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**Abstract:** Discusses the values of Stoicism which say nothing concrete about how a virtuous person should go about making choices and examines the Stoics impression that most of the things chosen are themselves good. Beliefs of the Stoics concerning the so-called 'indifferents'; Their distinctions with the class of indifferent; How virtuous people are categorized by the Stoics.

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## STOIC VALUES

### I

One of the most puzzling things position concerning the so-called "indifferent", (adiaphora). Let me summarize it. The Stoics seem to hold that all states of affairs other than virtue (arete) are indifferent as to goodness. At the same time they seem to think that virtue is partially constituted by a propensity to choose certain such indifferent states of affairs. For they maintain that the end (telos), which they identify with virtue and the sole good, is "to live in agreement with nature" (homologoumenos tel physei zen), in a sense that is taken to involve selecting things that are in accord with nature, even though these things, it seems, are indifferent. They make two seemingly within the class of indifferents, one between things that are "preferred" (proegmena)-and things that are dispreferred" (apoproegmena), and another between "appropriate acts" (kathekonta) and others. All of this is well known and uncontroversial.

But this position raises problems that have been felt since antiquity. The one on which I wish to concentrate is this. It seems puzzling that the.,. condition that is the end and the sole good shout part a propensity to choose or do .things that are indifferent, i.e., neither good nor bad. And although the Stoics at first seem to mitigate our puzzlement by saying that the things to be chosen or done do indeed have a kind of value which they call axia or "worth," they immediately puzzle us all over again by insisting that this kind of value is not any kind of goodness and cannot possibly be measured against the value of virtue.

Let us try to turn our puzzlement into more precisely stated problems. To begin with, it seems at first sight reasonable to think that the goodness .of a propensity to make a certain kind of choice should derive in one of three ways, either 1) from the goodness of the consequences of the making of the choice, or 2) from the goodness of what the choice is a choice of, i.e., its intentional object, or 3) from the goodness of a particular way of going about making the choice. The first view is straightforwardly consequentialist. The second way is not consequentialist, because what is chosen to happen may not actually result from the choice. The third way is the sort of way that Kant uses, which makes the goodness of the choice and the propensity to make it a function of the way in which it is made.

The Stoics, however, seem to have followed none of these ways. They say nothing, concrete, about how a virtuous person should go about making choices, comparable to what Kant says about the procedure of following the categorical imperative. And they expressly deny that most of the things chosen are themselves good. And although they do attribute the other kind of value, "worth," to the things that are chosen, they do not seem to explain what it is about that kind of value that renders good the propensity to choose things that have it. So what, if anything, can be said about why virtue is good? And why is its being good not actually undermined by the fact that it is a propensity to choose things that are neither good nor bad? Or if those things' having another sort of value is what makes virtue good, how does that come about? That is, how could choosing something with that other sort of value make the choosing of it good? Or if something else makes it good, what is that something else? Or is the goodness of virtue simply a brute fact that cannot be explained?

We can also articulate our puzzlement in a different way. Given that the virtuous person is held by the Stoics to be rational and to choose in accordance with reason (*logos*), we must wonder what the character of this reason is. In particular, what can be rational about a person who chooses A over B even though neither is either good or bad? If A and B are thus indifferent, then why does the perfectly virtuous and rational person think that there is anything to choose between them? How does such a person justify to himself the decision to do A on the basis of its "worth" even as he tells himself that it has no more goodness than B?

The same questions can be raised, moreover, about the person who is not perfectly virtuous and wise but who is trying to become so (the person who, in Stoic terms, is "making progress," *prokopton*, toward virtue). Why does it make sense for such a person to choose things that he is told he is supposed to come to regard as neither good nor bad? And how is it psychologically possible for him to do so? As the very history of the discussion of Stoicism shows, most people find it impossible to see how they could bring themselves to decide to do A rather than B if they are told that neither is better than the other.

Likewise, *mutandis*, we must wonder why this propensity to choose certain indifferents deserves the title 'virtue' to begin with. What can be virtuous about a person who chooses one thing over another even though both are indifferent as to goodness? Once again, how does the fact that a thing possesses this other kind of value make the choosing of it virtuous in any reasonable sense of that term?

These, then, are some of the problems that the Stoic position on indifferents raises. All of them challenge the coherence of (a) recommending that we make choices among things that are all said to be indifferent as to goodness and badness, and of (b) claiming that the propensity to do so is both (i) virtuous, (ii) rational, and (iii) the state of a human being that is good and the end.

Notice that these problems are quite distinct from another problem that might seem obviously to be good. The Stoic view on these matters certain particular things, such as pain and sickness, that might seem obviously to be bad, and certain other particular things, such as pleasure and health, that might seem obviously to be good. The Stoic view on these matter certainly seems peculiar and deserves discussion on its own account. Here, however, I am dealing with something else, namely, the combination of their claim that virtue is good with the claim that it involves a propensity to choose things that are themselves indifferent as to goodness.

