But there was also a minority of philosophers who thought that the paradoxes could not easily be dismissed by detecting the obvious ambiguity which lies at their bottom. They took them seriously, being aware that they show that some of our basic ideas about truth are obscure and that they cannot be 'solved' without being prepared to give up some of our received views and tenets. I am inclined to think that Chrysippus belonged to this minority.

3

On the Stoic Conception of the Good

MICHAEL FREDE

Following the Socratic tradition, the Stoics assume that, in order to achieve true well-being, in order to have a good life, one needs a certain competence which we may call virtue. One must be good at taking care of oneself, at dealing with the kinds of situations and problems one encounters in life. Following Socrates, the Stoics think that this competence is a real art, the art of living, and that wisdom, perfect rationality, the perfection of reason, consists in having mastered this art.

Reasonably enough, the Stoics assume that virtue is not something we are born with, which in this sense we have by nature. It is something which we, by our own efforts, have to toil to acquire. But the Stoics also believe that there is another sense in which we are by nature virtuous. They believe that nature has constructed human beings in such a way that, if nothing went wrong, we would, in the course of our natural development, become virtuous.

Hence, the Stoics have an account of how human beings develop naturally. This account, among other things, is meant to show how at some point we would naturally be motivated in such a way as to act virtuously, how at some point it would come naturally to us to act virtuously, if our natural development had not been thwarted, in part by our upbringing, in part by our own mistakes. Indeed, it is even meant to show that, if virtue in a given situation should demand this, we will naturally act altruistically, as we would put it. To a virtuous person who, for instance, after a shipwreck finds himself with somebody else clinging to a plank which can carry only one, it is an entirely open question who is to survive. There is nothing about the virtuous person which naturally prejudices the answer he is inclined to give in his own favour. On this Stoic account nature constructs us in such a way that we are born, first, with an awareness of ourselves

and our state, but also of relevant features of our environment, and, secondly, with an impulse to preserve ourselves in our natural state, and thus to go for things which are conducive to our survival and to shun things which are detrimental to it. And having been born endowed with this kind of concern for ourselves we are supposed to evolve naturally into creatures which act virtuously and thereby attain well-being and the good life. Obviously this is only possible, if in the course of this development one's motivation undergoes a radical change which would explain why, though one is born with an impulse to preserve oneself, one ends up not even being inclined to make decisions which are partial to oneself, as in the case of the shipwreck.

A crucial, if not the decisive step in this development is supposed to be the acquisition of a notion of the good—that is, the notion of what is truly good or a good. The acquisition of this notion is supposed to have a radical effect on our motivation in such a way as to make virtuous action possible in the first place. It is this step which I want to consider in what follows. One wants to know (i) what the notion of the good is which, it is claimed, we naturally acquire, (ii) how we naturally acquire it, and (iii) what effect its acquisition is supposed to have on us.

Unfortunately, the evidence we have on this crucial point is very meagre. Our main and almost only source for it is Cicero's report of the Stoic account of our natural development in *De finibus* 3. And this report, which is very brief and very sketchy anyway, becomes tantalizingly vague precisely when it comes to the crucial step we are interested in.

This is what Cicero has to say (3.20–1):

primum est officium (id enim appello καθῆκον) ut se conservet in naturae statu, deinceps ut ea teneat quae secundum naturam sint pellatque contraria. Qua inventa selectione et item reiectione, sequitur deinceps cum officio selectio, deinde ea perpetua, tum ad extremum constans consentaneaque naturae. In qua primum inesse incipit et intellegi quid sit quod vere bonum possit dici. Prima est enim conciliatio hominis ad ea quae sunt secundum naturam. Simul autem cepit intelligentiam vel notionem potius quam appellant ἔννοιαν illi, viditque rerum agendarum ordinem et, ut ita dicam, conordiam, multo eam pluris aestimavit quam omnia illa quae prima dilexerat. Atque ita cognitione et ratione collegit ut statueret in eo collocatum summum illud hominis per se laudandum et expetendum bonum. Quod cum positum sit in eo quod ὁμολογίαν Stoici, nos appellemus convenientiam, is placet, cum igitur in eo sit id bonum quo omnia referenda sunt, honeste facta ipsumque honestum, quod solum in bonis ducitur, quamquam post oritur, tamen id solum vi sua et dignitate expetendum est: eorum autem quae sunt prima naturae propter se nihil est expetendum.

An appropriate action (for this is what I call a *kathekon*) is first that one preserve oneself in one's natural state, then that one hold on to those things that are in accordance with nature and reject their opposites; once one has discovered this pattern of selection and also of rejection, there next comes selection according to what is appropriate, then selection invariably follows this pattern, until, finally, it does reliably so and accords with nature. It is first in this sort of selection that that which can truly be called good comes to be present and that one can understand what it consists in. For originally man comes to be attached to those things which are in accordance with nature. But as soon as he has gained this understanding, or rather this notion which they call an 'ennoia', and as he has come to see the order and, to put it this way, concord of the things to be done, he has come to value this concord so much more than all those things he had originally come to hold dear. And thus by insight and reasoning he has come to the conclusion that this highest good of men which is worthy of praise or admiration and desirable for its own sake lies precisely in this. It rests in what the Stoics call 'homologia', but which we may call agreement, if this is acceptable, the good, that is, in the sense that everything has to be referred to it, including right actions and righteousness itself, which alone is counted as a good; though this good emerges later, it alone is desirable in virtue of its own force and dignity, whereas none of the things which come first by nature is desirable for its own sake.

To understand what Cicero has to say, it may help to remind ourselves of two pieces of Stoic doctrine—namely, their conception of human rationality, and their conception of nature's design of the world in general and of human beings in particular.

