

Philosophy and education in Stoicism of the Roman Imperial era

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The Stoics of the Roman Imperial period share the imperative that education should not focus on erudition for its own sake, but contribute to the pursuit of the good life as they define it in philosophical terms. Hence these later Stoics express similar concerns about the technical and theoretical aspects of philosophy as they do about pre-philosophical education. Such a stance, however, does not imply ignorance or a deliberate rejection of the technical knowledge established by earlier Stoics, but rather a conscious choice of a certain mode of discourse, which cannot be reduced to popular moralising.

Introduction

In the first two centuries of the Roman imperial era, the study of philosophy constituted the crowning educational experience, in the sense of being both a privilege and a capstone. Only an elite among the elite studied philosophy, and only then after mastering a curriculum consisting of grammar (reading, writing and literature) and rhetoric. The ongoing cultural rivalry between rhetoricians and philosophers could be intense, even though a Stoic such as Seneca (c. 4 BCE–65 CE) clearly turned his rhetorical training to his advantage in order to convey his views more forcefully, especially in his letters and consolations. This tension was acknowledged in Seneca's comments about his father's misgivings about philosophy (*Ep.* 108.22), in the exchanges between Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE, *Med.* 1.7) and his rhetoric teacher Fronto (c. 100–170 CE, *De eloquentia* (Haines/van den Hout), *Ad M. Caes.* 3.15 (1.100 Haines, p. 48 van den Hout)), and in the concerns of Epictetus (c. 55–135 CE, *Diss.* 3.23.33–38), who, like Seneca (*Ep.* 40), warned that rhetorical flourishes should not cloud a philosopher's expression.¹

For Romans, Latin was the linguistic medium for rhetoric (even though rhetoric could also draw from Greek models). Philosophy, on the other hand, was most often

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expressed in Greek, even in the reflections that the emperor Marcus Aurelius addressed to himself. Seneca consciously departed from this model by not merely rendering Greek idiom, as had Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Lucretius (early to mid-first century BCE) before him, but also developing his philosophical views in Latin terms (Inwood, 2005, pp. 7–22).

As the following discussion of the views of Seneca, Cornutus (fl c. 60 CE), Musonius Rufus (fl c. 30–100 CE), Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius will demonstrate, these later Stoics could look back on a considerable legacy established by the founders of the school in the Hellenistic period: Zeno (334–262 BCE), Cleanthes (331–232 BCE) and especially the prolific Chrysippus (c. 280–206 BCE). The earlier Stoics had often framed their views in a conscious rivalry with Plato and his successors, and also claimed Socrates for their own purposes. During the Roman Republic, Stoics such as Panaetius (c. 185–110 BCE), who spent part of his life in Rome and belonged to the entourage of Scipio Africanus the Younger, and Posidonius (135–51 BCE), who went on an ambassadorship to Rome, directly infused Roman culture with their ideas; and Cicero, though not a Stoic himself, demonstrated a familiarity with many Stoic views.

Not all the Stoics of the Roman imperial era taught philosophy or directed a philosophical school. (For a good overview of Stoicism in the imperial era, see Gill, 2000 and 2003.) There is evidence of teaching activity on the part of Cornutus and Musonius Rufus, but not much information about its structure. Cornutus appears to have also taught topics pertaining to grammar as well as philosophy. Epictetus directed a school in Epirus. Other Stoics were engaged in a wide range of practices. Seneca progressively devoted more time to philosophy as he grew older, addressed others who had interests and concerns similar to his, and also wrote tragedies; Marcus Aurelius's writings were addressed to himself, and it is not clear whether he intended his reflections for a wider audience; and Manilius' work (first century CE) belongs within the tradition of didactic poetry. Cleomedes' astronomical treatise on the heavens is a rare example of a Stoic technical treatise from this period (c. 200 CE),² as is the *Elements of ethics* by a certain Hierocles (fl. 100 CE), to which we will return below.

Although the works of Seneca, Cornutus, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius engage the topic of education at the relatively advanced level of philosophy, they also provide some insights into pre-philosophical education. The writings of Seneca and especially Marcus Aurelius give us clues about how they themselves were educated. The entire first book of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, for instance, consists of an overview of the people who shaped him, including his teachers. Stoic philosophy itself, in turn, had its own curriculum, often conveniently divided into the three areas of logic, the study of nature (or physics, as the ancients called it), and ethics, though in the work of the authors examined here, ethics is the dominant strand of inquiry. Yet in the final analysis, in the view of these later Stoics, philosophy cannot be reduced to a curriculum or even a purely intellectual activity, but rather is meant to inform all human actions and to transform so-called 'ordinary' life from within existing social structures and responsibilities. The following discussion will examine these thinkers' views regarding pre-philosophical

education, the three branches of philosophy, and the ultimate goal of philosophical education.

