

# The Stoics

Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium (334–262), but was developed significantly by later philosophers, most notably Chrysippus of Soli (279–206) whose achievements (especially in logic) were remarkable. In logic, the Stoics offered a sophisticated propositional system. In ethics, they argued that emotions were the result of false beliefs, that virtue was sufficient for happiness, and that the wise and virtuous person thereby had nothing to fear. In physics, the Stoics put forward a complex physicalist view according to which everything that existed or had causal power was corporeal (i.e. had three dimensions, extension, and resistance). The school continued to develop and would influence a number of Roman thinkers, including Seneca (who was heavily influenced by Stoic ideas). Later works, by Stoics such as Epictetus (55–135) and the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180) give an idea of how later thinkers attempted to put the Stoic life into practice. Unfortunately, the great works of Chrysippus survive only in highly fragmented form. Below are some fragments showcasing Stoic thinking about how to reconcile freedom and determinism. Translations are adapted from B. Inwood & L. Gerson, *The Stoics Reader* (Hackett, 2008) and A. A. Long & D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (CUP, 1987).

## Virtue and Value

'Virtue is a consistent character, choiceworthy for its own sake and not from fear or hope or anything external. Happiness consists in virtue since virtue is a soul which has been fashioned to achieve consistency in the whole of life' (D.L. 7.89 = LS 61A).

'Viciousness is a tenor of character which is inconsistent in the whole of life and out of harmony with itself (Cicero *Tusc. Disp.* 4.29).

'They [the Stoics] say that some existing things are good, others are bad, and others are neither of these. The virtues — prudence, justice, courage, moderation, and the rest — are good. The opposites of these — imprudence, injustice, and the others — are bad. Everything which neither does benefit nor harms is neither of these. For instance, life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, reputation, noble birth, and their opposites, death, disease, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, low repute, ignoble birth and the like.... For these things are not good but indifferents of the species 'preferred'. For just as heating, not chilling, is the peculiar characteristic of what is hot, so too benefitting, not harming, is the peculiar characteristic of what is good. But wealth and health no more do benefit than they harm. Therefore wealth and health are not something good. Furthermore, they say: that which can be used well and badly is not something good. But wealth and health can be used well and badly. Therefore wealth and health are not something good' (D.L. 7.101–3 = LS 58A)

'All things in accordance with nature have value and all things contrary to nature have disvalue. Value has three senses: a thing's contribution and merit *per se*, the expert's appraisal, and thirdly, what Antipater calls 'selective' (*axia eklektikē*):<sup>1</sup> according to this, when circumstances permit, we choose these particular things instead of those, for instance health instead of disease, life instead of death, wealth instead of poverty. Disvalue, they say, also has three senses analogous to these' (Stobaeus 2.83.10–84.2 = LS 58 D).

## Emotions

Chrysippus completely departs from the doctrine of the ancients, defining distress as ‘a fresh opinion that something bad is present’ (Galen *On Hippocrates’ and Plato’s Doctrines* 4.2.1–2 = LS 65D).

Distress is an irrational contraction, or a fresh opinion that something bad is present, at which people think it right to be contracted/depressed. Fear is an irrational shrinking or avoidance of an expected danger. Appetite is an irrational stretching or pursuit of an expected good. Pleasure is an irrational swelling, or a fresh opinion that something good is present, at which people think it right to be swollen/elated’ (Andronicus *On Passions* 1 = LS 65 B).

‘They [the Stoics] say that passion is impulse which is excessive and disobedient to the dictates of reason, or a movement of soul which is irrational and contrary to nature; and that all passions belong to the soul’s commanding-faculty. Therefore, every fluttering is also a passion, and likewise, every passion is a fluttering... The generically primary ones are these four: appetite/desire, fear, distress/pain, pleasure. Appetite and fear come first, the former in relation to what appears good, and the latter in relation to what appears bad. Pleasure and distress result from these: pleasure, whenever we get the objects of our appetite or avoid the objects of our fear; distress, whenever we fail to get the objects of our appetite or experience the objects of our fear. In the case of all the soul’s passions, when they [the Stoics] call them ‘opinions’, ‘opinion’ is used instead of ‘weak supposition’, and ‘fresh’ instead of ‘the stimulus of an irrational contraction or swelling’... (Stobaeus 2.88.8–89.3 = LS [Long & Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*] 65A, C).