## **II**

The scholarly literature on Stoicism provides little elucidation of what the Stoic answers to these problems might be. Since we have only scanty records of what they actually said about

the issue, and since the records that we have do not attack the problems in a direct or systematic way, we are forced to think philosophically about what would have been reasonable for them to say, and then see whether the evidence makes it plausible that they did in fact say it. Unfortunately, most commentators have found the Stoic view sufficiently mystifying that they have seldom proceeded very far in this direction. Still, there are some attempts to provide illumination that deserve attention.

One attempt can, I think, be put aside right away. This is the view that originally the Stoics did not wish to make any evaluative distinctions among indifferents, but simply called everything except virtue indifferent and left it at that. Later, this story goes, they discovered that they were being criticized for not providing a believable action-guide for ordinary people, and so grudgingly modified their original view by granting that the distinction between, e.g., the preferred and the dispreferred is a genuine evaluative distinction.<sup>1</sup> But this story is unsatisfactory. The evidence for the alleged chronological change is very weak.<sup>2</sup> Moreover the story represents the Stoics as utterly insensitive to the real philosophical difficulties that are raised by the claim, which some of them unquestionably made, that goodness and "worth" are two distinct and incommensurable sorts of value. But there is equally unquestionable evidence that these difficulties were raised against them, and that they did make some sort of effort to meet them.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time we must beware of temptingly simple ways of explaining the relation between these two kinds of value. One such way would be to say that the value that indifferents can have is simply an instrumental value, some kind of conduciveness to virtue. There seems to be no evidence for this interpretation, and to my knowledge it has not been explicitly defended, though some interpretations perhaps implicitly suggest it.<sup>4</sup>

One might also hope to interpret the Stoic view wholly by means of the Kant's distinction between conditional and unconditional goods, to which it gave rise. In fact, the Stoics' way of arguing that virtue is the only good is precisely to maintain that virtue is the only thing that is beneficial to a person in any and all possible circumstances.<sup>5</sup> So like the good will in Kant's ethics, virtue is indeed unconditionally good, and other things are only conditionally beneficial. Moreover there is another similarity. A good will for Kant is a will that wills things that are at best only conditionally good, just as virtue is for the Stoics the propensity to choose things that only have value other than goodness. So is the Stoic view not very like Kant's?

Yes, in some ways, but there are crucial differences. For one thing, Kant does not deny that conditional goodness is a kind of goodness, so his view does not have the paradoxical look that the Stoics' position does. More importantly, though, Kant's description of the categorical imperative in all its formulations provides an account of how a good will deliberates and decides that is at least an attempt to make us understand what is both good and rational about it. Nothing in the Stoic position provides the same kind of explanation as these deliberative procedures. That is why we are now looking for some other way of understanding how the propensity to choose indifferents could be virtuous, rational, and the end.

Finally, one might think that because the two kinds of value are said to be incommensurable, there is simply nothing to be said about their relation to each other, that is, they are simply two different kinds of value that human beings can be concerned about, and that is that.

But the Stoics make it clear that there is indeed something to say about the relation between goodness and "worth." They are clearly not just two incommensurable values on a par with each other. For it is absolutely plain that goodness is, in some sense, more important than the other sort of value; as the end, it is the value that "really counts."<sup>6</sup> Most importantly, however, it is clear that if the Stoic view is to be made much sense of, there must be something to be

said about the relation between their two sorts of value. This is so precisely because the thing that has the one is a propensity to choose things having the other, and as we have seen they need to explain how this can be so. As critics since antiquity have recognised, it seems prima facie paradoxical to say that a good state of a person can consist in a propensity to make certain choices, but that the things chosen are not under any circumstances to be called good. What--one can reasonably ask--is the point of making such choices? It is no reply to say merely that there is some quite different sort of value that these things have, which makes the propensity to choose them something good. That is no reply, that is, unless one is prepared to explain the connection between things' having that kind of value and its being good to have a propensity to choose them, or else to say what else--a Kantian way of arriving at the choice, for example--makes that propensity good. Perhaps the Stoics failed to give a satisfactory explanation, but the evidence is clear that they tried,<sup>7</sup> and we shall see that in fact they had something quite substantial to say about the problem.

### III

In addition to the foregoing suggestions, two recent accounts of the Stoics need to be considered, one by Terence Irwin and the other by Gisela Striker.<sup>8</sup>

As Irwin points out, the Stoics conceded that they had to accord some kind of value to indifferents. For if indifferents had no kind of value at all, they agreed, it would make no sense to describe virtue as essentially involving choices among them, or indeed, as having any connection with the world at all.<sup>9</sup> Our question, though, is whether the particular kind of value that they do accord to indifferents makes it understandable that virtue should involve choices among them.

