

STOIC NOTES

THE STOICS AND OTHER CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHERS
AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION
FOR HAPPINESS
AND A BETTER WORLD

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ATALANTA
Utrecht
2014

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FOREWORD

During the writing of our book *Hoe komen kringen in het water* (How do ripples appear in water) Weia Reinboud and I came upon a number of ideas that coincide with important conceptions of the Stoics, in particular the oldest school of Stoicism, the Early Stoa.¹ We did this quite separately from the ideas of Zeno, Chrysippus and other Stoics. These include ideas such as determinism, ‘everything is material’, and the idea that feelings are conclusions from earlier thought processes. We were able to ‘glue on’ these Stoic ideas, as it were, and that is what we did, in a few paragraphs. In the same book, we worked out an ethical theory (without calling it an ethical theory) which consisted of: doing what is ‘the best for the earth’. In hindsight, we could have ‘glued on’ part of the Early Stoa ethics at this point—but I only noticed this later. As well as the Stoics, other Ancient Greeks such as Democritus, Epicurus, Diogenes the Cynic and the Sceptics were sources of recognition and inspiration while writing ‘Kringen’.

After publishing *Hoe komen kringen in het water* and the children’s version of the same story, *Het beste voor de aarde* (The best for the Earth),² these philosophers continued to fascinate and challenge me. Their ideas seemed to me to be worthy of more than a few paragraphs. I decided that one day I would write a book about them. That book is now here ... at last.

I have worked on these ‘Stoic Notes’ for more than 10 years, with many interruptions. Amongst all my activities, reading and writing about the Stoa was always on my list of jobs, often at the top of it, at some times more in the background, but during all these years ‘that

accursed Stoic book’ was my most valuable project. Too valuable to finish off quickly in between other things.

There were many changes in the world and in my own life –but my interest in Stoicism remained. I have personally derived a lot of benefit from a number of Stoic ideas, and continue to do so. I hope and suspect that more people would benefit greatly from these ideas.

Although the word ‘stoic’ is often used, for most people nowadays the philosophy of the Stoics is unknown—particularly that of the Early Stoa, which differs in a number of respects from that of the better-known Roman Stoics. I hope that with this book I can help to make the earlier version of Stoicism better known so that it can once again be seen as a rich source of inspiration for thinking, and for everyday life, as it was for centuries in ancient times. Stoic philosophy can provide inspiration not just for our personal lives, but also for our political perspectives on society and the world. We do not need to embrace the entire Stoic philosophy in order to take a serious look at a number of ideas.

I dedicate this book to my mother, who stimulated me to write from an early age, and my father, with his great interest for philosophy, in whose bookcase long ago I found a copy of *Uilen van Athene*.³

I would like to warmly thank all the people who have encouraged me by asking me year after year how far I was getting on with writing my book, and when it would finally be ready. In particular, I would like to thank the people who actively helped me formulate my thoughts, including Tienke de Groot and Metha de Vries, who provided several useful hints. Special thanks to Miriam van Reijen; I have obtained a lot from her insights and philosophical comments.

Finally, I must not forget to mention my friend Weia Reinboud, who read at least three earlier versions of this book and provided comments, who filled in many details, who continued to encourage me with her enthusiasm, and to whom I often cried with despair about my ‘Stoic book’ in an old-fashioned and un-Stoic way.

I

INTRODUCTION

*They hold the emotions to be judgments.*¹

The notorious year of 1968 and the turbulent years that followed it were times that I consciously took part in, and so I belong to the so-called protest generation. I find that funny, although of course this label is undeserved and says nothing about my contribution to the protests. The majority of that generation, after all, either did not protest at all, or only about minor issues. They wanted a higher student grant, or played the radio very loudly as a protest against complacency; they bleached their jeans and refused to comb their hair. But some went further and wanted a totally different society.

Many people are full of courage and enthusiasm when they are young; they are full of expectations as they begin to strive for their ideals. They are optimistic and think they will soon be able to change the world. If this does not succeed after demonstrations and suchlike, discouragement often follows.

I too have always extensively criticised ‘the existing order’ and protested against a wide variety of things, and I have always dreamed of a different, better society. My circle of friends consisted largely of people who also criticised and protested and dreamed of and strove for a better society. Gradually, however, this group became smaller, while I continued to seek alternatives and became more consistent in my views about the state of the world.

Is it possible to observe the state of the world and still be happy?

Is it possible to work for change without becoming discouraged? I think that ideas from the Early Stoa can help to prevent a crippling disillusionment setting in.

*

One of their ideas is about the phenomenon of anger. Left-wing movements, socialists, communists, anarchists, anti-globalists, utopians, feminists, anti-racists and animal rights activists tend to think mostly in terms of conflict, and their motivating force is mostly a form of anger, namely outrage at inequality, i.e. over the possessiveness and egoism of a part of humanity.

Radicalism increases in line with anger, or so it sometimes seems, but anger is not necessary for a movement aiming for a better world; indeed, it is more likely to be damaging. With help from some Early Stoa ideas, I hope to show that social change activity can be done well, indeed much better and more enjoyably, without this anger.

*

Here is an example. Many years ago, in the time that I began to read about Stoicism, there was a violent meeting between radical left-wing activists and a group of extreme right-wing people. It is good that alert people warned (and still warn) about extreme right-wing movements and other bad developments, but it ended up with a lot of damage being caused by left-wing people, which the violent types considered ‘a good thing’. Others became furious about this, which in turn provoked yet more outrage. Then it struck me: what an improvement it would be if the anger could be completely ‘abolished’! Anger—from mild irritation to blind hatred—clearly ends up increasing misery, after all.

Can a Stoic form of social protest exist: one that is sober, well thought through and not based on anger? Is a Stoic style of social revolution possible? In the last chapters, I will return to this question.

*

This book is both about personal happiness and happiness in a broader sense: building a better world. Whether these two goals are connected, and if so in what manner, is covered in the last chapters

of this book. In the meantime...

In the 1970s the slogan 'We demand happiness' appeared from time to time, painted on walls or written on bus shelters. I considered it one of the better slogans, because this phrase expressed the idea that you can do more than pursuing material interests and opposing a wide range of things. However, there is no 'right to happiness'. Happiness cannot come from outside—with the 'right' ingredients (i.e. with specific knowledge) you can create it yourself.

*

Feelings are a consequence of earlier thoughts—that is one of the inspiring insights of the Stoics. This Stoic view on feelings and thoughts forms one of the most important themes of this book. Feeling and thinking seem to be two different ways of reacting, each with its own conclusion for action. The Stoics, however, saw feelings as judgments, therefore as thoughts or consequences of thoughts. If you look at it in these terms, 'feeling' and 'thinking' are two sides of the same coin.

People who 'hide their feelings' consider just one side of the coin and pay no attention to the thoughts lying behind the 'hidden' feelings. Those who 'rely only on their feelings' only consider the other side of the coin and are not aware that, just like others (the more 'rational' types) they are in fact following specific ideas. Because of this, a lot of possibilities for improving personal lives as well as political life are lost.

*

It is not through misfortune or calamity that people are prevented from doing what they need to do, but by their thoughts about it. That is one of the kernels of wisdom that follows from this Stoic view on feeling and thinking. The Early Stoics found, incidentally, that they themselves were far from achieving Stoic wisdom. The only person they considered to have approached the Stoic ideal was Socrates, who they considered one of their predecessors.

*

Another consequence of this view of feeling and thinking as two

sides of the same coin is that someone can never be 'too rational'. This would be like saying that reasoning is too logical or that a sum is too accurate. Being cold or distant is not rational, because if you are really rational then you use not just your intellect but also your 'feelings', or more precisely: you process in a critical manner the ideas lying behind your 'feelings'.

Chapter IV includes more about feelings and thinking in the Early Stoa, and Chapter XI includes a practical elaboration of these ideas.

*

I have tried to maintain a clear use of words for concepts such as emotions and feelings; mostly I use the word 'feelings', and I see 'strong feelings' as a synonym for 'passions'. When I mention 'strong feelings', in most cases I mean nagging feelings—this is not always mentioned in order to avoid long-windedness. I prefer not to use the word 'emotions', but it appears here and there in quotations, where it again means 'strong feelings'. I also use the words 'affectations' or 'affectations' for all feelings and moods, whether strong or not.

*

Regarding word use: the word 'stoic' is often used in the sense of 'showing fortitude', 'unyielding', 'without flinching' or even 'cold-blooded', 'indifferent', 'without feelings' or 'hard'. That is not entirely unfounded. Stories of cold-bloodedness can be found in the whole of Ancient Greek culture. It was told that Anaxagoras (ca. 500-428 BC), one of the teachers of Socrates, reacted to the news of the death of his sons as follows: 'From the time they were born, I knew they were mortals.'

Many philosophers were even calm about their own approaching death. Take Socrates and Anaxagoras again. Both were sentenced to death. Socrates had plenty of chance to escape, but he did not do so. Anaxagoras was found not guilty by Pericles, but then committed suicide.

Similar extreme ideals are found in India. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* it appears that a 'powerful individual' is indifferent to insults and

honours, heat and cold, pleasure and pain. 'Fortitude' is probably as old as humanity.

*

Instead, as others have already done, I would like to advocate a more subtle interpretation of Stoicism. Fortitude often comes down to getting over something, 'pulling yourself together', acting tough and indifferent, hiding feelings—all of that is in my opinion far from Stoic. Stubbornness, indifference, toughness, honour, pride and fear of losing face all play a role in this—feelings and attitudes that are at odds with Stoicism as described by Zeno and other Early Stoics.

It is often thought that the Stoics wanted to banish all feelings, but that too appears not to be the case. In Chapter IV, there is more about feelings and thoughts in the Early Stoa.

*

There are few original Early Stoa texts remaining. What there is comes mostly from quotations from their opponents—you may well wonder how reliable they are. How much, then, remains of the original scope via these possibly inaccurate quotations? And that is without considering the issues of translation and interpretation. 'Living without passions' sounds somewhat different to 'living without feelings'; 'appropriate action' sounds very different to 'duties'.

*

Two ideas from Stoic ethics will play a key role in this book. Firstly, there is the already-mentioned Stoic idea that feelings are judgments, with the corollary that passions are based on errors of thought. Secondly, there is the Stoic idea that happiness and 'doing good work' go together.

I still think daily about these notions. Say, as an example, I get agitated about a car which drives close to me through a big puddle. Sure enough, my feelings stem from particular judgments. The driver is an egocentric person who does not realise that by driving like this a cyclist can get wet or covered in mud. Or maybe it is someone

who does realise it but could not care less. It could even be someone who does it on purpose. All the same, none of these three cases gives me a reason to be agitated. What I can do is think about how the world could be changed so that this sort of thing does not happen anymore, and how I could devote myself to this cause. But is it within my abilities to ensure that the world changes like this immediately, here and now? No, that is something for the long term, and it will only succeed if lots and lots of people want the same thing. But maybe I can say or do something to make clear to the 'drencher' what he or she has caused. In any case what I can do is to try not to make a fool of myself because of this incident. I can avoid this by observing that it is simply the case, in this point in time, that many people drive cars, many of these people are in a hurry, many of these people do not pay attention to whether the car is spraying water, and some of these people feel a need to behave in an annoying manner and intentionally frustrate others. Getting angry or upset or feeling wronged does not help at all; by doing this, you only frustrate yourself and sometimes others too. Briefly getting wet because of a couple of large splashes is of course nothing compared to the damage caused to nature by vehicles' exhaust fumes. Should I get angry about this then? No, the same argument applies here too.

*

It is surprising that something as interesting as this was thought of so long ago, but the fact that an idea was thought of long ago or in a faraway place does not by itself make an idea more valuable. It seems good to me to distinguish between historical interest ('interesting that they said that in those days') and interest in the ideas themselves ('how inspiring!'). Although I enjoy reading books about the first case, this book is primarily about the second case. Of course, there is sometimes a mixture of the two, but in any case it is not for me to give a complete picture of Stoic philosophy. For a complete overview of Stoic philosophy, other books are available.²

*

I do not want to heap praise on the ancient philosophers, because I have also learned a lot from more recent thinkers. However, it

remains the case that it was these ‘old guys’ who really got me thinking.

The Ancient Greek philosophers were genuine freethinkers. Their theories are often extreme, which makes them clear and challenging. Some ideas remain inspiring and useful in daily life, even nowadays.

*

It is sometimes said that it is not surprising that in the turbulent period after the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) different schools of philosophy sprang up, each in their own way seeking to attain peace of mind. To what extent there is a direct connection is difficult to establish, and for my ‘project’ it does not matter. I think that the world was a turbulent place in other times as well, and it is no less so today.

Important parts of the Stoics’ ideas have probably remained applicable right down the ages for people everywhere.

*

I did not just obtain inspiration from the Early (Greek) Stoa; the Cynics, the Epicureans and the Sceptics are also mentioned in this book. As of course are the Roman Stoics, far more of whose texts have fortunately been preserved. Around one and a half centuries before the first Stoics, there was incidentally already a philosopher, the atomist Democritus, who spread some ‘stoic-sounding’ ideas.

*All things occur as a result of inevitability. The purpose of action is rest, which is not identical with pleasure, as some have misinterpreted, but a state in which the soul progresses in calmness and strength, unperturbed by fear or superstition or any other emotion.*³

I have discovered many interesting things about Democritus. He is one of my favourites—although I know that the picture that I have of someone can be very different to how that person was in reality. Would I have liked him? And would I have liked Zeno, the founder of Stoicism? Would I have got on well with these gentlemen? For many modern thinkers, these are totally irrelevant questions. Not

for me. I enjoy thinking about this. It may well be that we would have soon been at loggerheads with each other. This could happen just because I am a woman and therefore in Democritus’ eyes less fit for philosophy, which would have made me furious. After which I could have gone to Zeno, who would have considered me quite unworthy as I was stupid enough to become furious. Phooey, what did they really imagine? Desperately, I would have sought out Diogenes the Cynic, who would have laughed in my face and made a hateful comment. No, do not be afraid that I might idealise these gentlemen. Even Hipparchia, one of the few ladies amongst the ancient philosophers about whom something is known, is not someone I would put on a pedestal.

Here, I am at a safe distance. The distance is great enough to proceed selectively and filter out the good, sensible and interesting ideas.

*

‘Do not be a slave to your feelings! Use your common sense, go your own way, and pursue what is good for yourself and others’.

No one can take that away from me.

Not even Zeus, according to Epictetus.⁴

II THE EARLY STOA

ZENO

The founder of the Stoic school is Zeno of Citium. (Zeno of Kition. Kition/Citium is now called Larnaca and is a city in Cyprus.) Zeno lived from approximately 334 BC to 262 BC. He came from a Phoenician, i.e. a Semitic background, and according to descriptions was dark-skinned. He obtained a Greek education from his father, who was apparently a rich merchant, and spoke extremely good Greek. On his twenty-first birthday, Zeno ended up in Athens. This must have been around 312 BC.

*

Centuries later (around 300 AD) Diogenes Laërtius wrote in his informative and entertaining book *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* of how Zeno came to be in Athens and decided to remain there: he was shipwrecked on a journey from Phoenicia to Peiraios (Piraeus) with a cargo of Tyrian purple dye. He also described how Zeno met Crates the Cynic: reading about Socrates in a bookshop (which sold scrolls), he asked enthusiastically where people like him could still be found;—just at that moment Crates walked past, and the bookshop owner said: ‘Follow that man’. He described how Zeno became a student of Crates because he ‘showed a strong inclination towards philosophy, although with too much innate modesty to adapt to the shamelessness of the Cynics’. It appeared that Zeno’s father, a rich merchant who often went to

Athens, had already brought back many books about Socrates for Zeno when he was a child. So it was not surprising that Zeno visited a bookshop immediately after he himself arrived in Athens.

*

In this way, Zeno became a student of Crates. Crates was part of the Cynic school (*Kunikoi*),¹ just as his self-opinionated partner, the philosopher Hipparchia² and the notorious Diogenes, who lived in a large ceramic jar. The first philosopher of the Cynic school was Antisthenes, one of the pupils of Socrates. *Kunikoi*/Cynics couldn’t care less about anything that smacked of status, decency and excess. Their way of life, focussing on frugality, autarchy and nonconformism, was very similar to what is nowadays called ‘individual anarchism’. They were very down-to-earth and wanted nothing to do with the Sophists’ bragging about knowledge, Plato’s search for the Essence, or Aristotle’s pursuit of moderation. (More about the Cynics can be found in Chapter X.) Zeno was for a long time a pupil of Crates. He had a lot of admiration for him and later wrote a book about him.

*

Zeno wrote many books. At a young age, while he was a pupil of Crates, he wrote (just like Plato, but very differently) a book with the name *Politeia* (The Republic), about the ideal city, a city of wise practitioners of philosophy, who needed no laws and lived in great friendship with each other.

In fact, *Politeia* is effectively an outline of the ideal society, in other words, a utopia. It is a utopia in the sense of ‘maybe not (entirely) achievable but nevertheless worth aiming towards’. There is a substantial difference between what was written in Zeno’s *Politeia* and the Stoic political philosophy as written in later times by Cicero, amongst others. At least, it appears to be so—as already noted, all that remains of it comes from quotations from other authors. The original *Politeia* of Zeno has been lost, just as with all his other works.

*

The young Zeno therefore began as a Cynic, but was more refined, cultural and theoretical than the other Cynics. His *Politeia* was in any case largely Cynic in approach, and by no means all of the ideas from it were adopted by later Stoics.

Ideas arising from the Cynics which Zeno did adopt included, for example, ideas about world citizenship: we are all citizens of one and the same notional city; borders are unnatural; origin, birth, class and sex are totally unimportant; there is no worldwide state but decisions are made by morally responsible people. There is just one community, humanity; and one country, the cosmos. All people are world citizens, *kosmopolitoi*. These ideas are explained further in Chapter VI (friendship and cosmopolitanism). Other ideas of Zeno and other representatives of the Early Stoa are described in Chapters III (nature), IV (feelings) and V (goodness and happiness). First of all, though, it is worth saying more about Zeno's *Politeia*.

*

Zeno's *Politeia* goes right against the established order. Zeno spoke out against money, temples, courts, laws, statues and schools. He was in favour of free love, and saw marriage as a dangerous institution because of jealousy and other possessive feelings; he believed bringing up and educating children should be done collectively, Zeno found ordinary upbringing worthless. A good person is worth more than a king; all good people are friends with each other. Sexual contact should take place on the basis of friendship, love and mutual agreement. Men and women would wear the same clothes, and no specific parts of the body needed to be kept covered.

*

In contrast to the ideals prevalent in Sparta and the ideals of Plato, Zeno's 'Ideal City' was not militaristic. Diogenes the Cynic had already spoken about the uselessness of weapons; Zeno and Chrysippus agreed with this. The only battle worth fighting, according to them, was the battle to achieve happiness and wisdom. Instead of pointlessly fighting, we would be better off living in agreement with nature, and living happily. And Crates said that the

people's 'knapsacks' contained no weapons but thyme, garlic, figs and bread. Therefore, they do not fight wars!

*

Zeno's *Politeia* was much shorter than that of Plato: he covered less subjects, and dealt with them much more simply. Simplicity is Zeno's recipe for goodness and harmony. Harmony is a key concept in Zeno's *Politeia*, and friendship is the key to well-being in the city. As a result, no laws are necessary, no strategic complications or military organisation, no need for an absolute ruler, not even a philosophical regulator ...

*

Freedom is understood primarily by Zeno (and other Stoics) as the power of independent/autonomous action. This includes moral freedom, the freedom to think and feel what you want; this is the freedom that everyone can grab for themselves in all situations. In a world of wise people where everything is organised on the basis of friendship, as Zeno outlined in his *Politeia*, there is also social freedom. Neither tyranny nor subjection occurs in such a world.

*

Who would live in such a city? For wise Stoics, living together peaceably would not be a problem: they are all concerned with *arete* (virtuousness) and with living well. They do their best. It is a society based on harmony. They do not need laws. For the wise, then... But, how do you become wise? These ideals would be utterly infeasible unless people drastically changed their ways of feeling, thinking and acting. In the Classical period, Zeno's *Politeia* was seen as incorrigibly utopian, for example, by Plutarch (ca. 50-125). Philodemus³ described it as an 'impossible hypotheses for nonexistent people!' Even the Stoics themselves admitted that it was ambitious: a community of good and wise people, yet such people are rarer than 'the Ethiopian phoenix'—a mythological creature.

*

Many Stoics from the Middle Stoa and the Late (Roman) Stoa did

not appreciate Zeno's Cynic ideas, neglecting his *Politeia* or dismissing it as a youthful work. One Athenodorus, a bookshop owner in Pergamon (who was later friends with Cato the Younger) even removed all the passages from Zeno's books which he did not like. Luckily he was discredited and the passages were replaced. A welcome bonus is that one Cassius, a Sceptic, quoted these passages in indignation, so that it is possible to trace to some extent what was in Zeno's *Politeia*.

*

Zeno's utopia is ambitious, but the basic principle that goodness (and therefore wisdom) can be learnt was maintained by later Stoics. The famous trio of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle also thought that way. Human 'evil', from that point of view (which I share), is actually 'only' a type of failure, and boils down to a lack of knowledge.

*

Frugality, practicality, ideas about equality of all people, the cosmopolitan attitude and the honesty of the Cynics were all correct according to Zeno. But apparently he eventually felt something was missing. In contrast to the Cynics, Zeno was not averse to theory; he wanted to underpin ethics by using logic and physics. He became a pupil of another philosopher, Stilpo of Megara, and regularly visited the *Akademeia* (Academy), the building where Plato's philosophy was taught, where he followed lessons of Polemon and Xenocrates. He also visited Theophrastus, the successor to Aristotle. (He could not have met Aristotle himself, as he was around 50 years older than Zeno and had already died before Zeno arrived in Athens.) However, Zeno did not like the great metaphysical theories of Plato and Aristotle. One day he started out on his own, resulting in the philosophy that we nowadays call 'Stoicism'.

*

Because as a 'foreigner' he was not allowed to own buildings or land, he gave his lectures walking back and forth in the *Stoa Poikilè*,⁴ a painted colonnade. According to Diogenes Laërtius, he also did this to 'stop it becoming a gathering place for idle people'. An

Athenian hangout from 300 BC! Whether he managed to inspire street kids or their older equivalents, I have no idea.

*

Some people suspect that Zeno was partly influenced by Asian thinkers. That is quite possible. Connections can indeed be made between Stoicism and Asian philosophies. Undoubtedly, people from different regions have always inspired and influenced each other. But at the same time it is entirely possible that people in different times and places in the world can arrive at the same line of reasoning.

*

Zeno clearly constructed his theories on epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and logic, partly under the influence of the thinkers already mentioned. His theory of nature relates back to that of Heraclitus (ca. 530-470) to a large extent. Zeno appears to have gone to work pragmatically, free of ties to others' ideas. In the initial phase of Stoicism there was plenty of space for criticism and controversy, both internal (such as the 'dropout' Aristo, described later) and with other schools of philosophy, for example with Arcesilaus from the Platonic *Akademeia*. For Zeno and his pupils, these critiques undoubtedly sparked a lot of internal discussion and adjustments of theories.

*

From the book titles listed by Diogenes Laërtius, it can be seen that Zeno was a multi-faceted person. Here is a selection: *On passions*, *On Greek education*, *On the universe*, *Pythagorean doctrines*, *General things*, *On poetical readings*, *Homeric problems*, *Solutions and Refutations*, *Ethics*.

*

According to stories, Zeno died as befits a Stoic: without protest, fear or lamentation. One day, when leaving his school, he tripped over and broke his toe. He quoted an appropriate line of poetry, then held his breath and died. In any case, Zeno was highly appre-

ciated by Athenians. His moderateness was proverbial: ‘Even more moderate than the philosopher Zeno’. He liked green figs and sunbathing. But more than anything he liked philosophy, and also, I think, his friends. One of them would become his successor.

CLEANTHES

Cleanthes of Assos (ca. 331-232) was the one who took over Zeno’s teaching in the colonnade after his death. He had been a boxer and arrived in Athens with just four drachmas to his name, according to Diogenes Laërtius. He must have been a diligent worker. To earn a living, he worked nights watering gardens, and philosophised in the daytime! Diogenes Laërtius also attributestens of book titles to Cleanthes. The only one of his texts that has been preserved is a hymn to Zeus—it is said that he gave a somewhat religious twist to Zeno’s ideas. This is not obvious from the list of book titles given by Diogenes Laërtius: *Of love, Of freedom, Of knowledge, Of beauty, Of friendship, On the thesis that virtue is the same in man and in woman, and many others*—and it is true, also the title *Of the gods*. During the time that Cleanthes led the school, some pupils dropped out, and a number of these started as philosophers by themselves. Aristo (or Ariston) was one of them. He placed more emphasis on Cynic values, such as autarchy. (More about him appears in Chapter V.)

CHRYSIPPUS

Chrysippus of Soli (ca. 280-205), who took over the reins after Cleanthes, was initially a long-distance runner. He was highly gifted and began his philosophy studies at the Platonic *Akademeia*. He possibly was a pupil of Zeno but certainly of Cleanthes, to whom he apparently said at one point: ‘Put forward your propositions and I will furnish proof of them.’ He was therefore very self-willed and soon began to give lessons himself.

Chrysippus is called the second founder of Stoicism; just as Zeno he wrote a *Politeia* (Republic), and he significantly extended Stoic theory. He wrote a large number of books: more than seven hundred,

red, according to Diogenes Laërtius, and it can be seen from the titles alone that he was a thorough scholar. To name just a few: *The philosopher’s inquiries, Of judgments which are not simple, On temporal judgments, A contribution to the subject of consequents, Epitome of interrogation and inquiry, Of anomalous words or phrases, Introduction to the study of ambiguities, To those who maintain that the premises of ‘mentiens’ (liars) are false, Of formed state, or habit, of mind, Definitions of the good or virtuous, Of the use of reason, Of the good or morally beautiful and pleasure*. And many more—but all of the original texts have been lost.

*

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum called Chrysippus one of the most creative and influential philosophers of the western tradition: he invented propositional logic and the philosophy of language, produced a theory on ethical choices, and propagated ideas about natural law and natural laws, which are still used in politics; moreover, he developed Zeno’s ideas about affections and produced ‘one of the most interesting analyses of emotion ever’.⁵

*

Chrysippus was often occupied with logic and came up with, amongst other things, the following: ‘If you never lost something, you have it still; but you never lost horns, ergo you have horns.’ and: ‘If you say something, it passes through your lips: now you say wagon, consequently a wagon passes through your lips.’⁶ But apart from this he was undoubtedly very serious—although according to some sources he apparently died in a fit of laughter.

*

Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus are considered the three most important representatives of the Early Stoa. Some of the other names that are cited by Diogenes Laërtius are the already-mentioned Aristo (who split away), Dionysius (‘the unfaithful’) and Persaeus, who Zeno lived together with. After Chrysippus, the school became more pragmatic, so that the Stoic ideas became more accessible to ‘ordinary people’. Should we see this as a weakening

or as an improvement? That issue is considered later; but first, more about the original teachings.

III

KNOWLEDGE, NATURE, COSMOS, LOGOS

Stoic theory consisted of far more than the practical, ethical ideas which I largely restrict myself to in this book. The Early Stoics compared philosophy to an orchard: logic they saw as the enclosure, physics as the trees and ethics as the fruit. Ethics, according to them, therefore arose from the other components of Stoic philosophy: physics and logic. Their concept of logic was very broad; epistemology (theory of knowledge) was an important part of it.

*

Although parts of this physics, logic and epistemology remain interesting, I find quite a lot of it not very robust. I also do not need to use most of it in order to arrive at an ethical theory that is very similar to that of the Early Stoics. Nevertheless, in this chapter I would like to give a brief sketch of these components of the Stoic 'orchard'. The core ideas of it are: the universe is a closed and eternal cyclical system; everything is material, including the soul; the universe is permeated with rationality and everything that occurs in it has some purpose.

Chrysippus said that bedbugs were useful because they wake us up, as are mice, because they prompt us to be tidy.¹

*

The Stoics were the first to develop a complete philosophy ('of everything'). In their logic, they built on the syllogisms of Aristotle; they developed propositional logic. Stoic epistemology is very interesting, and it is notable that it includes Sceptic features—this is remarkable because Sceptics and Stoics were fierce opponents of each other in classical times.

In their epistemology, the philosophers of the Early Stoa distinguished between four things: impressions (from senses), assent (accepting impressions), endeavour (desires, passions) and reason. Assent is an important part of this. It makes thinking an active process in which you can intervene.

Only once the 'leading part of the soul' gives its assent to the information coming in from the senses does something become a recognised object.²

*

The world view of the Stoics is monistic and materialistic, and contains many ideas from Heraclitus and Empedocles. The Stoics saw the world as deterministic, with no room for chance, but instead an endless evolution. Material, they thought, consisted of passive raw materials that are permeated by activity. They called this activity *logos*. *Logos* was the same as universal reason, but could also manifest itself as creative fire; *logos* also stood for the laws governing materials, for nature in the broad sense of the word, for providence, fate and Zeus.

*

Although the passive component of material was subject to change, and therefore transitory, this *logos* was indestructible.

*

They saw the world (the cosmos) not only as an entity consisting purely of material, where events occur by cause and effect, but also as an entity in which everything happens entirely rationally. Important in their ethics is deduction: everything is the way it is;

what is impossible is impossible; what has happened is fixed; it is an illusion to think that things could have happened differently.

*

In contrast to the equally deterministic atomist Democritus, the Stoics thought that matter was infinitely divisible. The Stoics also thought that empty space did not exist. Even the smallest components of matter were, according to Zeno and other Early Stoics, connected to each other via 'sympathy'.

*

Because of this connection, and because everything is permeated with *logos*, there is cohesion between all things. In living beings, *logos* manifests itself in different ways: plants can grow, animals can feel and people can think. In people, *logos*, reason, is expressed at a high level, according to the Stoics.

*

Everything is connected. This is also true for the human world; this is why many Stoics were greatly involved in world affairs. Individual happiness and the well-being of the rest of the world go together.

*

Stoic physics led to an attitude to life that was about living according to nature, which in the case of people, according to the Stoics, boiled down to living according to reason. This is the highest virtue, the only way for people to become really happy. This is only possible if the soul is free from passions.

*

Cleanthes said: 'A wise man is at one with Nature, because he believes that what Nature wants is the best for the great Whole'. And Chrysippus: 'If the foot could think, it would want to step into mud'.³

*

The Stoics saw the Whole, the cosmos, as a great intelligent living

being (that they sometimes called nature and sometimes cosmos, Zeus or *logos*), of which we people are just tiny parts that cannot observe the Whole. They considered it damaging if you opposed the situation you find yourself in (because of wrong ideas and the strong or nagging feelings that accompany them). Damaging, that is, for the Whole, but mostly for yourself, because whether you voluntarily went with the flow of events or strongly fought against them, the flow still carries you along. Grumbling just makes you unhappy, so why should you do that?

*

The following quote gives a good impression of the Stoic theory of nature and reason. Nature is oriented towards use and enjoyment.

(...) when in the case of living beings an instinct is included through which they are able to obtain suitable nutrition, then Nature must as a rule follow this instinct, according to the Stoics. But when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational, for them life according to reason rightly becomes the natural life. For reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically.⁴

Animals always live according to nature, just as plants, but for them, life is considerably simpler. Because of their powers of thought, people (that is, adults with well-functioning brains) have more options available. Part of human nature is that humans can learn. Things can go wrong precisely because of this, since people do not use their learning abilities optimally—they can also learn ‘wrong’ things (for example, because of upbringing or cultural influences). Fighting against events, as mentioned above, is an example. It is therefore important for everyone to learn to use reason.

*

An animal's first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation (...) for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself (...) for so [the animal] comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it.⁵

*

Looking after yourself well is totally logical, from the Stoic perspective. By considering the cosmos as a whole, and using general concepts such as ‘nature’, a more sensible kind of thinking is stimulated. Less subjective, less egoistical. If the universe is one large organism, then there is no difference between self-interest and collective interest, except that ‘self’ is closer to me.

IV FEELINGS ARE JUDGMENTS

‘Emotions are judgments’, wrote Chrysippus in one of his works—which again is currently seen as a ‘very modern’ viewpoint. Chrysippus provided a few good examples of this: ‘avarice being a supposition that money is a good, while the case is similar with drunkenness and profligacy and all the other emotions’¹ (By ‘profligacy’ I take him to mean ‘seeking momentary pleasure’.)

*

Both strong feelings (fear, anger) and less strong but nevertheless unpleasant feelings (gloominess, discontent) disrupt reasoning and therefore happiness. Euphoria, being out of your senses with enthusiasm, likewise disrupts reasoning, just as does being strongly and painfully in love, and of course jealousy, pride, honour and hatred; all excessive or nagging feelings disrupt good and pleasant life, peace and happiness. However, because feelings are judgments (or consequences of judgments), these consequences/judgments can be reconsidered through knowledge and insight.

*

It is often said that Stoics strived for *apatheia*, meaning lack of passions or a specific form of peace of mind, but this word is nowhere to be found, it seems, in the works of Zeno, Cleanthes or Chrysippus. However, it was used by the Cynics, by Aristotle and some others, such as Stilpo, who for a time was Zeno’s teacher. For the Cynics and Stilpo, *apatheia* meant something like insensitivity, both of

mind and body. They tried to inure themselves against pain. Zeno found this gave too much credit to pain, making it important again. The goal is not to withstand pain or eliminate it, but the undisturbed pursuit of insight, wisdom, good life and getting the best out of yourself.

*

The aim was not insensitivity, but a situation in which you are not carried along by passions. This is a logical consequence of the Stoic principle that rationality is the most valuable thing in this universe. Passions, strong feelings (themselves the consequence of thinking/judging) disturb thoughts and reflections. People who have the gift of reason and use reason optimally, which means that they do not allow themselves to be carried along by strong feelings or unpleasant affectations, live in agreement with nature, according to the Early Stoics. Just as a plant grows towards sunlight, it is natural for humans to make full use of reason.

*

For Early Stoa philosophers, the key is to reconsider ‘irrational and unnatural movements of the soul’ and ‘exaggeration, excessively strong feelings and endeavours’. This involves counteracting ‘loose’ thinking whereby ‘incorrect judgments’ such as greed, fear and other undesirable affectations emerge. Striving and wishing are not wrong by themselves; they are behaviours that are ‘natural’ for humans, just like thinking.

*

Because passion is a bad and uncontrolled form of reasoning, resulting from an inferior and false judgment that has also become intense and powerful ...²

Chrysippus, who as mentioned above had been a long-distance runner, compared those who allowed themselves to be carried along by feelings with runners who run off in such a way that they can no longer stop or change direction. It is about not going off the rails and learning to think reasonably, by trial and error. The Stoics did

not find all feelings objectionable, as can be seen from their appreciation of *eupatheiai*, good feelings.

Once strong (or nagging) feelings are out of the way, there is space for these good, pleasant feelings. Someone who manages to break through the notions behind jealousy and considers better notions can once again feel love. Someone who manages to alter the judgments behind his or her anger can once again feel concern for someone else.

