

## ART III.—THE STOICS.

*Die Philosophie der Griechen.* Von Dr. EDWARD ZELLER.  
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THE systems of Plato and Aristotle were splendid digressions from the main line of ancient speculation rather than stages in its regular development. The philosophers who came after them went back to an earlier tradition, and the influence of the two greatest Hellenic masters, when it was felt at all, acted almost entirely as a disturbing or deflecting force. The extraordinary reach of their principles could not, in truth, be appreciated until the organized experience of mankind had accumulated to an extent requiring the application of new rules for its comprehension and utilization; and to make such an accumulation possible nothing less was needed than the combined efforts of the whole western world. Such religious, educational, social, and political reforms as those contemplated in Plato's Republic, though originally designed for a single city community, could not be realized, even approximately, within a narrower field than that offered by the mediæval church and the feudal state. The ideal theory first gained practical significance in connection with the metaphysics of Christian theology. The place given by Plato to mathematics has only been fully justified by the development of modern science. So also Aristotle's criticism became of practical importance only when the dreams against which it was directed had embodied themselves in a fabric of oppressive superstition. Only the vast extension of reasoned knowledge has enabled us to disentangle the vitally important elements of Aristotle's logic from the mass of useless refinements in which they are embedded; his fourfold division of causes could not be estimated rightly even by Bacon, Descartes, or Spinoza; while his arrangement of the sciences, his remarks on classification, and his contributions to comparative biology bring us up to the very verge of theories whose first promulgation is still fresh in the memories of men.

Again, the spiritualism taught by Plato and Aristotle alike—by the disciple, indeed, with even more distinctness than by the master—was so entirely inconsistent with the common belief of antiquity as to remain a dead letter for nearly six centuries—that is, until the time of Plotinus. The difference between body and mind was recognized by every school, but only as the difference between solid and gaseous matter is recognized by us; while the antithesis between conscious and unconscious existence, with all

its momentous consequences, was recognized by none. The old hypothesis had to be thoroughly thought out before its insufficiency could be completely and irrevocably confessed.

Nor was this the only reason why the spiritualists lost touch of their age. If in some respects they were far in advance of early Greek thought, in other respects they were far behind it. Their systems were pervaded by an unphilosophical dualism which tended to undo much that had been achieved by their less prejudiced predecessors. For this we have partly to blame their environment. The opposition of God and the world, heaven and earth, mind and matter, necessity and free-will, considered as co-ordinate forces working within the same sphere, was a concession—though of course an unconscious concession—to the stupid bigotry of Athens. Yet at the same time they had failed to solve those psychological problems which had most interest for an Athenian public. Instead of following up the attempt made by the Sophists and Socrates to place morality on a scientific foundation, they busied themselves with the construction of a new machinery for diminishing the efficacy of temptation or for strengthening the efficacy of law. To the question What is the highest good? Plato gave an answer which nobody could understand, and Aristotle an answer which was almost absolutely useless to anybody but himself. The other great problem, What is the ultimate foundation of knowledge? was left in an equally unsatisfactory state. Plato never answered it at all; Aristotle merely pointed out the negative conditions which must be fulfilled by its solution.

It is not, then, surprising that the Academic and Peripetatic schools utterly failed to carry on the great movement inaugurated by their respective founders. The successors of Plato first lost themselves in a labyrinth of Pythagorean mysticism, and then sank into the position of mere moral instructors. It is outside our present purpose to relate the history of that remarkable revolution by which the Academy regained a foremost place in Greek thought; but we may observe that this was done by taking up and presenting in its original purity a tradition of older date than Platonism, though presented under a new aspect and mixed with other elements by Plato. The heirs of Aristotle, after staggering on a few paces under the immense burden of his encyclopædic bequest, came to a dead halt, and contented themselves with keeping the treasure safe until the time should arrive for its appropriation and reinvestment by a stronger speculative race.

No sooner did the two imperial systems lose their ascendancy than the germs which they had temporarily overshadowed sprang up into vigorous vitality, and for more than five centuries domi-

nated the whole course not only of Greek but of European thought. Of these by far the most important was the naturalistic idea, the belief that physical science might be substituted for religious superstitions and local conventions as an impregnable basis of conduct. On a former occasion\* we endeavoured to show that, while there are traces of this idea in the philosophy of Heraclitus, and while its roots stretch far back into the literature and popular faith of Greece, it was formulated for the first time by the two great Sophists, Prodicus and Hippias, who, in the momentous division between Nature and Law, placed themselves—Hippias more particularly—on the side of Nature. Two causes led to the temporary discredit of their teaching. One was the perversion by which natural right became the watchword of those who, like Plato's Callicles, held that nothing should stand between the strong man and the gratification of his desire for pleasure or for power. The other was the keen criticism of the Humanists, the friends of social convention, who held with Protagoras that Nature was unknowable, or with Gorgias that she did not exist, or with Socrates that her laws were the secret of the gods. It was in particular the overwhelming personal influence of Socrates which triumphed. He drew away from the Sophists their strongest disciple, Antisthenes, and convinced him that philosophy was valuable only in so far as it became a life-renovating power, and that, viewed in this light, it had no relation to anything outside ourselves. But just as Socrates had discarded the physical speculations of former teachers, so also did Antisthenes discard the dialectic which Socrates had substituted for them, even to the extent of denying that definition was possible. Yet he seems to have kept a firm hold on the two great ideas that were the net result of all previous philosophy, the idea of a Cosmos, the common citizenship of which made all men potentially equal, and the idea of reason as the essential prerogative of man.

Antisthenes pushed to its extreme consequences a movement begun by the naturalistic Sophists. His doctrine was what would now be called anarchic collectivism. The State, marriage, private property, and the then accepted forms of religion, were to be abolished, and all mankind were to herd promiscuously together. Either he or his followers, alone among the ancients, declared that slavery was wrong, and like Socrates, he held that the virtue of men and women was the same. But what he meant by this broad human virtue, which according to him was identical with happiness, is not clear. We only know that he dissociated

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\* WESTMINSTER REVIEW for April, 1880: Art. "The Greek Humanists: Nature and Law."

it in the strongest manner from pleasure. "I had rather be mad than delighted," is one of his characteristic sayings. It would appear, however, that what he really objected to was self-indulgence—the pursuit of sensual gratification for its own sake—and that he was ready to welcome the enjoyments naturally accompanying the healthy discharge of vital function.

Antisthenes and his school, of which Diogenes is the most popular and characteristic type, were afterwards known as Cynics; but the name is never mentioned by Plato and Aristotle, nor do they allude to the scurrility and systematic indecency afterwards associated with it. The anecdotes relating to this unsavoury subject should be received with extreme suspicion. There has always been a tendency to believe that philosophers carry out in practice what are vulgarly believed to be the logical consequences of their theories. Thus it is related of Pyrrho the Sceptic that when out walking he never turned aside to avoid any obstacle or danger, and was only saved from destruction by the vigilance of his friends. This is of course a silly fable; and we have Aristotle's word for it that the Sceptics took as good care of their lives as other people. In like manner we may conjecture that the Cynics, advocating as they did a return to Nature and defiance of prejudice, were falsely credited with what was falsely supposed to be the practical exemplification of their precepts. It is at any rate remarkable that Epictëtus, a man not disposed to undervalue the obligations of decorum, constantly refers to Diogenes as a kind of philosophic saint, and that he describes the ideal Cynic in words which would apply without alteration to the character of a Christian apostle.

Cynicism, if we understand it rightly, was only the mutilated form of an older philosophy having for its object to set morality free from convention, and to found it anew on a scientific knowledge of natural law. The need of such a system was not felt so long as Plato and Aristotle were unfolding their wonderful schemes for a reorganization of action and belief. With the temporary collapse of these schemes it came once more to the front. The result was a new school which so thoroughly satisfied the demands of the age, that for five centuries the noblest spirits of Greece and Rome, with few exceptions, adhered to its doctrines; that in dying it bequeathed some of their most vital elements to the metaphysics and the theology by which it was succeeded; that with their decay it reappeared as an important factor in modern thought; and that its name has become imperishably associated in our own language with the proud endurance of suffering, the self-sufficiency of conscious rectitude, and the renunciation of all sympathy, except what may be derived from contemplation of the immortal dead, whose heroism

is recorded in history, or of the eternal cosmic forces working out their glorious tasks with unimpassioned energy and imper-turbable repose.

