Stoic Philosophy and Social Theory

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About the Author

Will Johncock researches social theory, continental philosophy, and Stoic philosophy, with a particular interest in themes concerning time. He is the author of *Naturally Late: Synchronization in Socially Constructed Times* (2019) which studies how philosophy and social science differentiate natural time from human time structures. He has lectured at the University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney) and often publishes on current social issues related to time.

Abbreviations

I&G Inwood, Brad, and Lloyd Gerson. 2008. *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*.

L&S Long, Anthony, and David Sedley. 1987. *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Volume 1: Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*.

Introduction: Essential Versus External Social Being

What Does This Book Contribute? Why Now?

Ancient Stoic philosophy evaluates the socialized aspects of our lives in two ways. The Stoics emphasize the importance of a cohesive social fabric. Integral to this belief is the Stoic prioritization of the role that each of us should play in that cohesion. We will indeed see throughout this book that for the ancient Stoics, particularly of the later Roman eras, we are born for community.

Alongside this focus on how embedded we are in social life however, Stoic philosophies order us to be indifferent to many features of our social existence. These features typically comprise what the Stoics believe is outside our individual control. Examples of socialized phenomena considered by the Stoics to be outside our control include the class into which we are born, our reputation, and numerous aspects of our interpersonal relationships. The imperative to be indifferent to certain socialized elements of our lives targets what the Stoics categorize as external not only to our control but also to our entire subjectivity. An orthodox ancient Stoic view is that what occurs socially is often estranged from our internal nature and who we each really are.

Many of the Stoics implore us to be more attentive to this division of internal self from external socializing factors. Given this mandate we might presume that ancient Stoic figures from the founding era of Zeno to the final days of Marcus Aurelius could be concerned about this book. I say this because in this work we will study ancient Stoic positions in tandem

with modern social and sociological theories. The notable point here is that these social and sociological perspectives conceive of socialized elements of the self as pivotal rather than external to who we really are.

By involving these perspectives my intention is not to characterize Stoicism as comparatively demanding a turning away from our "socialized" selves. As I have indicated at the outset, there is a crucial Stoic appreciation of how we are inherently social and communal. Through integrating social and sociological theory into discussions with Stoic impressions of subjectivity and sociality, I instead want to consider how separated our individuality actually ever is from our social environment for the Stoics. The modern social and sociological theories incorporated into this work provide an ideal counterpoint to Stoic notions of what is internal and external to the self. This is due to the receptivity of modern theories of socialization to the possibility that what we consider to be essentially individual is always already social constituted.

I do not only direct this work toward interrogating Stoic positions though. Complementarily we will consider how elements of Stoic subjectivity lurk in what modern social theories determine is collectively common about our individual selves. For certain chapters this engages the subtle differences between ancient Stoic and conventional modern understandings of what appears to be the same concept. Take for example Chap. 14 where "happiness" is the focus. Happiness for the Stoics is not reducible to what in the present-day we might conceive as a pleasurable emotion that can reflect our experiences with an external world. Consistent with their belief in a truly internal rational self, Stoic happiness instead develops the ancient notion of *eudaimonia*.[1] A happy life in this context is our living in accordance with universally rational activity. We can weave this Stoic impression of universally rationalized happiness through a sociological sense of how universally our societies produce us as rational agents. It is from this kind of comparison in this book that certain perspectives in modern social and sociological theory start to look remarkably Stoic.

This dual orientation conditions this work's originality and the new perspectives it generates. A comparative study between ancient Stoic philosophy and modern social or sociological theory has not previously occurred to this scale. With the prospect of new perspectives though comes the requirement to explain their necessity and timing. What does this interdisciplinary project contribute? Why is now a good time for it?