Pre-philosophical education: Cornutus and Seneca

From the writings attributed to Cornutus it appears that he worked in grammar and rhetoric (areas to which the Stoics also devoted attention) as well as philosophy. He taught, among others, the poets Persius (34–62 CE) and Lucan (39–65 CE). The topic of his sole preserved text, *Introduction to Greek theology*, sits right at the intersection of literary studies and philosophy. The work stands in a tradition of allegorical interpretations of poetry (primarily but not exclusively Homer and Hesiod) through etymologies of divine names, which, when interpreted correctly, were believed to reveal the proper ‘philosophical’ view of the gods.

As the opening line and final paragraphs of this work indicate, it is intended to provide a young pupil (*paidion*) with the correct understanding of the nature of the universe, or physics, necessary to reinterpret mythological accounts. The Stoics considered theology the highest branch of physics, and Panaetius and Posidonius are said to have started their course of instruction with physics (Diogenes Laertius 7.41). Cornutus’ work is a physics textbook—but it is also plausible that it was meant to ease the transition from literary studies and rhetoric to philosophy, and thus either to prepare the ground for a potential interest in ‘higher’ philosophical studies or to prevent the worst misconceptions. The correct view of the gods would, it was assumed, yield the right attitude towards them: reverence with respect for traditional practices, yet also genuine piety without superstition.³

According to Cornutus, there were ‘philosophers’ even among the men ‘of old’, who had begun the tradition of clothing their insights in symbolic language. Both of these points, however, were a matter of debate within the Stoic tradition, as reflected in one of Seneca’s letters (*Ep.* 90). Though the Stoics agreed that the first generations of human beings had more direct access to the truth, they differed in their views about the extent of this knowledge and whether it was pre-philosophical. They also disagreed over when the practice of ‘hiding’, or, if viewed as a negative outcome (e.g. Cicero *De natura deorum* 2.63; 70–71; Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 1039F), losing true meanings in poetry, mythology and other media, such as paintings and cult practices, had started. In this context, Cornutus seems to present a strong endorsement of the allegorical method.

To what extent the earlier Stoics engaged in full-fledged ‘allegorising’ is unclear. (For the best current overview of the debate, see Ramelli, 2003, esp. pp. 31–41.) We do know that the early Stoics Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus shared Cornutus’ interest in etymologies of divine names that presumably revealed true insights about nature and the divine. Cicero’s *On the nature of the gods* provides invaluable information about this practice, notably about Chrysippus’ work of the same name, but in a context, it has to be noted, that is very critical of Stoicism (1.40–41). Seneca goes even further than Cicero in disapproving of this mode of interpretation, thereby also asserting his independence *vis-à-vis* his Stoic predecessors (*Ben.* 1.3.2–4).

In his criticism of the allegorising method, Seneca uses the three Graces as an example. (We have an instance of just such allegorising of the Graces in Cornutus 18.4-20.5 Lang. Thus Seneca may also have been indirectly criticising his contemporary.) Looking for hidden meanings in specific names, genealogies and attributes of the gods in myths, poetic renderings and art is not unique to the Stoics, he claims, but constitutes a broader cultural practice. His main complaint against allegorising is three-fold. First, such interpretations vary according to the views of any given interpreter. Second, poets are not reliable witnesses: often they simply make up names to suit their taste or to accommodate metrical constraints. Most importantly, this kind of analysis of poetry and of cultural artifacts is of no real use in instilling the right attitude and behaviour, he holds, making explicit the ethical implications of one's views of the divine. Capitalising on a well-attested cultural tension between the Greek and Roman traditions, Seneca claims that one could expect such an overly subtle approach from a Greek like Chrysippus. But this subtlety belies Chrysippus' usual acumen and is out of keeping with his ability elsewhere to state his points lucidly and succinctly. Perhaps Chrysippus' acumen is so finely pointed, Seneca scoffs, that it gets blunted and turns against itself, pricking rather than piercing (*Ben.* 1.4.1).