The Stoics not only assume that we acquire virtue or wisdom or perfect rationality (cf. 3.23 *in fine*) only over time; they also assume that mere reason is something which we acquire only over time as part of our natural development, though mere reason (as opposed to perfected reason), unlike virtue and wisdom, is supposed to emerge in large part independently of our efforts. We already noted above that, according to the Stoics, we, from the moment we are born, are endowed with perception, which allows us to be aware both of ourselves and of aspects of our environment. But this ability, which we share with animals, in the case of human beings naturally gives rise to notions or conceptions of things, and these in turn in various ways give rise to further notions and conceptions. Having acquired these

notions, we then naturally look at things, and think about them, in terms of these notions. Indeed, according to the Stoics, nature constructs us in such a way as to arrive naturally at certain specific notions or conceptions of things, which thus we naturally share with all other human beings. Hence, the Stoics call these specific notions 'common' or 'natural notions'. Thus, for example, the notion of the good which we are concerned with here is supposed to be one of these notions, a specific notion of what is good which we naturally acquire in the course of our development. By constructing us in such a way as naturally to have these common notions, nature ensures that we reasonably succeed in orienting ourselves in the world, that we ineliminably have available to us a way of thinking about things which is true to the way things are, and, moreover, a way of thinking about things which we naturally share with all other human beings, a common sense of things which we can trust and rely on.

Now, to have reason is supposed to consist in having a sufficient stock of such notions and in particular of common notions to enable us to think about the things we need to think about. It is in this way that reason emerges only over time, as we acquire the notions which constitute it. But it is also clear that, once it has emerged, it still allows of considerable perfection, including the kind of perfection wisdom or virtue is supposed to consist in. It is at this point that we actively and deliberately have to involve ourselves to attain the perfect competence which will guarantee our well-being.

One might think, if one thinks of the matter in Platonic or Aristotelian terms, that the emergence of reason amounts to the emergence of a rational part of the soul which, in conjunction with an irrational part of the soul, which is there right from the beginning, will form the fully developed human soul. But this is decidedly not the Stoic view. The Stoic view is that we are born with an irrational soul of the kind animals have, but that this soul as a whole in the case of human beings is transformed into, and thus replaced by, reason. The Stoics vehemently deny that there is, in addition to reason, an irrational part of the soul in which rational or even irrational impulses, desires, or emotions originate. They claim that the emotions have their origin in reason, that they are nothing but beliefs of a certain kind, though usually highly unreasonable beliefs and in that sense irrational. Thus on the Stoic account of our natural development our evolution is marked by a radical discontinuity at the point in which we turn from animal-like children into rational adults. It may be noted

that the Stoics assume a similar transformation at birth, at which we are supposed to turn from a plant-like foetus into an animal-like child. This discontinuity also cannot but affect our motivation. As children we are like animals, governed by, and acting on, non-rational impulses. As rational beings there is nothing there to motivate us except our beliefs. We have come to act for a reason, rather than on impulse. This is particularly clear if we keep in mind that the Stoics deny that there is an irrational part of the soul whose desires might motivate us. It also should be clear that the basic impulse to preserve ourselves and to go, as it were instinctively, for what is conducive to our survival, with which nature endowed us at birth and which governed our behaviour in our pre-rational stage, cannot survive our transformation into rational beings, since it is an animal impulse, and not a belief, or a set of beliefs, or some disposition of reason. This is a crucial point to which we will have to return repeatedly.

Now, notoriously, some modern philosophers have thought that we are not motivated by reason at all, but by a rational or irrational desire. But, equally notoriously, ancient philosophers in the Socratic tradition, rejecting this view, do assume that reason in itself does suffice to move us to act. This assumption, though, rests on certain presuppositions. Perhaps the crucial presupposition is that in the nature of things there are certain things which we, objectively and unqualifiedly, are better off for having and which hence are desirable in themselves. Moreover, it is assumed that we can identify these things. It is because there are such things, and because we are able to recognize them, that we have any reason to act at all. Such things are called 'good' or 'a good'. Recognizing something as a good, or even just believing to recognize something as a good, allows one to act for a reason, and nothing else does.

Given this, we readily understand why the acquisition of a notion of the good plays such a crucial role in the Stoic account of our development. The transformation of our animal soul into human reason would render us inactive, if, as part of reason, we did not also acquire a notion of the good. It is only because we now judge certain things to be good that we are motivated to act. So much for the Stoic conception of the nature of human rationality.

As to human reason's role in nature's design, it hardly needs to be said that the Stoics assume that nature is a perfectly rational agent which arranges the world down to the smallest detail in such a way that it is the best possible world. What perhaps does need some

explanation is the sense in which this is the best possible world. It is not the case that there is a list of goods and that nature manages, in virtue of its perfect rationality, to create the best possible world by maximizing these goods. Obviously the Stoics do not conceive of reason as essentially a means or an instrument to maximize an antecedently and independently given set of goods. It rather is the case that nature cannot but create an optimally reasonable world, a world which not only is not open to criticism, but does not admit of improvement of the kind which products of human art or craft might admit of. In its creation it reveals an insight, an ingenuity, a resourcefulness, an inventiveness, an imagination, a simplicity, an elegance, which it is impossible not to be stunned by, let alone to find fault with. It is in this sense that the world nature creates is the best possible world. It is a function of this rationality of nature's design, rather than an antecedently and independently given for it, that in such a world certain features or items are privileged. It would not, for example, be a reasonable world, if it took considerable resources to produce the things in it, and yet these things, hardly produced, for the slightest reason suffered damage, stopped to function the way they were meant to function, fell apart, and had to be discarded and replaced. Other things being equal, we would expect objects to have a certain stability and resistance to the changes they are likely to be exposed to. Thus, in the case of living organisms, we would not think that it was a well-designed world if the organism fell ill, got mutilated, or even died, if exposed to a situation it was bound to encounter constantly or even fairly regularly. Thus it is a consequence of nature's rationality, rather than an antecedent given for it, that certain states or features are favoured over others, life over death, bodily integrity over mutilation, health over disease. Of such items the Stoics say that they have value. It is not the case that, as Aristo had claimed, all things, except for wisdom and virtue, are entirely indifferent, as far as nature is concerned. For the reason given, certain things in nature are privileged, quite independently of our attitude towards them—of whether, for instance, we like them or not. But this is not because they are goods, but a mere consequence of the world's being an optimally rational creation.

Given that nature is taken to be a rational agent, we may ask what it is supposed to be motivated by when it arranges things the way it does. The answer would seem to be that it is the perfect rationality of the best possible arrangement which motivates it to arrange things

this way. It itself being perfectly rational, nature cannot but arrange things in the most rational way. If we also assume that nature, being a rational agent, is motivated by what it regards as good, the good it is motivated by must be the perfect rationality of its arrangement.