‘They [the Stoics] say that there are three good feelings: joy, watchfulness/caution, and wishing/volition (). Joy, they say, is the opposite of pleasure, consisting in well-reasoned swelling (elation); and watchfulness is the opposite of fear, consisting in well-reasoned shrinking. For the wise man will not be afraid at all, but he will be watchful. They say that wishing is the opposite of appetite, consisting in well-reasoned stretching [desire]. Just as certain passions fall under the primary ones, so too with the primary good feelings. Under wishing: kindness, generosity, warmth, affection. under watchfulness: respect, cleanliness. Under joy: delight, sociability, cheerfulness’ (D.L. 7.116 = LS 65F).

‘Only the Sage can love anyone. Did you never see puppies fawning over one another, playing and tumbling together so that you say “what could be more affectionate?” Do you want to get a good sense of their affection? Just throw a hunk of meat in the middle and you’ll find out. You and your son — just throw a chunk of property between you, or a pretty girl you both love, and you’ll find out how quickly he is willing to see you in your grave, and you’re praying for him to die’ (Epictetus 2.22.3–11).

## Psychology and Fittingness

As for the assertion made by some people that pleasure is the object to which the first impulse of animals is directed, it is shown by the Stoics to be false. For pleasure, if it is really felt, they declare to be a by-product, which never comes until nature by itself has sought and found the means suitable to the animal's existence or constitution; it is an aftermath comparable to the condition of animals thriving and plants in full bloom (D.L. 7.85–6).

The reason,' he replies, 'that animals move their parts appropriately is because if they moved them otherwise they would feel pain. So, as you yourselves say, they are compelled and it is fear rather than their wish which puts them on the right path.' But that is false. For things which are driven by necessity move slowly and what moves on its own has a certain nimbleness. Anyway, animals are so far from being driven to this action by pain that they strive for their natural motion even when pain impedes them. (8) Thus a baby who practices standing and getting used to moving around falls as soon as it begins to tax its strength. Over and over again it cries as it gets up again until despite the pain it works its way through to what nature asks of it. When certain animals which have a hard shell get turned upside down they twist themselves around and wave their legs and wrench them until they are again in an upright position (Seneca *Ep.* 121.7–8).

## Logic and Language

'There must not be such a thing in the world as a heap of grain, a mass or satiety, neither a mountain nor strong love, nor a row, nor strong wind, nor city, nor anything else which is known from its name and idea to have a measure of extent or multitude [...] do you think that a single grain of wheat is a heap? Thereupon you say No. Then I say: what do you say about 2 grains? For it is my purpose to ask you questions in succession, and if you do not admit that 2 grains are a heap then I shall ask you about 3 grains [...] for my part I shall not desist for masking you without ceasing if you admit that the quantity of each single one of these numbers constitutes a heap. it is not possible for you to say with regard to any one of these numbers that it constitutes a heap. I shall proceed to explain the cause of this. If you do not say with respect to any of the numbers, as in the case of the 100 grains of what for example, that it now constitutes a heap, but afterwards when a grain is added to it, you say that a heap has now been formed, consequently this quantity of grain becomes a heap by the addition of the single grain of wheat, and if the grain is taken away the heap is eliminated. And I know of nothing worse and more absurd than that the being and not-being of a heap is determined by a grain of corn (Galen *On Medical Experience* 16.1–17.3 = LS 37E).

Nature has permitted us no knowledge of limits such as would enable us to determine, in any case, how far to go. Nor is it so just with a heap of corn, form which the name (Sorites) is derived: there is no matter whatever concerning which, if questioned by gradual progression, we can tell how much must be added or subtracted before we can give a definite answer — rich or poor, famous or unknown, many or few, large or small, long or short, broad or narrow... (Cic. *Acad.* 2.92–6 = LS 37 H).

## Fate and Free Will

\*\*\*See also Cicero *De Fato* (especially 28–43)

But it is conceded that all things which happen by fate occur in a certain order and sequence and have an element of logical consequence in them. . . . Anyway, they say that fate is a string of causes (Alexander of Aphrodisias *De Anima Mantissa* CIAG Supp. 2.1, pp. 185.1–5)

Concerning [pairs of] contradictories that bear on the future, the Stoics accept the same principle as they do for other statements. For what is the case for [pairs of] contradictories concerning things present and past is also the case, they say, for future contradictories themselves and their parts. For either ‘it will be’ or ‘it will not be’ is true if they must be either true or false. For according to them, future events are determined. And if there will be a sea battle tomorrow, it is true to say that there will be. But if there will not be a sea battle, it is false to say that there will be. Either there will or there will not be a battle; therefore, each statement is either true or false (Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 13a37 CIAG vol. 8, pp. 406.34–407.5).

