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In this issue we have the first in a series of essays by Nigel Glassborow, a Stoic essayist who has made a considerable contribution to the Scholarch's Permanent Collection in the library of the College of Stoic Philosophers. Nigel is considered a traditional or classical Stoic, and his writings reflect an appreciation of the essential wisdom of the ancients. For additional essays by Mr. Glassborow, please go to the http://collegeofstoicphilosophers.org/library_scholarch

Thinking like Zeno

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It is said of Zeno that:

“Two questions lay before him - how to live and what to believe. His real interest was in the first, but it could not be answered without first facing the second.”

[Gilbert Murray a classical scholar and Professor of Greek at Oxford University. From his lecture which was originally presented at the South Place Institute in London on 16th March 1915]

This is confirmed by Zeno in that he set in place the Stoic prime guide for living life well: *To live in accord with Nature.*

It is acceptance of this, Zeno's aphorism, and all that the Stoic principles imply that is the mark of what it is to be a Stoic.

‘Meanwhile, I follow the guidance of Nature – a doctrine upon which all Stoics are agreed. Not to stray from Nature and to mould ourselves according to her law and pattern – this is true wisdom.’ [On the Happy Life iii. ‘Seneca Moral Essays’ Translation by John W Basore.]

‘To live according to virtue is the same thing as living according to one's experience of those things which happen by nature; Our individual natures are all parts of Universal Nature, and that means corresponding to one's own nature and to Universal Nature; doing none of those

things which the common law of mankind is in the habit of forbidding, and that common law is identical with that right reason that pervades everything, being the same with Jupiter [God], who is the regulator and chief manager of all existing things. Again, this very thing is the virtue of the happy man and the perfect happiness of life when everything is done according to a harmony with the genius of each individual with reference to the will of the universal governor and manager of all things.' [The Life of Zeno LIII. The Stoics, 'Lives of Eminent Philosophers' Diogenes Laertius Volume VII – Translated by R D Hicks.]

The consequences of '*To live in accord with Nature*' are foundational to Stoic thought and the rationale behind it tells us that we can only know how to live well if we have an understanding of the nature of the Existence that we find ourselves living in.

We have need to understand how individual aspects of Nature and Nature as a whole influences, affects and even, to varying degrees, controls our individual lives if we are to have a hope of being anything more than 'puppets of the gods'.

To understand why this is Stoic 'policy' we need to understand Zeno's thinking and to understand why his thinking is not in conflict with advances in knowledge up to the present day.

Zeno was not a 'fatalist' in that he believed that we can influence how we live and that we choose to live well and on top of this, if we live well we can, as a by-product, improve our state of 'eudaimonia'. We can bring about a state within ourselves whereby we can achieve a more or less permanent feeling that we are 'possessed of a good spirit' – this being the literal translation of the word 'eudaimonia'. So we are looking at 'good-spirits', not as that state of 'happiness' that is, according to its Middle-English root, an emotional reaction to fleeting chance events, but rather 'good-spirits' that are a rational feeling of wellbeing and oneness with the rest of the Cosmos that is based on a sound understanding of the realities of life.

Of course it is not necessary to be aware of every minutiae of Existence to achieve such. Nor do we need to prove things to the n^{th} degree. Life is not something that can be, or should be, subjected to being 'lived in accord with the scientific method'.

What Zeno and what we Stoics are looking to is how Nature affects our lives on a day to day basis and how we cope with such. So there are particular aspects of the nature of Existence that we do need to consider. As is to be seen throughout the history of mankind, some of these are foundational to our understanding of our place in the scheme of things. And only if we have an understanding regards our place in the scheme of things will we be able to truly assess how we should live.

So when it comes to being a Stoic we look to the Stoic metaphysics.

In searching for what to believe, Zeno saw that he first needed to consider the overall nature of the Cosmos we live in as well as the nature of 'Zeus' (the supreme god of the ancient Greek culture) in relation to the Cosmos.

Barring one or two off-message individuals who fell by the wayside, Zeno and his followers are theists and, as Marcus Aurelius so eloquently expresses matters, for the Stoic there is a close correlation between the nature of the Cosmos and the nature of 'Zeus' whereby both are to be seen as *'the universal governor and organiser of all things'*.

'We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven... as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you... The Holy Spirit indwells within us. One who marks our good deeds and our bad deeds, and is our guardian. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. ... He it is that gives noble and upright counsel.'
[XLI. On the God Within Us - 'Seneca Epistulae Morales' Translation by Richard M Gummere.]