A basic state of mind for Stoics is cheerfulness, *euthymia*. This good feeling also had an important role for the atomist Democritus. This is really a happy, cheerful state of mind. This is a step further than *apatheia*, ‘unperturbedness’ and ‘peace of mind’, expressions which are often used to describe the Stoic art of life.

*

According to Zeno, the affections can be divided into four categories: enjoyment, desire, sorrow and fear. Enjoyment consists of the judgment that something is ‘good’, and desire consists of seeking future ‘good’. ‘Sorrow’ (or pain, or displeasure)³ consists of the judgment that something is ‘bad’, and fear is about expecting something ‘bad’.

All affections can now be divided into these categories. Hatred is, for example, ‘a growing and lasting desire or craving that it should go ill with somebody’ (desire); ‘shame is fear of disgrace’ (fear); ‘rivalry, pain at the possession by another of what one has oneself’ (displeasure); ‘malevolent joy is pleasure at another’s ills’ (pleasure).⁴

*

Longing for fame, preference for superficial pleasure and amusement, touchiness and similar affections were compared in Early Stoic debates to bodily afflictions. Just as the body can suffer from having a cold or diarrhoea, so can the ‘soul’ be affected by jealousy, annoyance and suchlike. Grief is the ‘curling up of the soul’.

V GOODNESS, BEAUTY AND HAPPINESS

The Greek word *arete*, which is usually translated as ‘virtue’, but sometimes as ‘excellence’, can relate to skill or knowledge—in any field. (In Latin: *virtus*.) Excellence can relate to health, wisdom—or the beauty and perfection of a statue.

*Virtue, in the first place, is in one sense the perfection of anything in general.*¹

*

‘Virtue’ sounds rather like well-behaved to us.² For Ancient Greeks, *arete* was something far more neutral: a quality, or a form of knowledge. The Stoics saw virtue as ‘rationally excellent behaviour’ that everyone could learn.

*Further, they hold that the vices are forms of ignorance of those things whereof the corresponding virtues are the knowledge.*³

*

The four most important virtues were, according to Zeno (and Plato and Aristotle named the same four virtues): prudence (also called practical wisdom or insight), justice, courage and self-control (or, dependent on the translation: moderation, frugality or sensibility). Practical wisdom or prudence is, according to Zeno, necessary in

order to make ethical choices between what is ‘good’, what is ‘bad’ and what is neither. Courage is ‘knowledge of what we ought to choose, what we ought to beware of, and what is indifferent’,⁴ justice is wisdom when dividing things up, and frugality or self-control is wisdom when enjoying things. Wisdom is not something in itself, according to the Early Stoics, but something which always has a practical result. Not ‘armchair wisdom’, in other words!

*

The nature of happiness prompted many discussions in Athens in the time of Zeno. For example, there were lots of discussions around the question as to whether the purpose of life was enjoyment (*hèdonè*) or virtue (*arete*).

According to the Hedonist Aristippus (ca. 435-356), who like Plato and Antisthenes was a pupil of Socrates, the ultimate purpose was pleasure. Epicurus also asserted that, but by ‘pleasure’ he meant an enduring, sensible type of enjoyment, and whether he meant it or not, this came close to what the Stoics understood as ‘virtue’, in my opinion. Zeno was active at the same time as the very influential Epicurus—some even think that Zeno began his school as a reaction to the ideas of this philosopher. (Chapter X includes more on Epicurus.)

Pleasure or enjoyable feelings⁵ did not constitute a purpose for Stoics, in contrast to Hedonists.

*

Happiness cannot be found by pursuing pleasure according to Zeno, because ‘first there is the harrowing pain of longing, then the melancholy slump following satisfaction.’ Not very tempting.

*He had already become almost proverbial for his moderation; it was said of him: ‘More temperate than Zeno the philosopher’.*⁶

Although Zeno, Chrysippus and others had important philosophical objections to pursuit of ‘pleasure’ as a goal, they had nothing against pleasure by itself. From the Stoic perspective, there is no objection to total enjoyment. However, if you only pursue pleasure

when making choices, you arrive at less sensible choices that if you use your power of reason and aim to be a good person. With pleasure, moreover, there always lurks the danger that you may crave and desire it, and so become the slave of your desires. If that happens, pleasure becomes overshadowed by suffering. But most of all, for Stoics, pleasure is something quite different from happiness.

*

Just like the Cynics, Zeno made a direct connection between happiness (*eudaimonia*) and virtue (*arete*): he saw *arete* not as a means to happiness or to something else, but a goal, a goal that entirely coincided with happiness. This has always remained one of the core ideas of Stoic thought. The ethical idea of goodness was also called *katorthoma*, ‘the beautiful’, by the Stoics.

*

Zeno used yet another term, *euroia biou*, ‘richly flowing life’ or ‘undisturbed stream of life’.⁷ Stoic happiness is not a passive kind of enjoyment, and as already noted, it is more than just peace of mind—although that is a precondition for it.

*

Imagine that the world would be so arranged that ‘being good’ would be rewarded with ‘having it good’. In this situation, kind, helpful, co-operative people would be happy. People who are only out to benefit themselves would feel unhappy. Much ‘more honest’, don’t you think? Well, actually Stoics state frankly that this is exactly how things are! Doing good goes together with being happy. Thoughtless behaviour goes along with feeling unhappy. Being happy in this sense is of course not about material riches, not even ‘having enough to eat’, but inner riches, the only genuine happiness.

*

In other words, goodness is for Stoics ‘the natural perfection of a rational being’, making use of the possibilities afforded to you by nature, ‘getting the best out of yourself’, and a side-effect of this

is: joy, a good mood, and suchlike. Evil, for them, included 'folly, cowardice, injustice and the like, or matters participating in what is wrong' and this evil was accompanied by despair, dull moods and so on.

*

Although in many religions the idea of justice is rendered in a reward (or punishment) after death, the Stoics made the link between virtue (*arete*) and happiness in the here and now. Perfect goodness is at the same time perfect happiness.

*

In short, for the Early Stoics, doing your best to live a pleasant and good life was the only thing of importance. The motive 'to do my best' is a very active attitude, and it is precisely this motive which makes me feel happy. It feels good to do your best, to labour actively, and this is quite logical according to the Stoics, because that is the way that nature is constituted.

*

Everything, then, revolves around 'doing your best'. Everything else is 'indifferent', of no importance. It is neither good nor bad. This means that the following things are unimportant: life and death, health and illness, pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, strength and weakness, wealth and poverty, good reputation and disgrace, origin, appearance, recognition, prestige, fame and similar things. 'Unimportant' here means of no importance to Stoic happiness.

*

Whether we live long, remain healthy or will be rich or poor: these are all indifferent matters. Specifically, however rotten my situation, it does not mean that I cannot choose the most sensible thoughts and deeds. I can be abused; I can be robbed; someone can besmirch my good name; I can become ill; and so on. However limited my ability to act, it remains possible for me to get the best out of myself, and be satisfied about doing so too. In this sense, happiness,

the only real happiness, 'beauty', is therefore always possible.

*

Can I make my happiness entirely on my own, or am I (also) dependent on circumstances for my happiness? The Stoics reasoned as follows: not all poor people are necessarily unhappy, and by no means all rich people are happy. Not all sick people are unhappy, and health is likewise no guarantee of happiness. From this it follows that these circumstances cannot be real causes of happiness or unhappiness.

*While virtue is always used in a good sense and badness in a bad sense, health and bodily things can imply either good or bad meanings and therefore they are undoubtedly indifferent.*⁸

*

Early Stoics received many comments from others, and also had extensive discussions amongst themselves. It was proposed that even for Stoics, health would be preferable to sickness, and wealth to poverty, and so on. Surely saying that these things 'are of no importance to your happiness' is going too far? For one pupil of Zeno, who himself had health problems, the strict position of his teacher about health was a reason to drop out.

*Dionysius, the Renegade, declared that pleasure was the end of action; this under the trying circumstance of an attack of ophthalmia. For so violent was his suffering that he could not bring himself to call pain a thing indifferent.*⁹

Understandable. But I still find it an inspirational idea that you can always live intensively, regardless of pain or illness, and you can continue to obtain happiness from what you can make of your life. Likewise, for Zeno and other philosophers of the Early Stoa, this position related to an ideal, something to strive for. None of these philosophers claimed the word 'wise' as applying to himself.

*

As well as genuine goodness, correctness, beauty (*katorthoma*), Stoic philosophy was expanded based on practical considerations, undoubtedly after many discussions, to include a second type of goodness: *kathekon*, *appropriate behaviour*. *Kathekonta* is sometimes translated as ‘duty’, but means ‘appropriate behaviour’. Appropriate behaviour is behaviour where what I do in specific circumstances is what reason prompts me to do.

*

A plant turns towards sunlight; this is natural for the plant and therefore appropriate behaviour. Animals too also act in agreement with their nature, according to Stoics, so their behaviour is appropriate. But humans have more options because of reason, and therefore according to Early Stoics also have the options to behave appropriately or inappropriately. Appropriate behaviour can appear exactly the same as the behaviour of an ideal wise person, but it does not stem from universal understanding. Reason is not used optimally.

*

Only a wise person acts with *katorthoma*, because only a wise person acts from his or her understanding as a whole. This kind of understanding, it seems to me, is not achievable for any real person; something will always be lacking in our knowledge. The Stoics did consider this ideal ultimately achievable, but they also realised that it was a lot to ask for almost everyone. But fortunately, even without perfect understanding I can still behave appropriately according to the Stoics. The difference between appropriate behaviour and ideally good behaviour therefore boils down to a difference in knowledge.

*

Kathekonta, *appropriate behaviour*, is not the same as beauty, and therefore the same as *arete*, excellence. But without the ‘correct understanding’ you can still arrive at what appears to be the same behaviour, and in this case the behaviour is not called ‘ideally good’ but ‘appropriate’.

Imagine, for example, that I am miserable. If I nevertheless behave in a friendly manner, this does not really count as good or beautiful, because it does not come from correct understanding (otherwise I would not be miserable), but behaving in a friendly manner is sensible when living with others, so it is appropriate. *Kathekon* is therefore more practical than *katorthoma* and *arete*, and is a lot easier to reach for those who are not (perfectly) wise.

*

Another extension and relaxation of the theory was the recognition that some of the ‘indifferent’ things are generally preferable, while others should generally be avoided. The pursuit of preferable, pleasant things, it was admitted, is not wrong in itself; it can be ‘appropriate’, just like the aversion to non-preferable, unpleasant things. This pursuit is, according to the opinion of Zeno, Chrysippus and other Stoics, a characteristic of human nature and therefore in accordance with reason.

They maintained, however, that the positive (preferable) things in the list (health, having enough money and suchlike) may indeed lead to enjoyment or satisfaction, but not to happiness. They just do not make a good person of you—and therefore not a happy person in the Stoic sense. It is often ‘appropriate’ or ‘natural’ that someone prefers health, wealth, etc. But these choices are not ‘good’ or ‘attractive’ in the ethical sense. So, in a strict sense, they are still indifferent.

*

Aristo of Chios (ca. 320–250), a pupil of Zeno who began his own school, saw himself as the continuation of the true Cynic tradition. He considered the theory about preferences for particular ‘indifferent’ things rather feeble, a concession to the prevailing views. He came up with several counterexamples.¹⁰ He maintained that the pursuit of goodness must take place in complete indifference to anything that is neither good nor evil. ‘The wise man he compared to a good actor, who, if called upon to take the part of a Thersites or of an Agamemnon, will impersonate them both becomingly.’¹¹ He also diverged from the other Stoics by wanting nothing to do with

physics or logic. Only ethics concerns us, according to Aristo.

*

Chrysippus, in contrast, tried like a true scholar to create stronger foundations for the theory of preferences. He classified preferences into subdivisions and considered, for example, health more important than wealth. Most Stoics found health preferable—if only because health enables one to perform many good deeds.

*

The standpoint of Stoics on suicide followed logically from the idea that life and death are morally indifferent things. Suicide can be *kathekon*, i.e. appropriate, according to the standpoint of the Early Stoa. The moment to end your life has arrived when you are no longer able to contribute anything that is good.

The historian Diogenes Laërtius wrote that some said Zeno died at an advanced age by refusing food, whereas others (as I mentioned in Chapter II) said that he stumbled on leaving his school and broke a toe, after which he died by holding in his breath ...

Whether there is truth in either of these stories is one of the many things that are ‘indifferent’ to us.

*

Philosophy should ‘cure’ people of passions. If you are free of passions, and so no longer addicted to passive ‘happiness’, and without inner contradictions, then there is a space for active, really beautiful happiness, happiness-without-excitement. *Euroia biou*. Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and other Early Stoa philosophers had, just like the Cynics, experienced personally that it is not the pursuit of pleasure but getting the best out of yourself that makes you happy. And because people are very similar to each other, this would be the case for everyone.

*

But it is not easy. Diogenes Laërtius told a story about Persaeus, a pupil of Zeno:

To put him to the test, Antigonos once arranged for false messages to be given to him that his estate had been plundered by enemies, and when the man showed disappointment at this, he said: ‘Can you see that riches are not a matter of indifference?’

VI COSMOPOLITANISM, FRIENDSHIP AND COEXISTENCE

COSMOPOLITANISM

According to the Stoics, every living being is spontaneously and impulsively oriented towards self-preservation. Each animal experiences his/her individuality. An animal 'knows' what is good and what is bad for him or her, which contributes to remaining healthy and remaining alive. All living beings have a natural urge to appropriate the things that are useful for their continued physical existence. There is also a natural (and therefore reasonable) urge to flee from life-threatening situations.

*

If these urges are so strong, how do people arrive at behaviour that is (also) directed towards the interests of others, such as justice? Chrysippus came to the conclusion that while it is true that the first inclination of living beings is self-preservation, animals also care for their young. They experience the interests of their young as their own interests, their concept of 'I' expands, as it were; that is where 'justice' begins.

*

The 'I' or the 'own' can expand, by a little for animals, but by a lot more for humans, who are gifted with reason. For this, the Stoics

used the term *oikeiosis*: self-ownership, the extension of the 'I', of the 'own'.

What I regard as the 'own', as that for which I do my best, I can extend to larger and larger categories.

*

In 1901, a papyrus roll was discovered at Hermopolis with an interesting text from the Stoic Hierocles, who lived in the first century AD. This text was about this extension of the 'own'; for this, Hierocles used the image of ever widening concentric circles: myself—my close family—my whole family—my neighbours and friends—my city—the district where I live—the whole of humanity—the cosmos. It is ultimately about treating the people in the outermost circle as we treat ourselves and those in the innermost circle.

A Stoic thinks about the consequences of all of his or her actions for other people, not just people that he or she sees every day, but also all others.

*

As an aside, animals also are of course part of the cosmos. But what did that mean for the representatives of the Early Stoa? Chrysippus saw justice as a thing between people, who have the power of wisdom. His reasoning here was clearly different to that of the Aristotelian Theophrastos (ca. 370-286),¹ who found that, on the basis of kinship and likeness, people not only have responsibilities to people with different skin colours and from different places, but also to animals. Theophrastos was an early supporter of animal rights!

*

Another important aside. Justice for all people also meant for the Stoics that all people (men and women, rich and poor) are equal, and so are equally important. In Athens in the time of the Early Stoa, however, a large part of the population consisted of slaves. How they were treated depended on their 'master' or 'mistress'. It would also have made a great difference whether you had been appointed as a 'house slave', which often amounted to being a ser-

vant, or whether you as a slave had to toil and sweat in the mines. What was the Early Stoics' attitude to slavery? This is not entirely clear to me. On one hand their conception of justice must lead to the rejection of slavery and other forms of exploitation; on the other hand, their theory of moral indifference meant they would have to state that it is totally indifferent whether you were a slave, a king or an ordinary citizen.

Aristotle (who in contrast to the Stoics did not see slaves as equal to citizens) had already said: 'No one can get a slave to share in happiness, unless he also gets him to share in the life of a free man'. A logically consistent Stoic should, however, say that a slave can be happy (because circumstances are not relevant), but the slave-owner cannot (because he or she divides people into slaves and non-slaves, i.e. is unjust, because all people are equal).

In their philosophy the Stoics were nevertheless clear in saying that (in essence) there are no slaves, neither from birth nor from customs, and that a (so-called) slave was equal to a citizen, a king or any other person. The only classification that was important was that between the wise, in other words the really free people, and the non-wise people, in other words the unfree people, who could be called 'slaves' in this sense. Almost everyone belongs to this last group, as noted above.

'Deal with your slave as with a friend', was said by the Stoics. But isn't 'immediately setting them free' part of this?

In any case, by stating their opinions on the equality of all people, the Stoics stimulated discussion of slavery and thereby brought the abolition of this 'barbarity' a step closer.

*

The Stoics were not the first to adopt a cosmopolitan standpoint. 'Which country do you come from?' asked the inhabitants of ancient Athens to each other. Several philosophers gave wise answers to this. Even Socrates described himself as 'an inhabitant of the world'. Diogenes of Sinope, the Cynic, is however seen as the first cosmopolitan. He called himself an inhabitant of the cosmos, a world citizen; he recognised no borders and rejected the inconvenience of separate city-states and countries. His pupil Crates said in

the same spirit: 'I do not have a city or home as my fatherland. The entire universe is my city, my home.' And when Alexander asked Crates if he wanted his home city to be rebuilt, he said: 'Why should it be? Perhaps another Alexander will destroy it again.'²

*

This cosmopolitan attitude was maintained by Zeno. The Stoics started from the connectedness of all aspects of reality, and between all people (of all classes, races and peoples, although saying this ends discussion about different peoples).

The Stoics emphasised general human characteristics rather than those commonly cited in Ancient Greek society that were based on the supposed excellence of the Greek people.

*

Zeno, incidentally, gave a different emphasis to cosmopolitanism than Diogenes. For Diogenes, in the first place it was about independence, *autarkeia*. For Zeno, the emphasis was on the worldwide community of wise people.³ Everyone could be a part of this, but as we have seen, it was not at all easy! In the Later Stoa, the emphasis shifted slightly, falling primarily on the equality and connectedness of all people.

*

Cosmopolitanism implies that foreigners do not exist. There are people who speak other languages, but these languages are not to be called 'gibberish' and their speakers are not 'barbarians'. You certainly do not keep them captive as slaves or exploit or exclude them in other ways.

People who come from another region are to be considered equals and friends, and borders do not exist. Differences on the basis of culture, class, gender, skin colour, language, etc. either do not exist or are not important. The differences that do matter can all be expressed in terms of good or bad intentions. Stoics can be seen as the first humanists, the first people who spoke in terms of humans as belonging together as a species.

*

Cosmopolitanism is a position concerning humanity as a whole, which mainly brings to mind the outermost of the concentric circles. Further in amongst these circles, the aspiration to extend the concept of ‘own’ is called ‘friendship’.

FRIENDSHIP

To the question ‘Who is a friend?’ his answer was, ‘A second self (alter ego).’⁴

Friendship has a special place in Stoic ethics. For other Ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Epicurus, friendship was also an important subject, and although there are similarities between their views, there are also differences. For Stoics, friendship was bound to cosmopolitanism; there is no need to know a friend personally. People can be connected by reason, by agreement in thinking. This can happen with people nearby, but also with people from far away. (And I would add: with contemporary people and people from earlier times.)

For Epicurus, friendship was about usefulness and the enjoyment friends can obtain from each other. The Stoics did not consider these good motives; for them, friendship was an aim in itself. In this sense they considered friendship a virtue—but of course this applied to a good friendship, ideally between wise people, and naturally the virtuous part involved ‘giving’ friendship, not receiving it. They considered friendship as an activity in which someone does not take up a position of dependency, not weighing up whether they will get enough appreciation in return.

The Stoics probably found it problematic to consider friendship as a virtue (excellence), because ‘friendships’ can exist between unwise or ‘bad’ people (though they see these as sham friendships).

*

Friendship is considered as a form of (ethical) beauty, at least in the case of friendship between wise people. Friendships between ordinary people are in any case considered ‘suitable’, as Stoics consider

human beings as social animals. Via the shared use of reason, people all over the world can eventually become friends with each other.

*

For Epicurus, friendship was (as mentioned above) also of greatest importance, but this was about a philosophical community of friends. He expressed no desire to expand the circle of friends, certainly not to the whole world. In this respect, Epicurus seemed to have much less confidence than the Stoics in the ability of each person to be a good person.

For Aristotle, who also wrote about friendship, it did not involve a closed group as with Epicurus, but it was also not about friendship between all people as with the Stoics. He remained, as befitted Aristotle, a pursuer of realistic goals. But he did consider friendship between good people to be perfect.

*

The Stoics saw love as a special, intensive form of friendship: friendship with tenderness. Without friendship there can be no love. Friendship and love can be ‘useful’, or give enjoyment, but these are welcome side-effects; use and enjoyment never comprise the aim of friendship or love. Friendship (and thus love as well) is always an aim in itself, because it is beautiful and good to love each other and be friends with each other. Others, or the other, are seen as ‘another I’.

*

Eros played a large and very positive role in Zeno’s *Politeia*. Later Stoics or half-Stoics such as Cicero strongly criticised Zeno’s support for *eros*. Cicero considered *eros* the most dangerous of all passions. Plutarch, however, thought that with *eros*, Zeno did not mean bodily passion but moral love.

For me, it seems that most probably Zeno meant both bodily attraction and moral love. He did not consider *eros* as a passion, but as a way to become friends and express friendship and love. The Early Stoics, as noted above, had nothing against bodily enjoyment, as long as it is regarded as something additional and not as an end in

itself. Zeno saw eros perhaps as a connection between people that is natural and whose form individuals can shape together, physically or otherwise.

*

Friendship begins with yourself. If you can be friends with yourself, you can also be friends with someone else. This is simply expanding the concentric circles around the dot that is you. Self-love is natural and therefore normal, and has nothing to do with egoism.

*

Just as with the entire Stoic attitude to life, friendship is an active pursuit. The emphasis is on making friendship, on 'what can I give to the other(s)' and not on the question whether I 'will get enough in return'. If I get friendship 'in return', which is quite likely, then it is 'a bonus'.

*

As already noted, none of Zeno's writings have survived, only some quotations from them. And these are often quotations in the sense of: 'Look what he just said!' But these ideas are mostly not that crazy. They are challenging precisely because of their extreme nature, such as: 'True friendships is only possible between the wise'. This is the case according to Zeno, because true friendship is only generated by good. And for the same reasons, all wise people are by definition friends.

Thus: if friendship does not work out, a Stoic cannot dismiss this with a weak 'we don't suit each other'. No, the conclusion must be that at least one of the two lacks 'goodness', in other words that at least one is unwise. There is a strong chance, of course, that this is true for both.

*

All of this has been thought of from a very radical ideal: all wise people are friends, wisdom is in principle possible for everyone, and therefore friendship is in principle possible between everyone. Isn't that beautiful? Imagine that friendship had nothing to do with wis-

dom (in the sense of good intentions); wouldn't that be disturbing? It is better to base friendship on wisdom than on something formal such as trust or something nasty such as fear—as too often happens. Genuine friendship is free of formalities, and certainly free of fear.

*

Friendship is, according to Zeno, based on similarity in thinking and in ways of life. This similarity is of course based only on important things. All that counts is someone's intention to do his or her best to achieve good things. Such people are naturally friends of each other.

*

All in all, Stoics see humans not only as beings guided by reason but also as social beings. Wise Stoics are politically committed and do their best to improve society.⁵

COEXISTENCE

There were also statements made by Stoics about (peaceful) coexistence. 'The wise need no laws'. This idea had already been put forward more than once. Xenocrates (of the *Akademeia*, the school of Plato, (ca. 396-314 BC) asserted: 'Those who sincerely pursue wisdom do voluntarily what others are forced to do by law'. And Aristippus (the Hedonist mentioned earlier) said in the same vein: 'If all laws were abolished, we philosophers would continue our lives unchanged'. Zeno wrote in his *Politeia*: 'Those who are not wise cannot form a state; only a state of the wise deserves our interest'.⁶ In Plato's *Politeia* (Republic), the city is governed by wise people (men and women); in Zeno's *Politeia* everyone is wise and no one rules over others. The wise need no rulers and no laws, because wise people act in well-considered ways, on the basis of their own understanding. This is Zeno's ultimate ideal: a world commune of the wise.

*

Only the wise are free, because only the wise are capable of behaving independently. The other people are slaves of their own passions.

But they also rejected being ruled over by other people and ruling over people themselves:

*Indeed there is also a second form of slavery consisting in subordination, and a third which implies possession of the slave as well as his subordination; the correlative of such servitude being lordship; and this too is evil.*⁷

*

Just as with Plato, in Zeno's ideal women are equal to men, and people live in communes of a sort, with a free choice of partners, so that jealousy is prevented, and children can be brought up collectively in a loving environment.⁸

*

*On the basis of criticism of various positions that Plato had put forward in The Laws, Zeno designed a sketch of this ideal state which, since money, law courts etc. were superfluous and even marriage as a fixed institution did not exist, showed strong anarchist tendencies.*⁹

*

Zeno clearly liked to make radical statements: 'only the wise know happiness' (instead of: 'the wise know the most beautiful form of happiness'); 'only between the wise can friendship exist' (instead of 'friendship between the wise is the most beautiful form of friendship'); 'only the wise can be cosmopolitan' (instead of 'if the concept of cosmopolitanism appeals to you, you are to some extent wise'). For him, 'a bit wise' simply did not exist.

Because the emphasis was later changed, it seems the sting was taken out of some of his opinions. Zeno may come across as extreme with statements like 'the thinker is happy, even on the torture rack', but precisely because of this, his ideas represent a powerful challenge.

*

Chrysippus defended the 'Cynicism' of Zeno but was somewhat more pragmatic, saying that while the ideal state of wise people does not yet exist, wise people still ought to take part in public life.

By doing so, they can in any case exercise some good influence. All the same, he did not place great importance in getting involved in politics. The Stoic, Antipater (see Chapter VII) saw care for one's fatherland as an important duty for individuals. Fatherland and duty: what happened to the cosmopolitan, autonomous attitude? (Some consider this attitude of Antipater as an advancement compared to the individualism of Zeno: responsibility for others, namely countrymen/women but I consider it a degeneration compared to the genuine cosmopolitan idea where 'a fatherland' only exists if it comprises the whole world, and 'a people' only if it includes the whole of humanity.)

This position is echoed in the words of Diogenes of Babylon, who in discussion with Antipater about honesty when selling, said: 'If you take account of public interest, then you should not sell, but give away'.¹⁰

*

*Again, they say that justice, as well as law and right reason, exists by nature and not by convention.*¹¹

Concepts such as justice, proper reasoning and goodness are concepts used by people. They are very useful for people, because they form some of the tools for human society to improve itself, and improve the way people interact with the rest of nature. Because people are part of nature, it is logical to say that morals (and therefore justice and so on) arise out of nature, and therefore 'exist naturally'. You can also say that people's ideas about justice rest not so much on agreements but arise from the practice of living and surviving. But for the Stoics, the link between justice and nature was much stronger than this. Everything that was natural was obviously also just. As noted above, they saw the cosmos as a living being and humanity as part of that being, and therefore as part of a rational and meaningful universe. I, however, see no reason to attribute characteristics such as 'justice' or 'proper reasoning' to non-human nature. (There is more about coexistence in chapter XIV).

VII

MIDDLE STOA AND ROMAN STOA

According to Diogenes Laërtius, Chrysippus died at the age of seventy-three from an uncontrollable fit of laughter after a donkey had eaten his figs. In any case Chrysippus was followed by Zeno of Tarsus, who in turn was followed in 204 BC by Diogenes of Babylon (ca. 240-150 BC). The last of these departed for Rome in 156 BC with Carneades (of the Akadèmeia) and Critolaus (of the Peripatetic school), on an Athenian mission to ask for Athens to be exempted from a fine imposed by Rome. They spoke in the Roman Senate, but also in streets and squares, thereby generating a lot of interest in Greek philosophy. From this, it can be inferred that the relationships between these three schools, or at least between these three people, who disagreed on many points, were not hostile. I would be intrigued to know what conversations they had with each other during their journey.

*

These three men represented three of the four most important philosophical schools of Athens at that time: the Stoa, the Akadèmeia (Plato) and the Lukeion/Lyceum (Aristotle). The fourth school, Kêpos, the Garden, of Epicurus, did not take part in the journey. The 'Garden-goers' wanted nothing to do with politics—that being the reason for their absence.¹

*

Perhaps it came about partly because of this journey and all the

conversations that the three philosophers had with each other, and with many others, that Platonic and Peripatetic (Aristotelian) elements crept into Stoic theory. Stoicism became thus more eclectic, and thereby 'milder' and attractive to more people. To my taste, though, it also became less challenging, both for political and personal topics.

*

At some point the Early Stoa became the Middle Stoa, but where should the boundary be drawn? Perhaps, as some classicists suggest, this journey of Diogenes of Babylon to Rome would be a good point.

ANTIPATER

After Diogenes of Babylon, Antipater (Antipatros) of Tarsus (ca. 200-129 BC) took over the reins of Stoicism. He was a contemporary of Carneades of the Akadèmeia, which in the meantime had become very Sceptic and strongly criticised the Stoics. Antipater did not take part in verbal polemics; he preferred to express himself in writing, and was therefore called 'Pen-noise'.² After he died, Panaetius of Rhodes (ca. 185 - 110 BC) took over the reins from him.

*

The Stoics of this time placed more emphasis on the route taken to reach their ideals. You do not have to be either wise or foolish; something in between is perfectly possible. By this, the emphasis increasingly came to lay on *kathekon* (appropriate behaviour). In the theory of *kathékonta* it was possible to make progress.

*

Antipater attached great importance to dedication for others and the Whole. The aim was to serve mankind. That was also the best thing for each individual, because for Antipater, individual interest and public interest were one and the same thing.

PANAETIUS

For Antipater's pupil Panaetius (Panaitios, ca. 185-110 BC), justice was the highest principle: all people form one great community, connected by love of humanity.

In his work, logic, physics and epistemology faded into the background. Through the agency of Panaetius, Stoicism was increasingly seen as practical wisdom. He too travelled to Rome (ca. 144 BC), where he introduced his version of Stoic theory.

*

Panaetius was strongly opposed to astrology. Apparently this belief was also followed by some Stoics.³ Stoic principles included, as noted above, the theory that everything has a cause, but the Early Stoics also thought that everything in the cosmos had influence on everything else. This gave some people a reason to think that the future could be predicted from the positions of the stars. Panaetius refuted this by saying that one star can occupy different positions relative to the earth, and therefore cannot keep having the same influence.

POSIDONIUS

The Stoic school still had its home in Athens, but that changed in the time of Posidonius of Apameia (Poseidonios, ca. 135 - 51 BC), the successor of Panaetius. He began in Athens, but then started a Stoic school on Rhodes, after which this island became the centre of Stoicism for some time.

In contrast to Panaetius, Posidonius was very occupied with physics. He was a great scholar, a universal thinker, a scientist similar to Aristotle. And he was a great influence on Cicero.

*

Further, [the Stoics] say that that is not good of which both good and bad use can be made; (...) therefore wealth and health are not goods. On the other hand, Posidonius maintains that these things too are among goods.⁴

In short, the ideas of the Early Stoa began to be watered down considerably ...

ROMANS

Around the year 0 (though that year itself did not exist), a Stoic movement came into being in the Roman Empire, which was later called the 'Roman Stoa'. In contrast to the Early (Greek) Stoa, this is still fairly well known—and far more of its material has survived. For the Roman Stoa, the emphasis came to lie entirely on ethics, for which it was primarily about aiming for inner balance, in order to put up with the whims of nature, and especially the whims of the imperial regime. The most important exponents of this were Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

CICERO

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) was not himself a Stoic but held Stoicism in high esteem. He studied the school of thought, and criticised it, very seriously. Cicero played an important role in making Greek philosophy widely known amongst the Romans. He was a genuine eclectic, that is to say: he selected ideas from different schools of thought. In that sense, nearly everyone is an eclectic nowadays. What I like about him is that he was not simply 'converted' to a school of thought; he examined it very critically and provided commentary on different ideas from Greek philosophy. For example, he made an extensive comparison of Stoicism with the teaching of Epicurus. I will say more about this after discussing the ideas of Epicurus.

SENECA

Marcus Lucius Seneca (Seneca the Younger, 4 BC - 65 AD) was a tutor to (Emperor) Nero. Everyone knows that the latter was no darling—this is clear from the fact that he ordered Seneca to commit suicide. Which Seneca 'obediently' did... Well, obediently, the alternative, knowing Nero, would probably have been worse! Getting spoon-

fed Stoic ideas, as happened to Nero, is unfortunately not a panacea that makes someone a good person.

*

Seneca wrote a vast amount, which deserves a lengthier description than mine, but to my mind his ideas are more or less a repetition of stimulating ideas from Early Stoic ethics. His texts include many practical examples, which no doubt made Stoic ideas attractive for a wider audience.

*

When we are prepared for a disaster, it strikes us less hard (...) The wise man knows that everything awaits him. Whatever happens, he can always say 'I knew it'.⁵

By making good use of your experiences, certainly if your starting point is a deterministic universe, whatever happens you can say: 'I knew it'. To accidents, unexpected and undesirable events: 'I knew it'. Pure chance: 'I knew it'. Someone dies: 'I knew it'.

*

'I knew it'. Good advice for people who encounter disappointment time after time in their lives. The cause of this disappointment is their own optimism. Optimism about the world and optimism about other people. Instead of breaking into tears or anger, when bad luck or other unfavourable occurrences happen, we would be better off saying: 'I knew it'. We keep thinking that we really can determine what goes on in our surroundings. If things turn out differently, we act as if we are not 'listened' to, and we become angry or disappointed.

'Why does it rain just at the time when I want to go out?!'
Surely you knew that a rain shower was possible?

*

Seneca was exceedingly rich and he enjoyed his wealth to the full. The original ideas about the unimportance of wealth were expressed by people (such as Zeno) who were not themselves rich and lived

very frugally. How is that so?

Entirely in accordance with Early Stoic views, Marcus Lucius Seneca considered riches 'of no importance', because for wise people it does not matter if they are rich or poor. Wealth, argued Seneca, is only suitable for the wise, because only they can enjoy their possessions without worrying and share them out without getting attached to them. But it would be just as logical to claim that only the wise are suitable for poverty, because only (Stoic) wise people are capable of feeling happy despite being in miserable circumstances.

*

Seneca could, of course, as a rich man appeal to the preference theory of Stoicism. It is logical to have a preference for being healthy rather than being ill. And therefore, according to Seneca and many others, for wealth rather than poverty. In his dialogue *On the Happy Life*, in which he defended himself against contemporary criticism of his wealth, he admitted that he would rather practise the virtue of 'generosity' which wealth makes possible, than the virtues of poverty 'whose test is blood and sweat'.⁶

*

Perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that there is a Dutch book called *Seneca voor managers* (Seneca for Managers)... In Seneca's writings I have more often come across things oriented towards self-interest than in other Stoics' writings. 'Zeno for Managers' seems a lot less obvious to me. Although you could put your own spin on anything, and managers certainly can!