Seneca's famous *Letter* 88 on 'liberal studies' (*liberalia studia*), which also mentions the key Greek notion of 'encyclical education' (*egkuklios paideia*, 23), builds on this criticism within a larger assessment of the curriculum that normally preceded the study of philosophy. Homer can be turned into a Stoic, Epicurean, Peripatetic, or Academic, he complains, depending on who is interpreting him; if all of these doctrines can be read into Homer, none is really present. Even if Homer was a philosopher, he became so independently of his poetry.

In this letter, Seneca plays on the connection between *artes liberales* and *liberae*. Traditionally 'free studies/arts' meant those forms of knowledge that are appropriate for politically free men and do not aim at moneymaking or usefulness. (Seneca lumps painting and sculpture, which promote luxury, together with wrestling and athletics and ranks these activities lower than the 'liberal arts', 18–19). But the only study that makes human beings truly free, he claims, is that which pursues *wisdom* and *virtue*, two notions inextricably connected in Seneca's mind.

Among the traditional liberal arts, he discusses grammar, literary studies, music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. (One can see traces here of the curriculum of the so-called *trivium* and *quadrivium*, which goes back to Plato's educational programme in his *Republic*, Hadot, I., 2005.) According to Seneca, these forms of knowledge are helpful only to the extent that they are pro-paideutic, in the sense of preparing the soul for the reception of virtue (20), and that one limits one's efforts to the strictly essential rather than being carried away by a flood of useless tidbits of information (36–41). He denounces such excessive interests as motivated by pleasure and thus intemperate.

Mathematics often concerns itself with practical purposes, as when arithmetic serves the purpose of managing one's wealth, or geometry is needed for fixing the dimensions of an estate. But even forms of mathematics that are devoid of such practical concerns are at best auxiliary sciences, and thus do not belong within philosophy,

or physics in the philosophical sense. Mathematics, he argues, must always borrow its first principles from other forms of knowledge, whereas philosophy investigates causes and laws of natural phenomena and hence probes much more deeply (24–28).

If the goal of philosophy is to instill virtue and to make us better human beings, as Seneca holds here, then not even all of philosophy as included in the tradition will qualify as ‘free’. There are plenty of thinkers, Seneca complains, who have either vied with scholars of grammar and geometry in the pursuit of useless knowledge or who have undermined the possibility of knowledge altogether (42–46). Ultimately, he maintains, all forms of knowledge that do not teach us how to live well (42–43) in the context of a universe that is rationally ordered, or prepare the ground for this outcome, are superfluous.

Philosophy: logic, physics, ethics

In his letter on ‘liberal studies’, Seneca also alludes to the division of philosophy into logic, physics and ethics (24), which was central for the Stoics (though not unique to them). But most writings by the later Stoics tend to focus on ethics in action—on how to lead the good life and face challenges. As a result, many commentators have tended to consider their accounts mere popular moralising; scholars such as Paul Veyne have even gone so far as to claim that in the Roman imperial era, Stoicism lost its initial critical edge and innovative perspective by conforming itself to prevailing social customs and practices (Veyne, 1987, p. 45).

Rather than endorsing an unreflective conformism, however, these accounts have a much more complex hermeneutical status and represent a conscious choice and a very specific mode of doing philosophy as well as engaging critically with prevailing norms, a point to which I will return below. This mode of philosophy by no means implies that knowledge of the more technical and theoretical aspects of Stoicism was no longer available in this era or that the later Stoics no longer cared about it. The technical aspects of Stoicism were still present in doxographies, compilations of the views of different schools of thought and philosophers, such as the work by Diogenes Laertius (probably early third century CE). Such compilations offer insights into the circulation of Stoic works and ideas in all three areas of physics, logic and ethics. In addition, critics of the Stoics such as Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE), Galen (129–199/217 CE), and Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. late second to early third century CE) reveal that the debate about core Stoic tenets, and Chrysippus’ teachings in particular, was very much alive in this period. It may be that later Stoics tended not to focus on theory in part because they wanted to move beyond these controversies rather than get bogged down in them, as seems to have happened with earlier Stoics in their debate with the sceptical Academy. If so, the ‘grid’ of the structure and connections between different technical terms and notions that we find in doxographical sources, as developed primarily by Chrysippus, may not be the best lens through which to interpret these later accounts, even though they reveal many connections with earlier Stoic doctrine.