Here, according to Irwin, the Stoics' response is simply that that value--*axia* or "worth," which Irwin follows Antipater of Tarsus in calling "selective value"--"does not depend on a relation to an end."<sup>10</sup> The end for human beings is indeed virtue, Irwin says, but there can also be what he calls an "objective,"<sup>11</sup> e.g., of a craft, which is not the end and indeed is not even the end of that craft.<sup>12</sup> In fact, as I understand Irwin, there may simply be no systematic connection between the end of the craft and the realization of the objective, and the craftsman operating with both may realize that there is no such connection. <sup>13</sup> The Stoics, he says, reject Aristotle's position, that "every object of rational concern and value must be related to [the end, namely,] happiness." "They do not recognize two ends; but they recognise two objects of ultimate concern, virtue and the life according to nature ....",<sup>14</sup>

I do not think that we can be content with this account of the Stoic position. It is philosophically unsatisfactory to picture the various human "objectives" as being without any systematic connection at all to the human end. It would mean, as I have already urged, that there would be nothing to be said about what makes our "objectives" such that a propensity to adopt them deserves to be called virtue, or rational. This seems like an intolerable situation. Moreover, as we shall see, there is every reason to believe that the Stoics did try to make a connection. Irwin is quite correct that they did not think that the "objectives" derive their value from being conducive to the end. The connection is more involved than that. But still, we shall see (sec. VI), there is a connection.

As Striker puts it, the problem for the Stoics is that they "had to show that it is not absurd to choose something, the obtainment of which is indifferent for the goal of life."<sup>15</sup> To this end, Striker's account uses three distinct ideas. One is derived from Antipater, whose claim seems to have been that the Stoic position could be elucidated by the so-called "stochastic" crafts, such as archery, for which "success... is not the standard for judging the capabilities of the artist or even the correctness of his action in an individual case," because the presence of significant contingencies makes such a standard unreasonable. In such crafts, according to Striker, "the

intended result is not identical with the goal of the entire craft, and... one can achieve the goal even without achieving the result." Examples from such crafts, moreover, are said to be "particularly suited for showing that it is possible to work for something, the obtaining of which is a matter of indifference."<sup>16</sup> The point, according to Striker, is that because of uncontrollable and unpredictable contingencies, such as sudden gusts of wind, it is impossible to be certain that even a well aimed arrow will hit the target, and so the goal or end of archery must rather be to shoot in the proper way or with the proper form, not actually to hit the target after all.

As Striker points out, though, if this idea is supposed to illuminate the Stoic position by means of facts about our actual attitudes toward these crafts, it will not work.<sup>17</sup> Doctors, who are up against contingencies, still want to cure patients. Clearly archers want to hit targets and don't want winds to blow their arrows askew, and therefore they wait, when they can, for gusts of wind to pass. And try telling a golfer that as long as his form is good, his ball's being blown into a pond is a matter of indifference. It is perfectly true that according the Stoics, the wise man is supposed to be untroubled by the failure of his efforts because of contingencies, but this use of the archery example does not explain their account of ends and objectives. <sup>18</sup>

In order to explicate the Stoic position, then, Striker next tries a second idea. It concerns pursuits, like the playing of certain games, in which two goals can interact in complicated ways. <sup>19</sup> In the case that Striker describes, a person temporarily adopts the attitude of pursuing the goal of winning as ultimate, even though it is in his fixed view subordinate to his truly ultimate goal of getting vigorous exercise.<sup>20</sup> Though Striker takes this case to involve stochastic crafts, contingency really has nothing to do with this case, which could obtain even if winning and exercising were certain outcomes of an entirely non-stochastic pursuit. More importantly, this case does not show that winning is "indifferent" in the sense that the Stoics had in mind. It could only show, at best, that winning is only an instrumental good, pursued for the sake of exercise, though while one is caught up in the game one pretends that winning is good in itself. (As people actually play games, of course, they usually feel that both winning and the effort to win are good partly for themselves and partly instrumentally.) So the only way to make this sort of case serve the Stoics' defense is to take them to hold merely that states of affairs other than virtue are valuable only as contributing to virtue, though sometimes in order to obtain or preserve virtue we have to pretend to value them for their own sakes too. But Striker does not take them this way, and in any case we have seen that there is no evidence for it (sec. II).

Striker seems to concede this defect in the game analogy too, and so finally she introduces what appears to be a third idea, which is very similar to Irwin's approach.<sup>21</sup> It is simply the claim that "it is not absurd to refer appropriate action to something other than the goal of life," and that "it is simply wrong to assume that there can be only one reference point of all action."<sup>22</sup> Since Striker does not go on to suggest what the connection might be between the goal of life and the other "reference point[s]" of action, this seems tantamount to saying that there need be no connection at all. But our earlier considerations show that that is not a satisfactory result, and so we must look further.