*

In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca writes about the difference between desiring and craving. If you stop craving but still desire to do the same things, you can do these things without disquiet and enjoy them more. It seems to me that Seneca is the most strongly pleasure-oriented of all the Stoics which I describe here. But this is pleasure without 'slipping up'; he wanted nothing to do with passions. As for falling in love, he referred to Panaetius who seemed to have said that wise people could fall in love, because they are

sensible enough not to let themselves get carried away with it, but ordinary people would be better to stay away from it. (The same reasoning, then, that Seneca used with wealth.) In general it is the case that: 'We must, where possible, stay away from areas where we can slip up.'

*

It seems that even in Seneca's time, Stoics were often told that they were too demanding; that it was not about abolishing passions but moderating them, because passions are part of human nature. But Seneca said:

Do you know why we cannot do all this? Because we do not believe that we can. Or rather, no, the situation is quite different: because we love our moral weaknesses, we defend them and would rather excuse them than get rid of them. Nature has given humans enough energy, if we only make use of it. Nature has given humans enough energy, if we gather our strengths and apply them entirely to defending ourselves, and certainly not to attacking ourselves. What it amounts to is that we do not want to; to say that we cannot is an excuse.⁷

*

Concerning those who occupy themselves with pursuing material and bodily desires, gluttony and ambition, pure profit and meeting others' expectations, and those who occupy themselves with bodily beauty, he said:

They all stand in life without a fixed moral principle, with the consequence that they are slaves of their uncontrolled desires, wanting this today and that tomorrow (...) there are a few men whom slavery holds fast, but there are many more who hold fast to slavery.⁸

EPICETETUS

Epictetus (ca. 50-120 AD) was born in Hierapolis, in what is now the south of Turkey, as the son of a female slave. He also served as a slave, to a rich and influential Roman (the personal secretary of

Nero), where he became lucky to some extent: his master was broad-minded enough that the young Epictetus obtained permission to have lessons with the Stoic philosopher Gaius Musonius Rufus.

*

This Gaius Musonius Rufus (ca. 30-100 AD), who is nowadays little-known, was in his time probably as famous as Socrates. Rufus encouraged his pupils to 'rejoice in what is good and loathe what is inferior'. 'If you do that, you will become a philosopher of your own accord. You will not need to wear shabby clothes, walk around without a chiton, let your hair grow or do anything differently from all normal people. Because while these things suit philosophers, the practice of real philosophy is not in this, but in having the correct thoughts and insights.'

Notably, Rufus gave much attention to the role of women: *That Women Too Should Study Philosophy* is one of the titles of the surviving extracts of his work, and another is: *Should Daughters Receive the Same Education as Sons?* Once he even dared to go to a battlefield and preach about peace to the soldiers, for which he was of course laughed at and threatened by macho types.⁹

Epictetus obtained a lot from Rufus' lessons. For his inspiration, he also looked back to the ethics of the Early Stoa, of Zeno and Chrysippus.

*

One day, Epictetus was set free, probably after the death of his master. He opened his own school of philosophy in Rome, but in the year 89 AD there was an imperial decree that all philosophers must leave Rome and Italy. Epictetus then moved to Nicopolis on the coast of Northern Greece, and once again gave lessons there. He was incredibly popular; people came from far and wide to attend his lectures.

Epictetus was apparently lame, was a likeable teacher, and died unmarried. Little more is known about his personal life.

*

Like Socrates, he never wrote up his speeches. Luckily he had

a very diligent pupil who did write up his lectures. This pupil, Arrian (Flavius Arrianus) collected them in his famous *Handbook* (Enchiridion). The following quotations come from that handbook.

10

*

Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things.

It is not the reality outside of us that confuses us or makes us sad or angry, but the thoughts we have about the outside world. A Sceptic would also endorse this. Otherwise, how is it that one person is afraid of spiders while another is not? Many people are afraid, even of things that do not exist at all. You hear a burglar creeping through your house, but only your own fear is reality.

*

One must commit only to desire those things that one can indeed obtain, and only to abhor those things that one can actually avoid.

What is impossible is impossible, so do not try against your better judgment to do it. This is reminiscent of the commonsense Frisian saying: 'As 't net kin sa 't moat, dan moat it mar sa 't kin.' (If it cannot be done the way it should be done, then it must be done the way it can be done).¹¹ An unanswerable remark full of wisdom; easy to say, but difficult to apply in daily life (without grumbling!) Sensible thoughts appear throughout the ages and come from all corners of the world.

*

Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions.

The thought that some things can be changed and others cannot, and thus that it is sensible to take account of this, is one that I find

very useful. All the same, a few comments. Of course it is so that we did not construct our own bodies—but nowadays they can be worked on in many ways, from a life-saving appendix operation to a 'nose job' based on vanity or shame. To a certain extent we can also exercise influence on our reputation, on our possessions and on our position. A great deal is not under our control, but someone does not become rich automatically. If you are born very rich, then you do have the choice of sharing out your wealth with the poor. In short, for a lot of things it is not immediately obvious which of Epictetus' two categories they belong in. Life would be a lot easier if it were always clear whether something can or cannot be changed (by me).

Conversely, I cannot magically make myself wise: my realm of thought is subject to relationships of cause and effect. Thus, the hints and wise advice of Epictetus can only 'catch on' for me if they fit into the collection of ideas in my head. A number of ideas can make someone start enthusiastically to study Stoicism, for example 'wanting to get the best out of myself' or 'wanting to do good things (more than just what is pleasant for me)', or even 'no longer wanting to be carried away by my feelings' or 'curious about wisdom'.

*

As Epictetus himself said, it is about improving what can be changed, accepting what cannot be changed, and especially about developing the wisdom to make the distinction between the two categories.

*

A particularly difficult category is formed by things for which you do not know whether or not they can change. You try something (doing something with your computer, getting on well with someone, improving the world) and you fail, time after time. At what point do you decide that you do not have what it takes? What is true in any case is: until now you did not have 'what it takes'; you lacked the right knowledge, you or the other person lacked important communication skills, or there were other causes which prevent 'success'. Continually trying the same thing is pointless. But you

can keep thinking: maybe this time it will work, because now I have, or know something-or-other. What never helps is sulking, or kicking the equipment, or cursing at your friend.

With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies.

It is true that I was very disturbed when my friend broke a beautiful old jar of my mother's. We spent an afternoon sticking together the many pieces, but the jar was no longer totally whole. But it was just a jar. Years later when my mother died, this was an experience of a different order; it made me much more heartbroken. Still I understand the words of Epictetus, and obtain comfort from them.

*

Entirely in consistence with Seneca and the earlier Stoics, when he lost friends and loved ones, Epictetus reasoned: Surely you knew that they were mortal? This saying sounds cold or blunt to some, but it can genuinely help someone quietly to recognise and accept the death of loved ones. 'It is true: I knew it'. That does not mean that there are no feelings. What remains are the pleasant memories and the understanding that everything is transitory. Most people keep remembering their loved ones by association or in future plans; they need time, and much exercise of thought, to deal with their loss. A true Stoic continuously realises impermanence and accepts it, so that he or she does not need to 'get used to' any new situation.

*

Rather than complaining about bad luck and what life brings, Epictetus said it is better to take an example from Diogenes of Synope, the Cynic. Once, when he was captured, he did not long

for Athens and his friends and acquaintances, but made friends with the pirates and tried to set them on the right track. 'That is real freedom', said Epictetus. Indeed; it is practical action starting from the situation you are in. Diogenes is a good example of a nonconformist, who in all times and places needed no one other than himself in order to live how he wanted. If in prison, he would enter into discussions with other prisoners and guards. And as I would imagine him based on all the stories, even on the torture rack he would still be able to make his self-willed remarks, and even witty comments, with which he would probably confuse his torturers. Whether or not they are tall stories, Diogenes remains inspiring, because such a self-willed approach is genuinely possible.

What is now expected of the citizen? That he does not seek his own advantage, but continually sees himself as part of the whole. Then no one will attempt, perpetrate or pursue that which is against the interest of the Whole.

It is about taking account of the whole without ignoring the individual. If everyone thought this way, there would be no more conflicts of interest.¹²

Someone does himself wrong by damaging me. Should I then also do myself wrong by damaging him? Only damage to property and the body is called damage, but if the will declines or becomes worse, is that not also damage?

Taking revenge, as Epictetus seems to say here, is the most senseless thing that you can do. Quite apart from the reaction that others can have to it, from which you cannot immediately escape, taking revenge is primarily bad for yourself. It seems to bring temporary relief, but the thought behind it is unwise. Taking revenge is diametrically opposed to acting virtuously, and therefore to happiness.

For thus, if any hindrance arises in bathing, you will have it ready to say, 'It was not only to bathe that I desired, but to keep my mind in a state conformable to nature; and I will not keep it if I am bothered at things

that happen.'

These daily examples from antiquity are wonderful. When I think of Roman baths I see beautiful ruins before me, but many of them were newly built at that time, and what happened in them then must have been similar to what happens now in swimming baths. Even nowadays, when (say) other passengers in a train are rowdy, it is possible to think: I do not just want to reach my destination, I also want to remain sensible (i.e. wise, Stoic).

A man with no experience of philosophy will always hold others responsible for his setbacks; one starting to learn philosophy will hold himself responsible, but one who has achieved true wisdom will hold neither responsible.

(Here I read 'human' for 'man'...) If someone is a nuisance, there are many possible reasons for this. If you knew everything about that person, you would see that being a nuisance is just a logical consequence of what went before. You can say to someone 'you should have done that differently', but you cannot change the thoughts of someone else. 'I should have done that differently' is a more useful thought, but not if it only results in unproductive feelings of guilt. Neither laying the blame on another nor yourself, but learning from the past; that is the best way of dealing with setbacks. 'I will do that differently next time', or 'I will react differently to that'. In the now there is a lot that can be learned for the future.

Do not long for everything to happen precisely as you wish, but wish only that everything happens as it does, and you will succeed in life.

Does this mean that the world with all its deficiencies and social injustices will remain as it is? No, because resistance and protest against abuses are part of the chain of happenings. The world has changed a lot since the time of Epictetus, and that is the result of the deeds of all the people who have lived since then and those who are still alive now. Slavery has been abolished—but a lot still needs to be changed.

The key is to save your energy for things that are possible, instead of stubbornly carrying coals to Newcastle or trying to bring the dead back to life.

*

Whoever, then, would be free, let him wish nothing, let him decline nothing, which depends on others else he must necessarily be a slave.

*

You must never assume that the man who attacks you verbally or physically can harm you. It is no more than an idea that such people can harm you. And when someone annoys you, be aware that the cause of your annoyance lies in your own appraisal of the situation.

If others act unreasonably, this is no reason to do the same yourself. Anger at another always comes from feeling misunderstood or offended. That is something you do to yourself. In such a situation, you react less effectively than someone who remains level-headed. Sometimes we call someone 'irritating', but on further examination it appears that they do not irritate everyone, and do not irritate equally those whom they do irritate. Soberly considered, the situation when I am annoyed by someone is: I cannot change that person at that moment by being annoyed. By getting annoyed I torment myself, and often the annoyer or third parties as well. I therefore make the situation worse than it was. I would be better off thinking how I could change the situation now or in the future, so that the situation improves for everyone.

This involves doing the best within my capabilities and not worrying about things which are outside my capabilities—and especially learning to distinguish between the two. The striking examples of Epictetus (far more than I have mentioned here) can help with this.

MARCUS AURELIUS

Now for Marcus Aurelius, who lived from 121 to 180 AD. He grew up in rich and influential circles. Marcus obtained a private education from the best tutors, and via his philosophy tutor came to know

Stoic teaching, especially that of Epictetus. Emperor Hadrian, who himself had no children, had already noticed the serious and diligent Marcus during his search for a suitable successor. First he adopted an uncle of Marcus (who succeeded Hadrian immediately after his death) and Marcus was in turn adopted by this uncle, whose imperial name was Antoninus Pius. From the age of forty Marcus became Roman Emperor—but probably would rather have been a full-time philosopher. In any case it seems clear to me that Marcus Aurelius was not emperor for pleasure, but saw governing as a very great responsibility. He saw the Roman Empire as a good enterprise, which he happened to be predestined to lead for a time. He found this difficult, and so he addressed himself in encouraging, comforting and cautionary terms in his diary.

Although he was a very 'mild' emperor compared to others, even in his time Christians and other groups were persecuted, wars were fought, and so forth. He wrote down many of his thoughts, even when he travelled with his army through war zones. From what he wrote he seemed very conscientious—but his conscience apparently did not protest against war and dominion. How come? What should be made of the following pieces?

*A spider is proud when it has caught a fly, and another when he has caught a poor hare, and another when he has taken a little fish in a net, and another when he has taken wild boars, and another when he has taken bears, and another when he has taken Sarmatians [nomads from what is now Iran]. Are not these robbers, if thou examinest their opinions?*¹³

*

Love the art [of life], poor as it may be, which thou hast learned, and be content with it; and pass through the rest of life like one who has intrusted to the gods with his whole soul all that he has, making thyself neither the tyrant nor the slave of any man.

And an emperor said that! Here I read 'the gods' as a metaphor for 'the course of events'. Being emperor was part of the 'course of events' and was not something to be proud of.

*

Like other representatives of the Roman Stoa, Marcus was practically oriented and his goal was not 'to be wise' but 'to be good'. Perhaps he considered 'wanting to be wise' as an ambitious tendency, which of course would not be truly wise.

Noteworthy is the searching, sometimes uncertain tone which Marcus demonstrates in many of his passages. His 'life lessons' sound very different to those of his predecessors Seneca and Epictetus—the latter's writings are clearly directed at others, while Marcus' notes form a philosophical diary of sensible hints written for himself. Epictetus was clearly Marcus' greatest source of inspiration. The emperor had nothing but great appreciation for this former slave.

*

Marcus thought a lot about death.

(...) and, finally, waiting for death with a cheerful mind, as being nothing else than a dissolution of the elements of which every living being is compounded. But if there is no harm to the elements themselves in each continually changing into another, why should a man have any apprehension about the change and dissolution of all the elements? For it is according to nature, and nothing is evil which is according to nature.

*

Everything that is natural is therefore beautiful, he told himself. Even the folds of skin above the eyes of a lion and the foam that drips out of the mouth of a wild boar are beautiful and fascinating. Even old people can be considered beautiful. And the wide open mouth of a real lion is not less beautiful than that of a sculpture of a lion.

Everything that happens takes place out of necessity, in the long chain (or complex network) of causes and effects. All this is necessary and therefore natural. So it is all 'good', according to Marcus, and according to the Stoa.

*

According to Marcus, it is never necessary to get annoyed at others' mistakes. Just think of what mistakes you make yourself. You consider for example that money, or enjoyment, or fame is something good. As well as this, the mistake-maker can apparently not do otherwise than act in that way. What you can do is bring round him or her to other ideas.¹⁴

*

Alexander the Macedonian [i.e. Alexander the Great] and his groom by death were brought to the same state; for either they were received among the same seminal principles of the universe, or they were alike dispersed among the atoms.

Is it a consoling thought that everyone will eventually disintegrate into separate atoms? Perhaps it is. Everyone forms part of the same whole. However different people seem from one another, in questions of life and death we are all equal. Someone who realises that is more inclined to adopt a social, committed attitude.

Marcus clearly had a low opinion of military leaders, who probably had more 'fun' in their profession than he did:

Alexander and Caius [Julius Caesar] and Pompeius, what are they in comparison with Diogenes and Heraclitus and Socrates? For they were acquainted with things, and their causes [forms], and their matter, and the ruling principles of these men were the same [or conformable to their pursuits]. But as to the others, how many things had they to care for, and to how many things were they slaves!

*

Enjoyment is not good, according to Marcus, because 'baddies' have a lot of it. He gave as examples bandits, bastards, father-killers and tyrants. But would it really be so great, so full of pleasure, to live the life of a bandit? You would always need to watch out that you did not get stabbed or taken captive. Safety and genuine love are, I think, general human desires, which are scarcely or never satisfied in such company.

It would be fine if bad behaviour led directly to unhappiness, but if this were so, the world would probably have long since looked very different. It is the case that it is better to choose happiness with a 'pure conscience' over enjoyment or short-term pleasure. But the latter is often easier to obtain, and so is often 'reached'. Marcus probably found that a bit exasperating. But if happiness was easy to achieve as a side-effect of goodness, there would have been ideal people, from whom an ideal society could easily have been formed. Clearly, that is not the case.

VIII

ATTRACTIVE IDEAS FROM THE EARLY STOA

In previous chapters, the emphasis lay on the ideas as brought forward by Stoics; in this chapter, as well as in the following chapter on questions and misunderstandings, my own annotations to a number of these ideas are highlighted. This chapter describes a number of 'strong points' of Stoicism.

AUTONOMY

The pursuit of self-control, autonomy, *autarkeia*, is one of the things which appeals to me in Stoic teaching, particularly as expounded by Zeno. Independent thought, going my own way and not being distracted by things which are not relevant. Not letting myself be carried along by strong feelings. Not letting myself be fooled into getting a kick out of money, looks or outward appearances, nor subjugated by the fear of others' (negative) opinions. Freeing daily life of all forms of narrow-minded desires and faults. Focusing attention on what is really important: good life.

Another pleasant aspect of this idea is that happiness is possible for everyone in this way; good and bad luck are never distributed 'fairly', but everyone who has enough brains to worry occasionally also has enough brains to develop a Stoic view on life. In this, all people who are capable of thinking are equal.

The Stoics were not the only Ancient Greeks who were concerned about passions. Aristotle understood emotions to mean 'all perceptions associated with pleasure and pain'. He also found it to be characteristic that we do not choose consciously to be afraid or angry; it just happens. His starting point was that a happy medium can always be found between two incorrect positions. For example, he saw generosity as the proper way to deal with money, lying between the two extremes of extravagance and greed.

He found that you should keep choosing the middle way by moderating your strong 'incorrect' reactions.¹ The Stoics, however, found that moderating did not go far enough; 'cure, not moderate' was their advice—a greater challenge.

*

Greeks in general considered themselves superior to non-Greeks; they called the latter 'barbarians', who spoke no Greek but just babbled something or other. Stoics, with their cosmopolitan attitude, consider this distinction nonsense: it is not people who are from foreign lands or speak other languages who are barbarians; countries of origin or language are irrelevant. The only distinction that is relevant is that between the wise and the non-wise: all non-wise people are barbarians! Barbarians, or slaves, because they let themselves be directed by the outside world. The difference between real slaves and slaves in the sense that the Stoics use the term here, is that the latter can free themselves of their chains with their own strength of mind. Instead of punishment and persecution, which real slaves are threatened with, there is here just the 'threat' of a happier, more independent and more useful life.

*

Strong feelings are unreasonable. Some allow themselves to be carried along by anger, panic, adoration, jealousy or falling head over heels in love. Allowing yourself to be carried along by a strong feeling amounts to thinking that you need someone other than yourself for happiness. This boils down to a dependent attitude—

superficial even. Through passion, people can carry out thoughtless and damaging acts.

But there is nothing wrong with desires and aspirations. The key is to ensure that I do not become dependent on my cravings. Strong feelings cause a type of narrowing of consciousness that is damaging both on an intellectual and a moral level.

All feelings rest on judgments, on conclusions from earlier thinking—at any moment I can decide to think about and do something valuable; even the decision to do so is valuable, and causes *eupatheiai*: good, pleasant feelings.

*

Avoiding becoming addicted is not such an easy task: according to a Stoic perspective, almost everyone is more or less addicted to something. Think not just of drugs or alcohol, but coffee, chocolate, sweets, spending money, eating, falling in love, having sex, watching TV, getting a kick out of danger, trashy novels, listening to music, reading newspapers, gossiping ... All these are passive forms of enjoyment. Passive enjoyment is quite simply easier than living an active life. But with passive enjoyment, you keep missing something, so that people need stronger and stronger stimuli to achieve it. By focusing on activity, I have a lot more control over my own life. It provides a different quality of happiness.

DOWN WITH PASSIVITY; HAPPINESS IS ACTIVITY

According to the Stoics, a good life is not possible as long as I consider health, wealth and similar 'indifferent' matters to be indispensable. As long as I consider these things necessary, I will yearn for what I do not have, and fear losing what I do have. Considering appearance to be important, judging yourself and others according to beauty standards (either conventional ones or your own), is similar to this. All of this is unimportant and a waste of energy to get worked up about. What is important is to take an active attitude, to make what I personally think and do into a source of happiness. This is at the same time a form of happiness that cannot be hindered by anything outside of me, and which no one can take away from

me. Whatever my circumstances or the state of the world, I can always make something of my life by obtaining happiness from active involvement in (good) things. It is, I suspect, for most people very difficult to apply this principle all the time. Before you know it, you can fall back into the passive form of happiness, or more often, the associated passive form of unhappiness.

*

If you manage to drive out strong and nagging feelings—by refuting the ideas behind these feelings—you are not insensitive; quite the contrary. Lack of passion (*apatheia*) is not a goal in itself; if you do good things, good feelings (*eupatheiai*) arise by themselves: joy (instead of frenzy), carefulness (instead of fear) and desire (a rational form of aspiration instead of hankering or craving). Active attitudes, in other words, instead of passive. Instead of 'no passions' you could instead say 'no passivity'.

*

It sounds optimistic, but I think that an active attitude is a question of practice, i.e. an attitude that everyone can learn.

LONG-TERM THINKING

Because for Stoics, what is good coincides with what is wise, they should always be focused on sustainability, i.e. in the long term, while at the same time taking account of the consequences of particular behaviour for other people. Imagine I am allergic to eating olives, to the extent that I come out in infectious ulcers immediately after eating them. I know for certain that after such an experience, I would immediately stop eating olives, no matter how tasty they were! But what would I do if I heard that by eating delicious olives I risk the chance of serious and infectious ulcers at an advanced age? When the disadvantageous effects of something only manifest themselves in the long term, the need to change behaviour is less obvious for many people. Bad health because of eating too much unhealthy food is common. In this case, what someone wants in the short term does not correspond with what is good in the long term:

contradictory thoughts are involved. Mostly, people know perfectly well which of the thoughts are 'sensible' and which are 'unwise'.

Addicts (and as noted, from the Stoic perspective almost everyone is addicted to something) are fixated on satisfaction of short-term gratifications and completely fail to make rational assessments. 'Would you like a piece of chocolate?' 'Oh, yes, great!' What has that saliva in my mouth to do with becoming fat or getting toothache in the long term? I won't become fat from that one little piece, so thanks, I'll have one!

Less obvious still for many people is, for example, thinking about how food was produced. Have people or animals been exploited for this cream cake? Have these tomatoes been sprayed with poisonous pesticides, or transported by plane? For those who want to take account of the effects on other people and animals in the long term, these are important considerations. The example of driving cars is also very suitable for showing how difficult it seems to be for most people to change from short-term self-interest to a more broadly-based long-term interest (including self-interest). People keep driving because it is so easy, even if they know that this, together with other people's driving, leads to increasing pollution and global warming. Explaining away can play a role in all of this. 'It will take time'. 'What is the overall impact of whether or not I drive today?' 'I can stop, but the neighbours keep driving; I can be good but I'm not crazy'.

Behind these arguments, however, there always lurks the idea that the needs for short-term enjoyment and convenience are more important than other considerations. The compelling voice of short-term-ism stands on a pedestal and says: 'I just want that, because that's how I feel, so it must happen—and right now'.

Liberating yourself from this internal tyrant leads automatically to a long-term orientation.

LONG LIVE REASON!

Feelings are based on judgments. Craving, anger, delirious joy, fear and grief: all these affectations are, according to Stoics, the result of faulty (inadequate) formation of opinions. If these inadequate

judgments disappear, the strong, nagging feelings also go away immediately.

*

'Avarice is the supposition that money is something good', stated Chrysippus. Avarice is therefore not an innate character trait, but an attitude that someone takes on the basis of a particular judgment. If you look at it in this way, people can work on their actions, including their sometimes strange traits and social difficulties. Who knows, perhaps they will change their opinion, and therefore their attitude if someone else says a few sensible things to them?

IX

QUESTIONS, PRECONCEPTIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

‘A CONSISTENT STOIC DOES NOTHING’

It is not difficult to make Stoic ethics look ridiculous. For example, by saying: ‘A true Stoic ought to do nothing, make no decisions at all’. At least two ‘reasons’ can be given for this. The first is: ‘Whatever I do, it makes no difference, because I can be completely happy in any situation’.

The second is: ‘Everything is predetermined, so I do not have to decide or do anything myself’. How can we refute this (possibly faulty) reasoning?

I will deal with the second point below (under ‘Determinism and free will’). Regarding the first point: it is a misunderstanding that nothing makes any difference for a Stoic; one thing certainly makes a difference, and that is precisely my active contribution, my pursuit of wisdom, of ‘what is good’, a life of value, in which I get the best out of myself.

DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL

Stoicism is based on the human freedom to choose to behave appropriately or inappropriately, wise or unwise, but it is also based on a deterministic material universe. Although the will is of course not

free in the sense of lacking causality, we experience the result of evaluations in our head as decisions made in total freedom. Thus, ‘I’ can on a good day ‘decide’ to deepen my understanding of Stoicism. This decision is the necessary consequence of the state of affairs in my brain. But because it is my own brain—no one is forcing me—I experience the sense of complete freedom.

*

Whether I will behave appropriately or wisely depends just as much on the state of affairs as whether or not a volcano erupts. The behaviour of a volcano appears up to now to be unfathomable and unpredictable, let alone my behaviour. Unpredictability is, however, quite different from arbitrariness.

*

Saying ‘everything is predetermined, so I do not have to decide or do anything myself’ is not a logical conclusion from determinism. It could just have well been said that I did decide something (namely that I have nothing to decide on) and do something, namely rest on my laurels.

For a thinking being, making no decisions is not possible. The future is not fixed, the future is yet to be determined, by me amongst others—I am a part of the universe, a consequence of what went before me. The future of the universe will in turn follow from what went before, but no one, no computer, not even an imaginary one, is capable of predicting this future. The universe is itself the ‘computer’ and I am a component of it.

*

If everything is connected by cause and effect, I can decide nothing outside these causes and effects. A whole lot of things are therefore impossible—I can imagine many more things than are possible, and there are a lot of things which I do not imagine, both possible and impossible, because they do not ensue from the collection of ideas in my brain. Everything that ‘I’ decide shows up somewhere, and ‘I’ am not static, but a constantly changing and developing component of the great universe with all its complex causes and effects.

Because I cannot get to the bottom of all the causes and effects in and around ‘me’, it is hard for me to predict my future behaviour. Unpredictability is often confused with lack of causality. The problem that many people have with the combination of free will and determinism boils down to a misrepresentation: they place themselves, as it were, outside the universe, as if they were freely-floating souls that are not dependent on causes but nevertheless have effects—like little gods.

Is everything fixed in advance, then? That, too, is something you can only say if you pretend you are outside of the universe and outside of time. The universe is always busy establishing what happens next. We are part of this, as tiny parts of the universe.¹

*

A vast number of things are impossible, and learning to face that is one of the important lessons of Stoicism—so that you pay full attention to what is possible.

Just as someone who lives unhealthily can, without grumbling, try to become healthy again by behaviour changes (eating, drinking, exercise, fresh air), someone wanting to change the world can raise the issue of unjust distribution of food and opportunities in the world and try to change the situation, because healthy living and fair distribution of resources are within the scope of human possibilities. Grumbling about a hurricane is pointless; you can, however, try to prevent damage, and help people who have suffered damage from it. And so on.

Of course, whether or not grumbling occurs, it too is part of the necessary course of events in the universe, as is expressing the idea ‘you become unhappy by grumbling’. Someone who takes up that idea (because that idea evidently fits with other ideas in their head) and gives up grumbling can become glad from doing so.

*

A deterministic view of the world makes the step towards a Stoic attitude easier. If you look at most people’s many un-Stoic reactions, it is as if we think that the course of events can be turned back if we make enough fuss. By behaving angrily, you can perhaps drive

someone away. Yet by behaving angrily, you cannot drive the past away. A hurricane will also not take the slightest notice of you. By displaying distress (even if you do not feel it) you can perhaps generate sympathy. People might help you. But they cannot turn the clock back for you. What has happened has happened. Realising this (i.e. by ‘realising’ determinism) can lead to the insight that moaning, being jealous and all other troublesome feelings or moods are based on unreasonable ideas. This realisation can lead you to stop giving your assent to such ideas.

IS A STOIC INDIFFERENT?

No. Passions, strong emotions and feelings were considered aberrations or illnesses, not just by the Stoics but also by other Ancient Greek thinkers. The solution put forward by the Peripatetics (Aristotle and his pupils and successors)—moderating the passions—was considered incorrect by the Stoics, as noted earlier. Surely you do not moderate an illness! A bit of anger is still anger, and distracts from happiness and proper understanding of things. Affectations or passions must therefore not be tempered, but rigorously driven out by expanding understanding through thinking, after which strong feelings no longer arise. What happens to me is, according to the Stoics, ‘of no importance’; what is important is the attitude I take. A Stoic labours entirely for the ‘beautiful’ or the ‘good’, letting the negative events of life wash over and reacting in a resigned or indifferent way to them.

‘A STOIC IS HARD OR INSENSITIVE’

But even labouring for the good can lead to misunderstandings. In the book *A New Stoicism*² I stumbled upon the following line of reasoning: if a Stoic saves a child from a burning house, it is not out of empathy with the child but ‘to do good’. Compassion, according to the author, is not a Stoic attitude; if you do not need to have compassion for yourself, you also do not need to commiserate with another. Indeed, Zeno seems to have rejected compassion. If the child does perish in the flames, the example continues, the wise

woman or man does not mourn, because: 1. she or he has done what is good, 2. death is not evil, 3. everything that happens is the best, even if we do not understand it.

The misunderstanding here is not that it is incorrect; to me this does indeed appear to be Stoic reasoning. The misunderstanding is that this is seen by many people as hard and indifferent. What seems hard is merely sensible; in practice, the Stoic acts the same as someone who acts out of empathy. The Stoic remains calm where someone else might panic. Incidentally, from many stories of people who performed 'heroic deeds' (such as rescuing a child from a burning house) it is known that they were not overcome with emotions at that moment, but thought clearly and acted purposefully. Strong, nagging feelings are a particular nuisance when quick action is needed, and it seems there are people for whom these 'affectations' spontaneously disappear (without the use of Stoic theory), so that they can act purposefully. If I see an accident happen, it is better that I keep a cool head. Then I am in a better position to call a doctor, and also to sit quietly with the injured person and calm, help and comfort people. All that is certainly not insensitive. But it can be free from unpleasant feelings. If someone suffers, I do not need to share their suffering. The attitudes which are the most 'appropriate' at such a moment are consideration, alertness and helpfulness.

*

I have never come across an example about saving children in the ancient texts. It seems, though, that there are two pictures of 'the Stoic': on the one hand, the picture of the hard, strict, Stoic 'icicle' who feels committed to nothing and no one, and on the other hand, the super-social cosmopolitan, politically committed, labouring entirely for the welfare of others.

*

From a crude interpretation of the Stoic notions of indifferent matters, it could be concluded that a Stoic is indifferent to the suffering that someone else is subjected to. If it is the case that you do not need to worry about your own poverty or suffering, then according to this reasoning, you also do not need to be concerned about the

poverty, pain, etc. of others. However, I have never encountered examples of this. And from what I have encountered, it seems that the Stoics intentionally did things in pursuit of justice and other positive values. Hitting someone and then, when they complain or react indignantly, shouting 'Be stoic!' is therefore not a Stoic action. It is about doing your best, including in social life—the opposite of damaging others or not helping them.

*

I can empathise with other people, but I cannot change their thoughts that lead to sorrow. They can only do that themselves. And the suffering that I feel in sympathy with them lies only in my own head; it says nothing about the suffering (or lack of suffering) of others. (More than once I have 'sympathised' with others who themselves, it later turned out, were not suffering at all ...) Thoughts that lead to sharing suffering are (just like thoughts that lead to other compelling feelings) not desirable and not necessary. The key point, once again, is an active attitude; sharing suffering and feelings of guilt only cause me to feel rotten. It is much more useful to think how I can help someone, and in general how I can contribute to a world where everyone is free, has enough to eat and drink, can have a decent place to live, and so on.

*

A Stoic is not indifferent to the fate of others, but does not need to share others' suffering in order to help them. Stoic values such as justice and worldwide friendship (or solidarity) ensure a social attitude.

*

Dedicating yourself to what is good and sustainable: thinking (also) of others, taking account of people from far away, of the environment, of the long term and so on always causes a certain amount more trouble (sometimes a lot more) than thinking mainly about yourself and the short term. Focusing on fun, a life of ease and physical pleasure is all much easier than focusing on knowledge, wisdom and deep and long-lasting happiness. This is precisely

where people's 'badness' comes from. This illustrates the dangerous side of laziness; you could even say that laziness is hard and insensitive.

IRRATIONALITY

In Early Stoicism, there seems to be a contradiction: how can it be that a perfectly rational universe contains humans who think and act irrationally? It could be that passions do not belong to the universe, but that would mean that there is something else apart from the universe, or that there is disunity in the universe, and then the universe would not be perfect. Stoics from the Middle Stoa (notably Panaetius and Posidonius) tried to solve this problem, but this came at the cost of the monism of the Early Stoics: they saw the irrational as a kind of uprising against *logos*. The irrational is a little devil—it starts to look very much like the (already old) question of how evil can exist in the world alongside a god who is both good and all-powerful.

*

Logos, nature or the cosmos was seen by the Stoics as a kind of living being³—not only living, but also rational, perfectly rational even. The evil that we think we see (the things that do not seem just, logical or rational) was described in broad terms by the Early Stoics as a consequence of our limited outlook. If I sprain my foot, this is a painful nuisance, but is undoubtedly (according to Zeno and his associates) good for something in the greater whole: for that big beast, *logos*. Thus the outside world is totally 'rational'. But what is the situation with our often very 'irrational' world of thoughts? Is my un-Stoic moaning good for anything? For example, in order to learn from it what not to do? From the perspective of the Early Stoa that must be so, because my thoughts, however 'irrational', are also part of the universe, of *logos*.

*

Logos, the complete Reason which permeates everything, can of course not be unreasonable. But on a smaller scale, on another level,

for example in the thoughts of a human being, unreasonableness may well be present, because humans are small parts of the whole, of which they (generally) have no complete overview. People's thoughts can 'wobble', go off the road, just like the runner mentioned earlier, who is unable to stop quickly without stumbling.

*

Rationality is, for the Early Stoics, both a description and an endeavour. That is problematic, because if the description is correct and everything is rational, then no more endeavour is needed; then, even strong bursts of anger are rational.

If someone curses me, and I react sensibly in a Stoic manner, there are causes for this, just as there would be causes if I became angry, because for all events—a volcanic eruption, an eruption of anger, but equally for a wise reaction—there are corresponding causes. Is it the case, then, that all events are 'rational'?

No, I would say, because something can only be rational if preceded by thought activity, and a volcanic eruption is not preceded by thought activity. The Stoics, though, would say yes; the universe is a rational being, and even a volcanic eruption forms part of this rational universe. But, I would counter, even a foolish, i.e. irrationally thinking and acting, individual is part of this universe.

*

It seems to me that for Stoics, there are two levels of irrationality. The Great Whole that by definition operates rationally, and within it humans gifted with reason, who have no full overview of the whole, and sometimes or often let themselves be carried along by their irrational passions.