One day, some few years after the death of Aristotle, a short lean swarthy young man, of weak build, with clumsily shaped limbs, and head inclined to one side, was standing in an Athenian bookshop, intently studying a roll of manuscript. His name was Zeno, and he was a native of Citium, a Greek colony in Cyprus, where the Hellenic element had become adulterated with a considerable Phœnician infusion. According to some accounts, Zeno had come to the great centre of intellectual activity to study, according to others for the sale of Tyrian purple. At any rate the volume which he held in his hand decided his vocation. It was the second book of Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*. Zeno eagerly asked where such men as he whose sayings stood recorded there were to be found. At that moment the Cynic Crates happened to pass by. "There is one of them," said the bookseller, "follow him."

The history of this Crates was distinguished by the one solitary romance of Greek philosophy. A young lady of noble family, named Hipparchia, fell desperately in love with him, refused several most eligible suitors, and threatened to kill herself unless she was given to him in marriage. Her parents in despair sent for Crates. Marriage, for a philosopher, was against the principles of his sect, and he at first joined them in endeavouring to dissuade her. Finding his remonstrances unavailing, he at last flung at her feet the staff and wallet which constituted his whole worldly possessions, exclaiming, "Here is the bridegroom, and that is the dowry. Think of this matter well, for you cannot be my partner unless you follow the same calling with me." Hipparchia consented, and thenceforth, heedless of taunts, conformed her life in every respect to the Cynic pattern.

Zeno had more delicacy or less fortitude than Hipparchia; and the very meagre intellectual fare provided by Crates must have left his inquisitive mind unsatisfied. Accordingly we find him leaving this rather disappointing substitute for Socrates to study philosophy under Stilpo the Megarian dialectician and Polemo the head of the Academy; while we know that he must have gone back to Heracleitus for the physical basis from which contemporary speculation had by this time cut itself completely free. At length, about the beginning of the third century B.C., Zeno, after having been a learner for twenty years, opened a school on his own account. As if to mark the practical bearing of his doctrine he chose one of the most frequented resorts in the city for its promulgation. There was at Athens a portico called the Poecile Stoa, adorned with frescoes by Polygnôtus the

greatest painter of the Cimonian period. It was among the monuments of that wonderful city, at once what the Loggia dei Lanzi is to Florence, and what Raphael's Stanze are to Rome; while, like the Place de la Concorde in Paris, it was darkened by the terrible associations of a revolutionary epoch. A century before Zeno's time fourteen hundred Athenian citizens had been slaughtered under its colonnades by order of the Thirty. "I will purify the Stoa," said the Cypriote stranger; and the feelings still associated with the word Stoicism prove how nobly his promise was fulfilled.

How much of the complete system known in later times under this name was due to Zeno himself, we do not know; for nothing but a few fragments of his and of his immediate successors' writings is left. The idea of combining Antisthenes with Heraclitus, and both with Socrates, probably belongs to the founder of the school. His successor, Cleanthes, a man of character rather than of intellect, was content to hand on what the master had taught. Then came another Cypriote, Chrysippus, of whom we are told that without him the Stoa would not have existed, so thoroughly did he work out the system in all its details, and so strongly did he fortify its positions against hostile criticism by a framework of elaborate dialectic. "Give me the propositions, and I will find the proofs!" he used to say to Cleanthes. After him, nothing of importance was added to the doctrines of the school, although the spirit by which they were animated seems to have undergone profound modifications, in the lapse of ages.

In reality Stoicism was not, like the older Greek philosophers, a creation of individual genius. It bears the character of a compilation both on its first exposition and on its final completion. Polemo, who had been a fine gentleman before he became a philosopher, taunted Zeno with filching his opinions from every quarter, like the cunning little Phœnician trader that he was. And it was said that the seven hundred treatises of Chrysippus would be reduced to a blank if everything that he had borrowed from others were to be erased. He seems indeed, to have been the father of review-writers, and to have used the reviewer's right of transcription with more than modern license. Nearly a whole tragedy of Euripides reappeared in one of his "articles," and a wit on being asked what he was reading, replied, "the *Medea* of Chrysippus."

In this respect, Stoicism betrays its descent from the encyclopædic lectures of the earlier Sophists, particularly Hippias. While professedly subordinating every other study to the art of virtuous living, its professors seem to have either put a very wide interpretation on virtue, or else to have raised its founda-

tion to a most unnecessary height. They protested against Aristotle's glorification of knowledge as the supreme end, and declared its exclusive pursuit to be merely a more refined form of self-indulgence; but, being Greeks, they shared the speculative passion with him, and seized on any pretext that enabled them to gratify it. And this inquisitiveness was apparently much stronger in Asiatic Hellas, whence the Stoics were almost entirely recruited, than in the old country where centuries of intellectual activity had issued in a scepticism from which their fresher minds revolted.\* It is mentioned by Zeller as a proof of exhaustion and comparative indifference to such inquiries, that the Stoics should have fallen back upon their physics on the Heracleitean philosophy. But all the ideas respecting the constitution of Nature that were then possible had already been put forward. The Greek capacity for discovery was perhaps greater in the third century than at any former time; but from the very progress of science it was necessarily confined to specialists such as Aristarchus of Samos, or Archimedes. And if the Stoics made no original contributions to physical science, they at least accepted what seemed at that time to be its established results; here, as in other respects, offering a marked contrast to the Epicurean school. If a Cleanthes assailed the heliocentric hypothesis of Aristarchus on religious grounds, he was treading in the footsteps of Aristotle. It was far more important that he or his successors should have taught the true theory of the earth's shape, of the moon's phases, of eclipses, and of the relative size and distance of the heavenly bodies. On this last subject, indeed, one of the later Stoics, Posidonius, arrived at or accepted conclusions which, although falling far short of the reality, approximated to it in a very remarkable manner, when we consider what imperfect means of measurement the Greek astronomers had at their disposition.†

In returning to one of the older cosmologies, the Stoics placed themselves in opposition to the system of Aristotle as a whole, although on questions of detail they frequently adopted his conclusions. The object of Heracleitus, as against the Pythagoreans, had been to dissolve away every antithesis in a pervading

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\* It is significant that the only Stoic who fell back on pure Cynicism should have been Aristo of Chios, a genuine Greek, while the only one who, like Aristotle, identified good with knowledge was Herillus, a Carthaginian.

† Posidonius estimated the sun's distance from the earth at 500,000,000 stades, and the moon's distance at 2,000,000 stades, which, counting the stade at 200 yards, gives about 57,000,000 and 227,000 miles respectively. The sun's diameter he reckoned, according to one account, at 440,000 miles, about half the real amount; according to another account at a quarter less. Zeller, *Ph. d. Gr.*, iii. 1, p. 190, Note 2.

unity of contradictories, and, as against the Eleatics, to substitute an eternal series of transformations for the changeless unity of absolute existence. The Stoics now applied the same method on a scale proportional to the subsequent development of thought. Aristotle had carefully distinguished God from the world, even to the extent of isolating him from all share in its creation, and interest in its affairs. The Stoics declared that God and the world were one. So far, it is allowable to call them pantheists. Yet their pantheism was very different from what we are accustomed to denote by that name, from the system of Spinoza, for example. Their strong faith in final causes and in Providence—a faith in which they closely followed Socrates—would be hardly consistent with the denial of a consciousness to the Supreme Being, quite distinct from the human consciousness with which it is identified by some modern philosophers. Their God was sometimes described as the soul of the world, the fiery element surrounding and penetrating every other kind of matter. What remained was the body of God ; but it was a body which he had originally created out of his own substance, and would, in the fulness of time, absorb into that substance again. Thus they keep the future conflagration foretold by Heracleitus, but gave it a more religious colouring. The process of creation was then to begin over again, and all things were to run the same course as before down to the minutest particulars, human history repeating itself, and the same persons returning to live the same lives once more. Such a belief of course involved the most rigid fatalism : and here again their doctrine offers a pointed contrast to that of Aristotle. The Stagirite, differing, as it would seem in this respect from all the older physicists, maintained that there was an element of chance and spontaneity in the sublunary sphere ; and without going very deeply into the mechanism of motives or the theory of moral responsibility, he had claimed a similar indeterminateness for the human will. Stoicism would hear of neither ; with it, as with modern science, the chain of causation is unbroken from first to last, and extends to all phenomena alike. The old theological notion of an omnipotent divine will, or of a destiny superior even to that will, was at once confirmed and continued by the new theory of natural law, just as the predestination of the Reformers reappeared in the metaphysical rationalism of Spinoza.\*

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\* The Stoic necessarianism gave occasion to a repartee which has remained classical ever since, although its original authorship is known to few. A slave of Zeno's having been detected in some offence, tried to excuse himself by quoting his master's principle that he was fated to commit it. "And I was fated to chastise you," calmly replied the philosopher, immediately suiting the action to the words.