Rather, the apparent differences may be mostly a matter of focus. Cleomedes’ exposition on astronomy, Manilius’ didactic poem, and Seneca’s own *Naturales*

quaestiones attest to a continued interest in advanced Stoic physics. In his other writings, Seneca also likes to demonstrate occasionally that he ‘has the goods’, so to speak, including a decent knowledge of the Stoic tradition and key technical distinctions in it and other currents of thought (as in *Letters* 94 and 95, on the use of general doctrine and precepts, or *Letter* 58, on being, and *Letter* 65, on causality). But these expositions may have been little more than finger-exercises, just as a skilled orator may occasionally reveal the tools of his trade, both to refresh his skills and establish his credibility. As readers, we should avoid the anachronism of considering such passages more ‘philosophical’ than others (Reydam-Schils, 2007).⁴

The writings of the Stoic Hierocles demonstrate how misleading the scholarly view of these Stoics’ work as simply popular moralising can be. Praechter, evaluating Hierocles’ thought only on the basis of passages preserved in Stobaeus containing ‘how to’ guidelines for dealing with the gods and one’s socio-political relationships (1901: v), considered him simply an ‘ordinary soldier in the army of Stoicism’. But shortly afterwards von Arnim edited a papyrus with fragments from a more theoretical work by Hierocles on ethics (*Elements of ethics*) that now constitute our best evidence on the highly sophisticated Stoic notion of ‘appropriation’ (*oikeiōsis*), which stipulates that by nature and from birth, animals and human beings come equipped with a self-awareness and self-love that guides them toward self-preservation (von Arnim, 1906). This notion brings together insights from both physics (how nature works) and ethics (how human beings should lead their lives) and clearly demonstrates that later Stoics such as Hierocles still had a good grasp of the technical aspects of Stoicism. (The core texts for present purposes are Cicero *De finibus* 3.16-25, 62-68, Seneca *Ep.* 121.)

These Stoics had more than a mere awareness of doctrine. They also apparently still had access to extensive writings by their predecessors, notably by Chrysippus. According to the *Vita Persii* (32.35-33.40 Clausen), Cornutus inherited from Persius’ library about 700 scrolls of Chrysippus’ works. And although such sessions are not recorded in the extant evidence of Epictetus’ teachings, the expositions do mention that Epictetus’ approach partly relied on the writings of his Stoic predecessors, especially those of the prolific and systematic Chrysippus. Epictetus thus practised ‘commentary’ as a pedagogical method by reading philosophical works together with his pupils (*sunanagnōsis*, as this was called (Hadot I., 2005, second edition, revised and expanded: p. 423)). Either the teacher would comment on the passages read or students would be asked to do so (as mentioned in *Diss.* 1.10.7-13; 1.26; 4.9.6; this would become the dominant mode of teaching in later Platonism).

Yet it is very striking that whenever Epictetus mentions this pedagogical method, he more often than not sounds a cautionary note, claiming that it does one no good whatsoever to be able to interpret and understand Chrysippus’ works, or those of other thinkers for that matter, unless one can also put these insights into practice and show how one has changed for the better as a result of one’s reading (as in *Diss.* 1.4.5-17, 17.13-18, 2.16.34, 17.34-40, 19.5-15, 23.44, 3.2.13-18, 9.20-22, 21.6-7, 24.81). According to Epictetus, merely interpreting philosophical expositions and showing off one’s erudition is no different from the immersion of a scholar of literature in

trivial details that are meant to dazzle (*Diss.* 2.19.5-15; *Ench.* 49), and we have already seen how little Seneca also valued this kind of erudition. Presumably Epictetus would measure his own success as a teacher by the actual moral progress of his pupils, not by their ability to parrot his teachings, a point to which I will return below.

What holds for reading philosophical treatises in these later Stoic accounts also holds for the study of logic and physics. Although logic and physics do belong within philosophy, these branches of knowledge can create similar pitfalls as the other forms of knowledge to which students would have been exposed earlier in their lives. There is a right and a wrong way of engaging in these inquiries, these authors make clear; the wrong way entails studying them for their own sake and indulging in technical details.