#### **IV**

The challenge to the Stoics, we saw, was to defend the coherence of (a) recommending that we make choices among things that are all said to be indifferent in respect of goodness and badness, and of (b) claiming that the propensity to do so is (i) virtuous, (ii) rational, and (iii) the end. Remember, once again, that we are not trying to show that the Stoics are reasonable in holding that other things besides virtue (and vice) are indifferent. Rather, we are only trying to see whether it is coherent to combine that claim with the claim that the goal, i.e., the virtuous state, i.e., the rational state, of a human being is a propensity to choose from among those indifferents.

Let me make and very briefly explain an idea about how we might do this. I shall not be able to deal with all questions and doubts but I hope to be able to make it clear enough to seem worth serious consideration.

I shall begin with some relatively uncontroversial points about the Stoic position. As we saw, according to the Stoic view as it is standardly interpreted certain types of acts are "appropriate acts" (kathekonta), and certain types of things are "preferred" (proegmena). The relation between these two notions is tricky, but we do not need to explore it fully here. Preferred things are things to which we are naturally drawn or impelled (we have a *horme* toward them). Appropriate acts are those acts that "have a reasonable defense" (*eulogos apologia*).<sup>23</sup> Presumably some appropriate acts will be acts whereby one attempts to obtain things that are preferred, but many will not be, and some attempts to obtain things that are preferred might in some circumstances be the opposite of appropriate. <sup>24</sup>

It thus turns out that, according to the Stoics, most of the judgments in which we classify particular acts or things as appropriate or preferred are somewhat like what W. D. Ross called *prima facie* judgments, which may have to be revised when further facts and considerations come to light. A type of act that is generally appropriate will almost always have instances that are inappropriate in the actual circumstances, and the same holds *mutatis mutandis* for types of things that are preferred. In general the types of action that we naturally pick out are only approximations of what is in fact to be done or to be selected. And the fact that any act or thing seems at first sight to fit into one of these evaluative categories is, in and of itself, no guarantee that that act or thing is to be done or selected in those particular circumstances. If the circumstances are discovered to be different from normal, what seems like an appropriate act, for example, may well turn out to be inappropriate. <sup>25</sup>

What distinguishes the sage from ordinary people, on the Stoic view as it is standardly interpreted, is that the sage possesses a complete understanding of the structure of events, so that he knows everything that he needs to know in order to understand the relevant considerations concerning everything that he might do. In this sense, the acts that the sage performs fit, as he sees them, into the right sort of pattern or structure with all of the other acts that he performs. It is not clear whether the Stoics think that his knowledge can be formulated in rules or generalizations,<sup>26</sup> but that is not important for our purposes. Moreover this knowledge causes the sage to have propensities to perform acts and make choices not only in the particular present case, but in all other cases as well, so that he possesses a firm and unshakeable disposition always to act and choose correctly.<sup>27</sup>

It is only slightly less uncontroversial that the acts that the sage performs are all appropriate acts, the very same appropriate acts that might be performed by anyone else. An act performed by a sage is a *katorthoma*, a "right act." But every "right act" is also an "appropriate act," *kathekon*, and what makes the difference between them is the state of mind with which they are performed. You could not tell whether an act was merely a *kathekon* rather than also a *katorthoma* just by looking at the act itself without also knowing the state of mind of the person performing it. Moreover what makes the sage's state of mind distinctive is simply that he possesses the complete knowledge just mentioned whereas the other person does not.<sup>28</sup>

From these well understood features of the Stoic position, however, we can develop a quite straightforward answer to our questions about indifferents.

The crucial fact is that even when the sage and the ordinary person perform what is outwardly the very same act, they conceive of that act in quite different ways.<sup>29</sup> To the ordinary person, the act will be seen as falling under a type, such as honoring one's parents, for which there is a "reasonable defense."<sup>30</sup> These types include those that appear in the various precepts that we

employ in ordinary deliberation and teaching.<sup>31</sup> Thus for the ordinary person a particular action will seem justified qua falling under the concept or predicate, honoring one's parents, or perhaps some wider predicate under which it is subsumed.<sup>32</sup> For the sage, on the other hand, it will recommend itself in a rather different way. It will be seen primarily under the very general notion: fitting into the whole structure of acts that it is appropriate for him (and others) to perform. And it will be seen in this way only by the sage, because only the sage, according to the Stoics, is in a position to comprehend all of his actions within a systematic and coherent picture.<sup>33</sup>

This cardinal feature of the sage needs emphasis, because it is obscured in another line of interpretation which focuses mainly on the sage's way of coping with contingency. We saw some of this idea in the interpretations of Irwin and Striker, though their real focus was elsewhere. A more thoroughgoing use of this idea is found in Inwood's account. According to it, the act of the sage that is really a right act, and that the sage really aims for "without reservation," turns out not to be ordinary external acts, but "doing one's best" to do those acts (e.g., visiting one's parents for Thanksgiving). For this act of "doing one's best" (unlike the act of actually visiting one's parents) is immune from external contingencies and cannot fail to be carried out successfully?