This dogma of universal determinism was combined in the Stoical system with an equally outspoken materialism. The capacity for either acting or being acted on was, according to Plato, the one convincing evidence of real existence; and he had endeavoured to prove that there is such a thing as mind apart from matter by its possession of this characteristic mark. The Stoics simply reversed his argument. Whatever acts or is acted on, they said, must be corporeal; therefore the soul is a kind of body. Here they only followed the common opinion of all philosophers who believed in an external world, except Plato and Aristotle, while to a certain extent anticipating the scientific automatism first taught in modern times by Spinoza, and simultaneously revived by various thinkers in our own day. To a certain extent only; for they did not recognize the independent reality of a consciousness in which the mechanical processes are either reflected, or represented under a different aspect. And they further gave their theory a somewhat grotesque expression by interpreting those qualities and attributes of things, which other materialists have been content to consider as belonging to matter, as themselves actual bodies. For instance, the virtues and vices were, according to them, so many gaseous currents by which the soul is penetrated and shaped—a materialistic rendering of Plato's theory that qualities are distinct and independent substances.

We must mention as an additional point of contrast between the Stoics and the subsequent schools which they most resembled, that while these look on the soul as inseparable from the body, and sharing its fortunes from first to last, although perfectly distinct from it in idea, they emphasized the antithesis between the two just as strongly as Plato, giving the soul an absolutely infinite power of self-assertion during our mortal life, and allowing it a continued, though not an immortal, existence after death.

What has been said of the human soul applies equally to God, who is the soul of the world. He also is conceived under the form of a material, but very subtle and all-penetrating, element to which our souls are much more closely akin than to the coarse clay with which they are temporarily associated. And it was natural that the heavenly bodies, in whose composition the ethereal element seemed so visibly to predominate, should pass with the Stoics, as with Plato and Aristotle, for conscious beings inferior only in sacredness and majesty to the Supreme Ruler of all. Thus, the philosophy which we are studying helps to prove the strength and endurance of the religious reaction to which Socrates first gave an argumentative expression, and by which he was ultimately hurried to his doom. We may even trace its increasing ascendancy through the successive stages of the

Naturalistic school. Prodicus simply identified the gods of polytheism with unconscious physical forces ;\* Antisthenes, while discarding local worship, believed, like Rousseau, in the existence of a single deity ; Zeno, or his successors, revived the whole pantheon, but associated it with a pure morality, and explained away its more offensive features by an elaborate system of allegorical interpretation.

It was not, however, by its legendary beliefs that the living power of ancient religion was displayed, but by the study and practice of divination. This was to the Greeks and Romans what priestly direction is to a Catholic, or the interpretation of scripture texts to a Protestant believer. And the Stoics, in their anxiety to uphold religion as a bulwark of morality, went entirely along with the popular superstition ; while at the same time they endeavoured to reconcile it with the universality of natural law by the same clumsily rationalistic methods that have found favour with some modern scientific defenders of the miraculous. The signs by which we are enabled to predict an event entered, they said, equally with the event itself into the order of Nature, being either connected with it by direct causation, as is the configuration of the heavenly bodies at a man's birth with his after fortunes, or determined from the beginning of the world to precede it according to an invariable rule, as with the indications derived from inspecting the entrails of sacrificial victims. And when sceptics asked of what use was the premonitory sign when everything was predestined, they replied that our behaviour in view of the warning was predestined as well.

To us the religion of the Stoics is interesting chiefly as a part of the machinery by which they attempted to make good the connection between natural and moral law, assumed rather than proved by their Sophistic and Cynic precursors. But before proceeding to this branch of the subject we must glance at their mode of conceiving another side of the fundamental relationship between man and the universe. This is logic in its widest sense, so understood as to include an account of the process by which we get our knowledge and the ultimate evidence of its reality no less than the laws of formal ratiocination.

In their theory of cognition the Stoics chiefly followed Aristotle ; only with them the doctrine of empiricism is enunciated so distinctly as to be placed beyond the reach of misinterpretation. The mind is at first a *tabula rasa* and all our ideas are derived exclusively from the senses. But while knowledge as a whole rests on sense, the validity of each particular sense-perception must be determined by an appeal to reason, in other words, to

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\* Sextus Empiricus, p. 552, 18. F.

the totality of our acquired experience. So also the first principles of reasoning are not to be postulated, with Aristotle, as immediately and unconditionally certain; they are to be assumed as hypothetically true and gradually tested by the consequences deducible from them. Both principles well illustrate the synthetic method of the Stoics—their habit of bringing into close connection whatever Aristotle had studiously held apart. And we must maintain, in opposition to the German critics, that their method marks a real advance on his. It ought at any rate to find more favour with the experiential school of modern science, with those who hold that the highest mathematical and physical laws are proved, not by the impossibility of conceiving their contradictories, but by their close agreement with all the facts accessible to our observation.

It was a consequence of the principle just stated that in formal logic the Stoics should give precedence to the hypothetical over the categorical syllogism. From one point of view their preference for this mode of stating an argument was an advance on the method of Aristotle, whose reasonings, if explicitly set out, would have assumed the form of disjunctive syllogisms. From another point of view it was a return to the older dialectics of Socrates and Plato, who always looked on their major premises as possessing only a conditional validity—conditional, that is to say, on the consent of their interlocutor. We have further to note that both the disjunctive and the hypothetical syllogism were first recognised as such by the Stoics; a discovery connected with the feature which most profoundly distinguishes their logic from Aristotle's logic. We showed, in dealing with the latter, that it is based on an analysis of the concept, and that all its imperfections are due to that single circumstance. It was the Stoics who first brought judgment, so fatally neglected by the author of the *Analytics*, into proper prominence. Having once grasped propositions as the beginning and end of reasoning, they naturally and under the guidance of common language, passed from simple to complex assertions, and immediately detected the arguments to which these latter serve as a foundation. And if we proceed to ask why they were more interested in judgment than in conception, we shall probably find the explanation to be that their philosophy had its root in the ethical and practical interests which involve a continual process of injunction and belief, that is to say, a continual association of such disparate notions as an impression and an action; while the Aristotelian philosophy, being ultimately derived from early Greek thought, had for its leading principle the circumscription of external objects and their reproduction under the form of an abstract classification. Thus the naturalistic system, starting with the application of

scientific ideas to human life, ultimately carried back into science the vital idea of Law, that is, of fixed relations subsisting between disparate phenomena, and of knowledge as the subsumption of less general under more general relations.

Under the guidance of a somewhat similar principle the Stoic logicians attempted a reform of Aristotle's categories. These they reduced to four: Substance, Quality, Disposition, and Relation (*τὸ ὑποκείμενον, τὸ ποιόν, τὸ πῶς ἔχον, and τὸ πρὸς τι πῶς ἔχον\**); and the change was an improvement in so far as it introduced a certain method and subordination where none existed before; for each category implies, and is contained in, its predecessor; whereas the only order traceable in Aristotle's categories refers to the comparative frequency of the questions to which they correspond.

With the idea of subsumption and subordination to law, we pass at once to the Stoic ethics. For Zeno, the end of life was self-consistency; for Cleanthes, consistency with Nature; for Chrysippus, both the one and the other. The still surviving individualism of the Cynics is represented in the first of these principles; the religious inspiration of the Stoa in the second; and the comprehensiveness of its great systematizing intellect in the last. On the other hand there is a vagueness about the idea of self-consistency which seems to date from a time when Stoicism was less a new and exclusive school than an endeavour to appropriate whatever was best in the older schools. For to be consistent is the common ideal of all philosophy, and is just what distinguishes it from the uncalculating impulsiveness of ordinary life, the chance inspirations of ordinary thought. But the Peripatetic who chose knowledge as his highest good differed widely from the Hedonist who made pleasure or painlessness his end; and even if they agreed in thinking that the highest pleasure is yielded by knowledge, the Stoic himself would assert that the object of their common pursuit was with both alike essentially unmoral. He would, no doubt, maintain that the self-consistency of any theory but his own was a delusion, and that all false moralities would, if consistently acted out, inevitably land their professors in a contradiction.† Yet the absence of contradiction, although a valuable verification, is too negative a mark to serve for the sole test of rightness; and thus we are led on to the more specific standard of conformability to Nature, whether our own or that of the universe as a whole. Here again

\* Zeller, p. 93.