As the art of reasoning, and more specifically of demonstrations and syllogisms (for which both Zeno and Chrysippus were famous, or notorious, depending on one's perspective), logic is indispensable to virtue: someone who is fundamentally confused in his thinking about what the good is cannot be expected to live the virtuous life. (On the study and importance of logic in this era, see Barnes, 1997; Crivelli, 2007; Giavatto, 2008.) For this reason both Musonius Rufus and Epictetus are very severe with students who wish to bypass logic altogether or downplay its importance. When Epictetus once replied to his teacher Musonius Rufus that making a mistake in a logical problem was not as bad as burning the Capitol and one of Epictetus' students in turn said that it was not like killing one's father, both received the same reply: in logic, such sloppiness would in fact be the equivalent of those odious deeds (*Epictetus Diss.* 1.7.32-33; cf. also *Ench.* 52).

Another important pedagogical technique related to logic is the use of theses and demonstrations. Musonius Rufus provides a glimpse of how this worked in his teaching of ethics (1 Hense / Lutz), as in his example of the counter-intuitive thesis that pleasure is not a good. If we start, Musonius says, with the generally accepted premise that every good is desirable, and then add a second equally accepted one that some pleasures are not desirable, the conclusion that pleasure cannot be considered a good clearly follows. By this method, one moves from that which is more obvious to that which is harder to grasp. Yet, Musonius points out, a teacher should use only as many arguments and proofs as necessary to make the point, taking into account the pedagogical needs of his pupils: the gifted ones will need fewer arguments, while those who are dull, either because of a weaker disposition or a wrong upbringing, will need more evidence for the point to register. Yet the most convincing example, he claims, is a teacher who *acts* consistently with his words (see also 5 Hense / Lutz, discussed below). Here Musonius agrees with Epictetus that theorising, or drawing the right conclusions, is easier than practice, that is, living according to these insights (*Diss.* 1.26.3-4).

Physics appears to play a minimal role in Musonius Rufus' approach. Whereas Chrysippus famously defined the goal of human life as living according to nature, which included the nature both of individual human beings and of the universe (Diogenes Laertius 7.88), Musonius Rufus does not draw much attention to the universal dimension (17 p. 89 Hense) but tends to focus on human nature as different from that of the animals and the gods. Musonius does leave room for the notion of

Zeus as the ‘ensouled law’ (*nomos empsuchos* 16 p. 87 Hense) and depicts humans as citizens in Zeus’s city (i.e., the universe) (9 p. 42 Hense), but does not spell out the philosophical implications of this position.

Marcus Aurelius, in contrast, states emphatically that physics, like logic, is indispensable for the pursuit of philosophy, because views that are not based on the correct science of nature cannot hold their own. He argues that in order to make progress one needs a strong theoretical foundation and the self-confidence that results from the correct knowledge applied to each particular case (10.9). Yet a prominent, and often debated, feature of Marcus Aurelius’ writings is that he appears to leave open how exactly the universe is governed, tending instead to list alternatives, most often pitting the Stoic view of Providence against the Epicurean randomness of colliding atoms with a disjunctive ‘either . . . or’ structure. (Annas, 2004 and Cooper, 2004 are representative of the debate on this issue; see also Giavatto, 2008.) His strategy appears to be a double one. First he holds that regardless of one’s view of the universe, there are certain tenets about attitude and behaviour to which one should always cling. And in some cases, he uses an *a fortiori* approach: if an Epicurean can manage to be content with his lot, how much more should a Stoic be so, given his or her belief that a god has made everything good? By this approach, one could argue, Marcus Aurelius puts physics in what he sees as its proper place, as subservient to ethics.

Marcus Aurelius is not the only later Stoic to use these strategies, though they do loom largest in his reflections. Seneca, in one of his letters (16.4-6), leaves open whether an inexorable fate, a god, or chance rules the universe (though Stoicism assumes a connection between the first two possibilities—i.e., fate supposedly reflects the divinely imposed order of the universe). But the actual course he recommends to his addressee, namely, firmness of resolve, does not depend on any specific theory of the universe. Epictetus adopts a similar strategy, saying, ‘Why should I care whether existing things are compounded from atomic or incomposite elements, or from fire and earth? Isn’t it enough to learn the essence of good and bad . . . to run our lives using these as rules; and not to bother about those things that are beyond us?’ (fr. 1 Oldfather, trans. Long).

In *On benefits* (7.1), Seneca does not leave any doubt that it is much preferable to have a few maxims of practical philosophy at hand that will make us better and happier than a vast storehouse of recondite knowledge about nature and its hidden causes. But it is in the preface to the third book of his *Naturales quaestiones* that he solves the riddle of this quasi-sceptical approach to the study of nature. Physics and moral self-improvement are meant to reinforce each other, and only the physics that serves this mutual relation is worth pursuing. Understanding ourselves correctly implies understanding our place and role in the universe, how we relate to the divine principle, and to other human beings in the universal community.

