

Stoic Ethics as an alternative to Aristotelian and Kantian ethics
Fall 2006, Richard Sorabji, CUNY Graduate Center
Cross-listed with Classics
Registration limit 12

This is a course on Stoic ethics. References to Aristotle and Kant will be supplied, where direct comparison or contrast is useful, but the emphasis will be on Stoic ethics, because that has as much interest and has had as much influence on European thought as the currently better known ethics.

Seminars will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Sep 12 to Oct 26th. A short paper will be due on Oct 6th. A term paper, which can be on a new topic or substantially expanding the old one, will be due on Oct 20th, with a few days extension, for those writing on the last two topics.

The writings listed will be available on reserve, and relevant ones should be consulted for writing papers. In addition, selected translations restricted to the class will be made available on the web by password before teaching begins. Those translations will be required reading, but are unlikely to reach 100 pages.

Topic 1. Being true to your individual self in later Stoicism

Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights on Individuality, Life and Death*, Ch. 8, Chicago and Oxford University Presses, due August 2006, translates the Stoic passages from Cicero *On Duties* Book 1 and Epictetus *Discourses*, esp. Book 1, chapter 2.

The later Stoic stress on the individual, new in Greek thought, contrasts with Kant's insistence on universalisability. The knowledge Kant shows of the Stoic idea in the reported lectures on suicide is very imperfect despite his owning Cicero *On Duties*, and it may be influenced by Addison's play on Cato who committed suicide (*Lectures on Ethics*, translated Louis Infield, London 1930, p. 149, and new translation Cambridge University Press, both requested for reserve).

What is the role of rules in ethics for Stoics as opposed to Kant?

Brad Inwood, 'Rules and reasoning in Stoic ethics', in Katerina Ierodiakonou, ed., *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford University 1999, ch. 4.

For Aristotle's belief in perceptivity rather than rules, see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 5, 1137b29-32; Book 6, 1142a27-30.; 1143b5-14

For modern views see J. Dancy, *Ethics without Principles*, Oxford 2004, with critical notice by J. Raz, *Mind* 2006; Lawrence Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity*.

Topic 2. Epictetus' inviolable self narrowed down to a rightly directed will (*prohairesis*).

Epictetus' *Handbook*, printed with the *Discourses*, was used virtually unchanged in Christian monasteries, and he inspired Admiral Stockdale's withstanding of torture in Vietnam. His narrowed down self is invulnerable. But how has he changed Aristotle's concept of *prohairesis*?

Richard Sorabji, *Self*, ch 10.

Topic 3. Emotions and how to cope with them.

The big contrast here is between the Stoics and Aristotle. See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, Oxford University Press 2000. The Stoics think almost all emotion should be eradicated, and they substitute a more detached kinds of preference which views most things as indifferent. Eradication is possible through changing your viewpoint, because emotions are value judgements. The affective element is a necessary concomitant that may not be eradicable, but does not matter (Sorabji, chs 2, 11,12). Although one Stoic, Posidonius, is said to disagree with this intellectualistic account of emotion as judgement, and to go back to Plato's belief in emotional, non-rational powers of the soul, he does not prevail (Sorabji, chs 6-8 and discussion of Posidonius in Galen *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, translated in one volume by P. De Lacy, in *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* V 4 1.2, Books 1-V). I argue that Seneca in *On Anger* Book 2, sections 1-4 (one of his *Moral Essays*), cleverly shores up the Stoics' intellectualist view of emotion, and at the same time treats the arts and the theatre as producing not emotion, but only the affective concomitant, thereby in effect answering Aristotle's theory of catharsis. (Sorabji, ch 4).

The Stoic intellectualist account of wanting was part of their shoring up of Socrates' intellectualist view that one would never even want to go against one's better judgement. Aristotle also makes excessive concessions to this view in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3 (Sorabji, ch. 20). Another part of the defence of Socrates' view is the doctrine that most things are indifferent.

Aristotle believes that emotion should be moderated, not eradicated. He also rightly argues in Book 2 of his *Rhetoric* that persuasion is not just a matter of intellectual argument, but of emotional intelligence, and his account of the thoughts involved in emotion are central to his account of rhetoric and to his account in the *Poetics* of the role of catharsis in the theatre. The role of physiological changes and the character of pleasure and distress are discussed in his *On the Soul* (Sorabji, ch. 1).