Note, though, that there is another way to think of this. It might be that the good nature is motivated by is not the rationality of its creation, but its own rationality, which it safeguards or maintains by arranging things in the most rational way. It, as it were, owes it to itself to arrange things in the most rational way. At least for the moment we may leave it open in which of these two ways we should think about the matter.

The question then is how nature goes about arranging things in the most rational way—for example, constructing things of increasing complexity, but hence also of increasing vulnerability, which nevertheless are reasonably stable and resistant. Perhaps the most instructive text here is a short passage in the account of Stoic ethics in Diogenes Laertius (7.85–6):

85 *Τὴν δὲ πρώτην ὁρμὴν φασι τὸ ζῷον ἴσχειν ἐπὶ τὸ τηρεῖν ἑαυτό, οἰκειούσης αὐτὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, καθά φησιν ὁ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ τελῶν, πρῶτον[,] οἰκεῖον λέγων εἶναι παντὶ ζῴῳ τὴν αὑτοῦ σύστασιν καὶ τὴν ταύτης συνείδησιν· οὔτε γὰρ ἀλλοτριῶσαι εἰκὸς ἦν αὐτὸ <αὑτῷ> τὸ ζῷον, οὔτε ποιήσασαν αὐτό, μήτ' ἀλλοτριῶσαι μήτ' [οὐκ] οἰκειῶσαι. ἀπολείπεται τοίνυν λέγειν συστησαμένην αὐτὸ οἰκειῶσαι πρὸς ἑαυτό· οὕτω γὰρ τά τε βλάπτοντα διωθεῖται καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα προσίεται.*

86 *Ὃ δὲ λέγουσί τινες, πρὸς ἡδονὴν γίγνεσθαι τὴν πρώτην ὁρμὴν τοῖς ζῴοις, ψεῦδος ἀποφαίνουσιν. ἐπιγέννημα γάρ φασιν, εἰ ἄρα ἔστιν, ἡδονὴν εἶναι ὅταν αὐτὴ καθ' αὑτὴν ἡ φύσις ἐπιζητήσασα τὰ ἐναρμόζοντα τῇ συστάσει ἀπολάβῃ· ὃν τρόπον ἀφιλαρύνεται τὰ ζῷα καὶ θάλλει τὰ φυτά. οὐδέν τε, φασί, διήλλαξεν ἡ φύσις ἐπὶ τῶν φυτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ζῴων, ὅτι χωρὶς ὁρμῆς καὶ αἰσθήσεως κἀκεῖνα οἰκονομεῖ καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῶν τινα φυτοειδῶς γίνεται. ἐκ περιττοῦ δὲ τῆς ὁρμῆς τοῖς ζῴοις ἐπιγενομένης, ᾗ συγχρώμενα πορεύεται πρὸς τὰ οἰκεῖα, τούτοις μὲν τὸ κατὰ φύσιν τῷ κατὰ τὴν ὁρμὴν διοικεῖσθαι· τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῖς λογικοῖς κατὰ τελειοτέραν προστασίαν δεδομένου, τὸ κατὰ λόγον ζῆν ὀρθῶς γίνεσθαι <τοὺ>τοις κατὰ φύσιν· τεχνίτης γὰρ οὗτος ἐπιγίνεται τῆς ὁρμῆς.*

Unfortunately this text, like Cicero's, is highly condensed, too, and hence forces us to elicit by interpretation what in a larger version we would have been told explicitly.

On the basis of this text it seems that nature endows plants with a certain kind of physiology which helps them to stay alive and well. Equally it provides animals and human beings with this kind of physiology. It will, for example, bring it about that food is worked up into an appropriate form and transported to the various appropriate parts of the body, or that the temperature of various parts of the body is adjusted to the demands of the situation, and all this without the organism's having to do anything. Plants do not do anything, let alone act. But once we come to animals, nature takes a decisive step further. This is part of the ingenuity with which the world is constructed. Animals not only have this sort of physiology; nature also provides them with impulse which allows them to do things, to go after things which are conducive to their survival, their integrity, their health, and to avoid things which are detrimental to it. What is particularly ingenious about this is that, in this way, nature not only provides animals, given their increased complexity and vulnerability, with a better chance to survive, as a rational order of things requires; it actually constructs them in such a way that they, by their own behaviour, following their natural impulse, bring about and maintain this rational order, as far as their part in it is concerned. When it comes to human beings, nature even goes one step further. Instead of having them guided by impulse or instinct, as we might say, it constructs them in such a way as to be guided by reason. So nature endows us with reason to have a reasonable chance of survival, to be able to respond more adequately and differentially to the different situations in which human beings find themselves. But this is ingenious to the extreme. In this way nature not only achieves that we, like animals, by our own behaviour help to maintain the natural order, but also that, unlike animals, we do so of our own accord, ideally out of insight and understanding. The ingenuity of the scheme, indeed, is stunning. We are doing nature's work for it, and this of our own accord.

This design of nature, though, given what we have said earlier, would not work, unless we came to think that something is good and, desiring to attain it, did what nature means us to do, thus acting in such a way as to make this the best possible world, as far as we are involved. Now Cicero does not tell us how we actually come to think that something is good—that is to say, how we actually come to have some notion of the good and how we actually come to apply it in such a way as to be motivated to act in the way we do. But he does

tell us how we would naturally come to have the right notion of the good and apply it correctly in such a way as to become motivated to act virtuously by doing what nature ideally means us to do. So let us return to this difficult passage. Cicero identifies the point at which we naturally come both to have a notion of the good and to see what is good in the following way. If we had developed naturally we would reach a point at which we invariably and unhesitatingly, as nature means us to, select things in such a way that we go for what is conducive to our survival and avoid what is detrimental to it. And we are told about this pattern of selection and behaviour that in it we find the beginnings of the good and begin to understand what it is that deserves to be called 'good'; that is to say, looking at and reflecting on this pattern of selection or behaviour, we naturally come to have not only a notion, but the right, the natural notion of the good.