In answering the second part of this question first, the timeliness of this project can be situated by acknowledging the general resurgence of

interest in Stoicism. This resurgence is evident in both public and academic spheres. Stoic perspectives have driven bestseller books,[2] been the subject of mass media attention,[3] and filled numerous academic commentaries. Organizations such as *Modern Stoicism* continue to grow, conducting international "Stoicon" conferences and publishing anthologies on "Stoicism Today" (Ussher 2014, 2016). Not only is Stoic philosophy's popularity increasing, but the sense of a new collegiality around it has emerged. This community combines voices of theoretical expertise with those of the general public in spaces (online and offline) which authorize the participation of anyone who might have practical questions about Stoicism. The revival of public interest in Stoicism has possibly developed on the back of a greater intellectual and academic interest over the preceding three or four decades. As Gisela Striker notes in her 1996 volume of essays on Stoic epistemology and ethics, "a collection of this kind would hardly make sense were it not for the remarkable revival of interest in Hellenistic philosophy inaugurated" in the late 1970s (Striker 1996, ix).

My intention is to participate in the spirit of Stoicism's reanimation via engagements with its primary ancient sources. I complement this direction with secondary sources which have established Stoicism as a field of scholarly study (e.g. Lawrence Becker, Christopher Gill, Brad Inwood, Anthony Long, Martha Nussbaum, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, David Sedley, John Sellars, and William Stephens). There is a specific justification for rooting this approach in rigorous scholarship. The current public attention given to Stoicism has at times inspired a streamlining of its principles in order to develop a modern "guide to better living." One of the main proponents of this approach, Ryan Holiday, states that "Stoicism is a philosophy designed for the masses, and if it has to be *simplified* a bit to reach the masses, so be it" (Alter 2016; my emphasis). Holiday has a proven comprehension of Stoic philosophy and an ability to create and connect with an audience. Rather than seeking to simplify Stoicism's core principles however, I wish to adopt a method that embraces the intricacies of Stoicism's intellectual relevance and coherence. This will avoid aspects of contemporary discussion which use Stoic philosophies as a "bag of tricks" to produce "life hacks," as Massimo Pigliucci also observes (Pigliucci 2018).

I can instead best discuss the objectives of my approach via two responses to the earlier question which asks what this project contributes. The first contribution in this regard expands upon the opening considerations. This work participates in a heritage of thought which reconfigures

conceptions of what is internal versus external to our nature or self. Where are the boundaries regarding what you believe to be essentially you, versus contingently you, when considering the effects your social context or environment has on you? Our socialization seems inescapable. Is there though a separate internality to ourselves over which we each have a mastery and that is resilient to socialized influences?

We will see that the Stoics doggedly distinguish one's internal nature from what they believe to be externally and often socially enacted. There is for the Stoics a philosophically oriented internality for each of us that regularly requires training or development after socialized elements have misdirected us. As Anthony Long notes:

> Modern anthropologists have accustomed us to think of selves and their interests and needs as largely social constructs. It is clear that the Hellenistic philosophers understood this notion inasmuch as Cynics, Epicureans, and Stoics require their adherents to treat their pre-philosophical selves as sifted out of dominant social values to the detriment of what human nature actually requires of them. (Long 2006, 13)

This posits a distinction between a true Stoic individual nature and a socially constructed self. I have noted that there are nevertheless important aspects within Stoicism which positively characterize how our subjective internal nature expresses what is communal or collegial about existence. As we will see though there is a crucial difference between the Stoic worldview regarding our communal composition and what Long describes as the "anthropologist's view" on the social construction of the self. This difference concerns how a Stoic collegiality is a necessarily universal phenomenon, whereas the social scientist is concerned with contingently socialized figurations.

Despite this difference, the complex fabric of the commonalities and limits between self and society for the Stoics is part of what motivates my combined inquiry of Stoicism with social and sociological theory. I find it fascinating that Stoic philosophy represents each of us not only as a self-contained master but also as a site where our internal selves express a universal beyond. Comparisons emerge here with my impression of modern theses of sociality. Sociology in particular explores the common constitution of an individual self with a broader (collective) world beyond the individual.