† "Quid est sapientia? Semper idem velle atque idem nolle. Licet illam exceptiunculam non adjicias ut rectum sit quod velis. Non potest cuiquam semper idem placere nisi rectum." Seneca: *Epist.*, xx. 4.

a difficulty presents itself. The idea of Nature had taken such a powerful hold on the Greek mind that it was employed by every school in turn,—except perhaps by the extreme sceptics, still faithful to the traditions of Protagoras and Gorgias,—and was confidently appealed to in support of the most divergent ethical systems. We find it occupying a prominent place both in Plato's *Laws* and in Aristotle's *Politics*; while the maxim, Follow Nature, was borrowed by Zeno himself from Polemo the head of the Academy, or perhaps from Polemo's predecessor, Xenocrates. And Epicurus, the great opponent of Stoicism, maintained, not without plausibility, that every animal is led by nature to pursue its own pleasure in preference to any other end. Thus, when Cleanthes declared that pleasure was unnatural, he and the Epicureans could not have been talking about the same thing. They must have meant something different by pleasure or by nature or by both.

The last alternative seems the most probable. Nature with the Stoics was a fixed objective order whereby all things work together as co-operant parts of a single system. Each has a certain office to perform, and the perfect performance of it is the creature's virtue, or reason, or highest good; these three expressions being always used as strictly synonymous terms. Here we have the teleology, the dialectics, and the utilitarianism of Socrates so worked out and assimilated, that they differ only as various aspects of a single truth. The three lines of Socratic teaching had also been drawn to a single point by Plato; but his idealism had necessitated the creation of a new world for their development and concentration. The idea of Nature as it had grown up under the hands of Heraclitus, the Sophists, and Antisthenes, supplied Zeno with a ready-made mould into which his reforming aspirations could be run. The true Republic was not a pattern laid up in heaven, nor was it restricted to the narrow dimensions of a single Hellenic state. It was the whole real universe in every part of which except in the works of wicked men a divine law was recognized and obeyed. Nay, according to Cleanthes, God's law is obeyed even by the wicked, and the essence of morality consists only in its voluntary fulfilment. As others very vividly put it, we are like a dog tied under a cart, if we do not choose to run we shall be dragged along.\*

It will now be better understood whence arose the hostility of the Stoics to pleasure, and how they could speak of it in what seems to us such a paradoxical style. It was subjective feeling as opposed to objective law; it was relative, particular, and

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\* Zeller, p. 168, note 2.

individual, as opposed to their formal standard of right ; and it was continually drawing men away from their true nature by acting as a temptation to vice. Thus, probably for the last reason, Cleanthes could speak of pleasure as contrary to Nature, while less rigorous authorities regarded it as absolutely indifferent, being a consequence of natural actions, not an essential element in their performance. And when their opponents pointed to the universal desire for pleasure as a proof that it was the natural end of animated beings, the Stoics answered that what Nature had in view was not pleasure at all, but the preservation of life itself.\*

Such an interpretation of instinct introduces us to a new principle—self-interest ; and this was, in fact, recognized on all hands as the foundation of right conduct ; it was about the question, What is our interest ? that the ancient moralists were disagreed. The Cynics apparently held that, for every being, simple existence is the only good, and therefore with them virtue meant limiting oneself to the bare necessities of life ; while by following Nature they meant reducing existence to its lowest terms, and assimilating our actions so far as possible to those of the lower animals, plants, or even stones, all of which require no more than to maintain the integrity of their proper nature.

Where the Cynics left off the Stoics began. Recognizing simple self-preservation as the earliest interest and duty of man, they held that his ultimate and highest good was complete self-realization, the development of that rational, social, and beneficent nature which distinguishes him from the lower animals. Here their teleological religion came in as a valuable sanction for their ethics. Epictétus, probably following older authorities, argues that self-love has purposely been made identical with sociability. "The nature of an animal is to do all things for its own sake. Accordingly God has so ordered the nature of the rational animal that it cannot obtain any particular good without at the same time contributing to the common good. Because it is self-seeking it is not therefore unsocial."† But if our happiness depends on external goods, then we shall begin to fight with one another for their possession ;‡ friends, father, country, the gods themselves, everything will, with good reason, be sacrificed to their attainment. And, regarding this as a self-evident absurdity, Epictétus concludes that our happiness must consist solely in a righteous will, which we know to have been the doctrine of his whole school.

We have now reached the great point on which the Stoic ethics differed from that of Plato and Aristotle. The two latter, while upholding virtue as the highest good, allowed external

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\* Diogenes Laertius, vii. 85. † *Dissert.* I. xix. 11. ‡ *Ibid.* xxii. 9, ff.

advantages like pleasure and exemption from pain to enter into their definition of perfect happiness; nor yet did they demand the entire suppression of passion, but, on the contrary, assigned to it a certain part in the formation of character. We must add, although it was not a point insisted on by the ancient critics, that they did not bring out the socially beneficent character of virtue with anything like the distinctness of their successors. The Stoics, on the other hand, refused to admit that there was any good but a virtuous will, or that any useful purpose could be served by irrational feeling. If the passions agree with virtue they are superfluous, if they are opposed to it they are mischievous; and once we give them the rein they are more likely to disagree with than to obey it. The severer school had more reason on their side than is commonly admitted. Either there is no such thing as duty at all, or duty must be paramount over every other motive—that is to say, a perfect man will discharge his obligations at the sacrifice of every personal advantage. There is no pleasure that he will not renounce, no pain that he will not endure, rather than leave them unfulfilled. But to assume this supremacy over his will, duty must be incommensurable with any other motive; if it is a good at all, it must be the only good. To identify virtue with happiness seems to us absurd, because we are accustomed to associate it exclusively with those dispositions which are the cause of happiness in others, or altruism; and happiness itself with pleasure or the absence of pain, which are states of feeling necessarily conceived as egoistic. But neither the Stoics nor any other ancient moralists recognized such a distinction; all agreed that public and private interest must somehow be identical, the only question being should one be merged in the other, and if so, which? or should there be an illogical compromise between the two. The alternative chosen by Zeno was incomparably nobler than the system of Epicurus, while it was more consistent than those of Plato and Aristotle. He regarded right conduct exclusively in the light of those universal interests with which alone it is properly concerned; and if he appealed to the motives supplied by personal happiness, this was a confusion of phraseology rather than of thought.

The treatment of the passions by the Stoic school presents greater difficulties, due partly to their own vacillation, partly to the very indefinite nature of the feelings in question. It will be admitted that here also the claims of duty are supreme. To follow the promptings of fear or of anger, of pity or of love, without considering the ulterior consequences of our action, is, of course, wrong. For even if, in any particular instance, no harm comes of the concession, we cannot be sure that such will always be the case, and meanwhile the passion is strengthened

by indulgence. And we have also to consider the bad effect produced on the character of those who, finding themselves the object of passion, learn to address themselves to it instead of to reason. Difficulties arise when we begin to consider how far education should aim at the systematic discouragement of strong emotion. Here the Stoics seem to have taken up a position not very consistent either with their appeals to Nature or with their teleological assumptions. Nothing strikes one as more unnatural than the complete absence of human feeling; and a believer in design might plausibly maintain that every emotion conduced to the preservation either of the individual or of the race. We find, however, that the Stoics, here as elsewhere reversing the Aristotelian method, would not admit the existence of a psychological distinction between reason and passion. According to their analysis, the emotions are so many different forms of judgment. Joy and sorrow are false opinions respecting good and evil in the present: desire and fear, false opinions respecting good and evil in the future. But, granting a righteous will to be the only good, and its absence the only evil, there can be no room for any of these feelings in the mind of a truly virtuous man, since his opinions on the subject of good are correct, and its possession depends entirely on himself. Everything else arises from an external necessity, to strive with which would be useless because it is inevitable, and impious because it is supremely wise.

It will be seen that the Stoics condemned passion not as the cause of immoral actions but as intrinsically vicious in itself. Hence their censure extended to the rapturous delight and passionate grief which seem entirely out of relation to conduct properly so called. This was equivalent to saying that the will has complete control over emotion; a doctrine which our philosophers did not shrink from maintaining. It might have been supposed that a position which the most extreme supporters of free-will would hardly accept, would find still less favour with an avowedly necessarian school. And to regard the emotions as either themselves beliefs, or as inevitably caused by beliefs, would seem to remove them even farther from the sphere of moral responsibility. The Stoics, however, having arrived at the perfectly true doctrine that judgment is a form of volition, seem to have immediately invested it with the old associations of free choice which they were at the same time busily engaged in stripping off from its other forms. They took up the Socratic paradox that virtue is knowledge; but they would not agree with Socrates that it could be instilled by force of argument. To them vice was not so much ignorance as the obstinate refusal to be convinced.\*

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\* Zeller, p. 229.