The ongoing question whether emotion can be changed by physiology and diet or by Stoic thought processes is discussed by the doctor Galen and illumintaed by modern brain research (Sorabji chs 10 and 17).

The treatment by Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations*) and Seneca of preliminary affects (first movements) as not yet being emotion influenced Christian views of temptation. But different views from mine on this are offered in Margaret Graver's

review of Sorabji, *Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002), 225-234. And Gill and Cooper disagree with my interpretation of Posidonius in J. Sihvola, T. Engberg-Pedersen, *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1998.

Topic 4. Attachment to other humans and of all rational beings to each other as the basis of universal justice and the unity of mankind.

The natural state would be one of human solidarity, not as in contractual theories of each for himself or herself. Justice is therefore owed to all humans, even barbarians and slaves, and there is no such thing as Aristotle's natural slave (Aristotle *Politics* Book 1, chs 4-6 and 13). But this theory of universal justice is not a theory of human rights, an idea that started later (Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, chs 10-11, Duckworth and Cornell University, and in chapter 1 of R. Sorabji and D. Rodin, eds, *The Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions*, Ashgate 2006. Also H.C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, Cambridge 1965. A.A. Long, 'Greek ethics after MacIntyre and the Stoic community of reason', *Ancient Philosophy* 3, 1983, 184-199).

The Stoic idea of attachment (*oikeiôsis*) naturally spreading from oneself to other people has antecedents in Plato and Aristotle (Sorabji, *Animal Minds* ch 10).

A downside is that animals are viewed as irrational and therefore owed no justice, a view contested by other Greeks, but accepted and passed to Christianity by Augustine. Kant's unsympathetic(?) view of animals is discussed by Alexander Broadie and Elizabeth Pybus, 'Kant's treatment of animals', *Philosophy* 49, 1974, 375-383, in 'Kant and the maltreatment of animals' *Philosophy* 53, 1978, 560f, and in Tom Regan, 'Broadie and Pybus on Kant', *Philosophy* 51, 1976, 471f., Allen Wood, 'Kant on duties regarding non-rational nature 1', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* suppl vol. 72, 1998, 189-210.

For Kant's union of rational beings treating each other as ends, see *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, included in the Cambridge Kant: *Practical Philosophy* volume, and translated by H. J. Paton (both on reserve).

The rival doctrines of natural slaves and of the unity of mankind played roles, sometimes unexpected, in European colonialism: Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace*, Oxford University 1999.

For Kant's un-Stoic views on the state of nature in relation to war and peace, see Thomas Donaldson, 'Kant's global rationalism', in Terry Nardin, David Mapel, eds, *Traditions of International Ethics* 1993, Cambridge University, ch. 7, F.H Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, Cambridge University 1963, 62-80.

Topic 5. Hierocles: Stoic attachment theory and views of the self combined.

The late Stoic Hierocles gives a version of attachment theory in which the self as mind is the centre of concentric circles, with the body (which some Stoics sometimes

treated as also a self) as the next circle out, followed by other circles of fellow humans. The natural and ideal course is to extend the idea of ‘mine’ to all human circles (Sorabji *Self*, ch. 2). The animal’s or infant’s attachment from birth to its own body is due not to mere instinct, nor to rationality, but to something intermediate: self-perception. (Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* pp. 86-7).

Topic 6. Friendship

Stoics in Gretchen Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics* ch. 3, Chicago University 2005.

(i).

Why do humans need friendship, and does this need show that they are not self-sufficient?

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Books 8 and 9, esp. Book 9, chs 4, 8 and 9, discussed by Sorabji, *Self*, Chicago and Oxford 2006, ch. 13.

Seneca *Letters* 3, 6 (sections 5-6), 9, 35, 109

(ii).

Does friendship serve from or conflict with self-love?

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9, chs 4 and 8.

Cicero *On Friendship* 21, 80-81.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* 27: 423-430:

Allen Wood, ‘Self-love, self-benevolence and self-conceit’ in S. Engstrom, J. Whiting, eds *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, Cambridge University 1996, Ch 5.

(iii).

Is friendship incompatible with impartiality? (Kant)

S. Tenenbaum, ‘Friendship and the law of reason’, in Joyce Jenkins, Jennifer Whiting, Christopher Williams, eds, *Passions and Persons*, University of Notre Dame 2005, ch 13.