Actually Cicero just talks of a way or pattern of selection—namely, one in which one selects appropriately, but since appropriate selection entails appropriate action, and since Cicero himself, a few lines further down (see 'rerum agendarum'), shifts to talk of appropriate action, it will, I hope, not unduly distort the thought if we assume that Cicero is talking about a pattern of behaviour. This has the advantage that we immediately see why, for a Stoic, behaviour of this pattern, though it begins to be good—i.e. begins to satisfy the conditions for being good—does not yet, as it stands, deserve to be called 'good'. As is well known, the Stoics distinguish between appropriate actions (*kathekonta* or *officia*) and right actions (*katorthomata*). Roughly speaking, an appropriate action is one in doing which one does what is the right thing to do—namely, in general, one in which one goes for what is conducive to one's survival and avoids what is detrimental to it. But a right or virtuous action requires in addition that one does this with the right motivation, for the right reason; it requires that it be an action borne of virtue and wisdom, and it is for this reason that it deserves to be called 'good'. But, if we consider the pattern of behaviour of somebody who has come as far as always making the appropriate selection, it is clear that such a person, though he always does the appropriate thing and though he acts in accordance with nature—i.e. as nature means him to behave—does not yet act well, virtuously, wisely. His behaviour, though it begins to satisfy the conditions for counting as good, does not yet have the appropriate motivation to make it truly good behaviour.

That, in trying to understand the text in this way, we are on the right track is suggested by the fact that Cicero seems to go out of his way to emphasize that the behaviour of the person who is about to make the crucial discovery of the good is constituted by appropriate actions. Describing the pattern of selection or behaviour the person has finally arrived at, Cicero starts out by explicitly characterizing the 'officia', even referring to their Greek name, and he characterizes one of the steps as marked by 'selectio cum officio'. Furthermore, as indicated, the 'rerum agendarum' a few lines further down seems to identify the good as some additional feature of the actions which are already appropriate.

But, if this is correct, then the suggestion must be that the person, once he has developed this pattern of behaviour, by reflecting on it, is naturally led to come to think about things in such a way as not only to behave in accord with nature, but also to have the right motivation to do so—that is, to behave in this way for the right reason. The question, then, is how this is supposed to come about. Obviously the person, reflecting on the behaviour, is supposed to have some crucial insight which radically changes his way of thinking about what he is already doing, though he is not yet thinking about it in the right way.

Now, reflecting on his pattern of behaviour, the person might discover that it constitutes an ideal strategy for survival. Further reflecting on this he might come to see how ingeniously things were set up in such a way that he would develop a behaviour so admirably suited to his survival. This might make him think that things have been set up in this way by a supremely rational agent—namely, nature. But this would raise the question why nature has set things up this way. Pursuing this question he would have to realize that nature is not concerned in particular with his own survival. Though his behaviour is geared to enhance his chance of survival, it becomes clear that it is just part of a general pattern of behaviour which does not favour, does not attribute any particular importance to, his survival as opposed to the survival of others. Indeed, it is a pattern of behaviour which does not presuppose that life or survival is an intrinsic good at all. Rather, nature, being optimally rational, cannot but arrange things in such a way as to bring about the best possible —i.e. most reasonable—world. And it would not be a reasonable world, if human beings, hardly born, died off for the smallest reasons. It is for that reason that nature creates human beings who by their

own behaviour bring it about that, as far as they are involved, this is the best possible world, by reasonably successfully looking after themselves; and not just that; it creates human beings endowed with reason so that they will do what nature means them to do of their own accord, for a reason. All this he might come to realize.

He will also realize that this will work only if there is a reason why one would want to do what nature means one to do. Depending on one's view of nature, one might, after all, realize that nature wants us, prompted by reason, to act in a certain way, but wonder or even doubt whether there is any reason why we should accommodate nature.

But this would naturally raise the question in the person's mind what reason he has to do what nature means him to do. Here one Stoic answer would be that a reason, or the reason, why one should act in accordance with nature is precisely that this is what nature means us to do. After all, the basic Stoic formula for the end of human life since Zeno is 'to follow nature'. One might argue that this is an end imposed on us by nature, that we have been constructed in such a way as to be oriented towards this goal, that it does not make any sense, is utterly unreasonable, is bound to end in disaster, if one tries to live against the very principles of one's construction, especially given that, if we are to believe the Stoics, what we are going to do is anyway what nature means us to do, having preordained our behaviour accordingly. Also, this might in fact be what Cicero has in mind. A few lines further down he identifies the thing which we recognize as good and which occasions our acquisition of the notion of the good as 'the order and, as it were, concord of the appropriate actions', and yet a few lines further down he tells us that the good lies in what the Stoics call 'homologia' ('agreement' or 'conformity'), a term he chooses to render as 'convenientia'. If we ask 'concord or agreement with what?', 'nature' seems to be a plausible answer, especially since the Stoics since Zeno had talked of 'homologia, agreement, with nature'. A few paragraphs further on, in III. 26, Cicero does in fact identify the end as living in accordance with nature. And so, naturally enough, this also is what some commentators assume in their interpretation of this passage. The idea, thus, would be that we come to realize that appropriate action, if done for the reason that it accords with nature—i.e. for the reason that it is what nature means us to do—constitutes what is good, and that, recognizing this, it henceforth is our overriding aim to act in this way.

But it does spring to mind that Zeno also had talked of 'homologia' *tout court*—that is, of consistency, as what we should aim at—assuming, it seems, that being consistent and acting in accordance with nature amounted to the same thing, since the only way to be consistent is to act in accordance with nature. It is also conspicuous that Cicero does not talk of concord and agreement with nature, but simply of concord and of agreement or consistency. And when he talks of the order and the concord of the appropriate actions, he is naturally understood to refer, not to the agreement of these actions with nature, but rather to their internal order and consistency. Moreover, it is natural to understand the order to consist in the way these actions are related to each other in such a way as jointly to favour the survival of the individual, if not in a more complex ordering according to which some 'officia' are basic and others more and more derivative. Also, surely it is no accident that when Cicero describes the emergence of the pattern of behaviour, reflection on which leads to the discovery of the good, it is characterized by the fact that the person becomes more and more consistent and unwavering in his choices. In any case, the fact that Zeno also sometimes defines the end as 'living consistently [*homologoumenōs zēn*]' guarantees that 'consistency', too, is a legitimate Stoic answer as to why one should act appropriately or according to nature. And so the person, having come to act consistently, may well, on reflection upon his pattern of behaviour, come to think that it was good to behave this way if one did it for the reason that in this way one maintained consistency in one's behaviour.