The Stoic arguments are, indeed, when we come to analyse them, appeals to authority rather than to the logical understanding. We are told again and again that the common objects of desire and dread cannot really be good or evil, because they are not altogether under our control. And if we ask why this necessarily excludes them from the class of things to be pursued or avoided, the answer is that man, having been created for perfect happiness, must also have been created with the power to secure it by his own unaided exertions. But, even granting the very doubtful thesis that there is any ascertainable purpose in creation at all, it is hard to see how the Stoics could have answered any one who chose to maintain that man is created for enjoyment; since, judging by experience, he has secured a larger share of it than of virtue, and is just as capable of gaining it by a mere exercise of volition. For the professors of the Porch fully admitted that their ideal sage had never been realized, which, with their opinions about their indivisibility of virtue, was equivalent to saying that there never had been such a thing as a good man at all. Or, putting the same paradox into other words, since the two classes of wise and foolish divide humanity between them, and since the former class has only an ideal existence, they were obliged to admit that mankind are not merely most of them fools, but all fools. And this, as Plutarch has pointed out in his very clever attack on Stoicism, is equivalent to saying that the scheme of creation is a complete failure.\*

The inconsistencies of a great philosophical system are best explained by examining its historical antecedents. We have already attempted to disentangle the roots from which Stoicism was nourished, but one of them has not yet been taken into account. This was the still continued influence of Parmenides, derived, if not from his original teaching, then from some one or more of the altered shapes through which it had passed. It has been shown how Zeno used the Heracleitean method to break down all the demarcations laboriously built up by Plato and Aristotle. Spirit was identified with matter; ideas with aerial currents; God with the world; rational with sensible evidence; volition with judgment; and emotion with thought. But the idea of a fundamental antithesis, expelled from every other department of inquiry, took hold with all the more energy on what, to Stoicism, was the most vital of all distinctions—that between right and wrong. Once grasp this transformation of a metaphysical into a moral principle, and every paradox of the system will be seen to follow from it with logical necessity. What the supreme Idea had been to Plato and self-thinking

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\* Plutarch, *De Communibus Notitiis*, cap. xxxiii. p. 1076 B.  
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thought to Aristotle, that virtue became to the new school, simple, unchangeable, and self-sufficient. It must not only be independent of pleasure and pain, but absolutely incommensurable with them; therefore there can be no happiness but what it gives. As an indivisible unity, it must be possessed entirely or not at all; and, being eternal, once possessed it can never be lost. Further, since the same action may be either right or wrong, according to the motive of its performance, virtue is nothing external, but a subjective disposition, a state of the will and the affections; or, if these are to be considered as judgments, a state of the reason. Finally, since the universe is organized reason, virtue must be natural, and especially consonant to the nature of man as a rational animal; while, at the same time, its existence in absolute purity being inconsistent with experience, it must remain an unattainable ideal.

It has been shown in former studies how Greek philosophy, after straining an antithesis to the utmost, was driven by the very law of its being to close or bridge over the chasm by a series of accommodations and transitions. To this rule Stoicism was no exception; and perhaps its extraordinary vitality may have been partly due to the necessity imposed on its professors of continually reviewing their positions, with a view to softening down its most repellent features. We proceed to sketch in rapid outline the chief artifices employed for that purpose.

The doctrine, in its very earliest form, had left a large neutral ground between good and evil, comprehending almost all the common objects of desire and avoidance. These the Stoics now proceeded to divide according to a similar principle of arrangement. Whatever, without being morally good in the strictest sense, was either conducive to morality, or conformable to human nature, or both, they called preferable. Under this head came personal advantages, such as mental accomplishments, beauty, health, strength, and life itself; together with external advantages, such as wealth, honour, and high connections. The opposite to preferable things they called objectionable; and what lay between the two, such as the particular coin selected to make a payment with, absolutely indifferent.\*

The thorough-going condemnation of passion was explained away to a certain extent by allowing the sage himself to feel a slight touch of the feelings which fail to shake his determination, like a scar remaining after the wound is healed; and by admitting the desirability of sundry emotions, which, though carefully distinguished from the passions, seem to have differed from them in degree rather than in kind.†

In like manner, the peremptory alternative between consum-

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\* Zeller, pp. 260-1.

† Ibid. pp. 267-8.

mate wisdom and utter folly was softened down by admitting the possibility of a gradual progress from one to the other, itself subdivided into a number of more or less advanced grades, recalling Aristotle's idea of motion as a link between Privation and Form.\*

It was not, however, in any of these concessions that the Stoics found from first to last their most efficient solution for the difficulties of practical experience, but in the countenance they extended to an act which, more than any other, might have seemed fatally inconsistent both in spirit and in letter with their whole system, whether we choose to call it a defiance of divine law, a reversal of natural instinct, a selfish abandonment of duty, or a cowardly shrinking from pain. We allude, of course, to their habitual recommendation of suicide. "If you are not satisfied with life," they said, "you have only got to rise and depart; the door is always open." Various circumstances were specified in which the sage would exercise the privilege of "taking himself off," as they euphemistically expressed it. Severe pain, mutilation, incurable disease, advanced old age, the hopelessness of escaping from tyranny, and in general any hindrance to leading a "natural" life were held to be a sufficient justification for such a step. The first founders of the school set an example afterwards frequently followed. Zeno is said to have hanged himself for no better reason than that he fell and broke his finger through the weakness of old age; and Cleanthes, having been ordered to abstain temporarily from food, resolved, as he expressed it, not to turn back after going half way to death. This side of the Stoic doctrine found particular favour in Rome, and the voluntary death of Cato was always spoken of as his chief title to fame. Many noble spirits were sustained in their defiance of the imperial despotism by the thought that there was one last liberty of which not even Cæsar could deprive them. Objections were silenced by the argument that, life not being an absolute good, its loss might fairly be preferred to some relatively greater inconvenience. But why the sage should renounce an existence where perfect happiness depends entirely on his own will neither was, nor could be, explained.

If now, abandoning all technicalities, we endeavour to estimate the significance and value of the most general ideas contributed by Stoicism to ethical speculation, we shall find that they may be most conveniently considered under the following heads. First of all, the Stoics made morality completely inward. They declared that the intention was equivalent to the deed, and that the wish was equivalent to the intention—a view which has been

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\* Zeller, p. 270.

made familiar to all by the teaching of the Gospel, but whose origin in Greek philosophy has been strangely ignored even by rationalistic writers.\* From the inaccessibility of motives and feelings to direct external observation, it follows that each man must be, in the last resort, his own judge. Hence the notion of conscience is equally a Stoic creation. That we have a mystical intuition informing us, prior to experience, of the difference between right and wrong, was, indeed, a theory quite alien to their empirical derivation of knowledge. But that the educated wrongdoer carries in his bosom a perpetual witness and avenger of his guilt, they most distinctly asserted.† The difference between ancient and modern tragedy is alone sufficient to prove the novelty and power of this idea; for that the *Eumenides* do not represent even the germ of a conscience, it would now be waste of words to show. On the other hand, the fallibility of conscience and the extent to which it may be sophisticated were topics not embraced within the limits of Stoicism, and perhaps never adequately illustrated by any writer, even in modern times, except the great English novelist whose loss we still deplore.

The second Stoic idea to which we would invite attention is that, in the economy of life, every one has a certain function to fulfil, a certain part to play, which is marked out for him by circumstances beyond his control, but in the adequate performance of which his duty and dignity are peculiarly involved. It is true that this idea finds no assignable place in the teaching of the earliest Stoics, or rather in the few fragments of their teaching which alone have been preserved; but it is already touched upon by Cicero in a work avowedly adapted from Panætius, who flourished more than a century B.C.; it frequently recurs in the lectures of Epictêtus; and is enunciated with energetic concision in the solitary meditations of Marcus Aurelius.‡ The belief spoken of is, indeed, closely connected with the Stoic teleology, and only applies to the sphere of free intelligence a principle like that supposed to regulate the activity of inanimate or irrational beings. If every mineral, every plant, and every animal has its special use and office, so also must we, according to the capacity of our individual and

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\* "Omnia scelera, etiam ante effectum operis, quantum culpæ satis est, perfecta sunt."—Seneca, *De Const. Sap.* vii. 4.

† "Prope est a te Deus, tecum est, intus est . . . sacer intra nos spiritus sedet bonorum malorumque nostrorum observator et custos."—Seneca, *Epp.* xli. 1.

