are rather unpopular and people tend not to vote. Without exploring the reasons for such tepid attitudes, I simply conjecture that by the majority of people the state and large-scale community membership or citizenship have come to be regarded not as intrinsic goods but as instrumentally valuable just to the extent that they serve the independently perceived needs and desires of individuals and local groups.

However that may be, I propose that, notwithstanding our natural impulses and needs for material goods and services (which Stoic philosophers acknowledged but lacked the power or motivation to actively campaign for on an egalitarian scale), Stoicism challenges us to consider that rationality and mutual reverence are not only values of a categorically higher order but are also integral to our sheer survival as a civilized race. Is it the case that these higher-order values are at risk precisely because our cultures have placed so great a premium on the supposed necessity of nonessential material goods?

Rather than risk pontificating further, I restate my original formulation of this fourth step of the Stoicizing argument: *Our shared citizenship as rational beings is not for the sake of our economic and physical well-being (which ultimately is a matter of indifference) but to do everything in our power to live mutually beneficial lives as adjudicated by good reasoning*. When one gives

[23] Plato, *Rep.* II.369b; Epicurus, *KD* 33, 37.
[24] Cicero, *Off.* 1.158. Here Cicero does agree with Aristotle, *Politics* 3.6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

thought to such modern predicaments as the violence caused by the availability of guns and the tribal warfare they seem to promote, the ruin brought to many young people as a result of the international drug trade, the inanity and obscenity of much television, the hostility generated by religious and cultural disagreements, and, above all, the ethical failings of those in positions of great power, it is tempting to dismiss mutual beneficence and good reasoning as whistling in the wind. Yet, as understood in Stoicism, these heady expressions do not pick out some indiscoverable philosopher's stone, as one sees at once when one samples Epictetus. They are to be cashed out in terms of his concept of human "professions," which I mentioned a while back, meaning conducting one's family relationships and jobs really well and gracefully—whether as parent, son, daughter, shop person, paramedic, teacher, attorney, banker, or whatever—doing one's job not just as an instrumental necessity but as a manifestation of one's shared human/civic identity, where doing one's job "well" means doing it with integrity, truthfulness, respect for others and oneself, and with the Marcus Aurelius–like awareness that one may not get thanked, or may even be resented, for one's efforts.

This secular Stoicism is still tremendously alive, in my experience of daily life in the United States, to the extent that it, as distinct from the newspaper, motivates one to get up in the morning, though it does not capture the imagination of the media who primarily influence our young people. As the Stoics themselves so acutely recognized, social corruption stems not from anything wrong with human nature but from what they called "the persuasiveness of external things and from communication with the people whose company one keeps" (*SVF* 3.228).

VI. Equity and the "Common Interest" Implications of Natural Law

In order to achieve a tighter fit between the "common interest" implications of natural law and liberal communitarianism, I need to correct a prevalent misconception about the Stoic analysis of value and the objectives that human beings are naturally and rationally motivated to pursue. At the beginning of this essay, I drew attention to what is probably the most notorious and contentious of all Stoic doctrines—the confinement of authentic goodness to excellence of character. How could a philosophy that relegates to indifference everything else that people normally value, including life itself, be of political interest? Can a modern society find any relevance in the doctrine that all one actually needs for complete human flourishing is moral virtue? Is Stoicism not completely incompatible with an ideology that makes the common good and governmental credibility depend (ideally) on equitable provision and distribution of material goods and services, employment opportunities, national security, health care, and so forth?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I propose, now, to argue not only that Stoicism can make a good shot at rebutting these challenges, but also that its doctrine of value and indifference, when properly understood, can provide a much needed antidote to such social ills as tend to stem from unbridled market capitalism and media pressures for citizens to outdo one another.

According to the doctrine of *oikeiosis*, we are naturally equipped with inclinations and disinclinations that are basic both to our survival as individuals and to the prosperity of our families and societies. Hence, health and wealth are not only naturally (i.e., objectively) preferable to sickness and poverty, they are also such that we would be insane, given the opportunity to opt for them without taking unfair advantage of others, not to do so. Why, then, given this distinction between the naturally preferable and the naturally dispreferable, do the Stoics decline to apply the terms "good" and "bad" to these items respectively? Is it consistent to say that life-enhancing objectives to which we are naturally predisposed are, nonetheless, inessential to our well-being?