But why should there be this concern for consistency? A complete answer would involve reference to the kinds of considerations we already find in Plato's *Republic*. The argument there is that justice, and hence virtue, pays, because only if we are just and virtuous we are free from the kind of internal inconsistency, tension, dissent, and strife which is guaranteed to deprive us of blissful peace of mind. It is this internal consistency which, we may presume, the Stoics have in mind when they also specify the end as consisting in an *εὔροια βίου* (DL 7.88). But here I want to focus on a different aspect of consistency. The consistency in question in Plato's *Republic* first and foremost is the consistency between the different parts of the soul. Given that the Stoics deny that there are irrational parts of the soul, this for them reduces to consistency within reason. Fully to understand the concern for this consistency, one has to see that for

the Stoics there is a much closer connection between consistency and rationality than for us—indeed so close a connection that consistency for the Stoics is arguably the mark of perfect rationality. We have to remember that the Stoics saw themselves as going back to what they took to be Socrates' position—relying for this, it seems, on how Plato presents Socrates in such dialogues as the *Protagoras*. Now notoriously Socrates' method of elenctic dialectic turns on consistency as the crucial feature to be preserved. Not only is inconsistency treated as a criterion for lack of knowledge or wisdom. It also seems to be assumed that the progressive elimination of inconsistency will lead to knowledge and wisdom. This presupposes that deep down we do have a basic knowledge at least of what matters, that we are just very confused, because we have also acquired lots of false beliefs incompatible with this basic knowledge. I take it that in Plato this assumption at times takes the form of the doctrine of recollection, whereas in Stoicism it is supposed to be captured by the theory of common notions and the common sense based on them. Unable to get rid of these notions and the knowledge of the world they embody, the only way to become consistent is to eliminate the false beliefs which stand in the way of wisdom.

That, in fact, Cicero means to present the Stoic theory as one on which we become attracted by the wisdom or perfect rationality of our actions seems to be borne out by the fact that two paragraphs further on (in 3.23) we are told that we, in the way referred to here in our passage, finally come to recognize wisdom as the good which henceforth is much dearer to us than the things, such as life and health, we were originally attracted by. We should also remember that Cicero does not talk just about consistency, but also about the order and concord displayed by behaviour in accordance with nature. And reflection on this was supposed to lead one to the recognition of the stunning ingenuity and wisdom with which this pattern of behaviour was set up.

So it seems that what one comes to regard as good and what one comes to be attracted by is that one's behaviour should in its consistency and order display the kind of perfect rationality, insight, thoughtfulness, and ingenuity it does display as a work of nature, but which it could display as the work of one's own perfected reason. If this is correct, the view must be that the reason we have to do what nature means us to do is that it is optimally rational to act in this way and that acting in this way for this reason constitutes what is good

and what singularly attracts us. I hope the nature of this singular attraction will become somewhat clearer later.

Now, there is an ambiguity in the claim that we naturally come to be taken with the idea that our behaviour should be optimally rational, should reflect the kind of wisdom the works of nature quite generally do. This ambiguity corresponds fairly closely to the two possibilities we considered earlier concerning nature's own motivation as an agent. Nature might either be attracted by and enjoy, as it were, the supreme perfection of its art in creating and maintaining the world, or it might just be maintaining its own rationality. Correspondingly, the question here is whether we are attracted by the idea that our actions should display great art and wisdom in the way they are done, or whether we are attracted by the idea that they will reflect and maintain our own wisdom and art. And in the latter case we might think that this sort of motivation is just the natural continuation of our original impulse to preserve ourselves in our natural state. Given that we have now turned into rational beings, this impulse will naturally take the form, one will say, of an overriding concern with oneself as a rational being and hence of a concern to maintain, to cultivate, and to perfect one's rationality. And the best way to do this is to try to act as rationally as one can.

And, indeed, it seems that sometimes this was the kind of account the Stoics gave. In a well-known passage (*Ep. moral.* 121.14–18), Seneca tells us that the natural concern for ourselves with which we were endowed from birth by nature evolves appropriately corresponding to the stage we have reached in our natural development, and that it thus turns into an overriding concern for our rationality once we have reached the age of reason.

But one might also understand the change in motivation differently. One might be concerned to behave rationally, not out of a concern for one's own rationality, but because one is attracted by the sublime rationality of the world and thus is eager to maintain this rationality in one's sphere of action with the kind of ingenuity, wisdom, resourcefulness, and art which will make this part of what happens not just appropriate, but admirable. This concern is no longer self-regarding, but a concern for the world's being a certain way, a matter of being attracted by its being ordered in a certain way—namely, perfectly rationally.

If we look at the Cicero passage to see which of the two accounts would fit it better, it seems that it gives no support to the first account.

In this passage we are clearly supposed to be motivated by the attractiveness of behaviour which is perfectly and sublimely rational, rather than by a concern for our own rationality. In fact, I take it that the 'ipsum honestum' towards the end of 3.21, refers to virtue or wisdom and that Cicero tells us that perfect rationality or virtue as a feature of our mind and individual virtuous actions have to be seen as aiming at perfectly rational behaviour, rather than, conversely, perfectly rational behaviour as aiming at perfect rationality. Though Cicero somewhat misleadingly here calls virtue or wisdom the sole good, it is clear from the earlier part of the sentence that the good in the sense of the end is the perfectly rational behaviour, rather than the virtue or wisdom which produces it.