There is a second contribution that I anticipate this project will make. Students and scholars familiar with either Stoic philosophy, or with social and sociological theory, will find this book grounded in conventional perspectives. I regularly explain, for example, the influence of Plato and Aristotle in Stoic thought. As discussed, I also engage many influential contemporary secondary sources in order to establish how classical positions are currently situated. Part of the broader promise of this project though is that by being the first collection of studies of its kind, its work intersects established readings with new ideas on the limits of subjectivity and social existence. These are perspectives that would not have emerged without the incursions facilitated by interdisciplinarity. This originality means that this project offers something different for all readers, from experienced scholars to the uninitiated. By reanimating works from either era through newly identified intersections, these fields might even become more accessible or inviting to those outside it.

A chapter's theoretical pairings might seem unusual. An example is Chap. 9's analysis of Hierocles' and Lévi-Strauss' quite differently directed positions regarding circles of kinship and affection. As we open a dialogue between them, so we destabilize something that was seemingly separately essential to each. This reorients theses with which we are otherwise familiar and is an appealing purpose of this project. From a personal point of view, when developing these interdisciplinary deliberations new transtemporal ways of considering thinkers that I have been reading for years have manifested.

There are obviously blunt differences not only between contemporaneous fields of study but also between the past and present objectives that comprise ancient Stoicism versus modern social or sociological theory. As hinted in the preceding discussion however, certain concerns pervade all these eras and their consequent forms of inquiry. These concerns include what it means to be civil or discourteous, good or bad, pious or impious, democratic or totalitarian, rational or emotional, and so on. Considerations of the human interest in any theme over time actually often harbor counterintuitive implications regarding timelessness. Timelessness is a relatively typical feature of enquiries into subjects and topics that transcend a particular period. Proclamations about whether a tennis player is the greatest ever seem to require somewhat of an eradication of time. In order to facilitate a comparison between all players in history, we negate the temporal distance between them. This allows us to conceive of them playing concurrently against or under the same conditions. By removing or softening

the "then versus now" separation we can conceive of what is common or communicable between eras.

This insight informs the content of this book. When integrating ancient Greek and Roman philosophies with modern social theories from the last one or two centuries[4] (and often from the last few decades), a necessary timelessness contradicts temporal dislocation. We must maintain a receptivity to how certain themes appear to be timelessly relevant to humans if we are to develop dialogues between generationally disconnected genres of theory. Highlighting commonalities between Stoic philosophy and social or sociological theory that have not received dedicated attention elsewhere marks a unique signature of this work.

Original Theoretical Intersections on Relatable Themes

With this notion of transgenerational relations in mind, this book's focus on Stoic philosophy must be qualified by recognizing Stoicism's connections to its neighboring ancient philosophical epochs. As indicated in the previous section, I intend to fulfill the standard practice in Stoic scholarship of highlighting the heritage of certain Stoic principles in the Platonic and Aristotelian schools (Bonazzi 2017; Gill 2007a, b; Reydams-Schils 1997; Sedley 1999a, b). I will duly now flag that during the coming chapters I regularly indicate where Stoic thinkers either perpetuate or contradict relevant positions that philosophically precede them. Let me be clear though that the emphasis of this book is not a comparative analysis of ancient Greek and Roman philosophies and literatures. There are already libraries of works dedicated to this area of research. Indeed I draw upon many such texts for supporting commentary. Rather than such a focus, the hallmark of this book is how it brings Stoic positions into discussion with concepts found in relatively modern theories of sociality.

I have declared the theoretical orientations that dominate this book. As will become evident, however, I open all chapters briefly through relatable themes. This occurs by integrating questions or curiosities that speak to everyday experience. Such an approach frames with a practical voice the theoretical rigor of the analysis that follows. Beginning with a relatable question is intended to encourage us to consider how in day-to-day life we might ask the same kinds of questions that are apparent in the theory. Any sharp distinction between theory and daily practice hopefully becomes

destabilized accordingly. Evidencing the practicality of theory in fact ful-fills a key mandate of the Stoic school.