‡ Cicero, *De Off.* I. 31; Epictêtus, *Man.* 17, *ib.* 30; *Diss.* I. ii. 33, xvi. 20, xxix. 39, II. v. 10, *ib.* 21, x. 4, xiv. 8, xxiii. 38, xxv. 22; Antoninus, *Comm.* VI. 39, 43, IX. 29; cf. Seneca, *Epp.* lxxxv. 54.

determinate existence. By accomplishing the work thus imposed on us, we fulfil the purpose of our vocation, we have done all that the highest morality demands, and may with a clear conscience leave the rest to fate. To put the same idea into somewhat different terms: we are born into certain relationships, domestic, social, and political, by which the lines of our daily duties are prescribed with little latitude for personal choice. The implications of such an ethical standard are, on the whole, conservative; it is assumed that social institutions are, taking them altogether, nearly the best possible at any moment; and that our truest wisdom is to make the most of them, instead of sighing for some other sphere where our grand aspirations or volcanic passions might find a readier outlet for their feverish activity. And if the teaching of the first Stoics did not take the direction here indicated, it was because they, with the communistic theories inherited from their Cynic predecessors, began by condemning all existing social distinctions as irrational. They wished to abolish local religion, property, the family, and the State, as a substitute for which the whole human race was to be united under a single government, without private possessions or slaves, and with a complete community of women and children. It must, however, have gradually dawned on them that such a radical subversion of the present system was hardly compatible with their belief in the providential origin of all things; and that, besides this, the virtues which they made it so much their object to recommend would be, for the most part, superfluous in a communistic society. At the same time, the old notion of *Sôphrosynê* as a virtue which consisted in minding one's own business, or, stated more generally, in discerning and doing whatever work one is best fitted for, would continue to influence ethical teaching, with the effect of giving more and more individuality to the definition of duty. And the Stoic idea of a perfect sage, including as it did the possession of every accomplishment and an exclusive fitness for discharging every honourable function, would seem much less chimerical if interpreted to mean that a noble character, while everywhere intrinsically the same, might be realized under as many divergen-forms as there are opportunities for continuous usefulness in life.\*

We can understand, then, why the philosophy which, when first promulgated, had tended to withdraw its adherents from participation in public life, should, when transplanted to Roman

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\* It need hardly be observed that here also the morality of natural law has attained its highest artistic development under the hand of George Eliot—sometimes even to the neglect of purely artistic effect, as in *Daniel Deronda* and the *Spanish Gypsy*.

soil, have become associated with an energetic interest in politics ; why it was so eagerly embraced by those noble statesmen who fought to the death in defence of their ancient liberties ; how it could become the cement of a republican opposition under the worst Cæsars ; how it could be the pride and support of Rome's Prime Minister during that *quinquennium Neronis* which was the one bright episode in more than half a century of shame and terror ; how, finally, it could mount the throne with Marcus Aurelius, and prove, through his example, that the world's work might be most faithfully performed by one in whose meditations mere worldly interests occupied the smallest space. Nor can we agree with Zeller in thinking that it was the nationality, and not the philosophy, of these disciples which made them such efficient statesmen.\* On the contrary, it seems to us that the "Romanism" of these men was inseparable from their philosophy, and that they were all the more Roman because they were Stoics as well.

The third great idea of Stoicism was its doctrine of humanity. Men are all children of one Father, and citizens of one State ; the highest moral law is, Follow Nature, and Nature has made them to be social and to love one another ; the private interest of each is, or should be, identified with the universal interest ; we should live for others that we may live for ourselves ; even to our enemies we should show love and not anger ; the unnaturalness of passion is shown by nothing more clearly than by its anti-social and destructive tendencies. Here, also, the three great Stoics of the Roman empire—Seneca, Epictétus, and Marcus Aurelius—rather than the founders of the school, must be our authorities,† whether it be because their lessons correspond to a more developed state of thought, or simply because they have been more perfectly preserved. The former explanation is perhaps the more generally accepted. There seems, however, good reason for believing that the idea of universal love—the highest of all philosophical ideas next to that of the universe itself—dates further back than is commonly supposed. It can hardly be due

\* Zeller, p. 297, followed by Mr. Capes, in his excellent little work on Stoicism.

† Seneca, *De Irá*, I. v. 2 ff., II. xxxi. 7, *De Clem.* I. iii. 2., *De Benef.* IV. xxvi. 1, *Epp.* xcvi. 51 ff. ; Epictétus, *Diss.* IV. v. 10 ; Antoninus VII. 13 ; together with the additional references given by Zeller, p. 286 ff. It is to be observed that the mutual love attributed to human beings by the Stoic philosophers stands, not for an empirical characteristic, but for an unrealized ideal of human nature. The actual feelings of men towards one another are described by Seneca in language recalling that of Schopenhauer and Leopardi. "Erras," he exclaims, "si istorum tibi qui occurrunt vultibus credis : hominum effigies habent, animos ferarum : nisi quod illarum perniciosior est primus incursum. Nunquam enim illas ad nocendum nisi necessitas injicit : aut fame aut timore coguntur ad pugnam : homini perdere hominem libet.—" *Epp.* ciii. 2.

to Seneca, who had evidently far more capacity for popularizing and applying the thoughts of others than for original speculation, and who on this subject expresses himself with a rhetorical fluency not usually characterizing the exposition of new discoveries. The same remark applies to his illustrious successors, who, while agreeing with him in tone, do not seem to have drawn on his writings for their philosophy. It is also clear that the idea in question springs from two essentially Stoic conceptions: the objective conception of a unified world, a Cosmos to which all men belong; and the subjective conception of a rational nature common to them all. These, again, are rooted in early Greek thought, and were already emerging into distinctness at the time of Socrates. Accordingly we find that Plato, having to compose a characteristic speech for the Sophist Hippias, makes him say that like-minded men are by nature kinsmen and friends to one another.\* Nature, however, soon came to be viewed under a different aspect, and it was maintained, just as by some living philosophers, that her true law is the universal oppression of the weak by the strong. Then the idea of mind came in as a salutary corrective. It had supplied a basis for the ethics of Protagoras, and still more for the ethics of Socrates; it was now combined with its old rival by the Stoics, and from their union arose the conception of human nature as something allied with and illustrated by all other forms of animal life, yet capable, if fully developed, of rising infinitely above them. Nevertheless, the individual and the universal element were never quite reconciled in the Stoic ethics. The altruistic quality of justice was clearly perceived; but no attempt was made to show that all virtue is essentially social, and has come to be recognized as obligatory on the individual mainly because it conduces to the safety of the whole community. The learner was told to conquer his passions for his own sake rather than for the sake of others; and indulgence in violent anger, though more energetically denounced, was, in theory, placed on a par with immoderate delight or uncontrollable distress. So, also, vices of impurity were classed with comparatively harmless forms of sensuality, and considered in reference, not to the social degradation of their victims, but to the spiritual defilement of their perpetrators.

Yet, while the Stoics were far from anticipating the methods of modern Utilitarianism, they were, in a certain sense, strict Utilitarians—that is to say, they measured the goodness or badness of actions by their consequences; in other words, by their bearing on the supposed interest of the individual or of the com-

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\* Plato, *Protagoras*, 337 D.

munity. They did not, it is true, identify interest with pleasure or the absence of pain; but although, in our time, Hedonism and Utilitarianism are, for convenience, treated as interchangeable terms, they need not necessarily be so. If any one choose to regard bodily strength, health, wealth, beauty, intellect, knowledge, or even simple existence, as the highest good and the end conduciveness to which determines the morality of actions, he is a Utilitarian; and, even if it could be shown that a maximum of happiness would be ensured by the attainment of his end, he does not on that account become a Hedonist. Now it is certain that the early Stoics at least regarded the preservation of the human race as an end which rightfully took precedence of every other consideration; and, like Charles Austin, they liked to push their principles to paradoxical or offensive extremes, apparently for no other purpose than that of affronting the common feelings of mankind,\* without remembering that such feelings were likely to represent embodied experiences of utility. Thus—apart from their communistic theories—they were fond of specifying the circumstances in which incest would become legitimate; and they are said not only to have sanctioned cannibalism in cases of extreme necessity, but even to have recommended its introduction as a substitute for burial or cremation; although this, we may hope, was rather a grim illustration of what they meant by moral indifference than a serious practical suggestion.† Besides the encouragement which it gave to kind offices between friends and neighbours, the Stoic doctrine of humanity and mutual love was honourably exemplified in Seneca's emphatic condemnation of the gladiatorial games and of the horrible abuses connected with domestic slavery in Rome.‡ But we miss a clear perception that such abuses are always and everywhere the consequences of slavery; and the outspoken abolitionism of the naturalists alluded to by Aristotle does not seem to have been imitated by their successors in later ages.§ The most one can say is that the fiction of original liberty was imported into Roman juris-

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\* "He [Charles Austin] presented the Benthamic doctrines in the most startling form of which they were susceptible, exaggerating everything in them which tended to consequences offensive to any one's preconceived feelings."—Mill's *Autobiography*, p. 78.

† Zeller, p. 281.