Cicero perhaps does not attribute much significance to the difference. For, as mentioned earlier, in 3.23 he talks as if it had been shown that wisdom was the good, rather than wise behaviour. But there is an important difference. We have already asked earlier what is supposed to happen to the original impulse to preserve ourselves. One answer is that it turns into an overriding concern for our rationality. But the answer which seems more satisfactory is that this self-regarding concern entirely disappears, since it is no longer needed, and in some cases would be inappropriate. Being motivated to act optimally rationally, we, in doing so, will as a consequence still optimally preserve our rationality and take care of ourselves to the extent that this is what an optimal order of the world requires. But the optimal order of the world, in so far as it depends on our actions, does not require under all circumstances that we preserve ourselves. Given this answer we can explain how the Stoics, against Carneades, can believe that human beings naturally would develop in such a way that it might come to them naturally to let go of the plank in a shipwreck, if they see that in this way they would contribute to an optimal order of the world.

Having thus settled for an answer to the question as to the nature of the reflections in the course of which we naturally come to have the notion of the good, it is time now actually to consider more closely precisely what this notion is supposed to be. Here, obviously, some preliminary clarification is in order. There is a lack of precision about Cicero's report which is confusing, a confusion aggravated by a certain lack of perspicuity of the syntax of the last sentence in this report. Obviously Cicero is calling two different things 'good': (i) the perfectly rational behaviour we aim at and (ii) the rectitude, virtue, or

wisdom which enables us to act perfectly rationally, and which would be displayed in such behaviour. Indeed, he says of the latter that it alone deserves to be taken to be good or a good, though some lines earlier he had called the former the highest good. If we distinguish virtue from the virtuous life which it produces, this cannot be right, unless we assume that different senses of 'good' are involved. And this clearly is what Cicero assumes. It is clear from the way he talks that a pattern of perfectly rational behaviour, a perfectly rational life, is good or even the good or the highest good in the sense in which the end or telos (that to which everything else has to be referred) is the good. Virtue or wisdom is a good or the good in the sense that it is that, and the only thing, which we need in order to attain this end—namely, a perfectly rational life.

But, though there is a clear difference, the good in the first sense and the good in the second sense, in particular in the Stoic view, are very closely related. Since the mere presence of virtue or wisdom guarantees a virtuous, wise, perfectly rational life, and since what we cherish about this life is the wisdom displayed by it, we see why Cicero in 3.23 can talk as if we had shown that wisdom was the good, when we actually had shown that a certain kind of life was the good. Nevertheless, if we want to identify precisely the notion of the good which we are supposed to come to have naturally by reflecting on our behaviour, we should distinguish these two senses. In addition, Cicero also refers to right actions which we and the Stoics want to call 'good'. And finally we want to call virtuous persons 'good'. Obligingly the Stoics offer a whole variety of distinctions of senses of 'good' which easily accommodate these different uses (cf. e.g. SE. *M* 11.25–7).

Given the way these different uses are systematically related so as to be functions of each other, we can focus on one of these uses—namely, the use in which virtue or wisdom is good or a good.

Now, in this sense of 'good' according to the Stoics, something is a good, if one derives benefit from it. Virtue or wisdom is a good because one is obviously benefited by it, as it makes one act virtuously and thus attain the good life. In fact, the Stoics assume that virtue or wisdom is the only thing one is benefited by, the only thing one is unqualifiedly better off for having. Everything else is such that it will depend on whether one is wise or not, whether one will be better off for having it. They thus claim, as Cicero in our passage tells us, that virtue or wisdom is the only good.

Part of the notion of the good in this sense, then, is that it is beneficial. This goes a long way to account for the attraction of what is good in this sense. But I want to argue that there is another equally important element in the notion of the good in this sense which helps to account for its overwhelming attraction. I take it that this element is referred to in Cicero's account when he talks of rectitude as the *honestum*. This would seem to be a rendering of the Greek *to kalon*. We may, for example, remember that Socrates in Plato's *Gorgias* argues that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. In the course of this argument he assumes that what is good either is something which benefits us or is *kalon*—that is fine or beautiful. The Stoics claim that what is good is both. And I want to try to give content to the second part of the claim to come to understand why the good, once we have seen it, would exercise such an irresistible attraction.

Perhaps a way to achieve this is to return to our adolescent who has advanced far enough to act consistently according to nature. Yet there is still something missing such that we cannot call him, his disposition, his actions, or his whole pattern of behaviour or life 'good'. What is it that is missing?

Though he has not yet acquired full rationality, he does precisely what he is meant to do, and he even does it well. He not only functions, he functions well. There is a thin sense of 'good' in which we might say that he was a good child or a good young person, doing precisely what he is meant to do. It is a sense rather analogous to the sense in which we might speak of a good car or a good horse. Cars are meant to do certain things, and if they function well, and not do just barely what they are meant to do, but rather do it well, we call them good cars. Note, though, that, even if we have reason to appreciate a well-functioning car, we have no reason to admire or praise it, or to admire or praise its performance.

Now obviously the sense of 'good' the Stoics are after and which we are trying to elucidate is a much stronger sense. A good person is one whom, whose disposition, whose action, and whose behaviour we do praise, admire, perhaps even try to emulate. At this point it is too easy for us to jump to the conclusion that the Stoics must be concerned with moral goodness, as if it were clear what this was.

It seems to me that we might make some progress in identifying the Stoic sense of 'good' if, instead of looking at the car, we look at the car-designer. The car-designer, to be regarded as good at his art, has to construct a car which functions well, performs well, does those

things well which this sort of car is meant to do. To the extent that the car-designer manages to do this, there is nothing remarkable, admirable, or praiseworthy about what he does. He just does what he is supposed to do.

But there is more to car design than this. It, at its best, might involve amazing ingenuity, insight, imagination, resourcefulness, elegance and simplicity in the solution of technical problems, creativity, and all this in ways which may not even make a difference to the actual performance of the car. The car designer might be concerned with being as artful as he can in the design of the car. He may actually care very little about the particular car he happens to be designing. For somebody with his competence it is no problem to design a car with the given specifications. Managing to do so does not constitute an achievement. It is not something he would take pride in. But the matter changes radically if he manages to fulfil the same task with remarkable or even amazing ingenuity. The matter, of course, also changes if the task is specified in such a way that its solution would in any case require great ingenuity, and the designer managed, given his enormous resourcefulness, to absolve the task.