Incorporating relatable everyday themes evokes something of how the term "stoic" permeates not only academic discussion but also survives in modern parlance. To be described as "stoic" indicates one's capacity to endure an adverse experience, often without succumbing to emotional distress or complaining. If you have a "stoic personality" in the twenty-first century, it in many contexts recognizes your capability to withstand misfortune and to get on with your life undramatically. Pigliucci indeed describes how until his involvement with Stoicism's intellectual resurgence a few years ago, the word "Stoicism only brought to mind Mr. Spock from Star Trek" (Pigliucci 2016, viii). Tad Brennan also observes the usual cur-rency a term such as stoic holds, in that "we all know roughly what it means to be stoical or stoic—they are English words, fully naturalized from the Greek. Being stoic means being unemotional, indifferent to plea-sure and pain, resigned to fate" (Brennan 2005, 3). Brennan is correct that the term stoic has these everyday connotations. As we will see in this book though, for the ancient Stoics the priority was less about being *un*emotional and more about being indifferent to emotional pleasure and pain. To be stoic requires not an absence of feeling (as I am sure a scholar of Brennan's pedigree appreciates) but a resilience to externally contin-gent sources of one's felt self.

In the modern era, Stoicism's prioritization on internal governance often features in characterizations of entities beyond individual humans. Corporations, cities, countries, devices, technologies, and entire human populations, not to mention collective human ideologies, can all be con-ceived as stoic. "Stoicism" could indeed be a defining parameter of the longevity and survival of the school of Stoic philosophy itself.[5] This is particularly relevant to how in academic environments economic pressures have restricted the variety of areas of philosophy that can be comprehen-sively offered to students.[6] This has typically made it difficult for genres such as Stoicism to be extensively accommodated within modern philoso-phy syllabuses. For Stoic philosophy to perpetuate in a manner that fulfills its own principles there must be something about its collective response to these circumstances that remains unperturbed whenever it is institution-ally marginalized.

The differentiation of this book from established scholarship possibly gives it the potential to participate infinitesimally in reconfiguring how Stoic philosophy is situated in the academic landscape. The point is not

that Stoic philosophy can gain a greater prominence in tertiary education protocols if I can show how it applies to fields of inquiry outside the humanities (such as sociology). This might be a disciplinarily self-defeating outlook. The suggestion rather is that this book can contribute to an appreciation of Stoicism's relevance to any current positions concerned with sociality and vice versa. This in turn could invite new readers and student interest.

A qualification is necessary regarding the preceding discussion if I am at all at risk of presenting Stoicism as a *singular* ideology. It would be naive to reduce all generations of Stoic thought to an identical belief structure. As with any school, subsequent thinkers bring new perspectives. This is true of Stoicism both in the introduction of new ideas as well as in the revision of existing ideas.[7] With that having been noted, the claim that I will substantialize throughout this book is that one conception which *is* near-ubiquitous in the Stoic school is of our implication in a universal Nature. The Stoic subject asks not what they do or think in terms of the presumption of an autonomously originated and regulated individuality. Conversely the Stoic impression is that we act and think in accordance with what it means to be an expression of a universal nature. Individuation for the Stoics is the manifestation of something more all-encompassing.

This expands upon the earlier detailed second objective or reason for this project. Through the social and sociological theories integrated into these coming investigations, I explore how we might find a comparable modern claim regarding the *systemic* production of the subject. This claim is that what is individual or subjective is not an atomic invention with a separate constitution. As with the Stoic impression of a universality that encompasses and inaugurates individuality, social/sociological theory's belief in a systemic production of individuality contextualizes subjectifica-tion. The difference between the production of individuation for Stoic philosophy versus the sense of that process for social/sociological theory is the difference between universality and sociality. This is not an insignifi-cant difference. The opening nonetheless of a dialogue between the two realms is possible according to the consistencies in how each view the origination and ongoing inclinations of individuation. Intersections and tensions manifest from this regarding their respective impressions of the conditions for individual citizenship and collective social unity.[8]

The relatability of what it means to be both an individual being and a collective being invites a readership for this book beyond the already reviewed relevance to students and scholars. In rudimentary discussions

about this book, I have noticed an interest from potential readers who are entirely outside the featured academic fields. Given the comprehensive way that the key elements of any chapter are unpacked, I anticipate that even if you lack a thorough background in Stoic, social, or sociological theory you will feel accommodated by this book's method.