"For I regard God's will as better than my will. I shall attach myself to Him as a servant and follower, my choice is one with His, my desire one with His, in a word my will is one with His will." [IV.VII. 'Epictetus, the discourses as reported by Arrian, the Manual and Fragments' Translated by W A Oldfather.]

'All things are mutually intertwined, and the tie is sacred, and scarcely anything is alien the one to the other. For all things have been ranged side by side, and together help to order one ordered Universe. For there is both one Universe, made up of all things, and one God immanent in all things,... and one Law, one Reason common to all intelligent creatures, and one Truth.' [VII.9. 'The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus' Translated by C R Haines.]

By looking to the views of the wise from many cultures and from many ages and by stripping such of tradition and myth, Zeno saw that there are common threads that are to be found in all of the world belief systems. And when it comes to 'Zeus', if one strips away the ancient Greek traditions and myth one finds the same common threads – this is why Stoicism came more to use the generic term God than 'Zeus' (God being the English translation of the Greek 'Theos' and the Latin 'Deus').

'Zeus' was no longer seen as being a god of human stature that lived in some Olympian domain. Instead, being seen as 'the one God', the Stoic deity becomes that state or force or consciousness common to all faiths that is seen as being that which animates the Cosmos as a whole, together with all within it.

At the same time, based on beliefs from all over the world, the Stoic deity is seen to be both the Cause of all that is, as having influence down to the level of the nature of how our planet operates as a bio-system, and even to having a relationship with us, the individual.

Where is the proof for such ideas? In part it lies in the innate feeling that there is *'a friend beyond phenomena'* ['Stoics and sceptics' 1913, Edwyn Robert Bevan as referred to by Murray in his 1915 lecture] that is to be found in all of the people of the world. It is only by a great effort of denial driven by a human-centric sense of superiority that an individual can 'intellectually' reject this deep rooted feeling.

Stoicism claims that these wisdoms have grounds for acceptance in that they are so widespread.

But Zeno did not just rely on the 'common beliefs' of humankind. He also looked to what it is reasonable to assume regards how the Cosmos is manifested.

In looking to all that they saw about them, Zeno and his followers saw the Cosmos as being a coordinated integrated system where reason dictates that things are as they are because there is a 'force' that causes everything to be as it is.

Diogenes Laertius tells us of the Stoic metaphysics:

They [the Stoics] think that there are two general principles in the universe, the active and the passive. That the passive is matter, an existence without any distinctive quality. That the active is the reason which exists in the passive, that is to say, God. For that he, being eternal, and existing throughout all matter, makes everything. And Zeno, the Cittiaean, lays down this doctrine in his treatise on Essence, and so does Cleanthes in his essay on Atoms, Chrysippus in the first book of his Investigations in Natural Philosophy, towards the end, Archedemus in his work on Elements, and Posidonius in the second book of his treatise on Natural Philosophy. [The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers by Diogenes Laertius, Book VII, The Stoics, Life of Zeno LXVIII Translated by R D Hicks]

And they say that the substance of all existing things is Primary Matter, as Chrysippus asserts in the first book of his physics; and Zeno says the same. Now matter is that from which anything whatsoever is produced. And it is called by a twofold appellation, essence and matter; the one relating to all things taken together, and the other to things in particular and separate. The one which relates to all things taken together, never becomes either greater or less; but the one relating to things in particular does become greater or less, as the case may be. [The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers by Diogenes Laertius, Book VII, The Stoics, Life of Zeno LXXVI Translated by R D Hicks]

Zeno presents us with a Cosmos that is absolutely physical in nature – a strict materialism, but a materialism that is Stoic in nature in that the 'prime material' that, according to the Stoic rationale, fully fills the Cosmos and is the body of the Cosmos is seen to be imbued with the mind of God. As Marcus Aurelius tells us, Stoicism involves a belief in the '*one God immanent in all things.*' All of the material existence that we experience is, in a manner, 'conscious' and it is made manifest as 'things' (individualities) through the very 'Consciousness' that permeates the whole Cosmos. Zeno tells us that without such an integral 'Consciousness'/God, the Cosmos would forever have been '*an existence without any distinctive quality.*'

There is much in today's modern sciences that offer grounds for these and similar beliefs.

For Stoicism, God is all-encompassing. Seen as a whole, God is '*the universal governor and organiser of all things,*' but God can also be experienced as 'a friend' in the manner of Socrates' daemon.