There are several Stoic rejoinders to such questions. One strategy is to infer that, because it is possible to misuse the natural preferables and make good use of the natural dispreferables, such items cannot be *essentially* or *intrinsically* good or bad, meaning intrinsically beneficial or harmful to those affected by them.[25] Another proposal is that material misfortune or injustice, far from necessarily detracting from well-being, are appropriate challenges for the virtuous person to encounter and come out smiling, as it were (witness the likes of Socrates); and, in any case, such happenings, like everything else, are the way the world has to be if we could see it from the divine providential perspective. (Recall Epictetus's observations about the uselessness of staying detached from the problems social involvement may generate.) Much more promising, in my opinion, is the idea that there is such a thing as human excellence of character, the goodness of which, unlike any other value, is absolute and unconditional, because it depends not on the state of the world but on the good reasoning and beneficence of the person. For reasons I have already adumbrated but which I forbear to pursue in depth, the Stoics took excellence of character to be our natural goal as the rational and social beings that we are.

That doctrine is sufficient to show that excellence of character is a quite different kind of value from that of the natural preferables. It is not, I hasten to add, sufficient to show that human beings can be completely happy on the rack, as the Stoics' ancient critics tellingly objected. However, there is good evidence to show that what guides a Stoic's day-to-day decisions, including even the decision (*in extremis*) to take his or her own life, is a calculus of the relative preponderance of natural preferables and

[25] See LS, chap. 58.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dispreferables.[26] Here I will simply present a couple of quotations from Chrysippus (280–207 B.C.), to make the main point. First:

> As long as the future is uncertain to me, I always hold to those things that are better adapted to obtaining the natural preferables; for God himself has made me disposed to select these. But if I actually knew that I was fated now to be ill, I would even have an impulse to be ill. (*SVF* 3.191)

Does one ever know what is one's fate? In rare and fraught conditions this may happen, as it did to those brave passengers who downed the hijacked plane that crashed in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. They had the impulse to die in the sense that they knew its inevitability; they made the best of that terrible fact by so dying that they saved incalculably many other lives. Generally, however, like Chrysippus, we do not have precise advance knowledge of our fate, and so he recommends our doing the best we can to achieve the natural preferables, which include a healthy and prosperous life for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.

Now my second quotation:

> The wise man will engage in public discourse and conduct policy as if wealth and social esteem and health were good things. (*SVF* 3.698)

From what we now know about the natural preferables, Chrysippus's account of the wise lawmaker is exactly what we would expect. One cannot legislate for excellence of character. What one can do is conduct public policy from the liberal and nondiscriminatory perspectives I have already attributed to Stoicism. Given the "common interest" implications of natural law, and given everyone's common and natural interest in material resources and health, an authentically Stoic society should be one that seeks to provide citizens with these things in ways that are equitable in the light of reason. As for social esteem (Greek *doxa*), I take Chrysippus to be giving his Stoic lawmaker the authority to acknowledge that even a thoroughly liberal and nondiscriminatory ideology will need to grant that some citizens are more deserving than others in terms of public recognition.

VII. Conclusion: Stoic Morality and Political Realism

As is evident from the first quotation of Chrysippus cited in the last section, Stoic theory maintains that the natural preferables (which are broadly tantamount to life-enhancing material goods) constitute the outcomes that appropriate human (which is to say rational) action normally

[26] See Cicero, *Fin.* 3.22, 60–61.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

seeks to bring about. This doctrine was sometimes expressed in such formulas as "reasoning well in the selection and dis-selection of natural preferables" or "doing everything in one's power continuously and undeviatingly with a view to obtaining the predominating natural preferables" (LS 58K). According to such formulas, the natural preferables serve as the external objectives of normative actions. It is thus incumbent on us, whether as individuals, as social groups, or as lawmakers, to do everything in our power to promote public health, education, economic success, and so forth. Such things stand or should stand as the "target" (*skopos*) of our actions, but our "goal" or *telos* in acting is not the actual hitting of the target, but doing everything in our power to do so. It is to this latter alone—the well-reasoned aim and effort, or intention, or deployment of virtuous character—that the Stoics accorded authentic goodness. The success of the outcome—hitting the target—though preferable, remains a matter of indifference.