‡ "Homo sacra res homini jam per lusum et jocum occiditur . . . satisque spectaculi ex homine mors est."—Seneca, *Epp.* xcv. 33. "Servi sunt? Immo homines. Servi sunt? Immo contubernales. Servi sunt? Immo humiles amici. Servi sunt? Immo conservi."—*Ibid.* xlvi. 1. Compare the treatise *De Irâ, passim*.

§ Seneca once lets fall the words, "fortuna æquo jure genitos alium alii donavit."—*Consol. ad Marciam*, xx. 2; but this is the only expression of the kind that we have been able to discover in a Stoic writer of the empire.



prudence through the agency of Stoic lawyers, and helped to familiarize men's minds with the idea of universal emancipation before political and economical conditions permitted it to be made a reality.

It is probable that the philanthropic tendencies of the Stoics were, to a great extent, neutralized by the extreme individualism which formed the reverse side of their philosophical character; and also by what may be called the subjective idealism of their ethics. According to their principles no one can really do good to any one else, since what does not depend on my will is not a good to me. The altruistic virtues are valuable, not as sources of beneficent action, but as manifestations of benevolent sentiment. Thus, to set on foot comprehensive schemes for the relief of human suffering seemed no part of the Stoic's business. And the abolition of slavery, even had it been practicable, would have seemed rather superfluous to one who held that true freedom is a mental condition within the reach of all who desire it,\* while the richest and most powerful may be, and for the most part actually are, without it. Moreover, at the time when philosophy gained its greatest ascendancy, the one paramount object of practical statesmen must have been to save civilization from the barbarians, a work to which Marcus Aurelius devoted his life. Hence we learn without surprise that the legislative efforts of the imperial Stoic were directed to the strengthening, rather than to the renovation, of ancient institutions. Certain enactments were, indeed, framed for the protection of those who took part in the public games. It was provided, with a humanity from which even our own age might learn something, that performers on the high rope should be ensured against the consequences of an accidental fall by having the ground beneath them covered with feather beds; and the gladiators were only allowed to fight with blunted weapons. It must, however, be noted that in speaking of the combats with wild beasts which were still allowed to continue under his reign, Marcus Aurelius dwells only on the monotonous character which made them exceedingly wearisome to a cultivated mind; just as a philosophic sportsman may sometimes be heard to observe that shooting one grouse is very like shooting another; while elsewhere he refers with simple contempt to the poor wretches, who, when already half-devoured by the wild beasts, begged to be spared for another day's amusement.\* Whether he knew the whole extent of the judicial atrocities practised on his Christian subjects may well be doubted; but it may be equally doubted

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\* Seneca, *Epp.* lxxx.

† Antoninus, *Comm.* vi. 46; x. 8.

whether, had he known it, he would have interfered to save them. Pain and death were no evils ; but it was an evil that the law should be defied.

Those manifestations of sympathy which are often so much more precious than material assistance were also repugnant to Stoic principles. On this subject, Epictêtus expresses himself with singular harshness. "Do not," he says, "let yourself be put out by the sufferings of your friends. If they are unhappy, it is their own fault. God made them for happiness ; not for misery. They are grieved at parting from you, are they? Why, then, did they set their affections on things outside themselves? If they suffer for their folly it serves them right."\*

On the other hand, if Stoicism did not make men pitiful, it made them infinitely forgiving. Various causes conspired to bring about this result. If all are sinners, and if all sins are equal, no one has a right, under pretence of superior virtue, to cast a stone at his fellows. Such is the point of view insisted on with especial emphasis by Seneca, who, more perhaps than other philosophers, had reason to be conscious how far his practice fell short of his professions.† But, speaking generally, pride was the very last fault with which the Stoics could be charged. Both in ancient and modern times satirists have been prone to assume that every disciple of the Porch, in describing his ideal of a wise man, was actually describing himself. No misconception could be more complete. It is like supposing that, because Christ commanded his followers to be perfect even as their heavenly Father is perfect, every Christian for that reason thinks himself equal to God. The wise man of the Stoics had, by their own acknowledgment, never been realized at all ; he had only been approached by three characters, Socrates, Antisthenes, and Diogenes. "May the sage fall in love?" asked a young man of Panætius. "What the sage may do," replied the master, "is a question to be considered at some future time. Meanwhile, you and I, who are very far from being sages, had better be careful how we let ourselves become the slaves of a degrading passion."‡

In the next place, if it is not in the power of others to injure us, we have no right to resent anything that they can do to us. So argues Epictêtus, who began to learn philosophy when still a slave, and was carefully prepared by his instructor, Musonius,

\* Epictêtus, *Diss.* III. xxiv.

† Seneca, *De Irâ*, I. xiv. 2 ; *De Clement.* I. vi. 2.

‡ Seneca, *Epp.* cxvi. 4. It must be borne in mind that Panætius was speaking at a time when the object of passion would at best be either another man's wife or a member of the *demi-monde*.

to bear without repining whatever outrages his master might choose to inflict on him. Finally, to those who urged that they might justly blame the evil intentions of their assailants, Marcus Aurelius could reply that even this was too presumptuous, that all men did what they thought right, and that the motives of none could be adequately judged except by himself. And all the Stoics found a common ground for patience in their optimistic fatalism, in the doctrine that whatever happens is both necessarily determined, and determined by absolute goodness combined with infallible wisdom.

Doctrines like these, if consistently carried out, would have utterly destroyed so much of morality as depends on the social sanction; while, by inculcating the absolute indifference of external actions, they might ultimately have paralysed the individual conscience itself. But the Stoics were not consistent. Unlike some modern moralists, who are ready to forgive every injury so long as they are not themselves the victims, our philosophers were unsparing in their denunciations of wrongdoing; and it is very largely to their indignant protests that we are indebted for our knowledge of the corruption prevalent in Roman society under the Empire. It may even be contended that, in this respect, our judgment has been unfairly biassed. The picture drawn by the Stoics, or by writers trained under their influence, seems to have been too heavily charged with shadow; and but for the archæological evidence we should not have known how much genuine human affection lay concealed in those lower social strata where Christianity found a readier acceptance because it only gave a supernatural sanction to habits and sentiments already made familiar by the spontaneous tendencies of an unwarlike *régime*.

Before parting with Stoicism we have to say a few words on the metaphysical foundation of the whole system—the theory of Nature considered as a moral guide and support. It has been shown that the ultimate object of this, as of many other ethical theories, both ancient and modern, was to reconcile the instincts of individual self-preservation with virtue, which is the instinct of self-preservation in an entire community. The Stoics identified both impulses by declaring that virtue is the sole good of the individual no less than the supreme interest of the whole; thus involving themselves in an insoluble contradiction. For, from their nominalistic point of view, the good of the whole can be nothing but an aggregate of particular goods, or else a means for their attainment; and in either case the happiness of the individual has to be accounted for apart from his duty. And an analysis of the special virtues and vices would equally have forced them back on the assumption, which they persistently

repudiated, that individual existence and pleasure are intrinsically good, and their opposites intrinsically evil. To prove their fundamental paradox—the non-existence of individual as distinguished from social interest—the Stoics employed the analogy of an organized body where the good of the parts unquestionably subserves the good of the whole; and the object of their teleology was to show that the universe and, by implication, the human race, were properly to be viewed in that light. The acknowledged adaptation of life to its environment furnished some plausible arguments in support of their thesis; and the deficiencies were made good by a revival of the Heracleitean theory in which the unity of nature was conceived partly as a necessary interdependence of opposing forces, partly as a perpetual transformation of every substance into every other. Universal history also tended to confirm the same principle in its application to the human race. The Macedonian, and still more the Roman empire brought the idea of a world-wide community living under the same laws ever nearer to its realization; the decay of the old religion and the old civic patriotism set free a vast fund of energy, some of which was absorbed by philosophy; while a rank growth of immorality offered ever new opportunities for an indignant protest against senseless luxury and inhuman vice. This last circumstance, however, was not allowed to prejudice the optimism of the system; for the fertile physics of Heracleitus suggested a method by which moral evil could be interpreted as a necessary concomitant of good, a material for the perpetual exercise and illustration of virtuous deeds.

Yet, if the conception of unity was gaining ground, the conceptions of purpose and vitality must have been growing weaker as the triumph of brute force prolonged itself without limit or hope of redress. Hence Stoicism in its later forms shows a tendency to dissociate the dynamism of Heracleitus from the teleology of Socrates, and to lean on the former rather than on the latter for support. One symptom of this changed attitude is a blind worship of power for its own sake. We find the renunciation of pleasure and the defiance of pain appreciated more from an æsthetic than from an ethical point of view; they are exalted almost in the spirit of a Red Indian, not as means to higher ends, but as manifestations of unconquerable strength; and sometimes the highest sanction of duty takes the form of a morbid craving for applause, as if the universe was a Coliseum and life a gladiatorial game.