(547e) According to the opposing argument, the first and most important point would seem to be that nothing happens uncaused but according to prior causes. Second, that this cosmos, which is itself coordinated and sympathetic with itself, is administered by nature. Third, which would seem rather to be additional evidence, is the fact that divination is in good repute with all human beings because it really does exist, with divine cooperation, and second, that wise men are contented in the face of events, (547f ) since all of them occur according to [divine] allotment; and third, the much discussed point, that every proposition is true or false (Pseudo-Plutarch *On Fate* 574e–f ).

(1045b) Some philosophers think that they can free our impulses from being necessitated by external causes if they posit in the leading part of the soul an adventitious motion which becomes particularly evident in cases where things are indistinguishable. For when two things are equivalent and equal in importance and it is necessary to take one of the two, there being no cause which leads us to one or the other since they do not differ from each other, this adventitious cause generates a swerve in the soul all by itself (1045c) and so cuts through the stalemate. Chrysippus argues against them, on the grounds that they are doing violence to nature by [positing] something which is uncaused, and frequently cites dice and scales and many other things which cannot fall or settle in different ways at different times without some cause or difference, either something which is entirely in the things themselves or something which occurs in the external circumstances. For he claims that the uncaused and the automatic are totally non-existent and that in these adventitious [causes] which some philosophers make up and talk about there are hidden certain non-evident causes, and they draw our impulse in one direction or another without our perceiving it [...] (1049f ) But nevertheless one will have not just one or two occasions but thousands to address to Chrysippus this remark, which is now praised, “You have said the easiest thing in blaming the gods.” For first, in book 1 of his *Physics* he compares the eternity of motion to a posset, which spins and agitates the various things which come to pass in various ways. Then he says, (1050a) “Since the organization of the universe proceeds thus, it is necessary for us to be such as we are, in accordance with it, whether we are ill or lame, contrary to our individual nature, or whether we have turned out to be grammarians or musicians.” And again, a bit further on, “And on this principle we will say similar things about our virtue and our vice and, in

general, about our skills or lack of them, as I have said.” And a bit further on, removing all ambiguity, “For it is impossible for any of the parts, even the smallest one, to turn out differently than according to the common nature and its reason.” That the common nature and the (1050b) common reason of nature are fate and providence and Zeus, even the Antipodeans know this; for the Stoics prattle on about this everywhere and he says that Homer correctly said, “And Zeus’ plan was being fulfilled,” referring it to fate and the nature of the universe according to which everything is ordered. How, then, can it be the case at one and the same time that god is not partly responsible for anything shameful and that not even the smallest thing can occur otherwise than according to the common nature and its reason? For in everything that occurs surely there are some shameful things too. And yet, Epicurus twists this way and that and exercises his ingenuity (1050c) in his attempt to free and liberate voluntary action from the eternal motion, so as not to leave vice free of blame, whereas Chrysippus gives vice blatant freedom to say not only that it is necessary and according to fate but even that it occurs according to god’s reason and the best nature.

(Plutarch *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1045b–1050c [selections]).

## Stoics Puzzles concerning Identity

The argument about growth is an old one, for, as Chrysippus says, it is propounded by Epicharmus. Yet when the Academics hold that the puzzle is not altogether easy or straightforward, these people [sc. The Stoics] have laid many charges against them and denounced them as destroying our and contravening our conceptions. Yet they themselves not only fail to save our conceptions but also pervert sense-perception. (2) For the argument is a simple one and these people grant its premises: all particular substances are in flux and motion, releasing some things from themselves and receiving others which reach them from elsewhere; the numbers or quantities which these are added to or subtracted from do not remain the same but become different as the aforementioned arrivals and departures cause the substance to be transformed; the prevailing convention is wrong to call these processes of growth and decay: rather they should be called generation and destruction, since they transform the thing from what it is into something else, whereas growing and diminishing are affections of a body which serves as substrate and persists (Plut. *Comm. not.* 1083a7–c2 = LS 28 A1–2).

Each of us is a pair of twins, two-natured and double — not in the way the poets think of the Molionidae, joined in some parts and separated in others, but two bodies sharing the same colour, the same shape, the same weight, and the same place, <yet nevertheless double even though> no man previously has seen them. (4) But these men alone [i.e. the Stoics] have seen this combination, this duplicity, this ambiguity, that each of us is two substrates (*ὑποκείμενα*), the one substance (*οὐσία*), the other <[a peculiarly qualified individual]>; and that the one is always in flux and motion, neither growing nor diminishing nor remaining as it is at all, while the other remains and grows and diminishes and undergoes all the opposite affections to the first one — although it is its natural partner, combined and fused with it, and nowhere providing sense-perception with a grasp of the difference [...] (5) Yet this difference and distinction in us no one has marked off or discriminated, nor have we perceived that we are born double, always in flux with one part of ourselves, while remaining the same from birth to death with the other (Plut. *Comm. not.* 1083c5–e6 = LS 28 A3–5).