Although an important element of the Stoic view undoubtedly does concern the proper attitude toward contingencies (an element that gained more prominence, it seems, in later Stoicism), this attitude cannot be either the main characteristic distinguishing the sage from the ordinary person or the answer to our original problem. It might seem to answer our problem, because it might seem to make it disappear. That problem, remember, was to see how virtue could involve aiming to do things that are indifferent. But if the sage's aim is only to "do his best" to perform certain acts, and if (as Inwood claims) this itself is a "right" act, then the sage's propensity is no longer to do things that are indifferent. Unfortunately, however, a new problem emerges in place of the old one. For on this view the sage aims, not to do certain sorts of acts, but to do his best to do those same sorts of acts. But if it was problematical before to say that virtue involves aiming to do things that are indifferent, it is not a bit less problematical to say that virtue involves aiming to do one's best to do things that are indifferent.

Thus, even if we say that the sage's actual expectation is only that he will do his best to do certain things (and Inwood and others may conceivably be right about this), we must also recognize the crucial difference between, on the one hand, the sage's comprehension of the whole pattern into which his acts fit and, on the other hand, the ordinary person's piecemeal way, type-by-type and justification-by-justification, of regarding his acts (even if the particular acts happen to be just the same). And the evidence is clear that the Stoics emphasized this difference, and did not merely distinguish the two by their respective attitudes toward contingency.

The sage and the ordinary person, then, conceive of their acts in different ways. But of course the sage is capable of realizing that a particular act that he undertakes qua "act that fits into the unique coherent pattern of action" can also be seen by him as an "act of honoring one's parents." But plainly it is qua falling under the former concept, not qua falling under the latter, that the sage decides on and undertakes the action. Thus the sage is distinguished from the ordinary person by knowing two things: (1) there might, as we have seen, always turn out to be circumstances in which honoring one's parents was not appropriate; (2) what fundamentally recommends the act is not the fact that it falls under such a concept as "honoring one's parents," but rather the fact that it fits into the overall pattern of acts that the sage himself comprehends.

But if this is so, then clearly the sage can have two simultaneous attitudes toward one and the same act. He approves of the act qua fitting into the pattern that he comprehends, which gives it its status as a "right act," but he is indifferent toward it qua merely falling under the type, e.g., "honoring one's parents," that gives it its status as a merely "appropriate act." The Stoic claims about the end of life make it inevitable that the sage will have to have this dual attitude toward acts (and, *mutatis mutandis*, things that are preferred and dispreferred). The end, we saw, was "living in accord with nature."<sup>35</sup> This idea received various formulations by different Stoics, whose purposes need not be discussed here, but all of them show that living in accord with nature is taken to involve using one's understanding of nature to make decisions in accord with nature about what to choose and do. The sage, who has attained this end, must therefore choose things that he regards as being in accord with nature. But regarding them in this way is different from regarding them as falling under the various concepts that show them as preferred or appropriate.<sup>36</sup>

There is far too much to say here about how the Stoics conceived this notion of a coherent pattern of action, but it is important to mention one point. As is well known, the Stoics believe in an intimate connection between the coherent pattern of things that ought to be chosen and the orderly structure of the kosmos as it in fact develops over time. Though the former seems like an evaluative matter and the latter seems like a factual one, the Stoics evidently do not see the kind of sharp difference between them that some other philosophers have? For them, the sage's knowledge of how to act and what to choose is inseparable from his knowledge of how things actually work in nature.

Fortunately, our purposes here do not require us to explore this matter further. As everyone agrees, the inseparability of the sage's evaluative-seeming knowledge from his factual-seeming knowledge has something to do, on the Stoic view, with the sage's ability to realize that all events that actually occur are part of the pattern of nature and pro tanto to be approved of or at least in some sense accepted? But just as it is difficult to be sure how they think the sage's comprehension of the right way to act is framed in his own mind, it is equally unclear how they think the sage's knowledge of nature is formulated, and consequently it is unclear precisely how they think these two kinds of knowledge are related. But we do not need to solve these problems here. The crucial thing to recognize is that the sage is supposed to understand the whole pattern of acts that are to be performed. The connection of that pattern with the pattern of the actual workings of the kosmos can for present purposes be treated as a separate issue.

## **V**

But so far we only have part of the answer to our problem. For to see that the same thing can be regarded both as indifferent and nevertheless also as preferable, under two different concepts, is still not to see the connection between these two concepts. As I have insisted, we must still ask why virtue involves the propensity to choose certain things even though they are indifferent.