As is reflected in the above quotes from some of the Roman Stoics, Stoics believe that God is integral to our lives and how we live them. If we take the knowledge of the nature of things and how they are

aspects of the one living Cosmos permeated by God (Stoic physics) and align this with a suitable rationale (Stoic Logic/rationale) we will be guided as to how we ought to habitualise ourselves whereby we will live as good a life as we can, a life that reflects a good character (Stoic ethics).

In *'living in accord with Nature'* the Stoic will live as the rational social animal that they are in full knowledge that they are manifested out of the body of God, in that from our metaphysics we know that we are made out of the material that is the Cosmos and so contain within ourselves the *'two general principles'* of the Cosmos. These are *'the active and the passive'* where the *'active'* is God, and as such we know, as Seneca tells us, that God is within us while at the same time we are, in a manner, a part of God. And knowing this, we Stoics try to live in a way that respects God while serving society as best that our roles in life, abilities and Fate will allow.

When it comes to serving society we are told:

"The wise man... is born to be of help to all and to serve the common good." 'On Mercy' [II.vi. 'Seneca Moral Essays' Translation by John W Basore.]

"Mankind have been created for the sake of one another." [VIII.59. 'The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, together with his speeches and essays' Translated by C R Haines.]

When it comes to the Stoic ethics, in order to *'live in accord with Nature'*, the Stoic aims to develop the four cardinal characters that are necessary to manifest a good character:

Phronêsis (practical wisdom/prudence/living appropriately)

Andreia (fortitude/courage)

Dikaiosunê (justice/righteousness)

Sôphrosunê (soundness of mind/being subject to the rule of reason/self-discipline)

The Stoic does not seek to manifest a good character for their own sake. Nor do they seek it in order to achieve the state of *'eudaimonia'*. They do this so that *'they will better act out their roles in the play of life in accord with the guidance of the Playwright and so benefit the overall progress of the play.'*

As Seneca tells us:

"we must have a sound mind and one that is in constant possession of its sanity; second, it [the mind] must be courageous and energetic, and, too, capable of the noblest fortitude, ready for every emergency, careful of the body and of all that concerns it, but without anxiety; lastly, it must be attentive to all the advantages that adorn life – the user, but not the slave, of the gifts of Fortune." [iii. 'On the Happy Life' 'Seneca Moral Essays' Translation by John W Basore.]

And of course the Stoic will use *'the advantages that adorn life'* that come their way to appropriately enable them to better *'live in accord with Nature'* and so to better serve society.

In order to help the Stoic to live ethically in accord with their Stoic principles, Stoicism offers a full training program. The training has three purposes.

One is aimed at the would-be-Stoic or anyone with a troubled mind. This is mind training to help a person to look at life anew and to correct any adverse ingrained habits of thought processes and perception that are harmful to the individual's ability to cope with life – be it that such leads to a false overly negative or an overly positive view of life. We are enjoined by Marcus Aurelius [IV.11] to 'See things in all their naked reality.'

This training helps a person to regain a sound mind whereby they see life as it is and not through a filter of old misconceptions and it also helps the person to regain control of their emotions whereby their emotions will answer to the rule of reason. The training helps to prevent a person's emotions from triggering in an inappropriate manner or from running amuck and becoming excessive, violent and uncontrollable. This is the therapeutic part of the teachings that can be of use for the Stoic or non-Stoic.

But it is to be remembered that, contrary to popular modern belief, we Stoics do not eliminate emotions as part of our training. We ensure that our emotions and instincts serve us. Epictetus says at the start of his training program:

"but you have to give up some things entirely, and defer others for the time being." [1. The Encheiridion of Epictetus – Epictetus: The Discourses as reported by Arrian, The Manual and Fragments – as translated by W A Oldfather]

And so it is to be seen that the Epictetus' students in the closeted situation of Epictetus' school are guided to avoid all situations that elicit any emotional responses whatsoever until such time as they have learnt which ones only needed to be deferred '*for the time being*' in that the Student has learnt how to keep them under control while at the same time having learnt which ones need to be 'given up entirely' – namely those such as anger that are excessive, violent and uncontrollable and will not answer to the rule of reason.

When it comes to appropriate emotions, Epictetus tells us that emotions such a love/affection for a spouse or a child are to be encouraged.