The confusion arises partly through the use of words: 'irrational' human behaviour, in the sense of inadequate/foolish, is at the same time 'rational' in the sense of 'a consequence of thinking, judging'. The wider and narrower meanings of the words 'rational/reasonable' and 'irrational/unreasonable' can easily get confused.

*

The problem of irrationality only crops up if it is supposed that the

cosmos is a living being with an all-knowing and perfectly rational brain. I do not believe in that being; in that respect, I feel closer to the Atomists and the Sceptics.⁴ I just see fallible people, who now and again think and act effectively to some extent. I see rational thinking or rationality as a possibility of matter,⁵ and as an enormously complex and fragile state that can easily get stuck or fall apart entirely.

For those who do not believe in *logos*, the question, ‘How can the irrational arise in a rational world?’ can be simply ‘solved’ by making a distinction between causality and reasonableness. Causality is a concept that applies as much to the ‘behaviour’ of stones and clouds as to the feelings and thoughts of people—whether these thoughts are reasonable or unreasonable. The concept of reasonableness applies only to people (and sometimes also to other animals) who are capable of considering things, and therefore capable of reasonable behaviour.

‘STOICS ARE QUACKS’⁶

*Why are Stoics so intolerant? For the same reason as sanctimonious hypocrites. They are bad-tempered because they oppose nature, deny themselves everything and suffer as a result. They are secretly jealous of people with less strict morals.*⁷

This was said, notably, by one of my favourite thinkers of the Enlightenment!

It is of course totally unimportant whether or not Zeno was nice. Whether or not you could laugh with him. Whether or not he shared out his wisdom generously. If you believe a number of the stories about Zeno (often gossip from his opponents) he was uncompromising and had rigid opinions. What does that mean? Perhaps it is just that his opinions could not be made fun of, and he stood up for them. I do think that he definitely did not want anything to do with the ideas of Epicurus, nor of the Sceptics.

That Zeno strictly judged the behaviour of other people suggests that he thought that he could change people. It can also be deduced that Zeno considered that there is something wrong with anger, but

not with critical judgment of the behaviour of others.

From other anecdotes, Zeno comes across as someone who could enjoy life (‘he loved green figs and sunbathing’), who did not always avoid parties, who considered friendship very important, and who (sometimes or often?) was in love (‘Chremonides was a favourite of him’).⁸

*

Yet it may well be true that quite a lot of people who call or called themselves ‘Stoics’ are or were boring whiners. People who denied themselves all sorts of things, but continued to long for them, so that they reacted jealously to others who enjoyed those things. Of course, these people are, and were, not real Stoics!

‘IT CAN BE USEFUL TO GET ANGRY’

Oh yes? First, let us clear away a misunderstanding. If remaining calm is always the best thing, that does not mean that you must be lethargic and that you, for example, should not pull your hand back quickly as soon as you burn it. In such situations, physically acting quickly is of vital importance. These quick reactions happen by themselves; these are innate reflexes, functional and without panic. In these situations as well, ‘not getting angry’ has nothing to do with lethargy, nor with ‘letting them make a fool of me’. There are two Stoic arguments against anger and other compelling emotions. The first is of a logical nature: from the insight that all events follow necessarily from what happened before them, strong bursts of feelings are unreasonable: an unnecessary and absurd protest against the past. The second argument lies in the area of ethics and is practical in nature, aimed at the effects of anger: strong bursts of feelings, such as anger, cloud one’s thoughts, so that unwise decisions are likely to be taken. Anger can cause a lot of damage, as everyone knows.

*

That by far the most sensible thing to do in most situations is remain calm is something that Ancient Greeks already knew, just like eve-

ryone else with enough life experience. The Stoics, however, went a step further: the wise allow their peace of mind to be disturbed by nothing or no one, because nothing that comes from outside can be good or evil. Becoming angry is therefore never a suitable reaction. Indeed, nothing 'evil' can come at me from outside. A rain shower can turn out bad for me, because I do not like getting wet, so that I would be (un-Stoically) annoyed if I had to cycle through it. But a rain shower is not 'evil', and even after a long drought it is not 'good', however happy the farmers would be about it. A farmer may be happy with a rain shower, as are the worms, while a grasshopper would have preferred sunny weather. Because of humans' innate egocentricity, it is easy for them to think that things as they stand are arranged for them. Some pious people pray during their holiday for good weather, while the equally devout farmers neighbouring their holiday homes pray for rain. The same kind of naive attitude creates the idea that good and evil come at us from outside. Because the outside world as it manifests itself to me at a particular moment is neither good nor evil, it is not just unwise but senseless to react to it with strong feelings. In a dangerous situation, it is both sensible and logical to keep a cool head. The insight that neither lava approaching me nor a lion can be 'evil' does actually help, since because of this I am more likely to deal with it rationally, i.e. quietly, sensibly and soberly. Once I no longer see them as 'evil', I no longer have the tendency to get angry myself.

*

But what about human deeds? Surely they can be good or evil, and the deeds of others surely come at me from outside? Of course people have their own motivations, which are sometimes oriented around their own greed, getting their own way, revenge or other objectionable things. In other cases, people's motivations are for a better life for everyone, or similar attractive things. Even more commonly, they can be a combination of the two intentions. I can divide them into 'good' and 'evil' motivations, but that is 'only' my judgment. People's motives are the consequence of a long series of causes. In that respect, the origin of a power-mad person is not entirely different from the origin of a hurricane. For me they are

both phenomena in the outside world that I do not have control of. Getting angry at another person (or myself) is just as senseless as getting angry at a volcano.

*

All the same, there is an important difference: a human being can arrive at different thoughts through reason, for a hurricane that is somewhat harder. Someone can take other thoughts from the outside world and make them his or her own. People can try to be each other's inspiring pieces of the outside world.

*

From the insight that everything has a cause, I can see that my anger towards another person is just as unsuitable as anger at a rain shower. This does not make me a passive pawn within the whole, quite the contrary. Precisely because everything has a cause, I can think about how I myself can be the cause for things to change in the outside world.

'A STOIC KNOWS NO FEAR'

In the book *Kerngedachten van de Stoa* (Key thoughts of the Stoa) by M. van Straaten⁹ the author seems to assume that 'the real Stoic' can feel pain, enjoyment, fear or desire, but he does not let himself be led by them; he relies only on his power of reason.

Is that so? If someone is 'Stoically wise', does that mean that this person as a whole has no unpleasant feelings, or does a Stoic have these feelings but does not 'moan' about them?

*

Physical feelings (hunger, pain, enjoyment) are innate and can at the most be suppressed, put into perspective or ignored. There is nothing wrong with these physical feelings, and Stoicism says little or nothing about them. They are very useful for survival. People who cannot experience pain are a danger to themselves, as are people who cannot be scared. These basic feelings, which serve as signals, belong in our toolbox of life. Even that of a dyed-in-the-

wool Stoic.

It is different in the case of the feelings which get in the way of sensible decisions and therefore get in the way of a valuable or good life for myself and people around me. Hate, revenge, feeling unappreciated, pride, jealousy, being offended, anger, resentment, worry, melancholy, panic, etc. These are feelings which are about thoughtless judgments. Thoughtless judgments about the world outside myself or about my inner world. Judgments which I can consider debatable for myself, and can therefore change.

*

If the question is whether ‘the wise’ (i.e. someone who understands Stoicism well and has also succeeded in applying it) will experience no suffering, then the answer seems to me: indeed, no suffering. Bodily pain remains possible, but the wise do not suffer from the pain, and regarding being scared at danger and other basic physical reactions, ‘the wise’ will not give this more attention than is strictly necessary. In other words, not moaning about pain, and being scared for no longer than is needed to take action.

A moderately rational Stoic is not showing a ‘stiff upper lip’, just being sensible. In terms of the Stoa: only the wise are really free, being independent of the circumstances for their states of mind; the rest are slaves!

‘YOUR OWN FAULT’

In the Stoic theory of happiness, it may seem to some people that there is an idea that it is your own fault if you are not well, just as the current ‘all-in-the mind brigade’¹⁰ claims. After all, a ‘listless mood’ comes about because you have failed to leave bad things alone. But here we are only talking about cause and effect, not guilt, since the concept of guilt is inconsistent with determinism. ‘Doing my best’, certainly: that is something that is focused on now and on the future. But I can only do my best in those things that I can genuinely exercise influence over. The past is not one of them. Someone is therefore not guilty of her or his bad luck—(s)he can in fact learn to be unhappy no longer.

DETACHMENT

From the ideas of the Early Stoics, you could infer that Stoicism was primarily about detachment: do not attach yourself to anything, then nothing can be ‘taken away’ from you.¹¹ This statement is difficult to deny, but I still find it a somewhat negative point of view. Detachment places emphasis on things that are not there.

I would rather put it this way: all that I have is my inner world, which is at the same time a small part of the cosmos which I can work on considerably. Then, the only really important thing is that I do good things. The emphasis then comes to lie on what really is there: an active attitude where you try to make a positive contribution to the world.

‘STOICISM IS FOCUSED ON CONFORMATION, SO IS APOLITICAL OR
RIGHT-WING’

The Stoics, as I like to emphasise, also had social ideals, of which cosmopolitanism is the clearest example. All the same, the movement is not unambiguous, politically speaking. Zeno had unmistakable anarchist traits, while Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor and therefore definitely not an anarchist; Seneca is quoted with approval by those at the top of the modern business world. Looked at in this way, the Stoic doctrine can be used by people from all kinds of political and economic backgrounds. Panaetius liked talking of ‘duty’ while Zeno spoke only of ‘appropriate behaviour’. The Early Stoics also spoke of ‘going with the flow, not grumbling’. That does not sound very revolutionary. But was that meant as a political statement?

*

It seems at first sight as if ‘going with the flow’ means that you must accept everything as it is. But that is not stated. It is also not stated that you must not protest against hierarchical relationships and other oppression; actually, it is not a political message but a philosophical one. Philosophical ideas are more fundamental, more generally valid than political ones. Going with the flow, then, does

not mean adapting myself to the society that I happen to have grown up in, but that I face the world (including society) as it is and that I try as sensibly as possible to draw possible conclusions from this.

One possible conclusion would be to leave the situation as it is and direct my energy elsewhere, but my conclusion can also be that I will protest, or in some other way try to change the situation.

My opinion, incidentally, is that Stoic philosophy fits excellently with the societal idea of anarchism, but that is another story, which is covered in the last chapter.

ABSOLUTISM?

Assuming we trust the quotations from his work, Zeno used absolutist reasoning from time to time. You are only a wise person if you are always wise and never fail. The non-wise are bad, and remain so as long as they still do and think stupid or bad things, even if they make progress and become more sensible. Gradations in goodness or wisdom did not exist for him.

For if one truth is not more true than another, neither is one falsehood more false than another, and in the same way one deceit is not more so than another ...¹²

Zeno uses as an argument for this a comparison with drowning: drowning can occur in deep water, but if their head is just under the surface, people can also drown in shallow water. And a young puppy that is about to see for the first time (but has not yet done so) is just as blind as one whose eyes will remain closed for some time.

*

However, as Plutarch thought, you do not need to see the almost-wise as drowning; you can also see them as swimmers who have almost reached the shore.

*

Some things are absolute. There is no such thing as ‘a little bit

dead’. That, in fact, is what Zeno referred to. Also, ‘a little honest’ goes against the general notion of honesty, and ‘a little bit good’ sounds equally paradoxical. So I can well understand what Zeno and the other representatives of the Early Stoa meant about the concept of wisdom. It appeals to me, this allergy for ‘halfness’.¹³ All the same, it cannot be denied that one person in general behaves more honestly than another, and there is a difference in the extent to which people use their powers of reason. It can also not be denied that learning exists, and the Stoics themselves said that virtue can be learnt. Zeno and others seemed to want to reserve the term ‘wisdom’ for perfect, untarnished understanding and the behaviour that goes with it—but we cannot ask them now.

(As an aside ... Something quite different that I would have liked to ask Zeno: is it now ‘an indifferent matter’ that all the old texts have been lost?)

‘STOIC IS BORING’

Some people think that a life without passion is necessarily boring. Perhaps it appears so at a superficial glance: a life full of strong feelings is seen by many people as deep and interesting. But I think that a number of things are mixed up here: rational, in other words thought-through, action does not mean that the world of feelings is left on the back burner. It means that a whole lot of unpleasant feelings and moods no longer set in because you have become too sensible for that. If I compare myself with what I was like in my childhood, I can see clearly that I have become a lot more sensible. I used to whine a lot if I did not get my way. Now I no longer think of whining and grumbling as useful reactions, and I try to think of something more sensible. Maybe I might still get what I want, or else face the fact that I will not succeed at this moment, and it may be that a broader understanding leads to my wish vanishing in the light of day.

In this way, a change in judgment can cause all kinds of unpleasant feelings to make way for more appropriate moods combined with activity: beginning a good conversation, sorting out the muddle in my head by writing things down, or getting involved in activi-

ties where I can make use of my ideas instead of letting myself get dragged along by jealousy, discontentedness, anger, resentment, stubbornness and so forth. An active attitude to life is not boring at all.

*

But is it not boring to live without passionately falling in love? To me, living without love or friendship is not something for a Stoic. Here, as I mentioned earlier, it is about oneself 'giving' love and friendship. Whether love and friendship 'comes back' from others is part of the experience, and if it does that is a 'welcome bonus'.

According to Zeno, falling in love does not contribute to excellence or happiness as such, but with a good intention it can form part of the good life, and thereby strengthen the bond between people, so that *eros* (love) comes close to *arete* (virtue, excellence).¹⁴

*

Lovesickness, where someone allows himself or herself to be carried along entirely by passions, is of course a different matter—the question is whether such a strong affectation has anything to do with 'real' love. For example, greed may form part of it, jealousy can stick up its ugly head, as can despair and euphoria ... Is it boring to live without this kind of affectation?

*

Not for nothing is the negative term *apatheia* absent from Zeno, but he did use the words *euroia biou* for his endeavours: 'richly flowing life'. The opposite of boring!

X

CYNICS, ATOMISTS AND SCEPTICS

It was not just the Stoics who were occupied with the question of 'how to live'; Epicurus (Epikouros) and his followers (Epicureans)¹ and the Sceptics were as well. The three schools of thought came into existence at around the same time, in what is now called the Hellenistic period, a period running from approximately 323 BC (the death of Alexander the Great) to approximately 30 BC (the conquest of Egypt by the Roman Empire).² These schools of thought, however, differed somewhat in opinion in their answers to the question noted above. In this chapter we start with a 'retrospective' on the Cynics, who can be seen as the predecessors of the Stoics, followed by an outline of Democritus, who had a lot of influence on Epicurus and also the Sceptics; then Epicurus and the Sceptics themselves are discussed, with particular attention to their similarities and differences to the Stoics. Finally, we will return once more to Cicero, who provided commentary on all these people and schools of thought in the Early Roman period.

ANTISTHENES, DIOGENES AND CRATES

Socrates is mostly known via his pupils Plato and Xenophon, who wrote about him; Antisthenes (ca. 446-366 BC) was also one of his pupils. Antisthenes was in turn a teacher of Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 404-323 BC). The latter often compared himself with stray dogs, who did not need civilisation in order to live. *Kuôn* means 'dog', and the 'kunic'³ could be called 'dog-like philosophers'. Diogenes, who

was the subject of many tall stories, amusing but at the same time inspiring, also had a pupil, and that was Crates (ca. 366-286 BC). As I mentioned earlier, after his arrival in Athens, Zeno was a pupil of his for a time, not long after which he wrote his *Politeia*—so some people say that *Politeia* was written ‘on the tail of the dog’. Stoicism was seen as a civilised and improved version of Cynicism (*kunism*).

*

The Cynics rejected the contemporary norms and customs, suggesting instead ‘living according to nature’. For Diogenes, that meant for example that he threw away his drinking-bowl when he saw a child drinking water out of his hands. The idea of ‘living according to nature’ was adopted by Zeno and elaborated using a different emphasis. For humans, it is natural according to Zeno to make use of reason—whether or not they drunk out of a beaker is something he undoubtedly considered entirely unimportant.

*

Another example of the influence of Cynics on Stoicism is the word *adiaphora*. This word, which was used by Stoics to mean ‘indifferent things’ (neither good nor bad), had already been used by Cynics—but by them to mean ‘things that one can do with confidence although the prevailing custom forbids them’.

*

The thinking about poverty and riches is also clearly inspired by the Cynics. Wealth may have been a source of desire and envy for the masses, but I imagine the Cynics burning money in public (if they ever had it) or dumping it in the sea. In any case, they chose to live in poverty. The Stoics, however, considered the whole question of poverty or wealth unimportant. Frugality, also called moderation or self-control, is an important concept both to the Cynics and the Stoics.

*

Although the Cynics were proud of their stray dog lifestyle, they also wrote books. Diogenes Laërtius listed ten works of Antisthenes

together with the titles of their chapters. The titles are enough to arouse curiosity: *Of the Nature of Animals, Of Freedom and Slavery, Of Belief, Of the Guardian, or On Obedience, Of Odysseus, Penelope and the Dog, Heracles, or Of Wisdom or Strength*. For Diogenes the Cynic he listed, amongst others: *On Virtue, Sisyphus, On Love, A Mendicant, Anecdotes, Letters*. From these, it appears that the Cynics were not totally averse to theorising, as is often said of them. A major difference to the Stoics, however, is that they did not occupy themselves with logic and physics, i.e. with further underpinning of their ethical principles. They considered the practice of daily life particularly important.

This practice was mainly focused on the individual. But a critique of society can be heard in the following anecdote about Diogenes:

Once he saw the officials of a temple leading away someone who had stolen a bowl belonging to the treasurers, and said, ‘The great thieves are leading away the little thief.’⁴

DEMOCRITUS

The atomist Democritus was an enormously productive philosopher and scientist. He was born in 460 BC in Abdera and died probably in 370 BC. He was therefore a contemporary of Socrates and Plato. His ideas, however, were totally different. Democritus has become particularly famous for his ‘atomic theory’. He took from Leucippus this idea that everything is constructed from tiny individual objects: ‘atoms’. Apart from these, all that existed was emptiness, i.e. nothing. No gods or mysterious forces exist that you need to fear.

His opinions are these. The first principles of the universe are atoms and empty space; everything else is merely thought to exist.⁵

*

Democritus is, however, also the first of the Greek philosophers of whom it is known that he paid a lot of attention to the pursuit of happiness. Inner freedom from phantoms was a precondition for

this, according to him. Cheerfulness, *euthumia*, was for him the same as happiness.

*

He wrote an enormous amount: tens of works on ethics, natural philosophy, mathematics, music and poetry, but alas, all of it has been lost. Just as with Zeno, we must make do with quotations from others. That is a great pity, particularly because of the contents, but also because he apparently wrote in a clear, poetic style about all these subjects.

*In reality we know nothing, since the truth is at the bottom.*⁶

*

Democritus never included superfluous things in his texts; his ideas sound clear and never bombastic. He comes across to me as someone who demanded no more from life than is in it, but nevertheless lived as intensively as possible.

*

The best thing for a person is to live life in a cheerful mood and to get annoyed as little as possible. One can achieve that by not seeking one's happiness in transitory matters.

Not through their bodies or money do people find happiness but by sincerity and wisdom.

Someone who does wrong is more unhappy than someone who is wronged.

*

Democritus was a real *bon viveur* and was called 'The Laughing Philosopher'. But he was no superficial joker, as can be seen from the quotations above. He was adventurous, travelled a lot and immersed himself in many subjects. He was very frugal, even more than the Stoics, because they saw the cosmos more or less as a conscious being with intentions, while Democritus was an outspoken

atheist. He hypothesized that the belief in gods came about because people did not understand all manner of phenomena and were afraid of them, for example natural phenomena like thunder and lightning.

*

Passion is justified if one pursues pleasant things without doing evil in the process.

This is different to the standpoint of Zeno, who considered his own passions wrong (except for *eupatheiai*), because these states of minds eliminate reasonable thought, or at least put it on the back burner.

*

Enjoyment and non-enjoyment are the criteria to determine whether something is useful or damaging.

A lot can be said about this. In comparison with many types of ethics, this statement is a relief, because no authorities, duties or prohibitions from on high are there to determine what you can and cannot do. No fear, either, that you will be punished by these authorities. Nevertheless, Zeno and his associates would reject this point of view. But Democritus went further:

One must not select every enjoyment, only enjoyment of what is pleasant.

*

Anyway, it is clear that for Democritus, it was not enjoyment but cheerfulness (as mentioned earlier) that was the highest goal of life.⁷ This is clearly something different to egoistical, short-term pleasure, and closer to the Stoic interpretation of happiness or *eudaimonia*, where good feelings (*eupatheiai*) are linked to reasoned thought and good deeds.

*

Imperturbable wisdom countervails everything.

*

Just like Plato, Socrates and the Stoics, Democritus saw 'Evil' as a lack of knowledge:

The cause of a wrong deed is that one does not know a better one.

*

Good is not just committing no injustice, but also not wanting to commit it.

For Democritus, just as for the Stoics, it was about the intention, not the effect of an act. Someone can, despite the best intentions, still do something very stupid. Look, then, at these intentions, and judge someone on them. Sounds sympathetic.

All the same, on further examination the difference between the intention and the effect of an act is not so important, because from a Stoic perspective, thinking in terms of guilt is inappropriate. In the case of an action which has caused trouble or harm, then it is important in any case to work out what went wrong. That is, in order to learn from it. If the intention of the action was good, then something can be learned about its effects. If the intention was not good, this is more serious, but when soberly examined this too is a question of what can be learned.

*

Courage is the start of an action but chance is master of its outcome.

You could get grumpy about this lack of ability to influence outcomes. But Democritus is sensible:

It shows a lack of insight if one does not accept the inevitable things in life.

A Stoic before the term existed!

*

Likewise this:

Self-control creates a meal to satisfy one's appetite.

And:

If you do not desire much, then a little will be a lot in your eyes, since modest desires make poverty as strong as wealth.

Apparently there were plenty of occasions for statements like this back in those days! In this case, Stoicism went one step further by saying that wealth was not important. While Cynics, as noted above, totally rejected riches.

*

Finally, a call to 'slow down' from ancient times; possibly Democritus addressed these remarks mainly to himself ...

He who wants to be cheerful must not concern himself with too many things, neither in personal life nor in public life, and in all that he does he must not overreach his power and aptitude; even if chance smiles on him and seems to open the way to even more, he must be prepared to resign himself to what he can do and no longer attempt that which he cannot do. A movable load is, after all, safer than one that is too heavy.

*

Centuries later, after studying the theory of Democritus, the Roman orator and philosopher Cicero was left with two questions: what is matter, and what is the impulse that brings about everything? Questions to which conclusive answers have still not been found, but that does not lessen the philosophy of Democritus in my mind; quite the contrary.

Regarding that opinion, however, Plato is not on my side. It seems that he once said that he wanted to burn everything Democritus had written.⁸ What was behind that? And why did he always ignore him (so it seems) apart from this? Jealousy? Or did he consider the sensible, worldly theories of this cheerful philosopher a danger to humanity?

EPICURUS

Epicurus had a beautiful garden (*Kèpos*) just outside the city walls of Athens, where he stayed with his friends. They lived there outside of Athenian society and, in contrast to the Stoics, did not get involved in politics. ‘Live in secret’ was one of the pieces of advice that Epicurus gave.

*

What happened in the Garden? Were they self-supporting or did they get others to work for them? Did they pick figs from the trees, just like that? Who prepared the olives? If everyone went to live with friends in such a garden in a self-supporting manner, wouldn’t we have an ideal world? Are there not many social problems which arise from wanting to possess someone else’s garden?

*

Epicurus lived from 342 to 271 BC. He too wrote an enormous quantity of books and letters, of which luckily a few letters and fragments still exist. He took up Democritus’ ‘atomism’, but he was less clear over atheism than the ‘laughing philosopher’ had been. The standpoint of Epicurus about the gods is, however, original: the gods exist—that must be so, as everyone speaks of them—but they did not interfere with people and had no influence whatsoever on human society. They did not punish or take revenge. People did not therefore need to be afraid of them.

*

The Atomists, Democritus and Epicurus, were controversial enough in Ancient Greece and Rome, but through the rise of Christianity, the enmity became even worse. Perhaps this was unsurprising. One said that no gods exist (not even just one God) while the other asserted that they do exist but that you do not need to take any notice of them. That is of course not very consistent with obedience, with religion as a big stick to ensure people are well-behaved. The consequence is nowadays hardly anyone has heard of these philosophers, who were very famous in their time.

The Stoics, at least, mentioned Zeus now and again—but even with them you (fortunately) find no threats of purgatory, hell or other violence of the gods.

*

Also the Hedonism of Epicurus in particular, relying on one’s own enjoyment, would have pleased neither churches nor governments. Epicurus was and remained known mostly as a Hedonist, a *bon vivant*, in the negative sense but also often in the positive sense. For Epicurus, ‘enjoyment’, ‘desire’ or ‘feeling good’ was the goal of life. The word that he used, *hédoné*, was used to mean both physical and mental forms of wellbeing, as is the case with our word ‘enjoyment’.

*

Democritus was a real knowledge-gatherer, who found everything interesting, both for the knowledge itself and to use the knowledge for further philosophising. For Epicurus, knowledge was primarily a means to reduce or eliminate fear: fear of all kinds of natural phenomena, and fear of gods; fear, in other words, based on misunderstanding or lack of knowledge.

In truth, the motive for all that we do is this: having no pain and no fear. When we succeed in this, it calms the continual storm in our spirit.⁹

*

Because it is clear that Epicurus’ writings mostly do not concern purely physical gratification (although he has no objection to this), I find the words ‘lust’ and ‘pleasure’ rather misleading. So in some cases I have chosen to use expressions such as ‘feeling good’ and ‘enjoyment’ instead.

*

Despite many differences, there are also points of agreement between the Stoics and the school of Epicurus. These are mostly concerned with the quiet, sensible attitude to life that both schools stand for: taking account of the long term and the realisation that

you do not need much, that real happiness is something that you can only make yourself. Also, both theories take a material universe as their starting point.

*

A difference between the two schools is that Epicurus withdrew with his friends into his Garden, while the Stoics notably concerned themselves with society. The Stoic wise person was advised to take part in political life. Epicurus, as mentioned above, had the motto: 'live in secret'.

*

Another difference is that the Stoics thought that a good way of life serves a higher goal, namely the welfare of the cosmos, and that everything that happens to one is good for something. Epicurus, on the other hand, like Democritus kept to a 'simple' universe, consisting of empty space containing indivisible atoms, moving of their own accord and joining together. A universe without sense or goal, in which our world came into existence by chance. The Atomists exhibited through their physics a sensible, scientific vision, which is quite compatible with modern scientific theories of evolution and biology.

*

Epicurus and his friends were, incidentally, not so sensible in every domain: Epicurus appears to have behaved like a sort of guru, and his pupils more or less worshipped him. Perhaps it was Epicurus' pretension of wisdom and having truth in his hands that elicited the statement from the Stoics that no one was or had been wise, and that at most Socrates and Diogenes (the Cynic) came close to it.

*

Democritus was of course a determinist; to him, there was no difference between chance and necessity. Epicurus could not agree with this pure-logic version of determinism. In debates with real determinists he used as a rejoinder: 'Whoever maintains that everything happens according to fate cannot blame someone who says that not

everything happens according to fate. Fate is to blame for this statement itself, according to him.'¹⁰

According to Epicurus, some things happen out of necessity; others are a whim of fate, while others again are in our hands. The future is unpredictable because atoms sometimes make strange, unexpected jumps. This opinion of Epicurus constitutes not only one of the differences between him and the 'hard-core' determinist Democritus,¹¹ but is also at odds with the determinism of the Stoics.

*

Epicurus therefore tried to keep hold of the idea of free will by ascribing to atoms the possibility of making small deviations from 'their natural directions' now and again. But how does that resolve the issue of my free will? Surely it implies that my behaviour too can be explained by causeless small deviations of atoms? Fine, atomic movements can perhaps never be predicted completely, but what difference does that make to me? It still means that my 'self' is not the one pulling the strings.

*

Not that Epicurus is otherwise so vague! He rejected all fortune-telling. Certainly not all the Stoics did that. Because they postulated that the future is fixed, many of them thought that it was possible to predict it. To a certain extent, this is indeed so: weather forecasts, solar eclipses. But in most areas, reality is so complicated that making accurate predictions would take longer than the duration of the occurrences they try to predict.

*

'Those from the garden' and 'those from the colonnade' were often at each other's throats—metaphorically, in any case. The importance (or not) of *hédoné* was and remains the main bone of contention. While for Stoics reason is at the centre, *hédoné* (pleasure, i.e. a feeling) is what mattered most to Epicurus. Epicurus did not occupy himself with virtues or other moralistic perspectives. For him, pleasure was the only good and pain the only evil.

On pleasure we base everything that we desire and do not desire; it is our refuge, where feeling is the measure for judging all that is good.

*

One of the major differences between Epicurus and the Stoics is therefore that according to Epicurus, enjoyment (*hédoné*) ultimately coincides with 'real' happiness (*eudaimonia*), while for Stoics the latter is something more valuable, linked to excellent behaviour.

*

Given that everyone, according to Epicurus, just aims to feel good and avoid pain all the time, in his view it is good to examine this in detail and find out the best way to avoid pain and feel as good as possible (including in the long term, together with our friends). For this, he provided a description of reality as he saw it: feeling good is the motive for everyone, all the time. At the same time, he provided good advice: do not let yourself be distracted by all kinds of unnecessary fears, take seriously your wish to feel good, as this produces the best results; put aside all social standards and values and follow your feelings: those things that provide real 'sustainable' good feelings are what to go for.

*

Of our desires, some are natural and necessary; others are natural but not necessary; others again are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to illusory opinion.¹²

Epicurus considered natural and necessary the relief of pain, and for example drinking when you are thirsty. 'Natural but not necessary' comprises things which only give variation to pleasure but take away no (additional) pain, such as eating expensive food. 'Neither natural nor necessary' includes garlands, erecting statues, etc.

*

If we suffer no pain, we have no more need for enjoyment.

Wanting to feel good can, according to Epicurus, always be re-

stated in terms of wanting to avoid suffering. For example: you want to eat; another time you want to go for a walk. These are: to avoid hunger; to avoid a drowsy feeling. You want a snack: to fill a psychological emptiness, to occupy yourself pleasantly not in a difficult way, to avoid boredom. Not having any pain is, therefore, for Epicurus a (calm) form of enjoyment. For him, there is no such thing as a neutral mood.

Epicurus himself, incidentally, had a lot of physical pain: kidney stones, according to some stories. If that is the case, he must have had to endure a lot of physical pain.

*

A simple soup brings just as much pleasure as an expensive delicacy, once the pain of needing something has been taken away, while water and bread give the greatest pleasure of all when they come to someone who needs them.

Epicurus and his friends were, all in all, not a bunch of people gone astray, wallowing in lust, as some rumours liked to depict the garden's inhabitants, but sensible, frugally living people who enjoyed life, striving through philosophy for a body without pain and a soul without disquiet. A pleasant life full of enjoyment is, according to Epicurus, not possible for people who live foolish and unjust lives. From all this, it is clear that simply chasing short-term gratification is not what Epicurus stood for. Why, then, is that the picture that (even back then) was painted of him? Could people not stand the idea that 'good living' could be possible in such a simple manner?

*

Pleasure/feeling good is, according to Epicurus, something you reach when you experience no pain and no fear, and (for your mood or happiness) you become independent of what is outside of you. This independence of what is outside of you clearly corresponds to one of the most important aspirations of the Stoics. All the same, the latter probably did not often come regularly to Epicurus' Garden to sit drinking grape juice and eating figs ... quite the contrary. Because he argued that pleasure was the most important

motive in life, Epicurus was criticised by many—by Zeno of course, but it seems that Cleanthes particularly opposed Epicurus. Some, including Stoics¹³ but also others, interpreted Epicurus' ideas in very vulgar ways in order to discredit him. In ancient times, infighting was apparently no different to nowadays: the ideas of an 'opponent' were and still are often over-simplified rather than made firm before opposing them.

*

Epicurus said that the first instinct of a newborn is to aim for pleasure and avoid pain. Zeno, of course, did not agree with this and said that the first aim of humans is not pleasure but self-preservation—an innate idea, a judgment. That judgment is combined with a feeling of pleasure; nature has 'arranged' it so that active self-preservation is a pleasurable activity.¹⁴

While Epicurus saw feelings (aiming for pleasure, avoiding pain) as the beginning, the initial cause and so the most important one, the Stoics found that this feeling was 'merely' the consequence of a judgment. For a baby or a young mammal, for example, the (innate) judgment is that (in order to stay alive) it must drink its mother's milk.

*

Epicurus stated that pleasure does not lend itself to be debated about; it is a matter of perception. This is another difference to the Stoics, for whom enjoyment (a feeling) is a consequence of judgments, of thinking. Focusing on pleasure is, according to Stoics an 'irrational pursuit of something that appears to be worthy of desire'. Just as there are illnesses of the body (such as gout, arthritis, colds and diarrhoea), so there are unhealthy tendencies of the 'soul': ecstasy, superficial amusement, schadenfreude (pleasure derived from the misfortune of others), etc. So say the Stoics.

Epicurus reasoned very differently: pleasure is simply what everyone strives for and pain is what everyone tries to avoid. There is nothing wrong with this, according to Epicurus. But it is important that people use their power of reason when making choices; if you let your body choose, without thinking, then it always choose short-

term gratification, which may well in the long term result in a lot of suffering.

*

Taking account of the long term does therefore play a role in Epicurus' philosophy: sometimes you do something that is not so pleasant because you know that in the long run you will be better off because of it. This comparison of short-term gratification versus avoiding suffering and enabling pleasant feelings in the long term is called the 'hedonistic calculus'. A sick person can in some cases only stay alive by undergoing a painful treatment. Animals, too, sometimes withstand pain to improve their future situation. Epicurus gave the example of a tortoise that laboriously turns itself over if it ends up on its back.

*

In contrast to the Hedonist Aristippus,¹⁵ Epicurus warned about actively seeking pleasurable experiences: you need to watch out for this. It is much more sensible to try to be satisfied by the absence of unpleasant feelings (pain, deprivation, need). A complete absence of unpleasant feelings, according to Epicurus, means that you have reached the highest form of happiness. While you do not feel one hundred percent good, some unpleasant feelings remain.

*

You must consider that the future is not within our power, but also not entirely outside our power. So we should not firmly count on what it will bring, nor despair about what it will certainly not bring.

The lifestyle of Epicurus, demanding little or nothing from the outside world, is again very reminiscent of the Stoics. All the more as he emphasised that many of our needs are not natural but only imaginary needs. With these superfluous needs, we saddle ourselves with much discomfort. For this reason, Epicurus adhered to the concept of *autarkeia*: the ability to do things independently.

We consider it a great benefit to be independent of what is outside of

you.

Only accept those needs whose fulfilment lies within your powers. You can enjoy extra things, but be careful that you do not become dependent on luxury. Try to become as little dependent as possible on external factors, so that how you feel is determined as much as possible by your own actions.

Nothing is sufficient for someone who considers something that is sufficient to be too little.