... since the duality which they say belongs to each body is differentiated in a way unrecognizable by sense-perception. For if a peculiarly qualified thing like Plato is a body, and Plato's substance is a body, and there is no apparent difference between these in shape, colour, size and appearance, but both have equal weight and the same place, by what definition and mark shall we distinguish them and say that now we are grasping Plato himself, now the substance of Plato? For if there is some difference, let it be stated and demonstrated (Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 3008 = LS 28 C).

(1) Posidonius says that there are four kinds of destruction and generation from the existent to the existent. (2) For they recognized that there was no such thing as generation from, or destruction into, the non-existent, as we said before. (3) But of change into the existent he says that one kind is by division, one by alteration, one by fusion, and one an out-and-out change which they call 'by resolution'. (4) Of these, that by alteration belongs to the substance, while the other three belong to the so-called 'qualified individuals' which come to occupy the substance. And it is along these lines that processes of generation come about. (5) The substance neither grows nor diminishes through addition or subtraction, but simply alters, just as in the case of numbers and measures. (6) And it follows that it is in the case of peculiarly qualified individuals, such as Dion and Theon, that processes of both growth and diminution arise. (7) Therefore each individual's quality actually remains from its generation to its destruction, in the case of destructible animals, plants and the like. (8) In the case of peculiarly qualified individuals they say that there are two receptive parts, the one pertaining to the presence of the substance, the

other to that of the qualified individual. For it is the latter, as we have said several times, that is receptive of growth and diminution.

(9) The peculiarly qualified thing is not the same as its constituent substance. Nor on the other hand is it different from it, but is merely not the same, in that the substance both is a part of it and occupies the same place as it, whereas whatever is called different from something must be separated from it and not be thought of as even part of it. (10) That what corresponds to the peculiarly qualified is not the same as what corresponds to the substance, Mnesarchus says is clear. For things which are the same should have the same properties. (11) For if, for the sake of argument, someone were to mould a horse, squash it, then make a dog, it would be reasonable for us on seeing this to say that this previously did not exist but now does exist. So what is said when it comes to the qualified thing is different. (12) So too when it comes to substance, to hold universally that we are the same as our substances seems unconvincing. For it often comes about that the substance exists before something's generation, before Socrates' generation, say, when Socrates does not yet exist, and that after Socrates' destruction the substance remains although he no longer exists (Stob. 1.177.21–179.17 = LS 28 D = Posid. fr. 96).

(1) One can hear them [the Stoics], and find them in many works, disagreeing with the Academics and crying that they confuse everything with their 'indiscernibilities' and force a single qualified individual to occupy two substances. (2) And yet there is nobody who does not think this and consider that on the contrary it is extraordinary and paradoxical if one dove has not, in the whole of time, been indiscernible from another dove, and bee from bee, wheat-grain from wheat-grain, or fig from proverbial fig. (3) What really is contrary to our conception is these people's assertions and pretences to the effect that *two* peculiarly qualified individuals occupy *one* substance, and that the same substance which houses one peculiarly qualified individual, on the arrival of a second, receives and keeps both alike. For, if two, there will be three, four, five, and untold numbers, belonging to a single substance; and I do not mean in different parts, but all the infinite number of them belonging alike to the whole. (4) At least, Chrysippus says that Zeus and the world are like a man and providence like his soul, so that when the conflagration comes Zeus, being the only imperishable one among the gods, withdraws into providence, whereupon both, having come together, continue to occupy single substance of aether (Plut. *Comm. Not.* 1077c–e = LS 28 O).

(1) Chrysippus, the most distinguished member of their school, in his work *On the Growing Argument*, creates a freak of the following kind. (2) Having first established that it is impossible for two peculiarly qualified individuals to occupy the same substance jointly, (3) he says: 'For the sake of argument, let one individual be thought of as whole-limbed, the other as minus one foot. Let the whole-limbed one be called Dion, the defective one Theon. Then let one of Dion's feet be amputated'. (4) The question arises which one of them has perished, and his claim is that Theon is the stronger candidate. (5) These are the words of a paradox-monger rather than of a speaker of truth. For how can it be that Theon, who has had no part chopped off, has been snatched away, while Dion, whose foot has been amputated has not perished? (6) 'Necessarily', says Chrysippus. 'For Dion, the one whose foot has been cut off, has collapsed into the defective substance of Theon. And two peculiarly qualified individuals cannot occupy the same substrate. Therefore it is necessary that Dion remains while Theon has perished' (Philo *Aet. mundi* 48–51 = LS 28 P).