N. K. Badhwar, ed., *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, Cornell University 1995.

C. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, Cambridge University 1996, Ch. 7.

Marcia Baron, ‘Impartiality and Friendship’, *Ethics* 101, 1991, 836-57.

(iv).

Is detached love the truest? (Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.22).

Brad Inwood, ‘L’oikeiôsis sociale chez Epictète’, in K. Algra, P. van der Horts, D. Runia eds, *Polyhistor*, Brill, Leiden 1996, 243-264.

Topic 7. Determinism, responsibility, freedom

Richard Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause and Blame*, Duckworth, London 1980, and (forthcoming) Chicago University reprint, discusses Aristotle and the Stoics on

determinism and responsibility: Stoics in chs 3-4. But I shall have some qualifications to add.

Susanne Bobzien *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford University 1998, is the classic for the Stoics.

The irrelevance of will to the problem in Aristotle and the Stoics is explained in Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind* ch 21.

Topic 8. The ancient Greek pursuit of the happy life as a goal contrasted by Kant with the primacy of moral duty.

Does moral action require inclination or disinclination?

Stephen Engstrom, Jennifer Whiting, *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, Cambridge University 1996, esp. chapters by Irwin, Annas, Cooper, Schneewind. Brad Inwood's review on-line in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* makes more of the Stoics.

For the Stoic definition of the end of life see e.g. Cicero *On Ends* 3.22; 3.31

Topic 9. Owning property versus Communism

Aristotle *Politics* Book 1, chs 8-9

The later Stoics are said by A.A Long, to be the first to argue for property ownership, 'Stoic philosophers on persons, property-ownership and community', in Richard Sorabji, ed., *Aristotle and After*, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, suppl. Vol. 68, London 1997, ch. 2 (but see Aristotle *Politics* Book 5 on stability arising from a large middle class).

Communitistic sharing of property is recommended for some classes by Plato's *Republic* and by Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism.

Seneca *On Benefits*, one of his *Moral Essays*, represents a guide for Roman aristocratic society on giving and receiving.

Kant:

Brian Tierney, 'Permissive natural law and property: Grotius to Kant', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, 2001, 381-399.

Marcus Verhaegh, 'Kant and property rights', *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 18, 2004, 11-32.

Topic 10. Practical Ethics

Later Stoicism, though based on philosophical theory, is much more concretely practical than any other ethics, including that of Kant or Aristotle. Should you warn that the house you are selling contains rot? Should you obey your parents? How to choose a career? Whether and how to leave the rat race. When to get your hair cut. How to cope with anxieties about health. What sort of physical exercise should a philosopher take? How to cope with a traffic jam.

This can be illustrated from Cicero *On Duties* Books 1 and 3; Musonius Rufus fragments, Seneca's *Letters*, Epictetus *Discourses*.

On Reserve

Besides the articles and books listed above, the following are requested for reserve

Aristotle

The Complete Works of Aristotle, 2 vols, Oxford University Press, revised
Joanathan Barnes.

Stoics

A short summary of Stoic ethics is provided by Book 3 of Cicero *On Ends* (*De Finibus*), 1 Loeb vol.

Cicero *On the Republic; On Laws* (*De Republica; De Legibus*), 1 Loeb volume.

Cicero *On Duties* (*De Officiis*), 1 Loeb volume.

Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1 Loeb volume.

Cicero *On Friendship* (*De Amicitia*), 1 Loeb volume.

Seneca, 3 Loeb volumes of *Letters* (*Epistulae*), and 3 of *Moral Essays*.

Musonius Rufus, fragments translated by Cora Lutz, Yale Classical Studies 10, 1947, pp 3-147.

2 Loeb volumes of Epictetus.

1 Loeb volume of Marcus Aurelius *Meditations*

Kant

Cambridge University Press translation series, 5 volumes:

1. *Practical Philosophy* (includes *Critique of Practical Reason* = 2nd Critique; *Metaphysic of Morals; Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*).

2. *Lectures on Ethics*.

3. *Political Writings*

4. *Lectures on Ethics*

5 *Anthropology*

Along with

Lectures on Ethics, translated by Louis Infield London 1930

H J Paton, translator, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*