When considering greedy consumption, Epicurus thought not just of material things:

A thankless soul makes a being continually desirous of variation in its way of living.

People want an exciting life, but expect the excitement to come from outside. They throw themselves into nightlife, go on long travels and have one relationship after another, but the restlessness remains. Apparently this consumerist lifestyle already existed in ancient times.

It is not the stomach that is insatiable, as the masses say, but the wrong convictions about the unlimited filling of the stomach.

This could be a saying of Zeno, but these really are Epicurus' words.

Even on the rack the wise man is happy.

This 'Stoic' saying is also from Epicurus. At the same time, however, he said:

The wise man will also feel grief.¹⁶

*

There exist various types of sorrow, and I suspect that in this case Epicurus meant sorrow coloured by pleasant memories, rather than sombre, heavy or nagging types of sorrow.

While the Stoics emphasised that passions are nuisances, according to Epicurus the wise are more susceptible to feelings than others. He adds that this would not thwart his or her¹⁷ wisdom. The question remains as to whether Epicurus includes strong feelings here, or only the soft, quiet *eupatheiai* that the Stoics also spoke appreciatively of. Doubtless there must have been strong differences between these two schools of thought, which were very influential over a long period yet criticised each other strongly.

*

Discussions about pleasure were an important issue for Stoics. What they particularly objected to about Epicurus and his *bon vivant* friends was probably that everything was focused on their own well-being. Chrysippus stated that ethics ultimately revolved around a fundamental choice between pleasure and virtue as the highest good, because if personal pleasure is the highest good instead of striving for excellence, values such as friendship or justice lose their validity.¹⁸

*

As far as friendship is concerned, Epicurus appeared to consider it fine. For this philosopher, just as for Aristotle and the Stoics, friendship was very important:

Friendship dances around the world and calls all of us to awaken and consider ourselves happy.

According to Epicurus, after some time you come to see friends as a kind of extension of yourself. Through this, at a particular point in time your self-interest comes to coincide with that of your friends. This resembles the Stoic description of a friend as 'another I'. And this was not idle talk; it is known of Epicurus that he lived in harmony with his friends.

All the same, there is a significant difference. The friendship of Epicurus and his followers was restricted to the Garden, i.e. to his own group, while the Stoics were socially oriented, and (in theory, in any case) championed worldwide friendship.

*

The differences between the two schools of thought were even clearer when it came to justice. Epicurus saw justice, in contrast to the Stoics, not as something natural or fixed but as a human construction. According to him, there was once a time when each person pursued their own interest, bashing in the brains of others around them.¹⁹ Clever people then realised that people could better serve their own interests by living without these threats, by making agreements with each other. Unjust actions, after all, always involve turmoil: violence, anger, riots, fear and so on. When looked at in this way, justice stands in the service of self-interest, desire and feeling good.

Why, wondered Epicurus, would others such as the Stoics, persevere with a virtue such as justice if it did not deliver any benefit?²⁰

*

Despite this focus on ‘benefit’, Epicurus was not pragmatic, given his preference (similar to the Stoics and Democritus) for intentions rather than results:

It is better that a deed turns out wrong despite an accurate judgment than that a deed turns out right by chance despite a mistake.

*

Moreover, Epicurus asserted that someone who does not live well cannot lead a happy existence. Being good and feeling good are therefore the same for him. Cicero, however, added quite a different opinion; according to this thinker and orator, pleasant things are not always the same as good things; an example offered by Cicero was the fact that people often dedicate or even sacrifice themselves for ‘the good cause’. But that proves nothing, Epicurus would probably have said. They do that perhaps from a feeling of guilt

(i.e. to prevent an unpleasant feeling) or, more positively, because they have learned from experience that it feels pleasant to dedicate yourself to a cause.

*

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a Roman who introduced Greek philosophy to Ancient Rome, and in various books gave commentary on both the Early Stoa and the teachings of Epicurus. He clearly had more appreciation for Democritus than Epicurus: ‘as long as Epicurus follows Democritus, he rarely or never blunders’; ‘what he has to say comes from Democritus’. He considered Epicurus anti-intellectual, in contrast to ‘the laughing philosopher’. Cicero considered it totally disdainful to have gratification and (avoiding) suffering as one’s basic motivation. So it is not surprising that his sympathy lay not with Epicurus but with the Stoics when it came to ethics.

*

Cicero considered it contradictory of Epicurus that on one hand he considered pleasure the most important thing while on the other he said that luxury food does not give more pleasure than bread and figs. But from this, all that follows is that Epicurus gave a different meaning to pleasure than Cicero thought he did. Something broader and more subtle.

Enjoying a piece of dry bread and a glass of water was for Epicurus more than filling or ‘delighting’ the stomach; it was about a life-style focused around enjoyment. Very little is needed to be able to enjoy. Is this totally disdainful?

One of the things that Cicero resolutely rejected was that Epicurus seemed to make no distinction between, for example, the enjoyment of tasty olives and gathering and philosophising with friends. He created no hierarchy between higher and lower forms of pleasure. Pleasure is pleasure, end of story—a standpoint with some merit, it seems to me.

*

Without needing to divide it into higher or lower forms, pleasure

can however still be classified, for example, into the following four kinds: pleasant in the short-term for yourself, sustainably pleasant for yourself, pleasant in the short-term for (yourself and) others and sustainably pleasant for (yourself and) others.

It seems that Epicurus was interpreted by Cicero (and many others) as if he always meant the first kind: 'pleasant in the short-term for yourself'. 'Even for animals, pleasure is not the most important motive', is Cicero's commentary on the Hedonism of Epicurus, and: 'How can gods be happy then, as they have no body!' Ignoring the issue of gods, this commentary only refers to short-term, individual pleasure, although everything indicates that Epicurus was mainly talking about the other three kinds of pleasure. Even he had objections to short-term pleasure for yourself, inasmuch as it may have damaging consequences in the long term or for others. Enjoying a feast is harmless provided I do not overeat and I ensure there is enough left for later, both for myself and for others.

*

Cicero knew perfectly well that Epicurus himself lived very sensibly, but he assumed that a wide audience did not understand this. For some thinkers, Cicero said, their words are better than their deeds; 'for Epicurus the opposite is the case'.

*

Someone who says that the time for philosophising has not yet dawned or has passed is like someone who says that it is too early or too late for happiness.

Epicurus wrote that in his letter to Menoikeus. People are good at inventing excuses. That was so for Thales of Miletus (ca. 624 - 545BC), the first Greek philosopher, or at least the first who became (or rather remained) famous. There was a story that his mother kept pressing him to get married. For a long time he kept answering that it was too soon for that. Until one day his answer was: 'Now it is too late for that!'

In any case, that is not true for philosophising.

*

Epicurus summarised his ideas as the *tetrapharmakos*, the so-called 'fourfold medicine'; this is as follows: 1. the gods do nothing, 2. death means nothing, 3. pleasant feelings can be achieved simply, 4. unpleasant ones can simply be ignored or avoided.

*

But ... if all of this was really so simple, surely after all the intervening centuries this fourfold solution would by now be common knowledge? Perhaps Spinoza was more realistic at the end of his *Ethica* with the observation: 'All that is excellent is as difficult as it is rare'.²¹ All the same, the words of Epicurus sound encouraging, and remain worthy of consideration.

*

Finally it is worth mentioning this: both the Stoics and Epicurus stated that experiencing discomfort and feeling unhappy comes from faulty thinking. Both consider, for example, that fear is not necessary. The Stoics stated in general that fear (just like other unpleasant feelings) is based on a wrong judgment. Fear of death, for example, presupposes that death is evil, but that is not so, said the Stoics, because life and death are 'of no importance'; what is important is to live a good life, the rest is unimportant.

Epicurus emphasised that death is literally nothing for us to fear. He seemed to have somewhat more empathy for people who are fearful, and tried to reassure them: you do not need to fear death, because you are not present once it occurs.

The most terrible evil that there is, death, does not touch us at all, since death is not there while we exist and we no longer exist once death comes.

Even without fear of death, it is the case for the vast majority of people that they would like to remain alive. As long as I live, I hope (in Epicurean terms) to experience pleasant feelings, or (in Stoic terms) possibilities to live a good life. Active living (Stoic) and enjoying it to the full (Epicurean), yet not attaching myself to that life

even though it is the only one for me—that is the Stoic-Epicurean art of life.

PYRRHO, ARCESILAUS, CARNEADES AND SEXTUS

*According to some authorities the end proposed by the Sceptics is insensibility; according to others, gentleness.*²²

*

The Greek verb *skeptesthai* originally meant ‘to watch attentively’. The word *skepsis* meant ‘research’. Plato and Aristotle used it, but for them it was a way of arriving at the truth. For the Sceptics, *skepsis* was more than a means to an end.

*

*Scepticism is the ability to find the opposites both of objects of experience and of objects of thought in any way whatever. Because the opposed things or reasonings have equal force, we are led first to suspension of judgment, and then to serenity.*²³

*

A few centuries before the Hellenistic philosophers, there lived the thinker Parmenides (ca. 500 BC), who was a great influence on them with his rock-solid philosophy about reality, which he called ‘what-is’.²⁴ He stated that there was only one reality and that it was eternal, indivisible and unchangeable. With this, he in fact challenged everybody, that is, all the later philosophers. Some philosophers took over parts of his philosophy, such as Democritus, who changed the presupposition that there was one reality to: there are endless many individual ‘realities’ (atoms). Plato wrote one of his longest *Dialogues* as a response to Parmenides,²⁵ and for the Sceptics too, the rigorous philosophy of Parmenides sparked many discussions and debates.

*

The first fully-fledged Sceptic was Pyrrho of Elis (Purhôn, ca. 360-270 BC). Pyrrho intentionally committed none of his ideas to paper.

Ataraxia, imperturbability, can best be achieved, according to him, by making no pronouncements on reality (aphasia, not-speaking). Because of this, we are left with some guesswork, not just about his life but also his ideas. He was probably influenced in his Scepticism by the school of Democritus. (Democritus hypothesized that there were atoms, it is true, but apart from them there was only empty space and all other assertions rested purely on convention, according to him. His ‘truth’ was therefore very ‘stripped down’.)

*

The Sceptic type of reasoning can also be seen in the so-called Sophists of Athens, orators who trained their pupils to ‘philosophise’ in various directions via arguments and rhetoric; for them, a theory like that of Parmenides must have been a real feast. The Sophist philosopher Gorgias of Leontini (ca. 480-380 BC) opposed the teaching of Parmenides in this way:

*Nothing is; even if something was, I would not be able to understand it; and if I did succeed in understanding it, I would not be capable of informing others of it.*²⁶

*

The Sophists saw the possibility of arguing both for and against something as a useful skill, for example for making political or judicial pleas. The Sceptics, however, took it as very serious philosophically that two opposing assertions can often both be defended equally well: this showed to them that neither one assertion nor its opposite could be claimed as truth.

*

It is not so surprising that Stoicism was strongly criticised by the Sceptics: the fact is, the Stoics thought that you could arrive at the truth through research, and that truth revealed itself through clarity. By this, the Stoics were real dogmatists.

As I already outlined in Chapter III, in addition to the ethics that this book focuses on, the Stoics had an extensive physics, epistemology and thorough logic. Through these, they thought they could

thoroughly underpin their pronouncements, including in the fields of ethics and metaphysics.

The Stoics believed, as many did, that certain knowledge was possible, i.e. that you could fathom the nature of reality through understanding and insight. Anything you understand is reliable, according to them. This is a very arguable idea. People often ‘understand’ things that are later refuted, i.e. that they ‘understand’ very differently later. Understanding something is no guarantee for its accuracy. The riposte of the Stoics to this would of course be: you therefore did not really understand that the first time. But a Sceptic would then answer: how do you know for sure that this is not still the case? And so on, ad infinitum.

*

The Sceptics found that Stoic assertions were inadequately underpinned, but how on earth could you convince a Sceptic that one judgment is correct and another wrong? That would (almost certainly) never succeed, by definition.

*

Yet there were also areas of agreement. The most important agreement concerns the importance ascribed to inner peace, *ataraxia*, as also shared by the school of Epicurus. Also, the Sceptics, like the Stoics, started from the idea that feelings are based on judgments, and considered strong feelings damaging. The Sceptics’ solution for the phenomenon of strong feelings was however not to prevent and refute false judgments but to suspend judgment itself, getting rid of the whole concept of certainty and the need for certainty. Through this, rage and other strong affectations would no longer exist. Thinking that you can or do possess the truth makes people fanatical and agitated, causing arguments and other misery, according to the Sceptics. You would not explode in anger over something you are uncertain about. Suspend your judgment, and *ataraxia* will be your reward.

*

Pyrrho asserted ‘that nothing is beautiful or ugly or just or unjust.

In the same manner, regarding everything, he insisted that nothing really exists and that people do everything on the basis of agreement and custom.’²⁷ So for Pyrrho, even the atoms disappear out the back door. There are tall tales about him, saying that he did not go out of the way of danger: steep hills, wagons heading towards him, dogs ... ‘He was, however, always saved by his friends.’ But there was a good chance that he would watch out sometimes—he lived to about ninety.

Pyrrho, in spite of his criticisms, had appreciation for other philosophers, particularly Democritus. But also writers such as Homer carried his seal of approval.

*

For Pyrrho, supreme well-being consisted of having no more aspirations. Perhaps on his journeys he was influenced by Eastern philosophers. The Stoics were more moderate; they ‘merely’ found that too strong aspirations such as passions and desires were damaging. In other words: wishing, not yearning.

*

Roughly five centuries later, there lived Sextos Empeirikos, better known under his Latin name, Sextus Empiricus (ca. 150-220 AD). Little is known about Sextus himself. Here, too, we must suspend our judgments. He came from Greece or Libya, was educated in Alexandria or Athens and probably practiced as a doctor alongside his Sceptic philosophical activities.

He wrote a number of treatises on Scepticism, which fortunately, in contrast to the works of many others, are still in existence. One of his works begins as follows:

*When people are looking for something, the likely outcome is either that they will find it; or that they will give up the search and admit it cannot be found; or that they will carry on looking for it.*²⁸

He calls those who think they have found the truth dogmatists; these include for example the Aristotelians, the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Sceptic Academics of the school of Plato belong to

the second category, because they presupposed that the truth was unknowable, while the ‘real’ Sceptics, according to Sextus, keep searching for it. The latter can therefore not be caught in the paradox that dogmatists like to throw at Sceptics: ‘Is it true according to you that truth does not exist?’ These ‘real’ Sceptics are those who follow in the footsteps of Pyrrho, suspending all judgment, including judgment on the questions of whether or not truth exists and whether it could ever be found.

★

Sextus quotes approvingly from Anaxarchus of Abdera, a pupil of Democritus: ‘We know nothing; we do not even know that we know nothing.’

★

Although the Stoics were called dogmatists by Sextus Empiricus and other Sceptics, they were very critical in their assumptions. As noted, they had a very extensive theory of knowledge (epistemology). This primarily concerns the concept mentioned earlier, ‘assent’.²⁹ According to the Stoics, we do not simply give our assent to impressions, but to particular thoughts that we connect to these impressions. Such a thought could be ‘there is a glass of grape juice on the table’, but also ‘that juice looks tasty’. Each impression or observation (in any case for adults reasonably capable of thought) is tied to a thought, a judgment.

Once you know (understand) that something is not correct, say the Stoics, you no longer give your assent to the impression with the incorrect judgment. You then give your assent to a new judgment (‘there is red ink in that glass’). Sceptics take a few major steps further: they refuse in any case to assent to impressions, and suspend every judgment. At least in theory. They might well drink grape juice.

★

Sextus studied Stoicism and other dogmatic theories thoroughly; in his arguments he often uses Stoic logic, which he then criticised elsewhere.

The term *epoché*, the central idea of the Pyrrhonist Sceptics, suspension of judgment, comes notably from Zeno. He found suspension of judgment suitable for ‘the non-evident’. Even the Stoically wise suspends her judgment—but not always.

★

What the Sceptics enjoyed attacking was the Stoic supposition that there are particular impressions which are self-evident (*kataleptikos*, ‘gripping’ impressions).³⁰ In other words, the idea of the Stoics that it is theoretically possible (at least for the Stoically wise) to know particular things for certain. And what of course totally rubbed the Sceptics up the wrong way were utterances from the Stoics such as ‘the wise are never wrong’.

The Sceptics (particularly the contemporaries of the Early Stoics, ‘those of the *Akademeia*’, such as Arcesilaus and Carneades, and a number of centuries later Sextus Empiricus) readily made use of the critical theory of knowledge of the Stoics. In fact, they continued along the same lines in some areas.

★

According to the Stoics, Scepticism leads to inactivity and therefore can never lead to a good and happy life. This was (of course) denied by the Sceptics: the idea that you do not need to live according to dogmas does not mean that you may not choose; indeed, according to the Sceptics it simplifies the choices in daily life: it makes them all immaterial. In precisely this way, it creates unprecedented inner peace. *Ataraxia*. A Sceptic can make all manner of pronouncements about reality, such as that it is warm or cold, but:

*If he now and then says that something is so, he always means that something appears so.*³¹

★

*They declared the dogmatic philosophers to be fools, observing that what is concluded *ex hypothesi* is properly described not as inquiry but assumption.*³²

*

Carneades (ca. 214-129 BC) of the *Akademeia* must have been an enthusiastic philosopher. According to Diogenes Laërtius he had a very loud voice, was unconcerned about clothing, let his hair grow long and never went out to eat, so that he could devote all his time to his work. It was said that his friends even had to help him use his hands when eating because he was so possessed by his thoughts.

*

Carneades argued against Chrysippus so often and so ‘successfully’ that he apparently often wondered out loud what would have become of him without Chrysippus. He was also ‘lucky’ that this gifted thinker was no longer around to counterattack him—Chrysippus died when Carneades was just seven years old. The Stoic Antipater fiercely attacked Carneades (in writing) and would not budge an inch, but later Stoics (such as Panaetius) did allow themselves to be influenced by some of Carneades’ arguments.

*

One of Carneades’ criticisms of Stoicism was that Stoics made no distinction between aims and means: living according to nature is the aim, and that aim can be achieved by living according to nature; virtue is the aim, and that aim can be achieved by ... virtue itself. Panaetius produced a refutation of this objection: the object of an art does not always lie outside that art. Wisdom must not be compared to the art of navigation or medicine, he thought, but with acting or dance. The activity and the aim are the same. You dance for dancing’s sake. An example which I immediately think of when it comes to coincidence of aims and means is the expression: ‘there is not a way to peace; peace is the way’. The aim of ‘a pleasant world’ can only be achieved by doing plenty of pleasant things.

*

Virtue and interests are the same, according to the Stoics, but Carneades did not agree with this either. He came up with an

example: Imagine you sell your house. Do you do so fairly for a low price, or unfairly for a high price? This is, though, a very weak example. Antipater, the Stoic, gave a simple answer to this: selling fairly is the best and happiness has nothing to do with monetary advantage.

*

Sometimes Carneades and other Academics are called ‘moderate Sceptics’ compared to the more radical Pyrrhonists. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, for example, classified them in this way. This was because they took what is ‘reasonable’ or ‘believable’ as the foundation for daily activities. They also considered one thing more probable than another. Because they were firmly of the opinion that the truth would never be found, at other times they were called radicals. Pyrrhonists, in contrast, set aside the question of whether the truth would ever be found. Who, then, were the ‘real’ Sceptics?

*

As noted earlier, Carneades made a journey to Rome in 156 BC with two other philosophers,³³ generated interest in Greek philosophy there and gave two speeches as an illustration of Sceptic thought: one in which he defended the position that the State always acts justly, and the next day another equally impassionate and well-defended speech in which he argued the opposite. The authorities did not thank him for the latter ...

*

Sextus Empiricus, just like the Stoic Aristo of Chios,³⁴ attacked the Stoic theory of preference: saying that health is an indifferent matter, even though people prefer health, is inconsistent. Whether particular things are good or bad depends, according to Sextus, on the circumstances. He produced an example where health can be disadvantageous: if you are called up by the army because of it, while sick people were excused from it. (From which it appears that Sextus was not afflicted by pugnacity.) His conclusion was: ‘There therefore exists nothing that is good or bad by nature’. Everyone has a dif-

ferent understanding of what is good; there is no generally accepted 'goodness'. Peace of mind can be obtained by not just accepting or rejecting things but subjecting everything to a critical gaze.

People who think that good or bad exist by nature have after all an unhappy life, while those who do not know for certain and suspend their judgment go through life in a pleasurable and easy manner.³⁵

*

Striving for wealth or fame or pleasure makes people bad and therefore these things cannot be good of themselves, reasoned Sextus. That sounds logical. Funny, though, that Sextus himself now talks in terms of good and bad!

*

Sextus gave a clear example, probably from his medical practice, of how particular ideas cause particular emotions: someone who is operated on (without anaesthetic ...) probably only feels the pain of the cut, while a third party who watches perhaps faints by seeing blood and thinking about all manner of disasters, not because of the pain (because he does not suffer from it) but from his thought that pain is bad. So the disquiet from an opinion about a particular 'evil' can sometimes be worse than the disquiet arising from the so-called evil itself. Up to this point there is hardly any difference to the Stoics. But his remedy is different: someone who suspends his judgment about everything to do with opinions harvest the most complete happiness.

Suspending judgments boils down to 'life without answers', accepting that (probably, for the time being) no 'answers', in the sense of certainties, can be found.

*

According to Sextus, people remain susceptible to 'involuntary and irrational emotional changes', but they can keep control of their feelings. The strength of Stoicism to me is that feelings do not need to be kept under control as such, but through critical reflection you can ensure that only quiet, pleasant feelings remain.

*

Sextus disparaged the 'ethicists':

After all, the art of living which exists (according to their judgment) and brings happiness (according to their opinions) is not one, but consists of several inconsistent version, such as that of Epicurus, that of the Stoics and that of the Peripatetics. We must either practise all at the same time, or just one, or none at all. Practising all of them is impossible because of their contradictions; what one prescribes as preferable, another forbids as reprehensible, and it is not possible to pursue and avoid something at the same time.³⁶

But how can you choose? On what grounds? Sextus could find no criterion to make a choice between them. With this, Sextus remained within 'certainty thinking' because there are no certain grounds to choose one or the other, we are simply unable to choose the best. He was therefore not a pragmatist or eclectic who says: 'we can select a bit here and a bit there; if it all does not form a consistent theory, that is not bad as long as it works.'

*

Understanding something, according to Sextus, is the same as agreeing with it. What does a Stoic mean when she or he understands the saying of an Epicurean, 'pleasure is good'? Has the Stoic really understood this saying or not? If so, according to Sextus, then she or he must also think that the Epicurean is right and admit that the Stoic is wrong. And if not, then she or he cannot argue against it.

XI

STRONG AFFECTATIONS, GOOD FEELINGS

Oh, what good it would do many people to get out for once: not out of their environment, but out of themselves.¹

Throughout the ages there have been philosophers and other thinkers who totally disagreed with the Stoics. The Stoic theory of passions, in particular, was the subject of opposing opinions. One of the opponents was David Hume (1711-1776), a Sceptic who was called 'le bon David' by his friends in the circles of the French Enlightenment Philosophers, including Denis Diderot.

*

According to David Hume, reason has no power of expression over passion. Reason can, according to him, make no choice at all, not even between 'the destruction of the world and a scratch on my finger'. That arises because reason in its standard form is completely neutral; to make a choice, humans need passions, according to Hume.²

But passions, as the Stoics saw them, do not lead to a choice or a judgment; they are a judgment. David Hume, unlike the Stoics, apparently saw feeling and reason as two phenomena separate from each other. Logically he would therefore not agree that feelings are judgments. The question is what passions are: what can they possibly be if no judgment, no grain of reason lies in them? How, then,

can passions, divorced from all forms of thinking, lead to a choice?

*

Reasoning and feeling are two ways of thinking. That is how the Stoics saw it, and they were not the only ones; even nowadays there are many philosophers and scholars who look at it in this way. Feeling could be called 'fast thinking', 'thinking on autopilot' or 'thinking with exclamation marks', while reasoning is a form of slow thinking, thinking with question marks. 'Fast thinking' consists of readymade judgments, conclusions of earlier thinking, built up through life experience combined with innate ideas. Attempts at Stoic reflection involve (very) slow journeys of thought—but I would be better off starting them after I have jumped out of the way from fright (via 'fast thinking') and the falling tree has landed beside me.

*

If feelings can be seen as conclusions of earlier thinking, what David Hume said, 'without feelings we would never be able to make decisions' could be reworded as 'without conclusions of earlier thinking we would never be able to make decisions'. It seems obvious to me that this is the case. It seems clear to me that the Stoics did not mean that we must think without feeling anything at all, but that it is important to think critically and sensibly (and preferably wisely) so that (because thoughts and feelings are directly connected to each other) our feelings also can be quiet, beautiful and pleasant.

*

The contrast between feelings and reason that many people talk about is a false contrast; what is at issue is inconsistency between ideas that are more thought through and those that are less so. The less consistency, the more confused the feelings and the more often 'feelings' and 'reason' seem contradictory, on superficial consideration. It can happen that someone's 'head' and 'heart' give different advice, but 'heart' in this case only means 'reactions learned from ideas acquired earlier'; ideas that with a certain amount of effort can be retrieved and changed.

*

Someone who reacts emotionally feels they are in the right—as strong feelings are associated with ‘knowing for sure’. To react in a level-headed manner you must first think about it. Seeing feelings as conclusions of earlier thinking makes criticism of the ideas lying behind them possible and sensible.

The fact that my feelings can be changed means that I do not to submit to them if they ‘attack’ me, and it also means that I cannot use ‘feelings’ as an excuse. A feeling can, after all, only serve as an excuse if it were unchangeable.

If I retranslate my feelings as ideas, and I accept that others can have different ideas, this can improve communication and therefore co-operation and friendship.

*

In this chapter a number of feelings are examined; what can be said about them based on Stoic ideas?

ANGER

Of all affectations, anger is the most striking and damaging. In a fit of anger, people can do violence to other people or themselves, they can destroy things, or carry out other ‘stupidities’. Animosity and fieriness appear to be bad for one’s own health (for the heart). People who are very indignant, who let themselves be carried along by their anger, also run the risk of generating anger and indignation in others, by harsh words, slanging-matches, destructive behaviour, harsh or violent actions, etc. Even if only for these purely practical reasons, it is worth the effort of breaking the habit of becoming angry, not by suppressing anger but by not letting it go so far that you become furious.

*

Behind anger lies the thought that I am being disadvantaged, in combination with the illusion that I am still able to intervene. However, if things turn out differently to what I had wanted, the only thing that I can do is try to influence ‘future causes’. It

is important to realise how small my powers to do this are. Yet it is always worthwhile, because applying myself to what I consider good is the best thing I can do—so I can in any case be satisfied about that. And sometimes, small differences can suddenly have big consequences.

As for all passions, it is the case that only insight can prevent a fit of anger or cause it to disappear. The insight, that is, that circumstances are what they are, that people are the way they are—even though both people and circumstances can change in the future. How far, and in what direction, the changes might go I once more cannot control.

*

It is sometimes said about anger that it is good to express it, to relieve your feelings. As if anger is a balloon that you can deflate so that you can think sensibly again. But others, not only Stoic philosopher but also contemporary psychologists and neurologists, including Daniel Goleman, maintain that expressing anger has a contrary effect: someone gets ‘charged up’ and becomes even angrier. Actively cooling down by dealing with the causes of anger is better, according to this interpretation.

*

Someone who makes themselves extremely angry often has the tendency to maintain their anger out of fear of losing face. The anger itself is of course not Stoic; the shame related to it even less so. So, if I nevertheless let myself be carried away by a bout of anger, then recognising my clumsiness is the best thing I can do.

Only the (virtual) Stoic sage never makes a psychological slip-up.

*

What is the situation with ‘justified’ anger, for example about social injustice? In most political and idealistic groups (including activist groups) and social movements it seems to be part of the deal to get angry about all kinds of wrongs. Because it frequently does not involve being personally disadvantaged but expressing indignation about others’ disadvantage, this type of anger seems more justified,

noble even. But when soberly looked at, what does this anger deliver, for me or the world? Nothing at all! The same things (taking direct action, demonstrations, giving out pamphlets, discussing with other people) could have been done without this anger. Perhaps taking a ‘Stoic’ attitude would have benefitted these activities and in any case the activists would have felt better doing so. It is not for nothing that justice had an important place in the Stoics’ list of virtues. Anger over injustice is not necessary, it is enough (and more appropriate and effective) to actively strive for justice.

*

First ensure that your anger has gone and then improve the outside world. Socrates had a similar attitude: he waited until his anger had subsided before he criticised someone, because he suspected that during a fit of anger he would not be able to think and act justly. Anger is nothing more than a fit of madness, a quick way of thinking, judging and acting, which mostly only has negative consequences.

Perhaps rage (speaking loudly, clearly saying ‘the truth’) can sometimes have good pedagogic results, giving those to whom the rage is directed an impulse to think things over (from which they might change their behaviour). But then let me ensure that there are no connotations in my words, even though I raise my voice. Let me ensure that I am sensible and act from insight and overview, including in activism, so that while I may not yet have changed the world, I do change a very small part of it, a part that is very important to me. Moreover, others will listen better to me if I speak soberly and with consideration, and react in a less agitated manner, increasing the chance that what I am trying to achieve really will be achieved.

*

Surely you would not get angry at a rain shower? You can look at other people in the same way: they form a part of the world outside you. If they think, judge or want something different to you, this has specific causes. Your anger will make little change to this. Better use the energy instead to obtain insight into these causes.³

*

But some people do get angry about the weather. Or about fate, the universe or whatever; something that apparently (so they think) wants to obstruct them, something that has evil intentions for them, or at least disadvantages them.

Even though nearly everyone can see the irrationality of this, for most people it is difficult to escape this way of thinking entirely. That is to say: many people find it difficult to react without anger or annoyance to bad luck—they suffer from a naive and egocentric world view.

*

Indignation contains an impulse for revenge. By following this impulse, people maintain the spiral of violence (or at least of anger) and tensions remain between individuals and groups.

Years ago, I came across a saying of Abel Herzberg: ‘You are only really an anti-Nazi when you are no longer indignant.’⁴ He tried to understand why SS members behaved the way they did: he considered that understanding their beastly behaviour contributes to solutions.⁵ For many people, ‘understanding’ sounds like ‘explaining away’, but this is of course not the case at all here. Here, understanding means: trying to get insights into damaging behaviour in order to contribute more effectively to the subsequent prevention of this behaviour.

*

In short, anger is never sensible: if you feel capable of changing what annoys you then you do not need to become angry, and if you realise that you cannot change it then anger has no point at all. And if you do not know if you can change the situation or not, you would be better off thinking about it instead of spending your time being angry.

*

And if it feels good to express your anger? This shows you were already angry. This ‘Hedonistic argument’ does not negate my plea to prevent anger. Never getting angry at all feels a lot better, after

all.

FEAR

The Stoics naturally do not deny that dangerous situations exist. The solution for this is however not the passive 'being afraid', but as with all other strong or nagging feelings it is active application of one or more of the virtues. In this case, the aim is not to be concerned in the sense of worrying, but alert and cautious. 'Courage' is also a Stoic virtue⁶ that can be appropriate in threatening situations. Recognising (and facing the reality of) how threatening (or not) the situation is could also be called 'courageous'.

*

There are various situations which, when combined with un-Stoic thoughts, lead to fear. One kind relates to physical existence (fear of discomfort, illness and death), another with social life: fear of rejection by a loved one or friend, of exclusion from society, or a general fear of not being considered worthy by others. Seneca and Epictetus in particular gave many 'tips' on facing up to these kinds of fears.

*

From the fact that people exist (and have existed) who do not (and did not) worry about death, you can conclude that 'being afraid of dying' is not an essential human characteristic. It is just a possibility. An obvious way of dealing with fear of death is to try to think of other ideas and in so doing generate other feelings.

*

Earlier, I mentioned flinching as a useful reflex. Pulling your hand back quickly if you burn it on a hot pan seems like 'appropriate' behaviour to me. A Stoic has no intention of self-mutilation. It is a different situation when someone is jumpy, i.e. flinches even if there is no physical danger. In that case, flinching comes not from useful innate cautionary ideas but judgments made during the course of one's life. And once more it is the case that these alarming thoughts can be investigated and the jumpiness will disappear if more sensible thoughts take their place.

*

Fear originates as merely a rapid conclusion, on the basis of judging the situation you find yourself in, to flee or hide, or at least to keep a low profile. It would be nice if that is all it was: after concluding 'beware, danger!' you find a safe place, feel secure and fall asleep. Who knows, maybe that is how it works for many animals. Once I found a mouse (which later turned out to be perfectly healthy) which had hidden behind a suitcase which was open with its lid against the wall. Under the lid, the animal clearly felt safe enough to fall into a deep sleep. I picked up the mouse carefully and instead of panicking it remained asleep!

For people, however, the situation is often different. Because we are good at anticipating, which is often useful, we are also good at constructing scary visions. Our fantasy easily goes into overdrive. We remain stuck in a 'scared' situation unless and until we actively intervene against fearful fantasising. So it is really about constructing a new warning signal: a signal that warns 'hey, watch out, your feelings are running away, take action!'

FEELING GUILTY

Feelings of guilt are focused on the past, even though the past cannot be changed. This instantly shows that feeling guilty is not an effective or appropriate reaction. Instead of (passively) feeling guilty, for example that I have taken too little action to improve the world, I would be much better off (actively) thinking about the question of whether this is in fact the case, and if it is, what sort of good things I could do (and then do them).

*

Or do I first need to have felt guilty in order to arrive at the idea that I can do more for the world? No, quite the opposite! Look at it the other way around: imagine that you are helped by somebody. What would be nicer, that someone does this out of interest and with pleasure, or that someone does it to try to escape his or her feelings of guilt?

Thinking that activities such as 'helping people' or 'improving the

world' only happen because of feelings of guilt is to deny the social side of human nature. This social side is far from fully developed and is sometimes totally damaged, but that does not detract from the fact that people by their nature tend to help each other.⁷

*

Of course, it is possible that I do things with the best intentions and yet they turn out badly. In that case it is clear that I have done my best and that feelings of guilt are misplaced. But even if it is the case that I could (momentarily) not manage to do something good, if I therefore did not do my best, even then feeling guilty is uncalled-for. Apparently I could not do other than 'not do my best'. If I now, with my new understanding, were presented with the same choice I would do it differently, i.e. better. That is what is important.

*

Feeling guilty is simply counterproductive. People who feel guilty often allow it to get on top of them and withdraw into their shells. And it is also often the case that people feel guilty but still keep doing whatever they feel guilty about. For example, they feel guilty about driving a car, eating meat or living a life of luxury, but they do not want to give up these things. The guilty feelings then seem to be a kind of redemption, as if their behaviour becomes less damaging because they feel guilty.

*

It also often happens that people feel guilty about situations that they themselves never contributed to. They feel guilty, for example, about hunger in other parts of the world, a friend who is ill or a lonely aunt.