In the final analysis, according to the later Stoics, it is not just logic or physics in the philosophical curriculum that are subservient to the correct way of life. So, too, is talking about rather than practicing ethics. As Musonius Rufus (5 Hense / Lutz) and Epictetus claim, one can hold discussions and write as much as one wants about the good life, but anyone with philosophical interests is ultimately judged by the same

standard as a physician, a sailor, or a musician: it is what one accomplishes that matters. Musonius Rufus and Epictetus hereby also quietly subvert certain upper-class assumptions about the value of philosophy, as exemplified in Seneca's letter on the liberal arts discussed above (88). (Musonius Rufus, after all, taught the slave Epictetus.) Paradoxically, Musonius Rufus and Epictetus turn Seneca's notion of freedom on its head: even though they agree with Seneca that only virtue makes one truly free, they use the parallel of the arts and vocational training to underscore that philosophy, too, has to prove itself in its results. Or, as Epictetus puts it:

The builder does not come and say: *Listen to me lecturing on building*. He gets his contract for a house, builds it, and shows that he has the craft. You should act in the same sort of way: Eat like a human being, drink like a human being, and so too, dress, and marry, and father children, and play your roles as citizen; put up with abuse, and an inconsiderate brother, father, son, neighbor, fellow-traveler. Show all this to us, so that we can see what you have really learnt from the philosophers. (*Diss.* 3.21.1-6; trans. Long)

The role of philosophy, the goal of life

When Musonius Rufus locates the ideal relationship between teacher and pupil in an agrarian setting and recommends farming or being a shepherd as the best way of life for a philosopher, who should work with his own hands just like anybody else (11 Hense / Lutz), it is obvious that we are dealing with a very specific concept of philosophical education, and one that sets itself in conscious opposition to the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. Musonius Rufus argues that if work is balanced with leisure for study and discussion, this mode of interaction is the best because the teacher simultaneously sets an example by putting his principles into action and displaying virtue in his way of life (cf. also Seneca *Ep.* 6.6).

To understand what is behind Musonius Rufus' recommendations, we need to see how theory and practice relate to each other in Stoicism, and especially in the later accounts. 'Philosophy,' Musonius Rufus claims, 'is nothing else than to search out by reason what is right and proper, and by deeds to put it into practice' (14 end Hense / Lutz, cf. also 4, on philosophy as the art of becoming a good human being). A Platonist or a follower of Aristotle would agree that philosophy should serve the good life. But for all the points of contact with these other traditions, the Stoic *understanding* of the good life is fundamentally different from that of a Platonist or Aristotelian. The crucial point here is not even that the Stoics in general would consider all forms of philosophical knowledge, including logic and physics, to be virtues (*SVF* 2.35). After all, Plato and Aristotle's notions of virtue (which, one has to remember, in its original context is closer to our term 'excellence') are also capacious, including the virtues pertaining to reason. Rather, the difference is that Stoics do not have a hierarchical notion of virtue, seeing logic, physics and ethics as mutually entailing each other in one continuous and dynamic whole. (Cf. Hadot, P., 1979, 1991; Gourinat 2008. Other core texts here would include Diogenes Laertius 7.130 and *SVF* 3.280.)

What sets especially later Stoicism apart is the view that all theory, including what we would call theory or philosophising about ethics, must serve an ethics in action.

Theory and practice are inextricably intertwined, but with an emphasis on practice. Generally speaking, for Platonists contemporary to the Roman Stoics and later, the good life consists primarily, if not always exclusively, of the contemplation of and the mind's reunion with a higher, intelligible realm, or theory in that sense. Interpreters of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* disagree about which of two conceptions of the good life he endorses. According to one conception, the good life consists of the exercise of practical reason in a life of political and social activity. According to the other, it consists of the exercise of theoretical reason through contemplation. To the Stoics, positing pure thought (or even a higher state) as the goal of life and as 'practice' (cf. Aristotle *Politics* 1325b) would make little sense, not in the least because they do not recognise a transcendent intelligible and noetic dimension to reality. For them, with their unified view of virtue, in which all virtues entail each other, wisdom as the excellence of reason always constitutes *moral* virtue and being engaged *in the world*.⁵