Ancient critics such as Plutarch (first–second century A.D.) vigorously attacked the coherence of this doctrine. It was irrational, they complained, to accord goodness to a policy of action aimed at achieving normative outcomes that are not themselves countable as good.[27] Actually—and here I must be extremely brief—Stoicism seems to me not only to escape this charge, but also to offer a highly plausible combination of Kantian, utilitarian, and virtue ethics. Stoicism accords value (*axia*) both to goodness of intention or character and to external states of affairs that are "naturally" preferable to their opposites—such as the health and wealth of oneself and one's family and country. At the same time, it distinguishes sharply between the internal (or moral) value of the former and the external (or nonmoral) value of the objectives and outcomes. Thus, we can be consequentialists in the immediate targets of our actions and public policies (defending the aimed-at consequences in terms of what naturally enhances human material well-being), Kantians in our grounding of moral agency in autonomy and goodness of intention, and virtue ethicists in requiring that both our intentions and our aims reflect such states of character as justice, courage, and practical reason.

The goal/target distinction enables us to recognize why modern political discourse tends to be discredited by the populace at large. Our technocratic achievements have placed a premium on success and corresponding expectations. Hence, honest acknowledgment of failure is perceived as a sign of culpable weakness or inefficiency, leaving little or no room for assessments of acts in terms of what was reasonable and right in the circumstances. The Stoics recognized that honorable failure may be no less praiseworthy than honorable success, and that dishonorably achieved success, or the pretense of success, is always reprehensible, irrespective of the outcome. I make these points with particular reference to such lam-

[27] See LS, chap. 64.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052507070240 Published online by Cambridge University Press

entable practices as governmental disregard for truthfulness, the seeking and claiming of military success where success was never a realistic outcome, and the hubristic denials of accountability for other heinous offenses. Although Stoicism does not address itself directly to potential politicians, its applicability to them is as starkly clear as it is to human beings in general. We are always at risk of becoming arrogant, overconfident, and reluctant or unable to make reasonable adjustments in terms of what actually happens.

The Stoics require us to aim at the natural preferables as single-mindedly and intelligently as any utilitarian would prescribe our doing. Yet, at the same time, they urge us to do so with emotional "reservation," lest we invest our identity in outcomes that can never be certain or fully within our power.[28] Our goal as Stoic citizens is to practice the art of what is always possible or in our power—doing our best to live mutually beneficial lives—while recognizing that the external success we are naturally inclined to aim at may be frustrated because we live in a world we can never fully control.

If I am right in arguing, as I have done, for the relevance of Stoicism to modern society and political life, how might this be implemented in practice? Any adequate response to that question would need a whole symposium to itself, but I am sure that the first steps have to be educational, with the goal of shaping the judgment of future policy professionals and lawmakers as well as private citizens. We need to advocate an educational philosophy that encourages children, as early as possible, to develop their capacities for reason, to grasp the importance of truth and truthfulness, and to locate the highest worth in qualities of mind and character and mutual respect for one another and for people the world over, irrespective of their different religions and political systems. In our technocratic world, there is a strong tendency to categorize such proposals as mere *ideals,* the relevant question not being "Is this good?" but "Does it work?" Actually, this is a false dichotomy, because a positive response to these Stoic ideals by a sizable number of the citizenry seems to me to be both already actual (as I have said) and essential to our sheer survival as a civilized species. The media and market pressures to live thoughtless and self-absorbed lives will not go away, obviously; but with so many humanly caused disasters of recent years to choose from, it should be possible for gifted teachers to draw on these mistakes as evidence that any dream of a prosperous future will be fool's gold unless it is grounded in a thoroughly just and accurate (i.e., Stoic) recognition of our vulnerable and mutually dependent humanity.

Classics and Philosophy, University of California, Berkeley

[28] See Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 119–26.