But for the present I can give you the following assistance toward the attainment of what you desire. Does family affection seem to you to be in accordance with nature and good? Of course. What then? Is it possible that, while family affection is in accordance with nature and good, that which is reasonable is not good? By no means. That which is reasonable is not, therefore, incompatible with family affection? It is not, I think. Otherwise, when two things are incompatible and one of them is in accordance with nature, the other must be contrary to nature, must it not? [Chapter XI 15 -23 'Of Family Affection' - Epictetus: The Discourses as reported by Arrian, The Manual and Fragments – as translated by W A Oldfather]

Here, when talking to a man who left his child's sick bed because he could not cope with his own emotions, Epictetus argues that emotional feelings for family are natural and so are reasonable and to

be encouraged and it is for the individual to ensure that their emotions are kept within bounds, and are expressed appropriately. Love for his child should have kept the man at his daughter's bed side.

The second area of training is the learning of the Stoic beliefs, metaphysics and how the actual physical nature of life will inform the Stoic as to how they ought to live their lives – Stoic theory and observation. For instance, a person learns what it is that they are aiming for when they aim to become a person of good character by looking to common opinion about what a good character is, and, if they are lucky enough to be able to do so, by observing and being in the company of people who demonstrate that they are possessed of an advanced good character. Another aspect is that a person learns to belong, in that they discover their place in the scheme of things, both in relation to God and also to the life they have been born into.

Both of these areas of training helps the Stoic to know what is ethical.

In both these areas of training, progress as a Stoic involves habituating Stoic ideas and ways of thinking to whereby such ideas and ways become second nature, while at the same time using the habituation of the new ways to also overcome and eliminate any old habitual ways of thinking and acting that are liable to block any progress.

And this is the final area of training. It is the ongoing lifelong process of reinforcement through habituation of the understandings that the other two areas of training will have brought about. Such habituation is achieved through ongoing study and revision regards the Stoic metaphysics and principles so as to reinforce our beliefs, together with regular self-assessments and corrections of our 'opinions' as necessary. And to cap off all of the training, the Stoic beliefs and way of life are reinforced by actually acting as a Stoic. Actual experience of physically living as a Stoic is the most powerful tool in our arsenal.

Act as you would be and you will be as you act.

Living as a Stoic is not about philosophising about how one ought to think, albeit that such helps. Living as a Stoic is all about our actions and how we physically, in full consciousness, live our lives for the benefit of the whole.

When talking of God, Stoicism talks of 'providence' and 'determinism'. That is, that God does not randomly manifest the Cosmos as it is out of the 'passive' nature of the 'prime matter', but rather that God manifests all within the Cosmos with purpose. When it comes to 'the big picture' we as individuals may not always be able to see such purpose, but Stoicism enjoins us to seek out the purpose of our own life as best we can.

As individuals that are manifested out of 'the body of God', we Stoics are guided to be attentive and ready to play our part in helping to 'determine' the flow of life with 'providence' (forethought) whereby we try to direct the flow of change where we can possibly and appropriately, partially or fully, influence matters towards the better.

Which is why the Stoic of good character will be the person who 'lives in accord with Nature' by striving to make their will *'one with the will of God'* and who also lives up to being the rational responsible social animal that they are, with emphasis on the word 'social'.

And looking at the term 'rational', this relates to the word 'ratio' whereby the Stoic tries to consider the ratio of influence that all of the different aspects of their wisdom and acquired knowledge will bring to their judgements, opinions and choices – where foundational to this will be the Stoic beliefs, metaphysics and principles.

Stoicism is not solely about sorting out one's thought processes in order to achieve a sound mind. Overall Stoicism, as envisioned by Zeno, is a theistic belief system that is about physically living life honourably and appropriately in a manner that aligns one's will with the will of God – as Epictetus so clearly informs us.

By looking to how Zeno thought, we are able to take the advances in knowledge up to the present day and restate the reasonings behind much that Zeno offered us without changing Stoicism in any significant way. If we are to ensure that we stay true to Zeno's vision, if we are to stay true to Stoicism, we have need to hold to the Stoic theistic metaphysics that says, as Marcus Aurelius tells us, that the Cosmos as a whole *"is both one Universe, made up of all things, and one God immanent in all things"* in that the Stoic metaphysics tells us that the Cosmos is manifested out of its 'prime constituent' and that the 'active principle' of this 'prime constituent' is God.

And it just so happens that the subatomic and quantum sciences of today present us with the need for a 'Consciousness' that permeates the whole Cosmos - if some of their theories are going to stand up to scrutiny. Modern science is beginning to catch up with the thoughts and reasonings of Zeno.

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