For the sage, i.e., the perfectly virtuous person, the answer is straightforward. The sage's appropriate acts are simultaneously right acts. For him the particular acts that have a reasonable defense are precisely the acts that are done with a full understanding of the correct pattern of acts into which they fit. So for him the propensity to perform particular appropriate acts is extensionally equivalent to the propensity to act from full understanding.<sup>39</sup> But the sage's reason for performing those acts is that they satisfy the latter condition, not that they satisfy the former. Qua conforming to nature, these acts are not indifferent at all. When chosen as such, they are "right acts," not merely "appropriate acts," and so there is no reason to wonder how it could be the human end, or rational, or virtuous, for the sage to perform them.

For the ordinary person, however, the answer to our question is inevitably less direct. The



specifications that we ordinarily give of our appropriate acts, and of the things that we take to be preferable, are deficient in two ways: a) they cannot be guaranteed to specify particular acts that are all in accord with the pattern of acts that really are to be performed (i.e., that pattern that the sage comprehends), because we do not ordinarily know or correctly assess all the circumstances bearing on whether an act is really to be performed; and b) these specifications do not exhibit that pattern and the way in which the acts fulfilling them fit into it. Thus, a person proposing to do something on the ground that it falls under the concept, "honoring one's parents," is neither sure that he will thereby be doing what he really should do (or will in fact succeed in doing), nor able to exhibit why honoring one's parents itself is part of the correct overall pattern of right acts. We therefore still need to know why an ordinary person should regard the terms for what we call appropriate acts as designating what it is virtuous or rational, or part of the end, to do.

The reply is that these specifications are what might be called natural and necessary stages in an ordinary person's attempt to approximate the sage's complete comprehension of how to act and what to choose. According to the Stoics, human beings naturally move toward the sage's complete comprehension by beginning with particular impulses (*hormai*) to particular kinds of things, and with tendencies to take particular sorts of actions as justifiable. As they mature, reason takes over the systematization of these impulses and tendencies, which is completed only very rarely, by the sage. But they are part of natural human development and cannot be bypassed. As a result, even though the full conception of virtue can be possessed only by the sage, our conception of it must take it as involving a propensity to perform the acts, and choose the things, to which we are directed by these impulses and tendencies. If it did not, then we would have no way of giving concrete content to the idea of virtue at all, beyond simply the bare idea of conformity to nature.<sup>41</sup>

It is essential to the Stoic view, thus interpreted, to picture us nonsages as able to distinguish a notion of the good from the unsystematized collection of our impulses and our tendencies to find certain types of action defensible, but as lacking a full articulation or formulation of that notion. And this is in fact exactly how they do picture us. Indeed, the Stoics devote an important part of their psychology to explaining how we can arrive at such a notion. We can see this in Book 3 of Cicero's *De Finibus*. Here Cicero tells how the Stoics, in an attempt to meet opponents' objections that their ethical view cannot plausibly explain how the notion of the good develops in human beings, attempt to describe precisely that development. <sup>42</sup>

According to them, in a nutshell, the infant begins by seeking the things that are conducive to his own physical survival and integrity. Later, however, the human being supposedly becomes attracted to quite different things, which may even be at odds with his own existence. They say that once a person reaches a certain maturity, he comes to be able to see a pattern or structure in his own previous activity, and that he then comes to value this structure itself rather than the things to which he previously was attracted? This pattern, perfectly instantiated in the *kosmos* as a whole (and also in the mind of the sage), is the notion of the good? It is central to the account, however, that humans attain a partial grasp of the notion of the good, i.e., of a certain pattern or structure, and of its distinctness from their impulses, without (in most cases) ever becoming able fully to understand and articulate what this pattern is. Accordingly, the aims of the ordinary person must be thought of as involving more or less distant approximation of the understanding that the sage possesses.

We can now see in summary form how the Stoics could recommend choosing among indifferents and claim that doing so is virtuous, rational, and part of the human end. The sage makes such choices of things qua fitting the pattern that he comprehends, not qua falling under the separate and unsystematized maxims of actions and choice that we employ in our ordinary unsage-like way of thinking. So in an important sense he does not choose particular

indifferents at all, qua indifferents. All others, on the other hand, are forced to make such choices by their ignorance of the correct overall pattern governing choice and action, and simply need to do the best their imperfectly informed reasons can do, by following the maxims and impulses that appear advisable. Their choices are in this sense irrational and they are, strictly, "fools."<sup>46</sup> They choose things that cannot be guaranteed to be right, and they choose them under concepts that do not in fact convey the correct rationale for their choices. On the other hand, their choices are to be recommended, because they are the best that human beings are capable of short of sagehood, and because the making of them is part of the natural and necessary process that human beings go through from birth, toward the eventual but usually unobtainable goal of wisdom.