The sense of 'good' in which such a person is a good car-designer is obviously a much stronger sense of 'good'. It takes us into the dimension of real value of the kind which makes admiration, praise, and the like entirely appropriate. That it is not what we would call moral value should not obscure the fact that it admits of any level of 'depth' (or 'height', if you prefer). One sees this more readily, perhaps, if one thinks not of cars, but of the real value which we might attach to a piece of scholarship or some scientific work. There is a world of difference between a solid, but unremarkable piece of scholarship, and a piece of work of great scholarship. This is not necessarily characterized by remarkable conclusions, but by the way in which it manages to establish these conclusions, by the learning, the insight, the acuity, and the clarity it displays at arriving at these conclusions.

To a great extent it depends on the kind of artefact we are concerned with to which degree it admits of this kind of value. There is just that much thoughtfulness and insight which the production of socks admits of, or appropriately allows for. But works of art—in the modern sense of 'art'—of different kinds are characterized by the fact that they allow and ask for precisely the kind of qualities which constitute goodness in this stronger sense. And the suggestion is that this is the sense of 'good' in which the world according to the Stoics

is the best possible world. The competence involved in producing it inspires awe.

It seems, then, that there is a weak sense of 'good' in which we can call a car which performs well a good car. But it also seems obvious that a well-designed car in the second sense, or the best possible world, will be called 'good' in a much stronger sense and only as such deserve to be appropriately appreciated, praised, or admired.

If we now turn to human beings and to what they do, the suggestion is that what confers goodness on what they do and makes them, their disposition, and their behaviour appropriate objects of this particular appreciation is not what they do, but the wisdom, the insight, the understanding, the circumspection, the thoughtfulness, the inventiveness which determine what they do and how they do it—in short, the perfection of reason behind their behaviour.

This may strike us as extremely intellectualistic, but it should not surprise us from philosophers who followed Socrates in assuming that all personal failure is intellectual failure, and, moreover, could not but be intellectual failure, given that the soul is nothing but an intellect.

Hence the notion of the good involved here is not the notion of the moral good, at least not as this is generally conceived of. It is rather a notion of the good which corresponds to Aristotle's notion of intellectual virtue, or rather to a much richer conception of intellectual virtue, in so far as for the Stoics all virtue is intellectual virtue.

We thus finally can answer the question concerning the Stoic notion of the good. Taking the notion in which 'good' applies to goods, what is good has to benefit us, has to make us unqualifiedly better off. The Stoics agree that only virtue or wisdom meets this condition, since of everything else it is true that we may as well be harmed as be helped by its possession, depending on whether we make wise use of it or not. This is supposed to be true even of life, health, bodily integrity, and in general of those items nature, other things being equal, means us to go for. There is another important condition, though, which something has to satisfy to be truly good: it has to be *kalon*—that is to say, it has to have the kind of attractiveness which makes it an appropriate object for admiration, praise, and the like, and which, as we have seen, is due to the perfection of reason involved. Again, only virtue or wisdom satisfies this condition, whereas life, health, bodily integrity, and the like do not. Correspondingly, we will call a person 'good' if the person is wise and virtuous; an action will be good if it

is borne of such wisdom and virtue, and, finally, a pattern or stretch of behaviour or a life, the kind of life we aim at, will be called 'good' if it displays such wisdom and virtue.

What Cicero, then, in the passage under discussion seems to have in mind when he talks about how we naturally come to discover the good and acquire a corresponding notion of it is this: we come to see the unique attractiveness of a pattern of behaviour which is generated by wisdom; we admire not the pattern of behaviour as such, but the wisdom displayed in it, or, put differently, we admire it as a display of wisdom. Since it takes wisdom, and only wisdom, to generate behaviour which in this way displays wisdom, there is a related sense of 'good', which Cicero also refers to, in which wisdom as a disposition of a person can also be called 'good'.

It remains then to consider the effect which the acquisition of such a notion of the good is supposed to have on our motivation. This is an extremely complex matter, and I will restrict myself to one point. The way Cicero presents the matter, one easily comes to understand the Stoic position in the way I am tempted to think is mistaken. It may well be the case that Cicero himself misunderstood the Stoic position. And, given the difficulty of the matter, I would not be surprised if some Stoics themselves had been confused on the issue. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, clarification of the issue should help to advance our understanding of the Stoic position.

The way Cicero presents the matter, we, as we grow up, come to be attracted to, to be attracted by, to appreciate things such as life and health and bodily integrity, things which have value. But once we come to recognize the good, we come to value it much more highly than the things we had naturally become attached to earlier. And this has the effect that now it is our primary concern to act well, wisely, virtuously, rather than to attain the things which merely have value.

This clearly is the Stoic doctrine. We may try to understand it by remembering that the car designer may not actually particularly care about the performance specifications the car he designs is supposed to meet, that he is primarily concerned to design a car artfully. We may also, as Cicero does in the next paragraph (3.22), refer to the art of archery. The perfect archer is concerned to take perfect aim, to do everything an archer can do to hit the target. Actually hitting the target is secondary. If an unpredictable gust of wind carries the arrow away and it misses the target, this does not reflect on his mastery of the art and hence does not really affect the archer.

What I am concerned with, though, is that one might understand Cicero's account in the following way. What comes to matter to us more than anything else, what we come to value more than anything else, is wisdom and virtue. It is only if we attain virtue that we can attain well-being. But there are things other than virtue which have value. We by nature have become attached to them and appreciate them as valuable. And we continue to be attracted to them even when we have come to see the good. We will not now think that to attain them is to attain well-being. They will matter very little to us. But they do have some value. This constitutes some reason to go after them, if this does not conflict with virtue. And attaining or retaining them will be a source of very modest, but perfectly appropriate satisfaction, just as failing to attain or losing them will be a source of modest, but perfectly appropriate regret. It is in this sense that the things we originally became attracted to come to be a matter of secondary concern, once we have discovered the good.

But it seems to me that such an understanding of the Stoic position would be fundamentally mistaken. If that were the Stoic position, it would be open to the criticism, in fact raised by some of its opponents, that it threatens to collapse into the position of its Platonistic and Peripatetic rivals, and differs only in terminology. Neither Platonists nor Peripatetics will deny the overriding value of virtue and its unique role for human well-being. If the Stoics want to emphasize this by restricting the term 'good' to virtue and by calling all other goods merely 'valuables', there is no real issue with them.