Feeling guilty indicates that I think: I really ought to have helped. Even more: I ought to have wanted to help! There is nothing wrong with the impulse to help, but where does that smothering, unhappy-making 'ought to' come from? If 'ought to' does not refer to one or other supposed authority (a god or commandment, a boss, a father, a grandmother, a tradition, an ancestor, a government) and the recognition of this authority, then it apparently refers to one's

own conscience. 'I won't allow myself to do that, I must live this way or that.'

*

Of course, everyone has ideas about what is valuable (good) and what is objectionable (bad). That could be called a conscience. But the existence of an authority (of any sort) is baseless and can in no way be substantiated philosophically. This is also true for the authority of one's own conscience.

Helping someone else or improving the world are things that I can do simply as a result of striving to make something good and pleasant out of my life. An authority or sense of duty is not necessary for this. If I act based on wishes rather than a sense of duty, what I do will probably turn out significantly better for others, for the world and also for myself.

*

'Ought to' comes from nowhere, as if it is something external. I do not seem to be responsible for it. With feeling, something similar is up: 'I act from my feelings'—here too, it is as if I am not totally accountable for such actions. It is much clearer to use the word 'want'. I want this, not that, for such and such reasons. Someone can be held to account for what they want. This makes things clearer.

*

A guilty feeling is a nagging feeling: I ought to have done something other than what I did, or I ought to want something other than what I want. I failed, I am a bad person. If I think that about myself, why then do I not make a different choice?

*

According to primate researcher Frans de Waal, subjection to authority is an important phenomenon for the development of feelings. Guilt and shame are clear examples of this. Guilt can be traced back to fear of punishment and essentially boils down to punishing yourself in the hope of being spared by those in power. Frans de

Waal describes in *Good Natured* how for social animals that live in hierarchically organised groups, guilt arises from fear of the anger of those higher up the social ladder. This sounds plausible. Guilt is, then, simply fear of getting told off, getting a bite or a snarl. Even if you get the 'bite' or 'snarl' only from yourself.

*

The ability to possess the idea of doing something wrong and needing to be punished for it—from which guilt arises—is no doubt innate in humans. This feeling, however, does not have to develop, and if a guilty feeling nevertheless arises in my head, I can once again refute this self-judging notion by critical thinking. What is worth keeping, because it is an appropriate reaction, is a realisation that things that I used to do in a particular way can perhaps be done differently next time. That is simply learning, building life experience.

DISSATISFACTION AND DISCONTENTMENT

Continuing to act based on guilty feelings leads to dissatisfaction or discontentment. This is more of a mood than a strong burst of feeling.

*

Through self-sacrifice, someone can effectively choose this. Someone, for example, may consider it important to remain with her ill father but would also like to go to a concert with a friend. She would have chosen the concert if her father had not been ill, i.e. in an alternative universe, but here and now in this universe her father is ill. It is no use to grumble later: 'I really wanted something different'. Someone who does this is trying to live in two universes at the same time.

Shall I remain with my father because I think this is good and choose to do so? In that case, I will make something pleasant out of it! Or I will go out with my friend and make something pleasant out of that? Whatever I choose, it seems that it is what I wanted. 'It is not possible to choose something (including doing something) that

I actually did not want'.⁸

*

A consumption-based and therefore passive attitude, an attitude in which we think that the world outside ourselves is responsible for our well-being, makes us become and remain dissatisfied. It is never good, never enough, it could always have been better—that is what we think.

This does not always involve eating and drinking and other sensory enjoyment, or having the latest computer, the fastest bicycle or the best holiday; it can also involve aesthetic enjoyment, literature, art, scientific articles or lectures—even philosophy. The consumptive or passive aspect lies in the judgment that we need these things, this holiday or those lectures to feel good. So then we are dissatisfied if we miss this lecture, or if we have no money for that computer or those fancy foods.

Moderation or frugality is also named as one of the important virtues for Stoics. I do not like the term 'moderation' because it suggests something needs to be moderated, which is not the case for someone who has adopted an active Stoic attitude. Because of this, I prefer the term 'frugality'. This expresses the idea that a little is enough for someone.

*

A Stoic obtains satisfaction from activity instead of consumption. This to me does not mean that a Stoic cannot enjoy eating or reading. Enjoyment is not an aim in itself but a welcome bonus. The art is to enjoy it without getting attached to it: always remaining alert, not sitting back and letting things happen.

SHAME

Thoughts that lead to shame are also inadequate ideas. I see shame as a feeling arising from the fear of not belonging, i.e. from thoughts along the following lines: I must make a good impression, they need to like me, I must ensure that they value me. Shame arises when I have the idea that I have failed and that others will reject

me because of it. While for a Stoic, the key is to do your best to be a good person, according to your own values; whether others consider you strange or you become terrifically popular is of no importance at all.

The Cynic, Crates, once got Zeno, who had just become a pupil of his, to walk along a busy street with a dripping pot of lentil soup. This was to teach him not to be concerned about the opinions of other people on unimportant matters.

*

If you cannot be the way you want to be, then it remains the case that you did your best and continue to do so. Someone whose mental faculties deteriorate because of age or illness needs not be ashamed of this, for the perfectly simple reason that s/he can do nothing about it. And someone who could have done something about his or her thoughts becoming hazy, because of drunkenness or something similar, also need not be ashamed, because s/he can ensure that things will go better in future. Looking back can be good, to learn from the past, and then to make a new plan for the future.

*

Feelings such as shame often mean you allow something to get on top of you, instead of getting busy. Is something impossible? Then pay no more attention to it. If it is possible, then get busy with it. In both cases there is ample opportunity to live and learn.

DESPONDENCY

When Stoics talk of appropriate behaviour, this would never include despondency. If I am despondent, I let myself be led by my feelings, but my feelings lead to nothing. It cannot get more passive than this!

*

Despondency is a mood in which very little thinking takes place, so that someone in this state does not quickly think of a solution to get out of it. Discouraging thoughts (possibly old ones) go round her or

his head, resulting in a lack of energy. These could include thoughts such as 'why should I do something, everything is pointless' or 'I will never achieve anything', combined with heavy demands and self-judgments along the lines of 'I really want to achieve a lot in my life, otherwise I regard myself as a failure'.

*

Changing your behaviour is a question of hard work, just like slimming or getting rid of an addiction; good intentions are not enough. There are plenty of examples of how difficult it seems to be. People often know how bad something is but still keep doing it. A despondent mood can, in spite of all its misery, become a habit. Kicking this habit requires courage. Seeing life from a sunnier perspective can be quite a feat for some people. Stoic insights can undoubtedly help with this: helping you no longer to sit around waiting for happiness, but to set about the task yourself.

*

Besides heavy despondency, there is a lighter version. People (apart from Stoic and other sages) spend a lot of the day worrying about all sorts of little things. Small inconveniences, minor setbacks. We react to the outside world as if it is, or ought to be, as controllable as our inside world. We mark out a path in our thoughts, but the real path seems to be full of bumps and potholes; pitfalls are present and highway robbers can even attack. We set our aims and are permanently en route. We consider that these bumps and potholes frustrate our goals, but we should include the need to cope with them in our goals, because these obstacles (flat tyres and other bad luck) are part and parcel of life.

JEALOUSY

Jealousy is a combination of fear and anger. Fear that someone else has beat you to it, fear that you are found wanting because of someone's actions, and anger towards the other person (or people) because of this.

At the root of jealousy lie thoughts such as the idea that possessions

are important, the idea that you have a right to something, or the idea that other people are not friends but competitors (or even enemies). All these ideas are at odds with Stoic thinking.

*

Often people want something that someone else has, but they would not want to swap places with them.⁹ Someone with a lot of money is jealous of someone with a lot of free time. He or she then forgets, for example, that the one with a lot of free time has much less money to spend. Or vice versa. Or someone is jealous because someone else is so popular. S/he forgets that being popular involves doing something, a particular way of interacting with people, which does not suit everyone. The same is true for jealousy of artists, good writers or good musicians. Most people who are very good at something have put an awful lot of energy into it. To someone who is jealous of someone else, ask the question: would you want to live like that person? There is a good chance that you get the answer 'no'.

*

But suppose that someone was very successful in the 'good things of life' without expending much effort. Such 'lucky devils' exist, at least so it sometimes seems. Is jealousy then 'appropriate' for me? Of course not; it is philosophically impossible to substantiate, and I would just make myself unhappy. I would be better off realising that I could probably learn from the 'maestro', and in any case I can enjoy her or his performance.

*

When mentioning jealousy, many people think of jealousy in love. This type of jealousy is indeed very common. But jealousy has nothing further to do with love. I have namely no 'right' to love, certainly not to unconditional, clingy love. What could there be against someone who loves me loving others too? What could there be against me being deeply fond of several people at once? The more love, the better, surely?

Only free love exists—because unfree love is not love. That means

that everyone has the possibility of loving all others and (therefore) also falling in love with them. Jealousy is actually a ham-fisted attempt to compel someone to love you while stopping them from loving someone else. This mostly has the opposite effect to that intended. Not only by feeling jealous, which is bad enough, but also because the person you want love from is more likely to turn their back on you.

*

Jealousy has a lot to do with greediness and possessiveness, combined with 'comparisonitis'.¹⁰ The motor of capitalism, the competitive instinct, arises out of jealousy, and would therefore disappear if everyone was a Stoic. A Stoic economy is one in which all people want the best for each other, and strive for it.

BEING IN LOVE

In the preface to his reader *De mens is een dier dat kan denken* (The human is an animal that can think), Piet Gerbrandy wrote that he is surprised by Seneca, who stated that whoever is in love, ambitious or sorrowful should be regarded as sick. Gerbrandy commented: 'A greater contradiction with modern visions of humans is scarcely conceivable. Can we really understand people from the Classical period?'

Many centuries after Seneca, however, Spinoza wrote something similar in his Ethics, namely that falling in love, miserliness and a thirst for fame are similar aberrations to seeing strange objects in the daytime. Types of sickness, in other words. Is Spinoza incomprehensible for modern people?¹¹ No! I understand these ideas, and not just that, I find them very inspiring, and above all logical.

*

Nature, according to the Stoics, is organised such that useful things generate pleasure.¹² But not everything that generates pleasure is useful; short-term pleasure can have damaging consequences, and pleasure is therefore not something to aim for as a goal.

What can be said about the phenomenon of being in love? It is a

feeling that most people experience as very positive. It is true that less pleasant feelings such as embarrassment and fear of failure tend to accompany it, but the feeling itself, being very enthusiastic about someone so that you would rather do nothing more than be very close to them, is one that many people experience as pleasant. So pleasant, indeed, that people can remain in love for a long time even if it is not reciprocated.

*

Being in love in the sense of an attraction based on friendship and love constituted a cohesive force in the ideal society in Zeno's Politeia. This apparently was a form of love where I feel happy without losing myself, and without having to 'conquer' or 'possess' the object of my love. It is not at the cost of my independence.

But lovesickness, a stronger version of being in love, is clearly a feeling that runs away with me. This passion arises from a possessive urge, from thoughts such as 'I must be with X, and X must love me and me alone, otherwise my world will collapse around me'. It means I have set my heart on someone else and make my mood totally dependent on what they do. Lovesickness is therefore a source of yearning, frustration and unhappiness.

But luckily, even for being love it is true that feelings do not just happen to you, they are the result of thoughts which, once you are aware of them, you can actively shape and therefore change. Change into a 'manageable form of being in love', or simply into 'ordinary' love.

*

Lovesickness distorts reality. It is not very likely that the picture that you have, that one person is so much more special than the rest, is correct. The same is true for the idea that only that one person is really right for you. Once lovesickness is over, you can look again in the calm light of day, and that ever-so-special person will change back into an ordinary person.

It appears that many people simply enjoy being in love, for the buzz, to have the feeling of really being alive. When in love, they feel more energetic and lively than at other times; in this sense,

being in love works like an addiction; people must kick the habit if they want to get out of it.¹³

*

A passionate love can blind someone and is actually (just like all strong affectations) nothing other than a fit of madness. Unlike a fit of anger, a fit of passionate love mostly causes little harm, and for outsiders this foolishness often forms an enjoyable topic of conversation. Yet sometimes passionate love can cause much damage. Novels, plays and stories throughout the ages from all parts of the world show that this happens everywhere and has done since time immemorial.

However, it is not love that causes this misery, but the possessive urge that wrongly gets attached to it.

LOVE

With love by itself in the sense of loving someone, nothing can go wrong. Spinoza called envy, jealousy, ambition, miserliness and greed *passiones* (passions). Lovesickness, the passionate version of being in love, also belongs in this list. Love on the other hand belongs to the *actiones*, the acts.

Love is an activity. This form of love cannot be restricted and also can never be aroused under coercion. It is by definition free—'free love' is, as noted above, the only love that there is.

*

But this active form of love is almost never something we are brought up on. Erich Fromm wrote in *The Art of Loving* that love is experienced by most people as something that happens to them; a sensation, something passive. People are generally occupied primarily with how they can make themselves attractive, often focussing on success, money, fame, appearance, power. Indifferent matters.

'There is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started out with such tremendous hopes and expectations, and yet which fails so regularly, as love', according to Fromm. Loving as an activity is however something that everyone can learn. The best 'guarantee' of

getting love is to give it out without expecting anything in return ...

*

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), who was inspired both by Stoicism and Scepticism, also argued in favour of an active concept of love, focussed on giving love instead of receiving it. He was sceptical about marriage, using as an example the above-mentioned Greek natural philosopher Thales, who first considered it too early and later on too late to marry.

*

People who spend a large portion of their lives together generally lose their 'rose-coloured spectacles' and are sure to discover all kinds of habits and characteristics of their partners that did not occur or were not noticed when they first fell in love. In an attempt to make their partner fit their idealized picture of them, they continually express their annoyance and criticism. Miriam van Reijen considers that it shows more love if you accept another person as s/he is instead of trying to change her/him. 'We want another person to change so that we will be happy. We seek the source of happiness outside ourselves; we think that the behaviour of someone else stands in the way of our happiness.' Acceptance makes both partners free, according to her: one is free of the other's moaning, the other of annoyances and frustration (which she does not need to suppress, but can prevent by thinking it over), so that she can focus her energy on her own things. 'Do not forget that you cannot change another person; you can only change yourself.'

But the other person can also change himself/herself, and when it comes to all the choices you make in daily life you can provide new ideas to that other person. Whether these are taken up is not something you control.

*

Ultimately, it is possible to love everyone. Think of Zeno's ideal, where all sages are friends with each other, and the concentric circles of Hierocles. It is clear that such worldwide free love can (for the

time being) only be an aspiration, but each step in that direction is worthwhile.

GRIEF

*Nor indeed will the wise man ever feel grief; seeing that grief is irrational contraction of the soul.*¹⁴

The Early Stoics would never have cried. Except—undoubtedly—when they were children. Although the true Stoic would never be in a state of grief, grief is an affectation that causes little or no damage to the griever's surroundings. Someone who grieves does not protest, but cries or is silent. There can be many reasons for grief: an aim is not reached, a wish is not fulfilled, a love is unrequited, a loved one has died.

*

Living without grief does not imply a lack of feelings. Just as love and friendship are pleasant feelings which are included in the *eupatheiai*, thoughts about a friendship that is over or the death of a loved one can also be pleasant feelings. Seneca wrote letters of condolence to people who mourned the loss of a loved one. The atomist Epicurus wrote a lot about the enjoyment of pleasant memories after the death of friends.¹⁵

Marcus Aurelius, the Roman, saw the death of loved ones only as change—everything changes continually, life and death are part of this universe.

*

Based on the idea that people are not perfect Stoics, I think it is logical that we need time to investigate a new situation in which we can only enjoy the memories of our loved ones. Stoic commentary along the lines of: 'surely you knew that this was a mortal being' is therefore something I experience not as an unanswerable remark, but as a useful thought, which can guard me from sliding towards endless grief or dejection.

Sometimes people remain stuck in their grief; then it becomes a fret-

ful mood, caused by not wanting to face the new situation.

Grief is in that case a mood in which people think back nostalgically to the past and therefore harbour the irrational wish that the present ought to resemble the past in ways that are simply not possible. That is, instead of using this ‘thought-energy’ to make the present (and the future) more pleasant.

*

Seneca’s answer was mostly along the lines of ‘moaning does not help’: someone who complains, whines or sighs experiences the same things as someone who bears events bravely. Dying ‘too young’ is not possible, because it is possible to die at any age, and grief for someone who is dead is not necessary: a loveless person does not need to be missed in this way, and a loving person would not want others to be mournful about her/him, so said Seneca. He considered it inhuman (and rightly so) to remain indifferent when a loved one has died. Anyway, it was not for nothing that he wrote a lot about this; with all his sensible advice, he hoped to console people who experience grief.¹⁶

*

Some forms of grief effectively amount to self-pity. The kind of grief, that is, where I think I have been short-changed, as if I have a ‘right’ to something, to a particular amount of love or attention, or if I think that things should always go my way. The irrational thoughts that this grief is based on can once more be refuted by soberly facing the situation, even if a lot of ‘Stoic courage’ is often needed for this.

Joy

Cheerfulness, an active disposition, in other words being willing to do all manner of things, could be considered the ideal ‘basic mood’. A quiet type of joy, such as the joviality of the atomist Democritus. Even happiness perhaps, because you are busy doing good things. In a perfect Stoic, this basic mood is constantly present.

*

There are also other forms of joy. You can ‘be beside yourself’ with pleasure, for example. Would those Stoics consider that wrong? As far as I am concerned, there is nothing wrong with great fun. I suspect, however, that the Stoics preferred more serious moods—I bet this was usually the case.

HUMOUR

Did the Stoics have a sense of humour? In *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius, there are many humorous stories about Ancient Greek philosophers, particularly about the Cynics, but also about Stoics. The atomist Democritus was, as noted above, called ‘the laughing philosopher’. Did he laugh in a friendly way? Mockingly? In self-mockery? Undoubtedly they laughed, including the Stoics—but their laughs, unlike their texts, were not recorded anywhere.

*

Is humour a feeling? Joyfulness and cheerfulness are feelings and moods. Humour is not a mood, but an activity involving reasoning that makes you joyful. Humour requires suppleness of thought: looking at things from a totally different angle, making crazy leaps of logic. Logic was for Stoics a very important part of their philosophy, and I suspect that they had many jokes tinged with logic. Did they not laugh at the ‘problems’ set by Chrysippus along the lines of ‘you have not lost your horns, so you have them’?

*

With a Stoic outlook on life, which your practical efforts fail to keep up with, you can soon end up with self-mockery. Commonalities between a Stoic attitude and self-mockery are common sense and the desire to look at things from a distance. Particularly when I make a big deal of something that would be totally unimportant if ‘seen from the moon’, I can spontaneously burst out laughing. Whether I want to or not, I immediately see the pettiness of my concerns. And my laugh clears the air.

*

Needless to say: the fact that laughing is healthy for emotional life does not mean that reason does not enter into it. Only once you realise the absurdity of particular concerns or lamentations do you break out in laughter.

*

There does, however, also exist much malicious 'humour'. An awful lot of jokes revolve around making particular individuals or groups of people look ridiculous. By joining in with the laughter, you 'confirm' your own supposed superiority. In this so-called humour, there lies hostility, aggression and therefore verbal violence. A Stoic who is the 'victim' of this can of course cope with it, but would have no need at all to take part in such a thing.

*

Putting things into perspective and (genuine) humour do not belong together with anger, indignation, pity and grief. Nor with fear: you do not make jokes or laugh if you are extremely afraid. Via humour, people can (at least for a moment) release themselves from their situation. Humour can (at the very least) free people from their strong, nagging feelings.¹⁷ Irrational thoughts are always humourless. This does not mean that, conversely, all humour exhibits wisdom ...

COMMISERATION OR ENGAGEMENT?

Would a Stoic, who is not personally suffering, be concerned about the ups and downs of others? Martha Nussbaum has her doubts about this. In her book *Upheavals of Thought* she devotes many pages to the concept 'compassion'.¹⁸ For her, the Stoics do not come off well when it comes to this subject. But to my mind the answer to this question depends on what you mean by compassion: is it commiseration or engagement? Martha Nussbaum unfortunately makes no distinction between these.

*

If I commiserate (i.e. if I literally join in with the misery) with

people on the other side of the world who are hungry, that arises mainly because I know nothing I can do to solve the problem, yet I nevertheless feel partly responsible for it. The situation clashes with my ideas about justice; that is logical. But commiserating is not a proper answer; no one benefits from it, and I feel unhappy too. Commiserating goes no further than: 'how horrible, this should not happen, I ought really to do something about it'.

Commiserating immobilises things. I see that someone suffers and I suffer too. Anger, grief and particularly guilt can play a role in commiseration, i.e. in the thoughts that generate these feelings.

*

Behind commiseration lies the supposition that particular things are important, things which according to Stoicism are indifferent matters. It is therefore consistent to 'abolish' commiseration: if you reckon that circumstances and material things have no authentic value for you, you can see things that way for others too—even if the others think differently.

But—although Martha Nussbaum's commentary on the Stoics seems to omit this—commiseration is just one particular form of empathy. Nussbaum seems to think that the refusal to commiserate with others' suffering means that a Stoic is unfeeling. Yet it seems quite possible to me to empathise in another way with other people based on Stoic views. Where else could the virtue of justice come from? Why else would the Stoics consider all people to be equal, and why would friendship be seen as something of great importance?

*

'Getting rid' of commiseration is not the end of the matter. Compassion in the sense of engagement, after all, is quite compatible with Stoic ideas. A Stoic does not live on a desert island but takes an active part in social life, and so acts out of engagement, both with friends and acquaintances and with others. Think of the extension of the 'own' in the concentric circles of Hierocles (Chapter VI). From engagement or solidarity, we should therefore try to help others where necessary. Practical help based on engagement makes a real difference, in contrast to (passive) commiseration.

*

Nussbaum, incidentally, does remark that the motivation for this 'extreme' standpoint of the Stoics on compassion, that is diametrically opposed to social views and opinions on the Left, by saying that circumstances, including social circumstances, are indifferent, 'is at root a strongly egalitarian and cosmopolitan one'.¹⁹ When it comes to what life is ultimately about—good life—people are entirely equal. For a Stoic, competition is not possible: each person can only obtain happiness through the challenges that her or his own life offers.

Unfortunately, Martha Nussbaum does not trust in the same cosmopolitan motives being inextricably linked to an attitude of engagement with other people.

*

On the question of how the Early Stoic philosophers reacted to others' bad luck, I have not been able to find much information. According to Tad Brennan,²⁰ Ancient Greek ethics included little or nothing about the effects of individual behaviour on others; the emphasis was clearly on the question of how each individual could themselves achieve happiness (*eudaimonia*).

*

The focus on one's own happiness seems perhaps at first sight (in modern terms) egocentric, or even egoistic. But this would only be true if there were a conflict of interest between individuals, and it seems to me that the Stoics certainly did not think in terms of conflicts of interest.

A Stoic may strive for his or her own happiness, but this comes precisely from the insight that real happiness can only be reached by sensible behaviour, justice, focusing on friendship, common sense and other attractive values. These are primarily social values.

*

Stoic sages should not live on their own, wrote Diogenes Laërtius; society and activity are part of living according to nature.²¹

He also wrote that Stoics

*...say that the wise man is passionless, because he is not prone to fall into such infirmity. But they add that in another sense the term apathy is applied to the bad man, when, that is, it means that he is callous and relentless.*²²

*

It is clear that if people can choose, they prefer to avoid certain things while welcoming other things. This is part of human nature, so choosing 'preferable' things is seen by Stoics as reasonable—as long as it is realised that these things are not necessary for our happiness. This latter insight is too often lacking in the non-wise (more or less all people), so that every now and then they feel unhappy. How does a Stoic react to an unhappy person? Not by (passive) commiseration, but by activity, by offering practical help, but also (particularly if practical help is not possible) by suggesting Stoic ideas.

If the Early Stoics were not (sufficiently) focused on compassion (engagement) in their ethics, that is no reason for us to reject their ethics and thereby miss its strong points as well. Extending it seems to me to be a better solution.

*

For empathy too, a distinction can be made between an effective form and an ineffective, compelling, 'severe' form. The ineffective form is commiseration/pity. The suitable, effective form I have called engagement.

In order to understand others and really help, it is essential that I myself am calm. Someone who has been seized by strong feelings (for example by commiseration that is guilt-laden or tinged with anger) is not alert to the signals given out by another. People who practically help others, for example in emergencies, can benefit from (Stoic) peace of mind and a sensible attitude.

*

Stoic ideas do indeed contain social values. Stoics would therefore feel engaged in the development and welfare of other people—and

precisely because Stoics do not suffer from impeding feelings such as anger, humiliation, guilt or passive commiseration, they are free to think about how society can improve.

XII PITFALLS FOR INEXPERT STOICS

STIFF UPPER LIP

Sometimes difficult to distinguish from being Stoic, but boils down to suppressing feelings; always has comebacks (in a fit of anger or a heart condition).

DISINTERESTEDNESS

Emptiness. Banishing all feelings, even pleasant ones such as joy, love, engagement and interest, which do not lead to passivity or foolish behaviour. There is nothing wrong with feeling (a consequence of thinking) as long as you do not let yourself be carried away by feelings.

INDIFFERENCE

Aiming for nothing. 'It makes no difference after all, you can always be happy.' Devoting myself to everything that is good is, according to the Stoics, the most important thing I can do.

RATIONALISING

Or rather (in order to avoid making the word 'rational' appear bad): inventing excuses, smooth talking, explaining away feelings. None of this is belongs to Stoicism!

APOLITICAL ATTITUDE

The Early Stoics were very politically engaged. It is known of Zeno and Chrysippus that they both wrote a *Politeia* ('Republic'). The Roman Stoics were also socially engaged; that is quite clear. They had a cosmopolitan attitude and saw all people as of equal standing, which was quite exceptional in antiquity.

GUILT-THINKING

By feeling unhappy about particular words or deeds I achieve nothing, and the rest of the world does not benefit from it either. I would be better off using my energy to change my ideas (and thereby also my feelings and my behaviour). Because that is possible—that is the 'Good News'. (See also Chapter XI)

OPTIMISM

'The world is beautiful, people are nice, everything turns out well.' No, it doesn't. A Stoic attitude does not mean that I think that everything will turn out well or be better than expected. But it does mean that I maintain the idea: whatever happens, I can make something pleasant/good out of it through thought and action.

PASSIVITY

Being Stoic is an active attitude to life. Sensibly facing what happens is something different to letting everything happen to me and putting my own will to sleep.

PUTTING UP WITH THINGS

Saying: 'it is OK really, the neighbour is worse off than me' is merely resigning to 'fate' and has little to do with Stoicism. Leaning on someone else's (even worse) fate is, I think, in any case rather questionable. I would consider it a genuine Stoic attitude if in this situation I actively tried to make the best of it, trying to improve my

situation and that of others, and doing so without anger, pessimism or bitterness. Possibly together with the neighbour.

STOICISM AS A BRAKE

Never reacting enthusiastically to anything, never laughing enthusiastically, putting a brake on all you say: that too is a pitfall. There is nothing wrong with laughing or enthusiasm, or other positive expressions. And for something like anger it is not about avoiding saying particular things in order to swallow my anger, it is about really not thinking about those things. Not because being angry is impolite (think of Zeno, the half-Cynic), but because the ideas behind that behaviour are philosophically incorrect and because I make myself unhappy that way.

FAKE STOICISM

Actually, most adults act as if they are Stoic/sensible, while that is totally not the case. And this fake Stoic attitude is precisely what causes so many problems.

Seeing beyond the horizon of 'me', 'here' and 'now' is something you have to learn. Many adults still react in particular situations in the way they did when they were children, at least partly (and for the clumsiest part at that). But they know that this is not sensible, or think that it is 'not done', and so they deeply repress their strong, nagging feelings. Children are mostly a lot less complex than adults, because they show their feelings more openly, bottling them up less or not at all. Most adults like children because of this. They have lost the knack of showing their own feelings. Most fall between two stools: endearing childish attitudes and wise, sensible attitudes.

XIII HAPPINESS

'Any man who maintains that happiness comes wholly from within should be compelled to spend thirty-six hours in rags, in a blizzard, without food'.¹

*

According to the Stoics, and also according to Plato, a 'bad' person can never be happy, however prosperous he/she is. Is a good person always happy then? Results of scientific research in recent years do indicate something along these lines. Altruistically-oriented people appear to be happier and even live longer on average than others. People get good feelings from helping others. By helping neighbours, by supporting refugees, but also by joining an environmental activist group or not eating meat for idealistic reasons. Doing good things makes you feel good.

Aristotle considered that being good was a necessary but not sufficient condition for happiness: prosperity was necessary too. However, as noted above, according to the Stoics circumstances have no influence at all, and being good (*arete*/wisdom) is both a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness.

*

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) did not agree: he could quite easily imagine someone who was bad and nevertheless happy. Conversely, he could equally imagine someone who was good and nevertheless unhappy. Does this refute the idea of the Stoics, Plato and others? I

do not think so. I think that different kinds of happiness are being talked about here. 'Happiness' is actually a very vague term, because 'happiness' can have different depths, colours, gradations and measures of intensity and sustainability. At least, that is the case in daily usage.

The only happiness that counted for the Stoics was of course undisturbed, pure happiness. A 'bad' person, or more accurately an anti-social, egotistically behaving person would in any case not be able to experience this (undisturbed) form of happiness. Amongst his/her pleasant feelings there will at least be interference from feelings (or thoughts) such as a gnawing conscience or fear of punishment, and so the pleasant feelings can no longer be described as happiness in the Stoic sense. The malefactor can at the most experience pleasure: short-term pleasure. After that, there will be regret, fear, unease or other discomfort.

*

From an internal perspective, all choices that an individual makes are logical for that individual at that moment. Seen from an external perspective (or later by the individual himself/herself) a lot of behaviour seems irrational (though explicable): not effective, not in the individual's or others' interest. Irrational behaviour in the end always boils down to choosing short-term enjoyment (or short-term avoidance of suffering), instead of 'sustainable happiness'.

*

Stoic wisdom, and its resulting Stoic happiness, is an ideal that in all probability will never be fully achieved, but which is not *a priori* unfeasible; it is a personal utopia.

*

This chapter is about happiness. What is happiness? There are of course very many conceivable interpretations of that word, but broadly speaking there are four: good luck, enjoyment, euphoria and the Stoic *eudaimonia*, an active form of happiness, the only real happiness, which (to avoid confusion) I call 'sustainable happiness'.

GOOD LUCK

Because the word ‘happiness’ has such a broad meaning, it is sometimes difficult to work out what is meant by it. In Dutch, its meaning is broader still, as the Dutch word *geluk* can mean either ‘happiness’ or ‘good luck’, and its opposite *ongeluk* can mean ‘unhappiness’ or ‘bad luck’, or indeed ‘accident’. Gidia Jacobs states, for example: ‘*Geluk* (happiness or good luck) and *ongeluk* (unhappiness or bad luck) are not shared ‘fairly’ between people who do good or bad things.’² Here I would not use the words *geluk* and *ongeluk*, and certainly not without explanation. It is not happiness that is unequally ‘shared’ between people, but luck or good fortune. The words ‘luck’ and ‘fortune’ encapsulate the capriciousness of the reality outside us.

Good and bad luck are not only unequally shared; the ‘sharing’ has no connection at all to people’s good or bad deeds. Realising this saves a lot of worry.

*

‘Being fortunate’ in the sense of ‘having good luck’ is directly linked to external circumstances. You could win a lottery, the weather is good, you meet a particularly nice person; from a Stoic perspective all of that is (merely) a welcome bonus. Having good luck is, as everyone knows, something quite different from being happy.

ENJOYMENT

Then there is happiness in the sense of enjoyment/enjoying. You feel fine, you are enjoying nature, being with others or being alone, enjoying food or drink, a gripping book, good music, art, or the fond touches of a loved one. The Ancient Greeks called this sort of happiness *hedone*, sometimes translated as lust, other times as pleasure or enjoyment. Another distinction can be made between immediate enjoyment (particularly physical pleasure) and postponement of direct pleasure in order to aim for longer-term pleasure. As noted above, Epicurus argued that this longer term needs to be considered. For him it was mostly about avoiding pain/discomfort: a safer

way, because there are many types of immediate enjoyment which cause pain later on. Taking account of the effects in the long term means that there is less suffering and therefore more enjoyment—a neutral position, after all, did not exist according to Epicurus. For the Stoics, enjoyment is one of the ‘indifferent matters’; it can be excellent if linked to ‘a correct intention’, but enjoyment can also turn out badly. So enjoyment can take you in different directions, and for Stoics it is something quite different from real happiness (*eudaimonia*).

EUPHORIA

What is sometimes meant by the word ‘happiness’ is a situation of delirious joy: euphoria. In this case the ‘happiness’ is itself a strong, compelling feeling, which according to the Stoics needs to be avoided. Do people aim to feel euphoric, overjoyed, elated or very cheerful all the time? I do not think so. I myself am in any case glad that I am not madly happy all the time! It is, you see, quite tiring—not least of all for those in the immediate vicinity, who often use another expression for it: worked up. Someone in this mood does not consider things sensibly, philosophising is right out, and just as with all strong feelings, euphoria is accompanied by a unidirectional focus on oneself, which in the end does not feel good. Looking around with a broader outlook and being open to the rest of the world gives more satisfaction in the long term.

EUDAIMONIA

Finally, there is the happiness that the Greek philosophers called *eudaimonia*, the happiness that according to the Stoics coincides with ‘the good’ in the ethical sense. ‘The good life’ here does not mean ‘living it up’, but ‘making something good of life’. You create a ‘good mood’ from your own activity or thoughts, and if you think and act from true Stoic insight, your happiness cannot be destroyed. As noted earlier, Zeno called this way of living *euioia biou*, a good, onward-flowing life.

*

‘Good’ living here clearly means behaving such that not only your own interest counts, but also the interest of others or the public interest (justice), which also includes taking account of the long term (wisdom, self-control). It is logical that behaving this way involves more consideration than with egocentric short-term acts. It is also logical that it requires a more active attitude (‘courage’), in which reason is used a great deal.

*

This sort of goodness is one of the innate options for life; it is not an elevated kind of ‘Good’. It is, you could say, a possibility inherent in matter.³ According to the Stoics, what is good corresponds to nature. While they (like almost everyone at that time) thought that moral behaviour was only possible for humans, because only humans could think logically, we can now read in the books of ethologists such as Frans de Waal how morals play a role for anthropoid apes and other social animals,⁴ something of which the anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) had already given several examples in his book *Mutual Aid*. These findings indicate that morals do not stand above nature, as many think, but are part of it and logically arise from it.⁵

*

Kropotkin thought, just like Godwin (1756-1836), that nothing generates so much happiness as a friendly and helpful attitude towards other people.⁶ ‘Nothing feels as good as doing good’ is therefore an important theme for those who want to improve the world. This thought stands in opposition to the widely-spread idea of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) that ‘doing your duty’ is just always unpleasant.

*

There is of course a quandary. If doing good makes you happy, why do most people not make full use of this possibility? That is because not doing good, i.e. behaving egocentrically and short-sightedly, is equally a possibility for living beings. Doing good is more trouble—

sometimes much more—than not bothering. ‘Good’ means choosing the best solutions, including for the long term, which involves looking further than direct self-interest, so that a choice ‘has to’ be made for the best solution for myself and others. This solution is not ready for the taking. Common sense and self-control, ideas about justice, etc. all play a part in it.⁷ The short-term option is (literally) ready for the taking for whoever is looking for immediate enjoyment, euphoria or other non-Stoic types of happiness.