## **NOTES**

1. For two different versions of this view, see Max Pohlenz, "Plutarch's Schriften gegen die Stoiker," *Hermes*, 74 (1939), 23-26, and Anna Maria Ioppolo, *Aristone di Chio e lo Stoicismo Antico* (Bibiopolis, 1980), pp. 90, 151-52.

2. See I. G. Kidd, "Stoic Intermediates and the End for Man," A. A. Long, ed., *Problems in Stoicism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1971), pp. 150-72, and my "Nature and Regularity in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, I II (1985), 289-305.

3. See, e.g., Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* III.34.

4. See below, sec. III, on Striker's interpretation. Support for such an account might be sought from Diogenes Laertius VII.105 = SVF 3,126, in the second of the three senses of *axia* explained there, which applies to indifferents. But this defines *axia* by conduciveness not to virtue, but to the good life. On this definition see n39, below. ("SVF" refers to H. von Arnim, ed., *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* [Leipzig, 1903-1924].)

5. SVF 3.122, 123, 117.

6. This does not mean that goodness and worth can be freely summed. Indeed I think that the contrary is the case. Here I would disagree with Terence Irwin, "Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness," Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker, eds., *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 205-44. For--though I cannot argue this point here--I doubt that the Stoics regard it as intelligible to ask whether a good soul plus some worthy indifferent is somehow superior to a good soul alone. Irwin, however, believes that this issue must arise for the Stoics (pp. 213, 236-40), as it clearly seems to for Aristotle.

7. See *De Finibus* III.50--54, e.g., and iv.40-42.

8. Irwin, *op. cit.*, and Striker, "Antipater, or the Art of Living," Schofield and Striker, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 185-204.

9. This line of thought appears in *De Finibus* III.50-54, esp. c. 50. See Irwin, p. 206.

10. Irwin, p. 235. For the equation by Antipater of "worth" and "selective value" see SVF 3.124 = L&S 58D. I use the abbreviation "L&S" for fragments as translated in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

11. The Greek is *skopos*, as opposed to *telos*. For discussion of this distinction see, e.g., Striker, *op. cit.*, and Brad Inwood, "Goal and Target in Stoicism," *Journal of Philosophy*, 83 (1986), 547-56, with references in both.

12. Irwin, p. 231.

13. Irwin, pp. 231-32. The lack of any such interconnection is due, Irwin takes it, to contingencies which prevent any systematic connection between the practice of the craft and the occurrence of the results for which it is intended. See below on Striker's interpretation, and Inwood, *op. cit.*

14. Irwin, p. 236.

15. Striker, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

16. Striker, pp. 196, 198, 202, 204.

17. Striker, pp. 198, 202.

18. Striker, p. 199. See below, n36.

19. Striker concedes, p. 204, that the Stoics do not use this sort of example in describing virtue. She adduces the fact that Epictetus once employs a comparison to games, but then agrees that it does not point at all clearly to the use that she makes of the idea.

20. Striker, pp. 198, 202.

21. It is difficult to interpret Striker here. What she says expresses this idea less explicitly than Irwin does, and she may intend something else instead. It is not even clear to me that she fully gives up on the game analogy, or even on the analogy to stochastic crafts. Although she seems to reject these analogies at pp. 202-03 and p. 198, respectively, she nevertheless seems, on p. 204, to say that they are what shows that the Stoics have succeeded in demonstrating that their position (*viz.*, that one can reasonably "choose something the obtainment of which is indifferent for the goal of life," p. 192) is not absurd.

22. Striker, pp. 204, 203.

23. On *proegmena* see SVF 3.128 and 124 with 127 (L&S 58D and E). On *kathekonta* see SVF 3,494 = L&S 59B.

24. I cannot here explore in detail the relation between *kathekonta* and *pro-egmena*, but for various considerations see Kidd, "Stoic Intermediates," pp. 155-57, 164, and especially his "Moral Actions and Rules in Stoic Ethics," John M. Rist, ed., *The Stoics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 247-58, at Dr. 250-51.

25. Kidd, "Moral Actions and Rules in Stoic Ethics," pp. 256-57, and my "Two Notes on Stoics Terminology," *American Journal of Philology*, 99 (1978), 111-19, esp. 111-15.

26. For some evidence that they think it can be, see my "Nature and Regularity," pp. 300--04. For the other interpretation, see Kidd, "Moral Actions," and Inwood, "Goal and Target." Plainly Aristo believed not; cf. my "Nature and Regularity in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, III (1985), 289-305.