Method

What then is this method? After a few chapters, you might notice similarities in each chapter's structure. I have standardized the structure to help emphasize the timing of the paired theoretical components which comprise the following sequence.

I open the discussion through an accessible topic or question. This sets the scene for the introduction of an ancient Stoic perspective that speaks to this topic or question. Having established the Stoic perspective, I then integrate a related social or sociological theory.[9] The tandem analysis that manifests ultimately comprises the bulk of the chapter and is where this project's originality becomes most prominent.

Comprehensively engaging the Stoic component before integrating the social or sociological theory allows this structure to establish a foundation from which we can develop close readings of precise points that are communicable between the paired theorists. Close textual analysis, not incidentally, is a relatively pragmatic approach where the early Greek Stoics are concerned. For the thinkers of this epoch, there can unfortunately be a relative paucity of surviving literature. This reflects how chapters which feature Zeno of Citium, Cleanthes of Assos, and Chrysippus of Soli are dependent upon translations of sometimes meager fragments. Our sources of such fragments are Roman Stoics such as Seneca, ancient commentators such as Cicero, Diogenes Laërtius, and Stobaeus, and modern translators of the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (SVF)* (Von Arnim 2016). As scholars would be aware, the *SVF* comprises passages in Greek and Latin from the early Stoics and their followers.[10] I regularly defer for modern translations of these early fragments to Anthony Long and David Sedley (1987) (to be cited as "in L&S, page number"). Long and Sedley's text has indeed become an ever-present reference for modern Stoic scholarship.

In the chapters engaging Hierocles and Posidonius I complement my use of translators such as Long and Sedley, as well as Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson (2008) (to be cited as "in I&G, page number"), with the more dedicated attention given to these two ancients by other recent

translators. For Hierocles' works and fragments I often turn to the translations offered by Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan (Hierocles 2009). Where Posidonius is concerned I.G. Kidd translates the fragments (Posidonius 1999) that he and L. Edelstein collected in earlier volumes. For the chapters focused on later Roman Stoics such as Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, we have translations of what we believe to be entire or near-entire texts. We will in fact be working with more than one translation of texts such as Epictetus' *Discourses* and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. From this approach comes the advantage of being able to evaluate different translators' interpretations of key terms. In comparison to all these considerations, our access to the sources of modern social and sociological theory is of course much more straightforward.

As a final note on method, I will briefly indicate how you might choose to read this book. You do not absolutely have to read its chapters sequentially. Chapter 14 does not assume knowledge acquired from all previous 13 chapters. While I encourage readers to be aware of the interrelations between chapters and associated theorists, the method outlined earlier means that each chapter has its own self-contained scope.

Having said that, a sequential reading of the chapters would potentially better acquaint a reader with the category under which it and its neighboring chapters are grouped. If furthermore you are new to Stoic philosophy, there are basic elements of Stoicism that are unpacked in the first few chapters that will aid in your general comprehension. Despite these cautionary tones, neither reading approach will prevent you from appreciating the relations that are opened in any given chapter between Stoic philosophies and modern theories of socialized life and identity. Perhaps the best advice therefore, heralding the Stoic mantra that we are about to encounter, is to adopt the approach that you believe is in accordance with your nature.

NOTES

1. In *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia*, which we typically translate as happiness and well-being, refers to an activity rather than to an emotional state. This activity is a rational and virtuous existence (Aristotle 2004, 1.7). Socratic and Platonic conceptions of *eudaimonia* precede and shape Aristotle's position. The Stoic development of this focus on the "activity of happiness" is a topic for the coming chapters (in particular, Chaps. 4 and 14). We will see that emotion is not negated from Stoic

life (Sellars 2016a) but is reconfigured in accordance with rational activity. Also of interest will be how Aristotle accommodates, whereas the Stoics marginalize, external goods in relation to subjective happiness.