*

Yet, if you interpret goodness as ‘that which promotes sustainable happiness’, you would say that it is simply logical that ‘goodness’ is stronger than ‘badness’. In the book *Eén en één is zelden twee* (One and one is rarely two), Weia Reinboud describes her ‘law of unpredictable progress.’ This comprises (in my words): 1. people think, therefore they sometimes think of something new; 2. amongst the new ideas, from time to time there will be ones that can lead to improvement; 3. once more people realise that these ideas get rid of particular disadvantages, the new ideas will be taken up by these people. Therefore, as soon as particular knowledge becomes relatively common, the world will rise above some (disadvantageous) ideas and their accompanying disadvantageous phenomena, and these will be replaced by more suitable ideas and phenomena.⁸

*

None of this implies that ‘progress’ is effortless. For example, some people keep thinking up new ways to enrich themselves at the cost of others, etc. Saying that ‘good’ is stronger does not mean that an individual, a society or even humanity as a whole cannot perish as a result of bad (disadvantageous) developments.

*

I think, incidentally, that Stoic happiness is just as difficult to achieve if you are in a (materially) favourable situation as if you are in a (materially) miserable situation. In both cases, it is difficult not to let yourself be distracted by your situation. In the favourable situation there is a great temptation to satisfy yourself with short-term

enjoyment and a pleasurable mood (with all the disadvantages connected to it in the long term). In the miserable situation it is difficult not to let yourself be carried away by unpleasant feelings and allow a dejected mood to depress you.

*

If I want to achieve my Stoic aims more often, I will need to practise. Doing something without practice rarely succeeds—I have tried it often enough.

Well, this is the great stumbling block: virtually no one is brought up on Stoicism. Moreover, trying to become Stoic is never-ending; you must make this way of thought your own, and maintain it, just like maintaining your physical condition or learning a new language.

*

Stoicism can mean a great deal to individuals: getting rid of unpleasant feelings and increasing control over your own thinking and feeling. Just imagine what it would be like if the vast majority of people thought and acted more or less Stoically. What would that mean for society and on a larger scale for the world?

XIV

THE STOIC AS WORLD CITIZEN

Previous chapters were mostly about the options for individuals to become more sensible, calmer and wiser through a number of insights from particularly the Early Stoa. But how did the Stoics actually regard society? Chapter VI dealt with cosmopolitanism, justice and equality as Stoic values which are important for society. This chapter contains some additions to this and an attempt to work out which social structures best suit Stoicism.

*

Stoics did not consider themselves above politics. Indeed, they often took an active part in it. What sort of society did the Stoics strive for? A world of city-states, like ancient Athens? A worldwide empire? A democracy? Or a leaderless, 'anarchist' world community of the wise?

*

Although Zeno's 'city of the wise' was most reminiscent of a leaderless group of friends, based on equality and unanimity, it must be said that in ancient times, Stoicism was often considered appealing by kings and other rulers. This is particularly remarkable once you realise that Early Stoic philosophers paid no attention to convention or bourgeois politeness.

*

Alexander the Great, for example, had much admiration for

Diogenes the Cynic who, as I wrote earlier, can in one sense be called a forerunner of the Early Stoics. According to a well-known story, Alexander once visited Diogenes when he was sitting happily in the sun, perhaps next to his barrel. When Alexander said that he would give the philosopher whatever he wanted, the Cynic's answer was simple: 'Stand out of my light'. Another time, Alexander asked Diogenes: 'Are you not afraid of me?' Diogenes answered: 'Why, what are you, a good thing or a bad?' Alexander of course said: 'A good thing', after which Diogenes asked him: 'Who, then, is afraid of the good?' According to some sources Alexander once said: 'Had I not been Alexander, I should have liked to be Diogenes.'¹

And Antigonus, the king whose rule Zeno came under, came as often as he could to hear the arguments of Zeno. Zeno too once heard that he could ask the king for whatever he wanted, and Zeno, like Diogenes, wanted nothing from him—after which he was even more appreciated by the king.

*

'In a world of sages there would be no kings and no laws', argued Zeno, yet for Antigonus that was apparently not a threatening position. A world full of sages was, after all, a long way off. Stoic teaching was not really subversive. Zeno did not, after all, say that non-sages did not need a king or a leader. The Stoics had many supporters, but these did not constitute a majority in society, and moreover none of them called themselves sages. Little, then, to fear from this philosophy for a king.

*

Would Antigonus also have wanted to go and listen if Zeno and his companions made revolutionary arguments for a leaderless city or state? I would think so. But in that case he would probably have first sent a spy and then his army.

*

Still, Zeno was no flatterer. However much Antigonus wanted, the philosopher preferred to remain independent and did not enter the king's service. Cleanthes and Chrysippus also did not serve the king

as court philosophers.

The modes of getting a livelihood are also ludicrous, as e.g. maintenance by a king; for he will have to be humoured.²

Some other Stoics, such as Zeno's pupils Persaeus and Philonides did, however, take this step. And of course, much later, Seneca.

*

Why did a greedy, glory-seeking conqueror like Alexander appreciate a philosopher who was satisfied with just a barrel, a piece of bread and his own wisdom? And what did a ruler like Antigonus seek in the Stoics? Did he really do his best to be a 'Stoic king', i.e. a wise and just king? In the case of the later philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius it is clear: whatever else we think of him, he did his best.

*

According to Chrysippus and the other early Stoics, the best form of government is a mixture of democracy, monarchy and aristocracy. Though it is worth pointing out that according to these Stoics, only a sage would be eligible to be a king, and belonging to the aristocracy came not through birth, but 'only' by being good and wise.³ Actually, the Stoics were thinking here along the same lines as Plato had earlier done with his ideas and experiments about the philosopher as king. I, however, think that the Stoics were more realistic about it, more pragmatic, because they knew only too well that far-reaching wisdom was thinly sowed.

*

All power in one person leads to a major risk: if that person is not wise, a lot will go wrong, people will be repressed and exploited, etc. And if that one person was a perfect sage, would that not mean that s/he would refuse to rule over others?

And what should we make of an aristocracy on the basis of insight and wisdom? Nowadays that would probably be called a 'think-tank'. But a think-tank that can rule over others? Not ideal. And

democracy? Does the majority by definition make sensible decisions? Certainly not always. But if it was a philosophically and politically educated majority? If they were Stoics?

*

Democracies come in all shapes and sizes, from a dictatorship of the majority to all kinds of grassroots democracies. In a democracy based on consensus, people work with each other to seek out the best solutions for everyone. There are always possibilities to accommodate people with different wishes—as long as these are not repressive for others.

*

On a small scale (shared houses, families, groups of friends, meetings, environmental action camps) grassroots democratic forms of consultation and co-operation are used extensively. No one would say that it is easy to decide everything together, but if it works, the result is better than whatever result hierarchical structures may produce, because it is supported by everyone. In this way of living and co-operating, the group does not dominate over individuals; neither does an individual or a small group of people hold sway over the entire group.

Zeno thought up something similar for all sages, worldwide. But with a collection of wise individuals, starting an ideal society is of course a very easy task. Certainly in theory ... In a real shared house or commune, village, city or world, with real-existing, far-from-perfectly-wise individuals, leaderlessness is a question of trial and error—even for people of good will.

*

Political effort was encouraged by the Stoics; concerning yourself with your surroundings and humanity as a whole was seen as suitable, *kathekon*. Because humans are social animals, this effort was seen as being in agreement with nature. Through the commitment of Stoics, with their ideas about equality and justice, good developments in society should be encouraged and bad ones prevented.

*

A possible ‘political’ criticism of Stoicism is that a dictator or an authoritarian state would be quite happy with Stoic subjects. Subjects who say that all manner of things are ‘indifferent’: freedom or imprisonment, poverty or wealth, sickness or health. Subjects who do not strive for (competing) positions of power because social positions are also ‘indifferent’.

Kings, emperors and other rulers are undoubtedly interested in subjects who do not protest against poverty, etc.—but the question is whether Stoics are the right people to expect this from. It is true that wealth or poverty is indifferent for a Stoic; money is unimportant; a poor person can live a full life and even sick people can give meaning to their lives. A ‘true’ Stoic would however never consider herself/himself as a ‘subject’, and would therefore never behave as one. S/he would conduct herself/himself as totally equal to a king, a baker or anyone else.

*

The story mentioned above about Diogenes the Cynic, who did not want to sit in the shadow of the king, is not simply a story about frugality. It is mainly about equality: not putting someone else in the shade and ensuring that no one else puts you in the shade. A Stoic would not stand by and watch when injustices or other damaging events occur; whether these events arise from the acts of a king or of other people is of no importance whatsoever.

*

Another criticism of possible political attitudes of Stoics, as described earlier, is the supposition that a Stoic would not make a big deal of experiencing circumstances such as poverty and would therefore also not be concerned about others’ poverty.

It is true that if poverty affects me, it would be good for me to realise that even a poor person (with an active Stoic attitude to life) can be happy. If it concerns others’ poverty, then it is equally true for them that they can be happy despite their poverty.

That does not detract from the fact that as a Stoic I would feel concerned about other people. Striving for ‘justice’ is on its own enough

to prevent me from wilfully disadvantaging others so that I would become (in part) the cause of poverty. Stoicism, you could say, has different messages for victims and culprits. If others are disadvantaged by my greed or unjust distribution of resources, that is very much of concern to me.

XV THE NON-STOIC SOCIETY

‘To change the world, you must start with yourself’? Good idea, but what if we are so involved in ourselves that we forget the rest of the world? That is not possible—at least, not according to the Stoic approach.

*

We live in a society that is anything but Stoic. A just society in the sense of equal opportunities for self-development, equal distribution of money, land and goods is a long way off. Everyone appears to be equal before the law, but in the small print this often turns out not to be the case. There are a lot of hierarchical relationships, there is much unfairness, discrimination has not been eliminated from the world and the ‘moral’ of the law of the jungle is far from disappearing; indeed, the economy itself runs entirely on it.

*

What counts for individuals also counts for society. A society is, after all, nothing other than a collection of individuals who live in a certain way with and next to each other. Just as strong feelings in individuals were compared by Stoics to cold or diarrhoea, you could regard collective strong or compelling feelings (such as sexism or xenophobia) as illnesses. Contagious illnesses perhaps, but illnesses for which healing is possible. Much human misery, and certainly politically-based, large-scale misery, is caused by thoughts that are not up to the task and the feelings that go with them.

*

The 'democratic consumerism' which is part and parcel of modern capitalism could also be seen as such a sickness. High consumption is more or less impossible to reconcile with a Stoic attitude to life, just like being set on earning lots of money. This sort of behaviour, which is aimed at short-term pleasure and enjoyment, makes a large proportion of people take part in perpetrating injustice without consciously choosing to do so, through unfair distribution of food, environmental damage and disappearance of the countryside. Developments which the perpetrators ultimately also become victims of.

*

Although nature has 'organised' matters such that useful things go together with pleasure, pleasure is a bad counsellor according to the Stoics. People have the ability to think of all manner of things, but as long as 'enjoyment' is the motive, powers of thought will be applied to increasing all forms of pleasure. Often egoistical, short-lived pleasure that causes much damage. By focusing on long-term enjoyment à la Epicurus we progress a lot further, but even with this our vision remains somewhat limited.

*

With hedonism in the bad sense of the word, haphazardly seeking out more and 'stronger' forms of pleasure, people become simply consumers of life, 'slaves of their passions' as Stoics say. Their motives lack not only the Stoic quality of justice; courage, frugality and self-control are also hard to find. If we therefore use the Stoic qualities or 'virtues' as a criterion for the 'wisdom' of today's (democratic, capitalist) society, it does not come out well: there is much injustice, extravagance, conformism and lack of insight.¹

*

Wars and other misery arise time and again from passion-arousing judgments (from rulers or powerful groups) on the state of the world: greed (the idea that possessions are important and that you need to own as much or more than others), slight of honour (the

idea that you have been short-changed, and that it is necessary for others to hold you in great esteem), feelings of jealousy (the idea that it is wrong if someone else has something that you would also like to have), humiliation (the idea that others did not treat you in line with what you are worth, and that this actually decreases what you are worth), anger (the idea that great injustice has been done to you, and you can set it right by ranting and raving), revenge (the idea that you were badly offended, hurt or disadvantaged by others and that it helps to do something similar or possibly even worse to others), and so on.

*

As well as this, there are collective strong, nagging feelings, feelings (i.e. judgments) which many people allow certain politicians to whip up, such as fears and collective senses of inferiority. Populists play on the urges of many people to belong, and on the fear of 'the other'. This gives rise to ideologies based on collective strong feelings: nationalism, the belief that humanity can be divided into different nations, each with their 'national character', or the belief that humanity can be divided into races with various characteristics, into classes, sexes, winners and losers, attractive and unattractive, and so on. According to this way of thought, in each case one group is better and more important than the other, there is an aversion to the foreign, the Other, and an aversion to (specific!) changes. In short, not just anger and other strong individual feelings, but also passions like nationalism and collective hate of 'foreigners' arise from incorrect, unnecessary ideas. Ideas which can be refuted and therefore changed. Even if that is often a tough cookie.

*

Nationalism, hatred or fear of foreigners and also collective greed, competition and consumerism are passions which are particularly found in right-wing political movements. Fear plays a key role in religions, and particularly in the fundamentalist versions of them. There too, feelings of 'Us' (that exclude 'Them') can raise their ugly heads and get out of hand. But what about left-wing passions? Here, you might say, at least 'the heart is in the right place'. That

means: there are indeed 'strong feelings' in left-wing circles that can gain collective momentum. But an important difference is that the drive here is not self-interest but public interest—and that makes a big difference.

All the same, the tone of pamphlets is often anything but level-headed, and methods used by activists quite often harbour anger and aggressiveness. Unnecessary, and even damaging, in any case for the activists themselves, because strong emotions can in the course of time cause burn-out. But also damaging for the 'good cause', because outsiders see mainly the fierceness of the demonstrators or activists and the media unfortunately focuses mostly on this fierceness, and much less on conveying the arguments.

*

Criticism of injustice, warning of damaging developments: it is good to publicise these things, but then in a well-considered, peaceful manner. It would be of great utopian value if the energy which do-gooders expend by winding themselves up could be diverted into constructive action.

*

Analysing societal problems is often carried out in terms of victims, culprits and guiltiness instead of speaking in a level-headed manner about causes and solutions to the problems.

States, powerful institutions or businesses tend to be quickly seen as culprits, and 'ordinary people' as victims. The active contribution of 'ordinary people', of ourselves, is often overlooked or glossed over, for example in the case of environmental problems.

*

Just as 'feeling guilty' is based on the incorrect thought that you could have done something differently, the same applies to accusing others. It has no basis and also no use. If thinking in terms of guilt is abandoned, the analyses would be clearer, people would no longer feel under attack and they would be open to new ideas instead of being entrenched in old ones.

*

People live in enormously differing situations. There is no fair distribution of good and bad luck. It is to be expected that there are people walking around with more than an 'average quantity of bad luck' Fair distribution (or justice) is obviously not built into natural phenomena, but up until now this is also hard to find in human institutions (businesses, governments). The most effective thing is soberly to face reality. It may sound crazy, but it sometimes helps to see humanity as a big machine or computer in which lots of components do not work properly. In order to repair it, you start by assuming there are causes for the machine's failures, causes which can be tracked down with the right knowledge and insight. Becoming angry or indignant makes no sense and is pointless; in the case of a machine, that is obvious. In the case of rulers or political systems, it is equally 'incorrect', and moreover often damaging: for someone else, but also for myself.

*

Just as this applies in personal life, it also applies for improving the world: we arrive at clearer analyses and can therefore act more effectively if we do not allow ourselves to be carried away by strong feelings. An attitude of friendship/solidarity and commitment to others (people, animals, nature) is sufficient.

*

Fair distribution can only be put forward by individuals, and can only be put into practice by individuals co-operating with one another. Via this route, qualities such as justice² and equality can be built into social structures. But even then it remains the case that the system stands or falls on the motivations of the individuals who carry these structures.

And, obviously, a tornado takes no notice of them.

*

Ideas from Stoicism can offer great support to idealists who want to improve the world, by not letting themselves be carried along by feelings such as anger and indignation about wrongs, or by disap-

pointment in a society where few seem to be prepared to change course and live really differently.

If the motivations are not strong feelings and high expectations but wishes and well-thought-out ideas and arguments, then great dejection—a well-known symptom for idealists—can be avoided. And if this great dejection is avoided, more people will keep working for a better world.

*

A politically active Stoic could therefore, as well as striving for virtues such as justice, work on refuting prejudices and spreading good information, so that people can act on the basis of knowledge and insight.

*

It would of course be great if a number of Stoic ideas suddenly spread worldwide, but for idealists it seems to me useful to realise that they (just like everyone else) have very little under their personal control. Stoicism can help with facing the world as it is. Via the Stoics we can also learn to understand how feeling and thinking works for ourselves and other people—we can learn how we can change ourselves in this area and how we can deal with other people better.

*

As an aside, is it more difficult to be sensible and ‘good’ if you are in a disadvantageous situation? That sometimes seems to be the case. Someone who lives in poverty is more likely to steal bread than someone who is rich. But ... in a poor person’s situation, stealing bread is not evil. It is maybe not so decent, it would have been nicer to ask for it, but stealing bread if you are hungry and have no money to buy anything is a question of survival. The ‘evil’ (the damaging thing) lies more in the fact that this situation exists. It is the same with smuggling, stealing, etc. If you include the situation plus the intention, where one person steals to stay alive or to provide for children, while the other steals (or is corrupt) in order to get even richer, then I think that you cannot say that poverty and hunger lead people astray.

*

You also hear the opposite. It is often said that power and wealth corrupt. Although this is often the case, that too is not necessarily so. Every person has possibilities for exploiting or repressing ‘weaker’ people, and the more ‘power’ someone has, the greater the possibilities for this. Both ways of thinking (‘a bad situation provokes criminal behaviour’ and ‘a beneficial situation provokes corrupt behaviour’) merely express that in every situation there are different sorts of temptations for people. Some yield to them, others do not.

*

A philosopher-king as a Stoic sage remains a theoretical possibility, just as a Stoic government does—but if we are going to focus on exceptional situations, why not chose the best and most pleasant of all: nobody as king, nobody as subject, everyone wise or at least actively striving for wisdom?

*

For Zeno’s sages it was the case that they addressed themselves to the power of individuals. Most modern idealists, by contrast, concentrate on raising the matter of repressive social structures. They feel commitment to the victims of these structures, and give these people support. Solidarity.

Through a combination of both ‘strategies’, these approaches can strengthen each other. Changing undesirable social structures will not be successful and a ‘formal’ change will have no positive effect as long as the individuals do not ‘carry’ the new, ‘better’ structures, in other words, as long as they do not become a bit wiser and actively develop this wisdom, passing it on to their children and so on. Social systems, however bad they are, cannot prevent individuals from thinking things over, practicing and teaching themselves wisdom.

*

A world in which people compete with each other, are jealous, are quick-tempered, impulsively curse and fly off the handle is obviously not an ideal world and can never lead to an ideal society. For an

ideal world, as well as dismantling the old structures and building new ones, it is therefore necessary for people to strive to see each other as genuinely equal, and that they strive not to allow strong feelings to carry them away.

*

Many ideas from Stoicism are naturally compatible with striving for non-violence, in the physical sense. But also in verbal interactions Stoic ideas are important for a better, non-violent society. A Stoic would not curse or insult people, and if criticised, insulted or even cursed s/he would not become angry or indignant. A Stoic is open to criticism and s/he would not see this as an attack but as an opportunity to learn something.

*

Also on the phenomenon of indignation: idealists often say that they act out of feelings of anger and indignation. The above-mentioned philosopher David Hume stated correctly that from what there 'is' you can never deduce what there 'should be'. Indignation is found in the area of 'should be' and not of 'how the situation actually is'. ('It is a scandal that twenty percent of people consume eighty percent of the available food; this must change, and quickly.') Stoicism implies that you face what 'is'. ('The situation is such that twenty percent of people consume eighty percent of the available food.') 'Should be' can be translated into wishes, but not into demands. The wishes can immediately be converted into activity. ('I will not take part in overconsumption, and I will labour for a world in which food is fairly distributed.') A Stoic needs no anger or indignation to get into action, the wish to labour for a pleasant world is enough.

*

If I say that a just society on the basis of equality seems best to me, and therefore worth striving for, then I do not imply that such a society 'must happen' or 'is compulsory' or 'is proper'. Without coming into the area of 'should be' or 'ought', i.e. without moral indignation, I can realise that the egocentricity and short-term interest that such a society thwarts are less rational than cosmopoli-

tanism and taking account of the long term.

*

The concept of 'power', much used in politics, is on further examination rather vague. Do others have power over me? Do I have power over others? What do I mean if I say that someone has power over me, if that is not something physical? And for the physical form of power, would it not be better to use the words 'coercion' or 'violence'?

*

The Stoic Étienne de la Boétie (1530-1563) wrote when he was about eighteen an argument about 'voluntary slavery'.³ In this he expressed surprise that rulers keep succeeding in ruling over and repressing 'the people'. This arises not because such a 'tyrant' is strong (often he is not), and certainly not because such a ruler is good for people. So, he writes:

*Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.*⁴

*

There are (unfortunately) people who want power, who want to rule. But La Boétie wondered how it came about that these imperious types often get their way. How can one person boss around hundreds or thousands of other people, who could easily drive him away when it comes to muscle-power?

*

It is therefore the inhabitants themselves who permit, or, rather, bring about, their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their servitude. A people enslaves itself, cuts its own throat, when, having a choice between being vassals and being free men, it deserts its liberties and takes on the yoke, gives consent to its own

*misery, or, rather, apparently welcomes it.*⁵

This happens, according to Étienne de la Boétie, despite it being clear that ‘all beings, because they feel, suffer misery in subjection and long for liberty.’ Diogenes and Zeno would have endorsed this. ‘Stand out of my light!’

*

The only reason that La Boétie can come up with for most people’s running around after so-called lords and masters is the power of custom:

*Nevertheless it is clear enough that the powerful influence of custom is in no respect more compelling than in this, namely, habituation to subjection. It is said that Mithridates trained himself to drink poison. Like him we learn to swallow, and not to find bitter, the venom of servitude.*⁶

*

The ideas of La Boétie fit with the ideas of the Early Stoics and agree with the ideas of many anarchists of today. An insight that is important both in Stoicism and in the essay of La Boétie is that another person can have no power over my thoughts, in other words cannot force me to think things that I do not want to think.⁷ As for power over what I do, here too more is possible than one might at first think.

*

When would we arrive at a better world: if everyone became a Stoic or if everyone became inspired by Epicurus? Can an idealist also be inspired by Epicurus?

According to Luciano de Crescenzo, humanity can be divided into Stoics and Epicureans, and therefore idealists could also be divided into these two groups. The Stoics of today can, according to Crescenzo, be easily recognised: they always have high ideals, preferably as unachievable as possible.

*(A Stoic) would above all want to solve the problem of Hunger in the World, for the whole world. If a more limited programme was suggested to him, for example hunger in the San Carlo all’Arena district of Naples, he would immediately reject that, if only because it might succeed.*⁸

The Epicurean is a different kettle of fish, according to Crescenzo: ‘because he is conscious of the transience of life, he sets himself small goals that can be achieved within a short period.’

*

Imagine all idealists went to love in ‘Gardens of Epicurus’. There would be men, women, people from all backgrounds; everyone would take part in philosophy. Everyone in such a garden would be friends with each other. The food and drink would be simple but delicious. There would be laughter. People would enjoy each other’s company. They would live in seclusion. Epicurus would be quoted and honoured. Around the beautiful garden is a wall. What happens outside that wall is not important. Those in the garden do not concern themselves with the rest of the world.

*

Stoics indeed seem more ambitious, as Crescenzo wrote. They do not turn their backs on the world but are in the middle of it, and want to make their contribution to the whole. They are cosmopolitans, wanting no walls, no borders. Perhaps they are more independent and do not need a protecting wall. They also have no leader. Zeno, Chrysippus, Epictetus, Seneca; a lot of Stoics have made their own impressions on this philosophical movement.

All the same, a Stoic and an ‘Epicurean’ could be good and inspiring friends of each other; I can see enough agreements between the two schools of thought for this. Even if only because friendship and love play a major role in both.

*

Certainly, given the situation in the world, it seems to me not to be ‘suitable’ for the long term to go and live with friends in a garden

and not get involved in the world beyond this. There is a fair chance anyway that the garden would be compulsorily purchased to build yet another new motorway. To create a more pleasant world in the long term, it is necessary to focus attention on the external situation, interact with people who think differently and take action. Problems such as hunger, infectious diseases, war and climate change form enormous challenges for people who want to contribute to a better world. Stoicism in particular offers, to my mind, a lot of tools to help with this.

*

An ideal society consists of (enough) individuals who actively strive for its ideals. In the case of Zeno's *Politeia* (as with most utopias) there is no more than a book. A book that unfortunately has since been lost.

For Stoics after Zeno, it is the case that their ideals gradually sounded less socially subversive. The accent shifted from the idea of the city of sages to practical advice for 'ordinary' citizens, particularly in order to cope better with setbacks in daily life.

The part of Stoicism directed at individuals could fit in easily, for example in Roman thought. The political aspect less so—differently, at least. All people equal? Indeed. But some were surely more equal than others. Cosmopolitanism? Good idea: the whole world under Roman rule!

*

The fact that the first Stoic was also the most 'anarchist' is partly explained by him being a pupil of Crates the Cynic. But apparently it was these ideas that were less welcome and were later glossed over. Zeno's *Politeia* had, all in all, little political effect. The time was not yet ripe for it, we might say. And now? What will we do? We have once again plenty of opportunities to supplement and improve the old theories, and to try to apply them in our lives.

*

While a 'true Stoic' does not suffer in bad circumstances, such as the presence of rulers or oppressive systems, the same Stoic, even in a less

perfect form, would still try to improve the world, and s/he would feel good—happy even—doing this.

XVI UTOPIA

Utopia is for a society what happiness is for an individual.

*

There is a clear analogy between the *Politeia* of Zeno, the ‘city of the wise’, city of friendship, peace and freedom, and anarchists’ ideal of a free society. It is not for nothing that Peter Marshall in his book about anarchism, *Demanding the Impossible*, devoted a chapter to the Ancient Greeks, of which the largest part was about Zeno.

Zeno’s sages need no government nor manmade laws. For Stoics, nature, and insight into it, reason in other words, form the ‘law’, the guidelines. Customs and traditions were not important for the Stoics, neither were countries, skin colour, gender, origin, wealth, fame and so on. Stoics see the whole world as their home and all people as their equals. Wise people by themselves form an ideal society: a society without sovereigns and without subjects, without rulers, without bosses and without controllers.

Without ruling—in Ancient Greek that is *anarkhein*. In modern English: an anarchist society.¹

*

My idea is therefore that Stoic views, if they are consistently thought through, fit well with a left-wing, non-violent, anarchist vision of society. Striving for such a society forms a major challenge. A challenge that I think fits very well with the challenging ideas of the Stoics about feeling, thinking and happiness.

*

Just as the ideals of the Stoics were seen by many in ancient times as unachievable, so most people nowadays see an anarchist society as, at best, a nice dream that will never become reality. Most people, both pessimists and ‘realists’, are namely convinced that the majority of people need central authority (king, church, state, laws, regulations) to keep from straying in any way from the good path. Are these people correct, and is that necessarily always true for everyone?

We are getting to realise what Zeno would have answered: for wise people, these laws are totally unnecessary. They behave sensibly of their own accord and therefore take sufficient account of public interest. In principle it is possible for everyone to become wise, and so it should be possible for everyone to live without laws and central authority.

*

A utopia is easy to think of, but the route towards it is rough, and sometimes seems impassable. What remains is that personal and collective wisdom are in any case things that you can strive for. Striving to improve oneself and one’s surroundings fits well with the natural tendencies of humans. And each shift in the direction of the ideal is an improvement.

*

One single individual has few possibilities to change society, since the majority of people keep the existing social structures going. Sometimes because of fear of change, often because people benefit from the existing situation (or think they do). But it is not always the case that a majority of people conform; rapid or slow social changes, as history shows us, belong to the range of possibilities.

*

The name Utopia, which Thomas More (1478-1535) invented for his story about an ideal society, can be interpreted in two ways: as *eu topos*, good place, or as *ou topos*, nowhere-place, non-existent place. Whether More expressly intended this is not known, just as

it is not entirely clear if he himself would have wanted to live in his Utopia.²

I myself consider 'utopia' a nice word, precisely because of this ambivalence. I see a utopia as a sketch of an ideal society, a society that does not (yet) exist, but which it is worthwhile aiming for.

The repugnance which some people have towards the phenomenon of utopia always has something to do with the authoritarian character which people connect to utopias, which indeed can be found in some utopias such as Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia*. An anarchist utopia can obviously never be authoritarian, and in a consistent form of anarchism, the route towards it is peaceful and without coercion.

*

The link between Stoicism and anarchism is not new. Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) called the ideas of Zeno 'the best example of anarchist philosophy in Ancient Greece'.³ In Zeno's utopia, the Stoic sage is both an individualist and a socially committed person. S/he can go her/his own way, but can also co-operate well with others. If people followed their own nature and let themselves be guided by reason, they would be able to live in peace and harmony without repressive institutions. In Zeno's utopia, as described in his *Politeia*, there are as I wrote earlier no courts, there are no police, there are no armies, no temples and no schools, and money and marriage have been abolished.

This is a great deal 'more utopian' than what most anarchists of today dare to dream of.⁴

*In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support not mutual struggle has had the leading part.*⁵

*

Just like many people in Ancient Greece and Rome, the libertarian thinker and humanist Anton Constandse (1899-1985) saw Stoic aims as 'very idealistic' regarding the possibilities for people to improve

their own personalities. In contrast to the statist ideas of Plato with his 'enlightened despotism', the Stoics, according to him, put forward the ideal of 'liberated individuals who did not emotionally tie themselves into the polity or the economic system. In particular, they rejected all idealisation of money and violence, of power and authority.'⁶

According to Constandse, freedom-loving principles can have a leavening effect on any society.⁷ He invokes Seneca here: 'I am not free as long as one person remains a slave.' From this it once again appears that you do not need to be an anarchist to invent one of the core ideas of anarchism.⁸ Good ideas are often simple, and are invented time and time again—they are reasonable and human.

*

Many parallels can be drawn between Stoicism as a personal utopia and anarchism as a utopia for human society: peace of mind for an individual corresponds to peaceful coexistence for society; sensibly thinking things through for an individual corresponds to calm deliberations for a group of people; and just as an individual can try to prevent and drive away strong, nagging feelings by thinking sensibly, so people in a society can learn from each other's wisdom and prevent prejudice and wars from starting.

The above implies that a Stoic society can be no other than one where people both recognise each other's equality and live peacefully and work together side by side, without competition, without repression, without hate. I do not know of any way in which such a society would differ from an anarchist one.

*

One of the slogans of feminism around 1980 (the second wave) was 'the personal is political'. Combining (elements from) Stoicism and anarchism boils down to combining personal aims to political ideals. But the political and the personal are also philosophical. When thinking about ideals, philosophy is indispensable. Everything that I think about the personal and the political is a consequence of judgments, and these judgments can be broadened through philosophical, critical (i.e. sceptical) inquiry.

*

How would a society of Stoics turn out? Or, more broadly, what would the world be like if there were many modern Stoics around? And more achievably, what would the world look like if many people strived for Stoic wisdom? That is, if many people aimed towards an attitude to life in which you take control, where you actively intervene in your state of mind via your thoughts?

*

People would talk with each other and philosophise. In this way, they come to agreement. Friendship and love would, just as in Zeno's city of the wise, play an important connecting role. People would neither rule nor let themselves be ruled. Philosophy would be the only authority: that is to say, a collection of the most sensible thoughts from everyone. There would be no wars—why would wars be needed without passions such as greed, hate, honour, anger or retribution, and only with people who consider themselves and each other as cosmopolitan, as equal inhabitants of the Earth? People would no longer be addicted to anything at all. People would not be afraid of being different to others. There would be no class differences, no bosses or servants. These words would still exist to describe the past, but in the utopia they would have no meaning. There would be no grab-it-all economy, no capitalism. Money and possessions would be considered unimportant, because no one would be greedy. Because no one would have their eyes on money, phenomena such as interest and speculation would not exist. (If money existed at all; after all, Zeno wanted to abolish it, and many anarchists are of the same opinion). It would still be possible for someone to be poor or suffer hunger because of natural circumstances, because of bad luck. Others would then rush to help—sensibly and effectively. Looking down on people of another gender or skin colour, or judging each other on the basis of indifferent matters such as origin, age or any external characteristics would also not occur. People from all over would be welcome everywhere: they are each other's poten-

tial friends. There is no such thing as a foreigner. The natural environment would not be destroyed. People would take account of future generations. The Stoic person, however modern, can never be a consumer eager for short-term pleasure. There would be no nationalism, no resentment, no sexism, and animals would not be exploited.⁹

*

All very attractive, but is it really possible to change the world?

*

Changing is not difficult by itself. I change every day, every minute. The world changes every second. It is actually impossible not to change. As Heraclitus said: you cannot step twice into the same river. I change. Everything changes. My thoughts are a consequence of what came before them. I changed upon Stoicism, others' thoughts that fitted well with ideas that I already had, and so became inspiring and evoked more questions. In this book I have elaborated a number of these ideas, utopian and Stoic. Perhaps these ideas in turn fit well with others' questions and opinions?

*

Stoicism provides many ideas but no blueprint for an ideal society, let alone 'the' ideal society. Nor does it need to. A narrowly described utopia even has its 'scary' sides, precisely because all decisions come from 'the grassroots'. Such a society can therefore never be described fully in advance. People live their own lives and something pleasant can only come about if everyone contributes on a voluntary basis.

*

For an ideal society we can, like Sceptics, search and keep searching for the best ideas, realising that we do not own the truth; like Epicurus we can enjoy a simple life in a sensible way; we can be self-willed and not afraid of being different, like the Cynics; we can be laughing philosophers, actively investigating, critical and interested

in science, like Democritus; and above all we can try to be Stoics, even though we will never achieve a state of perfect wisdom.

*

The challenge remains. The signposts point in the direction of the most pleasant, the best of all. Simply striving for this makes you happy.

*

What connects the philosophers discussed in this book is the emphasis that they lay on *autarkeia*, on searching for your own way, if necessary against all conventions. Someone who really goes and lives according to her or his own ideals would probably soon bump up against society's laws and rules, and certainly also against all sorts of other people's expectations.

That is not the easiest way, but for someone who decides once and for all to cast off the 'yoke of internal slavery' it is the only way.

It of course takes many individuals to achieve real social change; many individuals who change their behaviour, let their voice be heard and co-operate with one another.

FOOTNOTES

FOREWORD

1—Stoa means portico or colonnade (a covered walkway); the place where lessons were originally given became the name of the school. (Originally also called Zenoists.)