27. Kidd, "Moral Actions," p. 257, and Long and Sedley, pp. 364-68.

28. SVF 3.500-02 and Long and Sedley, pp. 365-67, as well as Kidd, "Stoic Intermediates," pp. 156-57, and "Moral Action," pp. 249, 256-57. For an interpretation that perhaps differs from this one, see e.g., Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Discovering the Good," Schofield and Striker, eds.,

*op. cit.*, pp. 145-83, at pp. 179-82. Engberg-Pedersen says that the considerations that he offers show that "the wise man's insight makes a difference even as regards the what" (p. 182). It is not clear to me what this means, and whether it conflicts with the more standard interpretation, which I am agreeing with here. If he means that in particular cases the sage's further investigation of the grounds for an act might lead him to do something different from what the ordinary person would do, then the point seems unquestionable. But if he means that a *katorthoma* might fail to be a *kathekon*, then I would disagree. (It is also unclear why in his he takes Kidd, "Moral Action," to support his position.)

29. This idea is clearly seen by, e.g., Kidd, "Moral Actions," pp. 256-57, and by Long and Sedley, p. 429.

30. *Dionogenes Laertius* 7.108, in *SVF* 3.496--L&S 59E1; cf. *SVF* 3.494.

31. On precepts see Long and Sedley, pp. 427-29.

32. Long and Sedley, p. 429. Such a relation of subsumption is suggested by, e.g., *Diog. Laert.* 7.108 and *Seneca, Letters* 94.31.

33. The Stoics do not, of course, make it very clear just what kind of "system" is involved here, or what the relevant sort of coherence consists in. One of the only clues we have is their linking of the alleged coherence of their ethical view with the coherence that they ascribe to the physical universe and equally to the correct theory of it (see, e.g., *Cicero, De Finibus* III.21, 73).

34. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 210-15, esp. p. 214.

35. *SVF* 3.4-12.

36. Another way of describing the mistake in the line of interpretation represented by Inwood is this. Instead of saying that the sage and the ordinary person might aim to do the same particular act but aim at it under different concepts, that interpretation provides a different sort of act, "doing one's best," to be the sage's real aim (*op. cit.*, p. 214). The difficulty then is that we would still need to distinguish between the sage's concept for what he wants to "do his best" to do (*viz.*, fitting into the overall pattern of right action) and the ordinary person's concept for what he wants to do (*viz.*, e.g., honoring his parents or visiting them for Thanksgiving). (In fact, I believe that the Stoics' views about the sage's attitude toward contingency require just this account.)

The simile of the archer is often taken to manifest the Stoic concern about contingency (of. on Irwin and Striker in sec. II). I would argue, though, that this is not the case, and that the real point of the simile is that because our understanding of the good is only approximate, we must undertake to hit the target, *viz.* doing the right thing, by aiming at something else, *viz.* what is given by our ordinary rules of appropriate action. Notice that the occurrence of the simile in *De Fin.* III.22 makes no mention of contingency or gusts of wind or anything of that kind. Whether Antipater was mainly concerned about contingency (of. Striker, *op. cit.*) I am not prepared to say.

- 37. A. A. Long, "The Logical Basis of Stoic Ethics," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 71 (1970-1971), 85-104, and Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action*, pp. 198-201.
- 38. G. B. Kerferd, "What Does the Wise Man Know?" Rist, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 125-36, and

my "The Role of Physics in Stoic Ethics," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (1984), Spindel Conference Supplement, 57-74, esp. 71-72. For evidence on the Stoics' view about the predictability of all events, see SVF 2.944 with 3.605 and 2.943.

- 39. Likewise the things that the sage chooses to have, or "selects," are the things that, in those circumstances, it is right to select. Since the sage's life is good, those things therefore contribute to that goodness, and accordingly have "worth" in the second sense defined by Diog. Laert. VII.105 --SVF 3.126 (cS. supra, n. 4).
- 40. Long and Sedley, pp. 350-53 with pp. 366-68.
- 41. De Fin. IIL50-51 with Kidd, "Moral Action," p. 257; my "Nature and Regularity," pp. 299-300; and Irwin, op. cit., p. 206.
- 42. In "The Basis of Stoic Ethics," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 83 (1979), 144-78, I argued (see esp. pp. 147-49) that the account in DeFin. III is an account of the development of human motivation, designed to show, in response to their opponents' disbelief, their notion of the good could indeed be developed by human beings starting out as they actually do. That the account is an account of development was also subsequently maintained by Striker, "the Role of Oikeiosis in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), 145-67 (see esp. p. 158). For another view see Engberg-Pedersen, op. cit., pp. 158ff. Certainly what is said here at least includes an account of development.
- 43. De Fin. III.20--21, 23-24.
- 44. Kerferd, "What Does the Wise Man Know?" p. 132, and Long and Sedley, p. 374.
- 45. E.g., De Fin. 3.21 with 73-74.
- 46. SVF 3.657ff., passim.

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