2. Ryan Holiday (2014) simplifies some of Stoicism's central principles to show their applications to daily life. Alexandra Alter (2016) of the *New York Times* reports that this book has sold over 230,000 copies. Donald Robertson's books (2010, 2013, and 2018) which discuss Stoic philosophy through the perspectives of cognitive behavioral therapy have equally brought a greater current awareness to the practical benefits of Stoic theory. Tim LeBon (2014) has also commercially popularized a blend of psychology and Stoic philosophy. Piotr Stankiewicz attributes the appeal of such works to their focus on "the 'philosophy of life' aspect of" Stoicism (Stankiewicz 2017, 55).

3. Recent mass media articles discussing the increasing popularity of applying Stoic principles to modern life include Matthew Sharpe (2017) in *The Conversation*, Elif Batuman (2016) in *The New Yorker*, Sarah Berry (2016) in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Massimo Pigliucci (2015) in the *New York Times*, and William Irvine for the BBC (2015). Olivia Goldhill also describes in *Quartz* magazine how "silicon valley tech workers are using an ancient philosophy [Stoicism] designed for Greek slaves as a life hack," whereby it must be said that "Stoicism is having a moment" (Goldhill 2016).

4. The "modern" era of scholarship to which I refer begins in the mid-eighteenth century. Historians regularly further refine the definition of this period to the "late modern era." The division of the modern era into earlier and later stages tends to either subsume the eighteenth century within a longer modern period argued to begin around 1450, or in Peter Wilson's estimation push "the start of later modernity back to around 1750" (Wilson 2014, 4). See Cameron on the relation of this definition to the industrial revolution (Cameron 1999, xvii).

5. We can use this point to illustrate the distinction between (1) the adjective form of "stoicism" which qualifies the subject or object with which it is associated and that begins with a lower case "s" (unless found at the start of a sentence) and (2) the noun form of "Stoicism" which refers to the ancient school of philosophy and that begins with an upper case "S."

6. Pam Papadelos reports that in a world "where universities are run akin to commercial enterprises, there is a concern that philosophy will be further relegated into the marginal and obsolete" (Papadelos 2010, 158). On a similar theme, see Yamada (2010, 95) and Connell (2014).

7. See, for example, Annas (1993, 162).

8. David Inglis also exhibits an interest in a common terrain between ancient Stoicism and modern sociology. Inglis attends to the traces of Stoic cosmopolitanism that are present in the objects of analysis of Auguste Comte's sociology (Inglis 2014, 79–80).

9. The exception to this rule is Chap. 7 which inverts this structure. In this chapter, I introduce the sociological theory before the Stoic philosophy.
10. John Sellars contextualizes the publication of von Arnim's collection by providing an outline of the discovery of Stoic texts and fragments which preceded and proceeded this work (Sellars 2016b, 1–14).

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Subjectivity

Who Controls Your Thoughts? Epictetus and Émile Durkheim on Mental Structure

YOU ARE PART OF A RATIONAL AND ORDERED UNIVERSE

The introductory first chapter presents Stoic philosophy's dual positions regarding our social existence that we will begin to address in this chapter. For the Stoics, we have a responsibility to contribute to collective life given how embedded we are from birth in community. We must also however for Stoicism remain indifferent to numerous features of social existence. In this latter regard, the Stoics maintain that there is an internalized nature to each of us that defies external influence and comprises our rational ways of thinking and being.