The noble spirit of Marcus Aurelius was, indeed, proof against such temptations; and he had far more to dread than to hope from the unlightened voice of public opinion; but to him also,

"standing between two eternities," Nature presented herself chiefly under the aspect of an overwhelming and absorbing force. Pleasure is not so much dangerous as worthless, weak, and evanescent. Selfishness, pride, anger, and discontent will soon be swept into abyssal gulfs of oblivion by the roaring cataract of change. Universal history is one long monotonous procession of phantasms passing over the scene into death and utter night. In one short life we may see all that ever was, or is, or is to be; the same pageant has already been and shall be repeated an infinite number of times. Nothing endures but the process of unending renovation: we must die that the world may be ever young. Death itself only reunites us with the absolute All whence we come, in which we move, and whither we return. But the imperial sage makes no attempt to explain why we should ever have separated ourselves from it in thought; or why one life should be better worth living than another in the universal vanity of things.

The physics of Stoicism were, in truth, the scaffolding, rather than the foundation, of its ethical superstructure. The real foundation was the necessity of social existence formulated under the influence of a logical exclusiveness first introduced by Parmenides, and inherited from his teaching by every system of philosophy in turn. Yet there is no doubt that Stoic morality was considerably strengthened and steadied by the support it found in conceptions derived from a different order of speculations; so much so that at last it grew to conscious independence of that support.

Marcus Aurelius, a constant student of Lucretius, seems to have had occasional misgivings with respect to the certainty of his own creed; but they never extended to his practical beliefs. He was determined that, whatever might be the origin of this world, his relation to it should be still the same. "Though things be purposeless, act not thou without a purpose." "If the universe is an ungoverned chaos, be content that in that wild torrent thou hast a governing reason within thyself."\*

There seems, then, good reason for believing that the law of

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\* *Comm.* IX. 28, xii. 14. A modern disciple of Aurelius has expressed himself to the same purpose in slightly different language:—

"Long fed on boundless hopes, O race of man,  
How angrily thou spurn'st all simpler fare!  
'Christ,' some one says, 'was human as we are.  
No judge eyes us from heaven our sin to scan;  
We live no more, when we have done our span.'  
'Well, then, for Christ,' thou answerest, 'who can care?  
From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear?  
Live we, like brutes, our life without a plan!'

duty, after being divorced from mythology, and seriously compromised by its association, even among the Stoics themselves, with our egoistic instincts, gained an entirely new authority when placed, at least in appearance, under the sanction of a power whose commands did not even admit of being disobeyed. And the question spontaneously presents itself whether we, after getting rid of the old errors and confusions, may profitably employ the same method in defence of the same convictions, whether the ancient alliance between fact and right can be reorganized on a basis of scientific proof.

A great reformer of the last generation, finding that the idea of Nature was constantly put forward to thwart his most cherished schemes, prepared a mine for its destruction which was only exploded after his death. Seldom has so powerful a charge of logical dynamite been collected within so small a space as in Mill's famous Essay on Nature. But the immediate effect was less than might have been anticipated, because the attack was supposed to be directed against religion, whereas it was only aimed at an abstract metaphysical dogma, not necessarily connected with any theological beliefs, and held by many who have discarded all such beliefs. A stronger impression was perhaps produced by the nearly simultaneous declaration of Sir W. Gull—in reference to the supposed *vis medicatrix natureæ*—that, in cases of disease, “what Nature wants is to put the man in his coffin.” The new school of political economists have also done much to show that legislative interference with the “natural laws” of wealth need by no means be so generally mischievous as was once supposed. And the doctrine of Evolution, besides breaking down the old distinctions between Nature and Man, has represented the former as essentially variable, and therefore, to that extent, incapable of affording a fixed standard for moral action. It is, however, from this school that a new attempt to rehabilitate the old physical ethics has lately proceeded. The object of Mr. Herbert Spencer's *Data of Ethics* is, among other points, to prove that a true morality represents the ultimate stage of evolution, and reproduces in social life that permanent equilibration towards which every form of evolution constantly tends. And Mr. Spencer also shows how evolution is bringing about a state of things in which the self-regarding shall be finally

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So answerest thou ; but why not rather say :  
 ‘Hath man no second life ?—*Pitch this one high !*  
 Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see ?  
*More strictly, then, the inward judge obey !*  
 Was Christ a man like us ?—*Ah ! let us try*  
*If we then, too, can be such men as he !’*”

*The Better Part*, by Mr. Matthew Arnold. The italics are in the original.

harmonized with the social impulses. Now, it will be readily admitted that morality is a product of evolution in this sense that it is a gradual formation, that it is the product of many converging conditions, and that it progresses according to a certain method. But that the same method is observed through all orders of evolution seems less evident. For instance, in the formation, first of the solar system, and then of the earth's crust, there is a continual loss of force, while in the development of organic life there is as continual a gain; and on arriving at subjective phenomena we are met by facts which, in the present state of our knowledge, cannot advantageously be expressed in terms of force and matter at all. Even if we do not agree with George Sand in thinking that self-sacrifice is the only virtue, we must admit that the possibility, at least, of its being sometimes demanded is inseparable from the idea of duty; and without consciousness self-sacrifice cannot be conceived; which is equivalent to saying that it involves other than mechanical notions. Thus we are confronted by the standing difficulty of all evolutionary theories, and on a point where that difficulty is peculiarly sensible. Nor is this an objection to be got rid of by the argument that it applies to all philosophical systems alike. To an idealist, the dependence of morality on consciousness is a practical confirmation of his professed principles. Holding that the universal forms of experience are the conditions under which an object is apprehended, rather than modifications imposed by an unknowable object on an unknowable subject, and that these forms are common to all intelligent beings, he holds also that the perception of duty is the widening of our individual selves into that universal self which is the subjective side of all experience.

Again, whatever harmony evolution may introduce into our conceptions, whatever hopes it may encourage with regard to the future of our race, one does not see precisely what sanction it gives to morality at present—that is to say, how it makes self-sacrifice easier than before. Because certain forces have been unconsciously working towards a certain end through ages past, why should I consciously work towards the same end? If the perfection of humanity is predetermined, my conduct cannot prevent its consummation; if it in any way depends on me, the question returns, why should my particular interests be sacrificed to it? The man who does not already love his contemporaries whom he has seen is unlikely to love them the more for the sake of a remote posterity whom he will never see at all. Finally, it must be remembered that evolution is only half the cosmic process; it is accompanied at every stage by partial dissolution, to which in the long run it must entirely give way; and if, as Mr.

Spencer observes, evolution is the more interesting of the two,\* this preference is itself due to the lifeward tendency of our thoughts; in other words, to those moral sentiments which it is sought to base on what, abstractedly considered, has all along been a creation of their own.

The idea of Nature, or of the universe, or of human history, as a whole—but for its evil associations with fanaticism and superstition, we should gladly say the belief in God—is one the ethical value of which can be more easily felt than analysed. We do not agree with the most brilliant of the English Positivists in restricting its influence to the æsthetic emotions. The elevating influence of these should be duly recognized, but the place due to more severely intellectual pursuits in moral training is greater far. Whatever studies tend to withdraw us from the petty circle of our personal interests and pleasures are indirectly favourable to the preponderance of social over selfish impulses; and the service thus rendered is amply repaid, since these very studies necessitate for their continuance a large expenditure of moral energy. It might even be contended that the influence of speculation on practice is determined by the previous influence of practice on speculation. Physical laws act as an armature to the law of duty, extending and perpetuating its grasp on the minds of men; but it was through the magnetism of duty that their confused currents were first drawn into parallelism and harmony with its attraction. Yet those who base morality on religion, or give faith precedence over works, have discerned with a sure, though dim, instinct the dependence of noble and far-sighted action on some paramount intellectual initiative and control; in other words, the highest ethical ideals are conditioned by the highest philosophical generalizations. And what was once a creative, still continues to work as an educating force. Our aspirations towards agreement with ourselves and with humanity as a whole are strengthened by the contemplation of that supreme unity, which, even if it be but the glorified reflection of our individual or generic identity, still remains the idea in and through which those lesser unities were first completely realized—the idea which has originated all man's most fruitful faiths, and will at last absorb them all. Meanwhile our highest devotion can hardly find more fitting utterance than in the prayer which once rose to a Stoic's lips:—

“ But Jove all-bounteous ! who in clouds  
 enwrap the lightning wieldest ;  
 May'st Thou from baneful Ignorance  
 the race of men deliver !

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\* *First Principles*, § 177.