2—*Hoe komen kringen in het water. Aardige filosofie, (How ripples appear in water. Nice philosophy)* by Weia Reinboud, and *Het beste voor de aarde. Het moeilijkste kinderboek van altijd (The best for the Earth. The most difficult children's book ever)*, by Rymke Wiersma, both published by Atalanta, September 1989.

3—Diogenes Laërtius, *Uilen van Athene (Owls of Athens)*, extracts from *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, translated into Dutch by J. C. B. Eykman, Amsterdam 1966.

I. INTRODUCTION

1—Diogenes Laërtius on the Stoics, from *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius, translated by Robert Drew Hicks. Available online at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers (Book VII). In later footnotes, this source is abbreviated to DL.

2—Recommendations: Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life, in which the most important components of Stoicism (particularly the core concepts) are extremely well elaborated by a philosopher who is not afraid of providing his own interpretation; while aimed at practical applications there is Epictetus' 'notebook', Enchiridion, in various editions; also very interesting (and entertaining) is Plutarch, On Stoic Self-Contradictions, translated by various authors, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plut.+De+Stoic+1>. And then of course the already-mentioned book of Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, in which, despite the (often funny) disjointedness, much can be read about the Early Stoics (Book VII). See the literature list.*

3—Democritus, from Rein Ferwerda's Dutch translation with annotations, *Stofjes in het zonlicht*.

4—In *The Discourses of Epictetus*, translated by P. E. Matheson, there are quotes from Epictetus such as: 'My leg you will chain—yes, but my will—no, not even Zeus can conquer that.' (Book I, chapter I).

II. THE EARLY STOA

1—In this translation, capital letters are used for terms like ‘Cynic’ and ‘Stoic’ in the philosophical sense, to make clear that these have nothing to do with everyday phrases such as ‘what a cynic’ or ‘with stoic resignation’.

2—Hipparchia (ca. 346-300 BC) was totally enthralled with the words and lifestyle of Crates and cared nothing for wealth, noble origin or beauty. She also showed no interest at all in the (other) men who competed for her attention. Crates warned her: if she went to live with him she would have to live the (frugal) life of the Cynics. There was nothing she would prefer to this. Against her parents’ will she put on ‘Cynic’ clothes, went to live with Crates and played a full part in philosophical discussions, giving short shrift to those who thought that as a woman she should not do that. (DL book VI.)

3—Epicurean philosopher and poet (ca. 110-40/35 BC). Many scrolls of his books ended up in a library in Herculaneum, where they were covered in lava and rubble by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD. The project in which the unearthed carbonised scrolls were rolled out and deciphered using modern techniques was named the Philodemus Project.

4—The Stoa Poikilè was a colonnade with frescoes made by famous artists (including Polygnotus), depicting Athenian victories. This Stoa in the north-west corner of the Athenian Agora, the market place, was built around 460 BC, and was revealed in 1981 by American archaeologists—or rather, what remained of it: some steps and some foundations.

5—Martha Nussbaum in the foreword to *The Stoic Idea of the City* by Malcolm Schofield.

6—DL book VII, 186-189.

III. KNOWLEDGE, NATURE, COSMOS, LOGOS

1—DL book VII. This quotation was cited by Klaas Rozemond in the otherwise very enjoyable and original book *Filosofie voor de zwijnen* (Philosophy for Swine) as proof that Stoics had an enormous contempt for animals. No further evidence of this is apparent (though the Stoics were certainly not vegans, any more than the rest of their contemporaries). I interpret the quotation more as a hint that you can see a useful or advantageous side to everything. Which, incidentally, is also a little dubious.

2—Wybe Wiersma. (On the thesis *Peri Telos*, about the aim of the Stoics, it is written Wijbe, but I assume that the name was pronounced ‘wiebe’, just as in my father’s passport his name appears as Hijlke, although his Frisian name Hylke is really pronounced ‘heel-ke’. The Frisians should of course never have agreed to interference from Holland in the spelling of Frisian words).

3—DL book VII.

4—DL book VII, 86.

5—DL book VII, 85.

IV. FEELINGS ARE JUDGMENTS

1—DL book VII.

2—Plutarch, quoted by M. van Straaten.

3—Sometimes in translations the word ‘grief’ is used, but I consider ‘sorrow’, ‘displeasure’ and ‘pain’ more suitable as opposites of enjoyment or pleasure. For this, pleasure and pain are used for both bodily and ‘spiritual’ experiences.

4—DL book VII, 111-115.

V. GOODNESS, BEAUTY AND HAPPINESS

1—DL book VII, 90.

2—In Christianity and other religions, ‘virtue’ and ‘good and evil’ are loaded words, and ‘evil’ is connected to Hell and damnation. Such threats cannot be found in the works of the Stoics.

3—DL book VII, 93.

4—DL book VII, 92.

5—Here and there I use the word ‘enjoyment’ as a synonym for ‘pleasure’, because pleasure usually has the connotation of short-term feelings, while Epicurus clearly had a preference for more long-term forms of pleasure.

6—DL book VII, 27.

7—Via Google, when typing in ‘euroia biou’, many languages apart from Greek appear, with the translations: a smooth flow of life, der gute Fluss des Lebens, bon écoulement de la vie, livets lette strøm, the easy flow of life, the good flowing of life, una corrente favorevole, and a Chinese version which I do not understand..

8—The Sceptic Sextus Empiricus is in this instance sympathetic to the Stoics.

9—DL book VII, 166-168.

10—Aristo was very eloquent and had the nickname ‘the Siren’. Zeno, however, called him a ‘chatterbox’ because he used a lot of words, while Zeno himself was concise in speech (DL book VII, 18). Eratosthenes of Cyrene, the greatest scientist of the time, and the third librarian of Alexandria, who amongst other things was the first to calculate the circumference of the Earth, was one of Aristo’s pupils.

11—DL book VII, 160.

VI. COSMOPOLITANISM, FRIENDSHIP AND COEXISTENCE

1—Not a Stoic, but the successor of Aristotle as mentioned earlier, with whom Zeno had taken lessons. For ‘the Stoics and the animals issue’ see also footnote 8 of Chapter XV.

2—DL book VI, 93.

3—Anne Banateanu, *La théorie stoïcienne de l’amitié*. (The Stoic theory of friendship).

4—DL book VII, 23.

5—Anne Banateanu, *op. cit.*

6—DL book VII.

7—DL book VII.

8— ‘It is also their doctrine that amongst the wise there should be a community of wives with free choice of partners (...) Under such circumstances we shall feel paternal affection for all the children alike, and there will be an end of the jealousies arising from adultery.’ DL Book VII, 131. Comment: wise people were therefore men, and women were seen as ‘communal possessions’ of those men—and ‘we’ should feel fatherly love. What about equality, then? (Incidentally, this is a text of Diogenes Laërtius, so we cannot hold Zeno responsible for it.) Were women second-class beings in Stoic philosophy? Nowhere is any form of dichotomy apparent, like that of Aristotle. Just like with Plato, Zeno’s ideal city was not a men’s club. Everyone was considered capable of philosophising, men and women. Zeno argued in his *Politeia* for men and women to wear the same clothes. In contrast to Plato’s *Republic* where there were three classes, in Zeno’s ideal city all people were equal. Yet it could well be so that in that area there were an awful lot of ‘blind spots’.

It is also remarkable that Zeno wanted to create circumstances in which less or no jealousy would be generated, instead of saying: jealousy arises from incorrect thoughts, which you can change. This whole train of thought is in fact remarkable, because most people of today see the unattached free love that Zeno argued for as a source of jealousy. For that matter, I agree with Zeno that unattached love—a restricted, shy form of love—does not tally with Stoic philosophy, because this kind of ‘love’ rests on thinking in terms of possessions (greed, fear). It must be said that the *Politeia* was an early work of Zeno. He never dissociated himself from it, but it is clear that later on his emphasis came to lie elsewhere.

9—Wybe Wiersma.

10—G. Rodis-Lewis, *La morale stoïcienne*. (Stoic Morals)

11—DL book VII, 128.

VII. MIDDLE STOA AND ROMAN STOA

1—Teun Tieleman wrote about this in his article *Hellenistische filosofen: een groepsportret* (Hellenistic philosophers, a group portrait), *Lampas* 38 (p. 226), 2005.

2—P. A. Meijer in *Plutarchus, Stoï-sche tegenstrijdigheden*, (‘On the Self-Contradictions of the Stoics’).

3—But even back then, opinions on these sort of issues were divided. It was said about Diogenes the Cynic that he considered humans the most intelligent of all living beings if he looked at doctors and philosophers, but ‘when again he saw interpreters of dreams and diviners and those who attended to them (...) he thought no animal more silly.’ DL book VI, 24.

4—DL book VII, 103.

5—Seneca, quoted by Cornelis Verhoeven.

6—Dialogues: the Latin original is *quarum experimentum sanguis et sudor est*.

7—Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*. Compare the English translation by Richard M. Gummere: ‘And do you know why we have not the power to attain this Stoic ideal? It is because we refuse to believe in our power. Nay, of a surety, there is something else which plays a part: it is because we are in love with our vices; we uphold them and prefer to make excuses for them rather than shake them off. We mortals have been endowed with sufficient strength by nature, if only we use this strength, if only we concentrate our powers and rouse them all to help us or at least not to hinder us. The reason is unwillingness, the excuse, inability’.

8—Seneca, *Epistulae* (Letters) 22. From the Dutch translation by Henk van der Werf, apart from the last sentence, which is from the Richard M. Gummere translation (see the previous footnote).

9—Musonius Rufus, *Een oprechte stoï-cijn* (Musonius Rufus, A Sincere Stoic), introduced and translated by Simone Mooij-Valk.

10—Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*. Some quotes are from the translation by Elizabeth Carter, c. 1750. <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html> and others from the Dutch translation with notes by Hein L. van Dolen and Charles Hupperts, *Zakboekje. Wenken voor een evenwichtig leven*.

11—I came across a wall tile with this text in my parents’ house.

12—More about the ideal of lack of conflicts of interest can be found in other publications of Atalanta: *Hoe komen kringen in het water* (How ripples appear in water) and *Een en een is zelden twee* (One and one is rarely two), by Weia Reinboud and Rymke Wiersma.

13—All quotations of Marcus Aurelius come from *The Thoughts of Emperor Marcus Aurelius*, translated by George Long.

14—Marcus Aurelius, book X, 30. Miriam van Reijen in her book *Filosoferen over emoties* (Philosophising about Emotions) speaks along the same lines when she

writes: 'There is no reason to blame someone else, because if you thought the same you would act in the same way. The only sensible thing is to enable the other person to change his or her thoughts.'

VIII. SOME ATTRACTIVE IDEAS FROM THE EARLY STOA

1—But this moderation is still not an easy task: 'so, too, anyone can get angry— that is easy— or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. (...) For it is not easy to determine both how and with whom and on what provocation and how long one should be angry.' Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by W. D. Ross).

IX. QUESTIONS, PRECONCEPTIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

1—The future of the universe can never be calculated, because that would require a computer that is larger than the universe. See *Hoe komen kringen in het water* (How ripples appear in water) by Weia Reinboud and Rymke Wiersma.

2—Lawrence C. Becker. An interesting attempt to construct a new Stoicism with the old 'ingredients'. It is nice that here (just as, incidentally, with Tad Brennan) the pronoun 'she' is used for the sage or wise person.

3—Sometimes also called Zeus ... Just as with Spinoza, you may wonder if the use of a religious concept came about because of strategic intentions. In the case of 'Spinozists' it is clear that there are two schools of thought, an atheist school and a theist (pantheist) school. Perhaps it was similar with the 'Zenoists', and in any case those interested in Stoicism today include both atheists and theists (including pantheists).

4—There is more about these schools of thought in Chapter X.

5—See also *Hoe komen kringen in het water*.

6—Forgive me this somewhat 'cynical' expression ...

7—Denis Diderot (1713-1784), quoted by Stendhal in his book *De L'Amour* (On Love).

8—DL book VII.

9—A book from 1969. The first book that I read about the Stoics, alongside the account of Diogenes Laërtius; I got a lot out of it. In all likelihood it can now only be obtained second-hand, or borrowed from libraries.

10—For this, Karin Spauk coined the Dutch word *orenmaffia*: literally, 'ears-mafia': those who say that symptoms originate between your ears, i.e. in your mind.

11—See particularly the *Enchiridion* ('Notebook') of Epictetus.

12—DL book VII, 120.

13—Or half-measures; the term 'halfness' (halfheid) comes from Multatuli.

14—*The Stoic Idea of the City* by Malcolm Schofield.

X. CYNICS, ATOMISTS AND SCEPTICS

1—The original Dutch text consistently uses transliterations of Greek philosophers' names, in this case *Epikouros*, instead of the names they are nowadays commonly known by, which are sometimes Latinized versions such as Epicurus, and sometimes a transliteration of the Greek originals, such as Chremonides. For Epicurus' followers, I sometimes use the name 'Epicureans'. The school as a whole is often called the Garden (*kèpos*).

2—Keimpe Algra, *In dienst van de ethiek* (In service of ethics) in *Wijsgerig Perspectief, 'Hellenisme'* (Philosophical Perspective, 'Hellenism'), edited by Teun Tieleman, 2002.

3—The Cynics met in an old gymnasium just outside the city walls of Athens, called *kunosarges*, 'living dog'. Perhaps the *kunikoi*/Cynics were therefore named after the place where they met, but this nickname was undoubtedly strengthened because they felt affinity to dogs and found stray dogs in particular inspiring for their independent and self-supporting way of life: *autarkeia*.

4—DL book VI, 45.

5—DL book IX, 44 .

6—Quotations translated from *Stofjes in het zonlicht*, unless noted otherwise. ('Stofjes'.)

7—Translator Rein Ferwerda in his notes to 'Stofjes'.

8—DL book IX, 40.

9—*Epicurus, Letter about happiness, translated by Hans Warren and Mario Molegraaf* (HW/MM). Further quotations from Epicurus come from HW/MM unless noted otherwise.

10—Here, 'fate' means 'event attached to causes', rather in the sense of chance or 'something that just happens'.

11—It was not for nothing that Karl Marx wrote his thesis about (the difference between the natural philosophy of) Democritus and Epicurus.

12—DL book X, 149.

13— 'Diotimus the Stoic, who is hostile to him, has assailed him with bitter slanders, adducing fifty scandalous letters as written by Epicurus ...' (DL book X, 3.)

14—DL book VII, 149: 'Nature, they hold, aims both at utility and at pleasure (...)'

15—Pupil of Socrates, founder of the school of Cyrene/Kurene, which championed a more radical form of Hedonism, which was less concerned about

possible harm over the long term.

16—This and the previous quotation are from DL book X.

17—In the Garden, the women played a full part in philosophising.

18—Keimpe Algra, introduction to: Epicurus, *Letter about happiness*.

19—Thomas Hobbes was therefore not the first to think of this. But Epicurus' solution is entirely different.

20—Keimpe Algra, introduction to: Epicurus, *Letter about happiness*.

21—Spinoza, *Ethica*.

22—DL book IX, 108. Robert Drew Hicks, the translator, adds: 'i.e. a calm, the opposite of an excitable, temperament: cf. Plato, *Lys* 211 e.'

23—Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism (Scepticism)*. <http://web.archive.org/web/20070621153548/http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/GMR/hmp/modules/hdco405/units/unit05/outlines.html>.

24—A friend and pupil of Parmenides was Zeno of Elea. Note: this is the Zeno who is famous for his paradoxes about Achilles and the tortoise, etc., not to be confused with 'our' Zeno of Citium, the Stoic, who lived a few centuries later.

25—*The Parmenides*. According to Luciano de Crescenzo in his *History of Greek Philosophy*, this is, despite Plato's talent for writing, 'the most boring and complicated conversation in philosophy.'

26—Luciano de Crescenzo.

27—Sextus Empiricus (SE).

28—SE. From <http://web.archive.org/web/20070621153548/http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/GMR/hmp/modules/hdco405/units/unit05/outlines.html>.

29—Extensively described in the book *The Stoic Life* by Tad Brennan.

30—The description is reminiscent of 'l'idée claire et distincte' (the clear and distinct idea) of René Descartes (1596-1650).

31—SE.

32—DL book IX, 91.

33—See Chapter VII of this book.

33—See Chapter V of this book.

35—SE.

36—SE (*Against the Ethicists*, 173).

XI. STRONG AFFECTATIONS, GOOD FEELINGS

1—Seneca, quoted in *Seneca voor managers (Seneca for Managers)*.

2—De Martelaere/Lemmens.

3—'In order to teach people to endure, let them practice their patience on lifeless objects which resist our actions through mechanical means or physical necessity. Each day provides opportunities for this.' (Arthur Schopenhauer,

1788-1860.)

4—I once read this in an article about him in a supplement to the *NRC Handelsblad* newspaper.

5—See also the ideas of proponents of 'non-violent communication', such as Marshall Rosenberg (see Bibliography).

6—All virtues were, according to the Stoics, forms of knowledge. Courage they saw as the knowledge 'of what we ought to choose, what we ought to beware of, and what is indifferent'. (DL book VII, 92-95.)

7—In this respect I am in agreement with the ideas of Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) as he describes in his book *Mutual Aid*.

8—Miriam van Reijen, *Filosoferen over emoties (Philosophising about Emotions)*.

9—Miriam van Reijen, *Filosoferen over emoties (Philosophising about Emotions)*.

10—Dutch: *vergelijkeritis*. A term from *Hoe komen kringen in het water* (How ripples appear in water) by Weia Reinboud, meaning 'a propensity to compare oneself continually to others and, in doing so, worry about a possible 'negative' outcome.'

11—Baruch, later Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-1677) never, as far as I know, called himself a Stoic, but there are clear similarities between the philosophy of the Early Stoics and that of Spinoza. He was particularly in agreement with Stoic physics (cohesion of nature, determinism). His portrayal of mankind is however rather different: according to Spinoza, we can never completely control our emotional affectations. In his best-known book, *Ethica*, he said that even the Stoics had to admit that it is a major task to curb and moderate our passions. Spinoza found that the passions did not need to be banished; the key was to make reason a passion that could drive away all other passions. For this, see the book *Spinoza. De geest is gewillig maar het vlees is sterk* (The spirit is willing but the flesh is strong [sic]) by Miriam van Reijen (Kampen, April 2008).

12—DL book VII, 149 about the Stoics: 'Nature, they hold, aims both at utility and at pleasure, as is clear from the analogy of human craftsmanship.'

13—In his book *On Love*, Stendhal (1783-1842) describes 'love' (by which he means lovesickness) as a mania, an illness, which can be healed with difficulty; healing takes at least half a year. The only remedy that speeds up healing, according to Stendhal, is to be in constant mortal danger for an extended period, for example on a ship during a heavy storm that lasts at least two weeks. He also found that the object of one's love becomes idealised. There is also a lot of fantasising about loved ones, and these phenomena are difficult to refute. As an extra disadvantage of lovesickness, he mentions the fact that you lose all your interest in other things, that the rest of your life ceases to be exciting. Lovesickness clearly causes a distortion, a strongly biased view of reality. Nevertheless, he still pleads for people to dare to love, and denounces

those who do not recognise the phenomenon of love (lovesickness) or passion.

14—DL book VII, 118.

15—See Chapter X of this book.

16—Miriam van Reijen, *Filosoferen over emoties* (Philosophising about Emotions).

17—During the last, hectic phase of writing this book, I got a lot out of watching a number of films of the brilliant acrobat and comic Buster Keaton (1895-1966), also called 'The great stone face'. Whatever disasters overcame him, he remained 'stoic' and tried to make the best of it. Is it too far-fetched to call him a Stoic humourist?

18—Martha Nussbaum wondered if the radical standpoint of the Stoics about external matters was in fact logically consistent. When the virtues named by the Ancient Greek Stoics, such as courage, justice and frugality are looked at in separation from material things it is difficult to see what they concretely mean. How could you be just if food, shelter, etc. are totally insignificant? If money is insignificant then it is surely totally inconsequential that one person has a lot of it and another very little?

Here, however, she overlooks something that I find especially interesting: if I am just, then I will not want to cause poverty or other adversity in others. While if an adversity such as this affects me, the Stoic view still applies: this adversity does not need to make me unhappy, because happiness is possible in any situation. Happiness depends on what I think and do, and if I let myself be led by greed (and disadvantage others) then, according to Stoic logic, I cannot be happy. See also Chapter XIV.

19—Martha Nussbaum, *Oplevingen van het denken* (Revival of Thinking).

20—Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life. Emotions, Duties, & Fate*.

21—DL book VII, 123: 'Nor yet, they go on to say, will the wise man live in solitude; for he is naturally made for society and action.' Spinoza, who was 'in line with the Stoics' regarding empathy, made it clear that this does not mean that we should let down our fellow human beings: 'He who is moved to help others neither by reason nor by compassion, is rightly styled inhuman (...)' Notes to Proposition 50, *Ethics* (translated by R. H. M. Elwes).

22—DL book VII, 117.

XIII. HAPPINESS

1—This saying of Bertrand Russell, quoted by Ellis and Harper (p.125), is in fact a variation of the ancient question of whether a Stoic would feel happy even on the torture rack. An extreme situation is thought up in order to show that if the theory does not hold good here, then it should not hold good in

any situation. A possible answer is: an extremely wise/Stoic individual would be capable of experiencing happiness even in these extreme situations. It is of course then not about enjoyment or other passive forms of happiness, but the active, Stoic form: doing what is best in the situation. That the 'average person' is not capable of this does not mean that it is not possible for this average person to work towards this ideal.

2—Gidia Jacobs: *Rationeel-emotieve therapie, een praktische gids voor hulpverleners* (Rational emotive behaviour therapy; a practical guide for social workers). A number of thoughts from Stoicism have been taken up by Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), but the radicalness of the Early Stoa was rejected. Striving for independence and striving not to be led by strong, nagging feelings, in particular, was watered down in REBT. 'To horrible situations belong suitably horrible feelings, such as anxiety or grief', according to Gidia Jacobs. But an unpleasant feeling is, according to the Stoics, not attached to a particular situation, but comes about only when there is a judgment along the lines of 'this is horrible'. In the same situation, it is possible to think: 'how can I solve this' or 'nothing can be done about it', together with the feelings attached to these thoughts.

Albert Ellis, the founder of REBT, and Robert Harper in their book *A New Guide to Rational Living* distance themselves from the start from 'orthodox Stoicism or other utopian creeds' (p.7). They concentrate on what is achievable for many people, not just for heroes or ascetics. REBT is intended for practical application, and practitioners perhaps think that they must therefore take a more pragmatic position, but in doing so they miss a great deal of the challenging aspects of Early Stoicism, as well as the adventure of thinking that is philosophy.

3—*Hoe komen kringen in het water* (How ripples appear in water) by Weia Reinboud and Rymke Wiersma.

4—See his book *Van nature goed* (Good Natured).

5—From this can also be deduced that what is classified as 'good' behaviour is not fixed, but depends on the whole situation. On the one hand, from 'what is' can be deduced 'what ought', but 'what ought' is not fixed, and is dependent on the wishes and ideals of individuals and groups.

6—Peter Marshall.

7—See *Een en een is zelden twee* (One and one is rarely two), by Weia Reinboud and Rymke Wiersma.

8—Funnily enough, years after Weia had written this and we published this pamphlet about 'anti-authoritarian ethics', I came across a book about Spinoza in which the same logical reasoning appears. Spinoza too saw goodness and evil apparently not as symmetrical or coincidental matters. The writer of that book, H. G. Hubbeling, concluded that Spinoza may have shared a number of ideas about humanity with Hobbes, but not his

pessimism, because 1. people would try to promote each other's happiness through equality and agreement, 2. love is stronger than hate (because positive feelings are more active and because grief shrinks the possibilities for action), 3. because reason unites people, the group of people living according to reason eventually becomes larger than the others, because the latter remain divided, and 4. that people need each other in order to stand firm in life and therefore that nothing is as useful for humans as their fellow humans. H. G. Hubbeling, *Spinoza*.

XIV. THE STOIC AS WORLD CITIZEN

1—DL book VI.

2—Chrysippus: DL book VII, 189.

3—DL book VII, and Hans Dijkhuis, *De machtige filosoof (The Powerful Philosopher)*.

XV. THE NON-STOIC SOCIETY

1—Even sensible, considered enjoyment in the manner of Epicurus is a rarity, but the 'Slow Food' movement seems to me to be a good example of it.

2—Justice sounds like an absolute value, just like 'having a right to ...' It is a word that I mostly try to avoid, because it is difficult to define. But if Stoics take justice to mean 'fair distribution and suchlike', I find this clear enough, and so I use the word in this book. From feminists there is also criticism of this 'rational' concept that male philosophers came up with, and there is a preference for, e.g. the concept of 'care'. Care for each other could also be named as a virtue or quality. I think that I have already made it clear enough that concern for others is part and parcel of my interpretation of Stoic ethics. Not just particular feminists, but also some (other) left-wingers sometimes seem in the same way to have something against rationality and logical thought. Indeed, particular forms of logical thinking can be used to 'justify' bad things (more accurately, to make excuses for them), but that has nothing to do with the reasonableness or rationality which the Stoics alluded to. If anything is irrational, fighting wars is, and if anything is rational, cooperation is. The so-called feminine feelings, such as tenderness, commitment and carefulness, arise from rational thoughts; women are definitely not less rational than men (quite the contrary, I would almost say). Therefore, the somewhat practical virtue 'caring for each other' is also rational.

If particular thoughts cause particular feelings, this means that those rational, sensible thoughts also bring feelings with them. The more sensible, the more pleasant the feelings are; the more rational, the more *eupatheiai* (good feelings in the Stoic sense).

3—*La servitude volontaire*. After his early death, his close friend Michel de Montaigne arranged for copies to be made of the text. One of these copies was preserved, and published (only in) 1853. Étienne de la Boétie died very young, to the great distress of Montaigne.

4—Étienne de la Boétie, *La servitude volontaire*.

5—Étienne de la Boétie (EdlB).

6—EdlB. Mithridates the Great (120-63 BC) fought the Romans in Asia Minor; he was continually afraid that he would be poisoned.

7—Concerning Stoics and power, there is also the following argument:

To the extent that power is inflicting suffering, a Stoic would say that you can withdraw from power, because a Stoic does not care for bodily pain or external situations. Now, suffering is indeed not such a good criterion, because a dentist can also inflict suffering; it is more about damage, damage to someone's interests. But a Stoic once again escapes by saying that nothing that another can do can damage my real interests; I am always free if I know those real interests. Power generally means a restriction on freedom to choose, but according to the Stoics, you can always choose to make this restriction insignificant, and so you can choose for yourself whether you are within someone else's power. If that were the case, all power would rest on illusion.

The Stoic argument shows that whether A has power over B depends not only on the activities that A can do in relation to B, but also on the importance that B ascribes to these activities. You do not say that B is in the power of A if what A can do for B is totally unimportant, if it is something that B shall possibly ignore.

I came across this interesting train of thought in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*; this is a paraphrase of the original text.

8—Luciano de Crescenzo, *Geschiedenis van de Griekse filosofie. Socrates en daarna*. (The History of Greek Philosophy. Volume 2: Socrates and beyond.)

XVI. UTOPIA

1—See *Time for Anarchy and Anarchy? What's that?* (both online at <http://www.at-a-lanta.nl/opdezesite.html>).

2—Hans Achterhuis suspects that More intended his story as a joke. Hans Achterhuis, *Utopie (Utopia)*; Amsterdam 2006.

3—Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible. A History of anarchism*.

4—Considering that an ideal society (a utopia) is something that is in principle possible rests on at least two premises: people can change (excellence/arete depends on knowledge and can therefore be learned—a starting point of Stoics), and 'good' (cooperation, friendship, care for yourself and others) is stronger than 'evil' (egotism, greed, destructiveness). Earlier, I mentioned the 'law of unpredictable progress', which corresponds to the Stoic principle that more knowledge/insight leads to wisdom and thereby to 'doing good'. This 'good' is not something obedient or dutiful. It is indeed something beautiful,

but not something elevated; it is ‘simply’ a part of nature. The Stoics strove towards ‘living in agreement with nature’. That this saying is somewhat problematic was mentioned earlier; here it is about the good not being supernatural but something that is simply part of nature. Care (love) for their young is innate in many animals. Cooperation is for social animals in the interest of the species. (Frans de Waal wrote many interesting anecdotes about anthropoid apes. He also, incidentally, wrote appreciatively about Kropotkin.)

5—Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution*—quotation taken from http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/mutaidcontents.html.

6—Anton Constandse, *Het soevereine Ik. Het individualisme van Lao-tse tot Friedrich Nietzsche*, (The sovereign I: individualism from Lao-tse to Friedrich Nietzsche).

7—Anton Constandse en het anarchisme, (Anton Constandse and anarchism), *De AS* 39/40.

8—The anarchist Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) wrote something similar in his work *Man, Society and Freedom* (translated by Sam Dolgoff in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 1971): ‘I am not myself free or human until or unless I recognize the freedom and humanity of all my fellowmen.’

9—What was the opinion of the Early Stoics on whether or not to eat or otherwise make use of animals? In quotes of, or about, Stoics and food, I have rarely come across ingredients from animals; bread, figs and olives were mentioned a lot. Traditional Stoicism in any case applies the argument of frugality. Animal products were a luxury food for Ancient Greeks. More important for rejecting the use of animals, however, is the argument that animals also have the ‘right’ to exist in freedom and without human disturbance. In other words, the recognition that the virtue of justice is also applicable to animals. For this last argument, there is little inspiration to be found in the writings of Early Stoics. It is notable that even in antiquity, this was already a thorny issue. According to the vegetarian Plutarch, who in any case strongly criticised the Stoa in his *Moralia*, the Stoic Chrysippus saw animals only as beings which could be useful for humans. Of course, the concentric circles of Hierocles (see Chapter VI) can be extended to the kingdom of non-human animals.

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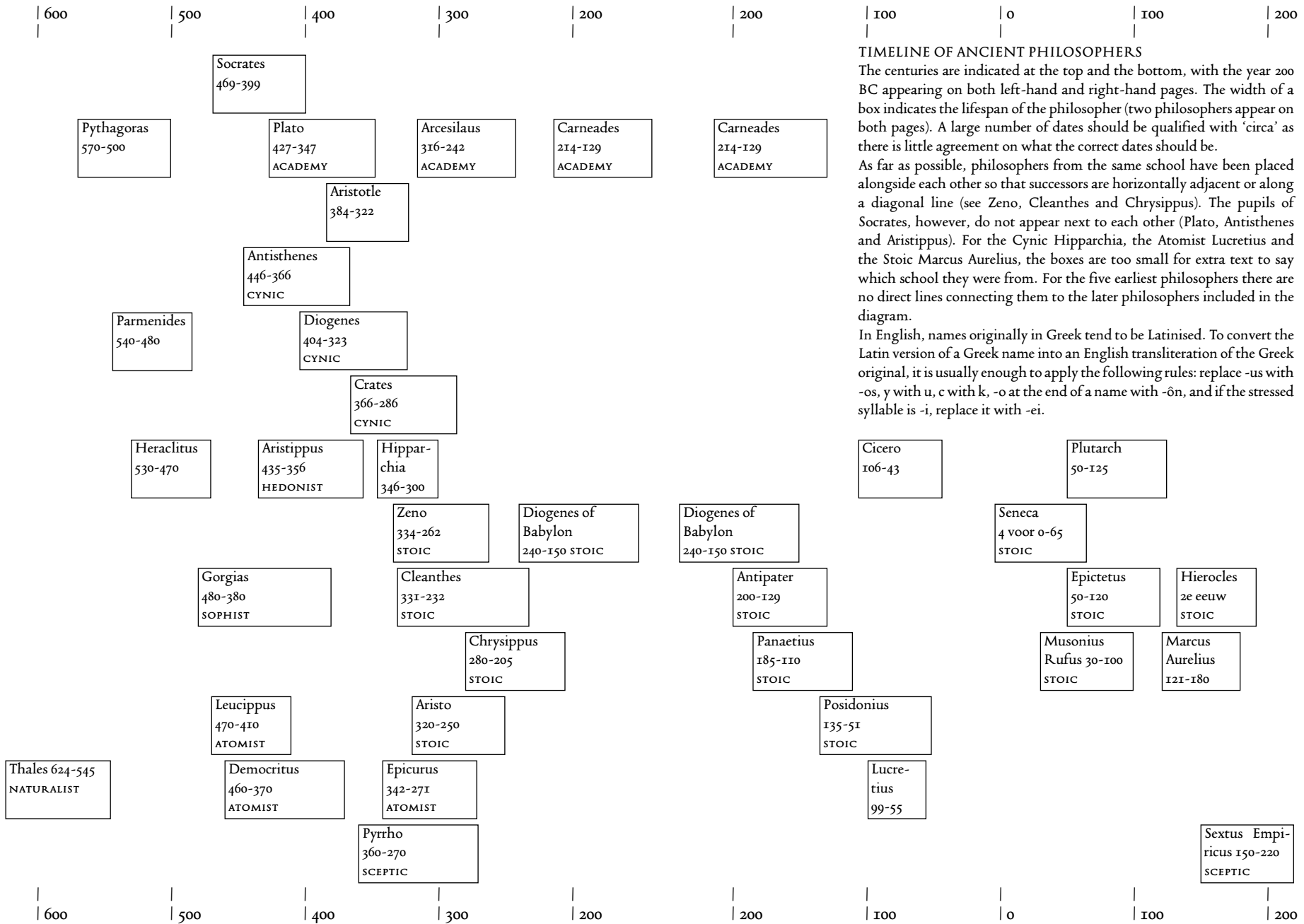
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TIMELINE OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS

The centuries are indicated at the top and the bottom, with the year 200 BC appearing on both left-hand and right-hand pages. The width of a box indicates the lifespan of the philosopher (two philosophers appear on both pages). A large number of dates should be qualified with 'circa' as there is little agreement on what the correct dates should be.

As far as possible, philosophers from the same school have been placed alongside each other so that successors are horizontally adjacent or along a diagonal line (see Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus). The pupils of Socrates, however, do not appear next to each other (Plato, Antisthenes and Aristippus). For the Cynic Hipparchia, the Atomist Lucretius and the Stoic Marcus Aurelius, the boxes are too small for extra text to say which school they were from. For the five earliest philosophers there are no direct lines connecting them to the later philosophers included in the diagram.

In English, names originally in Greek tend to be Latinised. To convert the Latin version of a Greek name into an English transliteration of the Greek original, it is usually enough to apply the following rules: replace -us with -os, y with u, c with k, -o at the end of a name with -ôn, and if the stressed syllable is -i, replace it with -ei.

translation of
STOISCHE NOTITIES – DE STOICIJNEN EN ANDERE KLASIEKE FILOSOFEN
ALS BRON VAN INSPIRATIE VOOR GELUK EN EEN MOOIERE WERELD
original text: Rymke Wiersma 2008
translation: Stuart Field 2014
book and font design: Weia Reinboud
font: Atalanta
a searchable and downloadable version of this text can be found at:
www.at-a-lanta.nl/opdezesite.html

Atalanta started 1980 as a women's print shop
turning to publishing a few years later
with publications mostly about
philosophy, environment and politics
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