Via a structuralist theory of socialization, we will in this chapter consider though whether anything about these ways of thinking and being is entirely internal to the self. This will ask to what extent any of us *control* what we think. As a preliminary note, beyond these scholarly contexts, we might recognize that contemporary self-help mantras believe that there *are* aspects of our mental orientations over which we do have total control. Such strategies abound with messages encouraging individuals to only concern themselves with what is "in their control."[1] The directive to "let something go" complementarily emphasizes relinquishing the investment in anything beyond our control that is unsettling. What is outside your governance might refer to another person's opinion of you or the potential loss of your job due to a company takeover. In either situation, the advice could be to focus on your own sense of self or work performance rather than on what external parameters dictate. But this begs the

question; what or where is the division of the mental self from these externalities?

Stoic philosophy and sociological theory each investigate the question of our internal control over our mind. Moreover for the Stoics as we will encounter repeatedly in this book, a concern about one's mental governance exemplifies how philosophy practically contributes to a person's day-to-day life.[2] This theme of internal mental control manifests extensively in the later era work of the Roman Stoic, Epictetus (55–135 A.C.E.). To understand how Epictetus conceives of this control, we must first unpack his Stoic appreciation of the rationality of humans as found in Book One of his *Discourses*.[3] Robert Dobbin's translation of Epictetus' *Discourses* (2008) drives our engagement with it in this book. Such analysis regularly occurs in tandem though with translations by Percy Matheson (1916), William Oldfather (1961), and Robin Hard (2014), in order to evaluate different readings of Epictetus' vernacular.

Epictetus connects our control of mental phenomena to the prioritization of rationality. This position perpetuates the early Stoic definition[4] of humans as rational beings—the "rational animal" (Epictetus 2008, 1.2, 1). Such a characterization is especially interesting for our concerns in this chapter regarding the internality versus externality of the human mind. This is because for Epictetus our rational nature is what concurrently distinguishes us from other less-rational creatures in the world and yet also binds us to the world. The binding occurs because we exist in a universe that for the Stoics is also rational.

Before we get to the counterintuitive notion of a rational universe, we must firstly discuss how rationality for the Stoics distinguishes us from aspects of the world. William Stephens observes that for Epictetus human beings straightforwardly begin where non-rational nonhuman animals also begin "by eating, drinking, resting, procreating, using sense-impressions, and the like" (Stephens 2014, 214). These appear to be necessarily material features of our being for Epictetus. In *Discourses* he states that "since we are on earth" we are "bound to a material body and material things" (Epictetus 2008, 1.1, 9). Nevertheless, our animal-body-ness is a concern for Epictetus when we overly "incline" toward or identify with it. An over-identification with our bodies involves unregulated indulgences in sensory pleasures. In this mode Epictetus laments that we "sink to the level of wolves" and other base animals (1.3, 7).

Epictetus portrays how human thinking and reasoning capacities condition our divergence from this mode. Here he posits that only humans have

an understanding of these sense-impressions and of our broader nature (1.6, 2.10–14).[5] Anthony Long grounds what this "understanding" means for Epictetus by describing it as a "reflexive capacity" (Long 2002, 131). Epictetus exemplifies Long's point when claiming that it is a distinctly human characteristic to know not only that we are a "part" of a "whole" world but also what sort of part we are. This includes appreciating our servitude to the whole. Sometimes this servitude even involves sacrificing ourselves for the sake of the whole, meaning that it can be proper as Robin Hard translates for "parts to yield to the whole" (Epictetus 2014, 4.7, 7). The rationality required in self-sacrificing for the ongoing prosperity of the whole is a topic for a later chapter (where the theme ironically is self-preservation). For now, though, we acknowledge Long's review of Epictetus' position that self-awareness ranks humans on a scale of nature somewhere below God at the highest extreme but well above nonhuman animals (Long 2002, 157).