But I take it that the sense in which things which merely have value for the Stoics become a secondary concern is a completely different one. It is not secondary in the sense of 'minor' and 'overridden'; it is secondary in the sense of 'completely derivative'. I take it that the Stoic position is that the concern for things which merely have value is entirely derivative on the concern for the good. It is only because one cares for the good that one also cares for things which merely have value. Thus, if out of concern for the good one is concerned to attain or retain health, and if one's concern for the good is entirely satisfied because with perfect rationality one has done everything one reasonably can to attain or retain health, it will not matter in the least to one whether or not one actually manages to attain or retain health. There is no independent, though perhaps rather minor, concern for things like health which could be disappointed or frustrated.

The reason why I think that this is the Stoic position is the following. To begin with, I assume that the very point of the doctrine of the notion of the good is to allow us to understand rational action as due to the recognition of something as good. So we should not expect the notion of value to have the same function. Moreover, the Stoics, even on Cicero's account as quoted in the beginning, claim that only the good is choiceworthy and that only the good is desirable in itself. But if things which have mere value are not desirable in themselves, then the desire for them in a rational person can only be the desire for them as mere means to the good. This means that they are not desirable in their own right and independently of a desire for the good. They are not appropriate objects of choice except as means to the good.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to think that the impulses which we originally developed naturally are retained once we become rational. Once we become rational, we may have a reason to continue to do what earlier we did on animal impulse. But that animal impulse is no longer there. This discontinuity is obscured by talking, as Cicero does, as if we continued to value, to be attracted by, to be endeared to these natural valuables, except that now we value the good much higher. But what reason would we have to go for what is merely valuable? The only reason the Stoic theory seems to provide us with is that it may be wise, reasonable, or virtuous to go for what has value.

That this, in fact, is the Stoic view is confirmed by Cicero's own criticism of the Stoic position in *De fin.* 4. He there (4.26) raises the question how the Stoics can justify the claim that wisdom makes us abandon what nature originally had commended to us. This Stoic view presupposes that the original impulse to go for certain things and to avoid their opposites, though appropriate in the pre-rational stage, is no longer reasonable once we have become rational, but is replaced by an attachment to the good. And it is only as a consequence of this new attachment that we will, when appropriate, have a derivative concern for what we were instinctively impelled towards in the pre-rational stage. But, as, for instance, the Stoic doctrine of suicide shows, there will be situations in which it is not appropriate to act to maintain one's life.

Here we also may remember our earlier observation that at this stage of our development there is no longer any need for a basic impulse to preserve ourselves which would now naturally take the form of particular concern for our rationality. For we will now take

care of ourselves, in particular of our rationality, being motivated to live as rationally as possible. As we are already thus motivated, there is no need for a further, independent source of motivation to ensure that, as nature means us to, we take care of ourselves.

This interpretation, though, also has the consequence that the concern one now has for oneself is no longer based on an attitude which gives preference to oneself over others. This is why it seemed important to emphasize that one's overriding concern became a concern for rationality in one's behaviour rather than one's own rationality—i.e. one's own state of mind. It is a mere consequence of one's concern for rationality in what one is doing, and not an expression of self-concern, that one concerns oneself with oneself when that seems reasonable. After all, in general nature means one to take care of oneself. But by doing so, because it is rational, one does not in the least attribute to oneself a privileged position which would justify an overriding concern for oneself. It is for this reason that the shipwrecked person who is wise is in no way, let alone naturally, prejudiced in his own favour when deciding who should survive.

It also is only in this way that we can understand that there is nothing which could add to or detract from the bliss of the wise person. If he acts wisely, as he is bound to, being wise, it will not matter to him in the least if by his action he does not attain or retain what he set out to attain or retain, even if it is his physical integrity, his health, his life, or if he dies tortured on the rack. And this is not the case because the satisfaction he gets out of acting wisely is so great that by comparison the pain, the loss of life, or bodily integrity seems insignificant and of very little weight. The reason is that there is no sense of loss at all, because there is no independent impulse or desire for such things as life, health, bodily integrity, let alone pleasure, which could be disappointed or frustrated. It is only because *we* take these things to be goods, even if we recognize that they are very modest goods, that we have difficulties in understanding the Stoic wise man. But this is due to the fact that we confuse being good and being valuable. Being good has to do with our well-being. Being valuable has to do with the world's being a good, reasonable world, with having derivatively a privileged status in an optimally rational world. That nature constructs us in such a way as to have a reasonable chance to survive and even originally endowed us with an impulse to behave in such a way as to have a reasonable chance to survive is no reason to think that *we* are better off for being alive, let alone that

the world necessarily is better off for our being alive. This just shows that to derive what is good from what is natural is a very complicated business, a business which requires a much higher respect for, and fidelity to, common sense and a much deeper understanding of nature than most people are bothered to acquire.

4

Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics

BRAD INWOOD

Stoic ethics is often criticized for its impractical rigidity and pointless idealism. Its most prominent feature seems to be its proneness to paradoxical theses, such as claims that all moral errors are equal, that only the wise man is free, and that all human passions should be eliminated rather than moderated. Stoic ethics demands that human beings achieve perfect virtue and act accordingly; the alternative is the complete unhappiness from which all of us suffer. And yet at first sight it appears to offer very little in the way of realistic hope or guidance for people who wish to be happy. It seems to be an abstract and Procrustean dogmatism, which deduces from general principles conclusions which have little bearing on the kind of striving and thinking which normally characterizes ethics. It seems to leave little room for progress in an ethics which (like most others in the ancient world) is centred on the improvement of human character.

Since the mid-1960s more sympathetic and sophisticated accounts of Stoic ethics have, of course, begun to tell a different story. But there is still a gap which remains to be filled. One of the issues on which the Stoics have seemed to be most inflexible and unrealistic has been the role of rules, or laws, in Stoic ethics. In this discussion I want to argue that, when we look more closely at how those notions are used in Stoic ethics, we see that, far from being a source of rigidity, rules and laws are more closely connected to a theory of moral reasoning which emphasizes flexibility and situational variability. The particular importance of this theme emerges from a picture of Stoic views

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