Small wonder, then, that the later Stoics put so much emphasis on training (*meletê*, *askêsis*, as in Musonius Rufus 6 Hense / Lutz) as the indispensable bridge between theoretical insights and practice.⁶ This notion, which has connections with the Socratic and Cynic traditions, encompasses much more than Aristotle's habituation, which is meant to shape the lower, irrational aspects of the soul (as in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2). The Stoics, with the potential and debated exception of Posidonius, do not accept irrational aspects of the soul as existing independently from reason. Hence training and habituation involve a human being's entire disposition, including the process of learning to use one's reason correctly. The Stoic notion of the good has this feature in common with its Platonic and Aristotelian counterparts that it is a radical departure from ordinary conceptions of happiness, and thus it is not easy to implement against prevailing practices, weaknesses in one's own disposition, and bad habits. Therefore, according to this view, pupils need all the help they can get to make these insights sufficiently their own or to acquire the right 'disposition' (*ethos*, as in Musonius Rufus 5 Hense / Lutz) for putting them into practice under all circumstances.

To this end, Musonius Rufus (6 Hense / Lutz) stipulates exercises for both body and soul, but holds that of the two, the care of the soul is the most important. He establishes an explicit connection between the exercises of the soul and demonstrations (1 Hense / Lutz): the training of the soul, he claims, involves having ready at hand (*procheirous*) the demonstrations concerning true (as opposed to apparent) good and evil, becoming accustomed (*ethizesthai*) to making the correct distinctions, and practising (*meletan*) the avoidance of true evil and the pursuit of true good. (Diogenes Laertius (6.70) attributes the same distinction between two types of exercises to Diogenes the Cynic (fl. mid-fourth century BCE, on this topic cf. Goulet-Cazé, 1986); cf. also Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 7.16.)

Here *askêsis*, it has to be noted, has not yet acquired its later connotations of 'asceticism,' though frugality and the endurance of hardships are recommended for the sake of self-control and temperance, which are essential if one does not want to be swept off one's feet by the pull of the wrong values (as in Musonius Rufus 18-20

Hense / Lutz). For instance, Epictetus urges his students to ‘on occasion, when you are very thirsty, take cold water into your mouth, and then spit it out, without telling anybody’ (*Ench.* 47). But a good Stoic, as Seneca reminds us, is also capable of putting affluence and easier conditions to good use (*De vita beata* 20.3-end).

For the later Stoics, ethics in action means showing one’s mettle in ordinary, everyday life circumstances and in society, among one’s given socio-political obligations. For this reason, students are not meant to form settled attachments to a school, as increasingly happened, for instance, with the inner circles of the schools of Platonism. The knowledge and training acquired through education has to be portable and to become fully interiorised, ‘digested,’ as it were (Epictetus *Diss.* 3.21.1-3; *Ench.* 46; Seneca *Ep.* 2.2-4, 84, *De beneficiis* 7.2.1). Thus Seneca and Epictetus show their own independence toward their Stoic predecessors and do not extol a Zeno, Cleanthes, or Chrysippus above all others. ‘We Stoics,’ Seneca claims, ‘are not subjects of a despot: each of us lays claim to his own freedom’ (*Ep.* 33.4). If Chrysippus took the liberty to disagree with his teacher Cleanthes, ‘Why, then, following the example of Chrysippus himself, should not every man claim his own freedom?’ (*Ep.* 113.23).

Epictetus and Musonius Rufus also play down their own importance as philosophers (as in *Diss.* 1.16.20, 1.2.35, 3.1.36, 3.7.1, 3.8.7)⁷—even though they do, on occasion, mention the benefits of studying under their guidance.⁸ Students are told sternly not to show off their philosophical knowledge (e.g., Epictetus *Diss.* 1.26.9) and that external trappings, such as a certain dress code, do not make the philosopher (as in Epictetus *Diss.* 3.12.16, 3.14.4, 3.23, 4.8.15-16; Musonius Rufus (16 Hense / Lutz). Many of the accounts preserved in Epictetus’ *Discourses* explicitly address the challenge of the transition from the school to everyday life (as in 4.1.132-143, 4.5.37, 4.12.12; cf. also 1.29.34-35, 2.9.15-16, 2.10.29-30, 2.16.2, 3.3.17, 3.20.18). As they point out, it is quite a bit easier to display the correct attitude and behaviour among like-minded people and peers than to hold on to what one has learned outside the school environment (*Diss.* 2.16.20-21). And if Epictetus devotes so much attention to this topic, it is precisely because his pupils are meant to return to their regular lives.

In the long run, and over the course of an entire lifetime, according to this view, teachers are there only to point the way (as Seneca and Epictetus indicate Chrysippus had done for them). It is self-education and monitoring one’s own progress as one goes through different situations in life that are to do the bulk of the work. Modes of such ongoing training include reading and excerpting philosophical works, refreshing one’s memory of key tenets so as to have these ready at hand (as the etymology of ‘manual’ or Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* implies), engaging in conversations with others, witnessing one’s conversations with oneself, contemplating the order of the universe, or writing.

Although Seneca is not a teacher in the same sense as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, he increasingly focused on philosophical writings toward the end of his life and mapped out his own moral progress and challenges, along with summaries and advice for his addressees and audience. Marcus Aurelius’ reflections, many of which were

jotted down during military campaigns, are the clearest example of writing as ongoing training, especially if originally intended primarily for himself and not for a broader audience. (Epictetus attributed this kind of writing even to Socrates allegedly training himself in the art of refutation, raising objections and coming up with counter-arguments, *Diss.* 2.1.32–33, 2.6.26–27, as rightly noted in Döring, 1974, p. 218 n. 2). In those reflections, we find the most powerful man in the then known world, as measured by conventional standards, warning himself against completely identifying himself with his public role. ‘Make sure,’ he tells himself, ‘that you are not turned into a Caesar,’ without leaving space for the self to continue groping for that which truly matters.

In the course of interpreting Homer and Virgil, being trained in delivering speeches, and acquiring other forms of learning, all the way up to one’s philosophical education, one should aim towards ‘a holy disposition and acts that serve the common good’ (6.30), as Marcus Aurelius succinctly rendered the purpose of human life.

Notes

1. During the later period known as the Second Sophistic, the rivalry becomes all the more pronounced, with Dion of Prusa (also known as Chrysostom), Apuleius and Maximus of Tyre clearly straddling the divide.
2. Even though the dates suggested for Cleomedes range from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE, a dating of ‘some time around 200 CE’ has been proposed as likely by Alan C. Bowen and Robert B. Todd (2004) pp. xi–xii, 2–4.
3. Cf. Boys-Stones, 2007, who emphasises a strong strand of ethical pedagogy in his work, which also reflects on the political and civic aspects of human communities.
4. On the point that texts such as Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* and Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations* are as ‘philosophical’ as Chrysippus’ treatises, see Sellars, 2009, esp. pp. 126–128, 165–166, 167–175. Pace Brennan, 2005, who uses a stereotypical distinction between Chrysippus as ‘one of the greatest thinkers of all time’ and Epictetus as ‘one of the greatest talkers’ (p. 10).
5. Here my approach differs from P. Hadot, 1998, p. 216, repeated by Sellars, 2007 and 2009, esp. p. 145 (summary statement), who stipulate that there is a practical side to physics and logic as well. While I do not take issue with this claim as such and the implication that there are appropriate exercises in logic and physics, I would also emphasise that physics and logic are practical precisely to the extent that they serve a human being’s correct understanding of the good and its implementation in life, that is, ethics in action.
6. P. Hadot (1995) is still the seminal work on this topic, but my focus here is on what is distinctive in the later Stoic tradition; cf. also Hijmans, 1959; Sellars, 2009, esp. pp. 107–166. Xenophon does not hesitate to attribute this notion to Socrates (*Mem.* 1.2.19).
7. On this aspect of Epictetus, who prefers to see himself as a ‘trainer of the young’, see *Diss.* 2.19.29–34, cf. Long, 2002, pp. 121–125. Thus when Musonius Rufus speaks as one man in exile to another, he presents his arguments as addressed to himself as well as to his addressee (9 Hense / Lutz), and when he counsels a youth who has a conflict with his father over the study of philosophy, he does not insert himself between the son and the father to bring about a transfer of authority (16 Hense / Lutz). On this topic, cf. also Bénatouil, 2009, especially pp. 134–155, and G. Reydam-Schils, ‘Authority and agency in Roman Stoicism,’ forthcoming.
8. Even though Epictetus explicitly distances himself from the practice of doctors advertising for patients, *Diss.* 3.23.27. See Musonius Rufus 17 Hense / Lutz; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.11, addressed to a Roman official merely passing through, and 2.19.29–34.

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