Alongside this awareness of our distinction from other parts of the world, Epictetus nevertheless posits our inherent connection to the whole/world. In assuming that all things have a common and connected physical constitution, Epictetus rhetorically asks why the same would not also be true of mental phenomena; "if plants and our bodies are so intimately linked to the world and its rhythms, won't the same be true of our minds—only more so?" (Epictetus 2008, 1.14, 5). This belief in a connected universality of the mind takes Epictetus into the realm of rationality. In particular, for the Stoics it is God's reason that entirely permeates a universe of which we and our minds are parts. This divine rationality conditions as Epictetus describes the "first, all-inclusive state … composed of God and man," whereby via a universally common reason we find the "source of the seeds of being" (1.9, 4). The earlier notion that rationality characterizes our capacities as a species distinct from others would not be unfamiliar. The claim however that the universe is itself rational seems less easy to substantiate. How then does Epictetus come to such an assertion?[6]

Here I direct us to how Stoic rationality requires observably ordered behavioral patterns. In an everyday regard the consistency of decisions and actions evidences what we often refer to as rationality. If we observe someone walk quickly when crossing the street in order to avoid the oncoming traffic, we might typically describe their behavior as rational. The sense is that from their previous street-crossing experiences they rationalize how quickly the traffic is moving and how quickly to move to avoid being struck by a vehicle. This kind of rationality involves an interpretation of

phenomenal patterns. We all draw generalized rules from localized scenarios and behave in a reliably patterned way in response. If conversely one day we saw this person walking quickly across the street to avoid the traffic but the next day observed them to be crawling slowly across it despite similar traffic conditions, the inconsistency would probably engender a characterization of them as "irrational." This discussion is not a definitive appraisal of how rationality seems to manifest.[7] It is specifically intended rather to note the common correlation of rationality with predictability and order.

Reliable causal patterns also underpin the connection between reason and order that is integral to Epictetus' appreciation of not just our experience of the world but of the world itself. We can find in Diogenes Laërtius' recounting of Chrysippean philosophy the ancient principles on which Epictetus could be relying here.[8] Chrysippus attributes how "our individual natures are all parts of universal nature" to a "right reason which pervades everything." This all-pervasive reason or rationality divinely orders everything according to Chrysippus in reflecting the "will of the orderer of the universe" (Diogenes Laërtius 1853, 7.53). For Epictetus this ordering omnipresence is exhibited in the regular arrangements found in the world that a rational God impels:

> How else, after all, could things take place with such regularity, as if God were issuing orders. When he tells plants to bloom, they bloom, when he tells them to bear fruits, they bear fruit, when he tells them to ripen, they ripen. (Epictetus 2008, 1.14, 3)

Epictetus argues that these omnipresent and regularized connections are overtly apparent between celestial bodies and our planet. Celestial relations reveal the universality of order and explain how "the waxing and the waning of the moon, and the coming and going of the sun, coincide with such obvious changes and fluctuations here on earth" (1.14, 4). Through this unison we witness for Epictetus the universe's rational production, for "this design, so big, so beautiful and so well planned" does not run "haphazardly" (2.14, 26). From this recognizable universal rationality, the particularity of the human rational animal manifests. Epictetus locates the seat of this human rationality in the reliably "wonderful fruit in a human mind" (1.4, 32). This is because the evidence of this rationality emerges not simply in our behavioral orderings but more intrinsically in our mental control.

Things over Which You Have Control

A primary characteristic of human rationality for Epictetus is our ability to control our thoughts and perspectives.[9] These controllable functions of the self are entirely internal to each of us in this portrayal. Given that it is from our mentality and our will that our attitudes and judgments additionally take shape, Epictetus posits in the *Enchiridion* that such modes must also be "within our control" (Epictetus 2004, 1). The internality and therefore controllability of these aspects of the self is distinguished by Epictetus from what is external to oneself. Epictetus defines externalities as physical phenomena such as our body and our possessions, as well as social phenomena like our reputation. We should avoid emotional investments in external phenomena, Epictetus advises. In the aforementioned scenario of crossing the street, it would be Epictetus' estimation that we have no control over the traffic itself or of drivers' evaluations of how adequately we crossed the street. We do however have control over any fear we might feel regarding the speeding traffic. It is likewise up to us whether we are bothered by what the drivers might think of our attempts to avoid their cars:

> Some things are within our control, and some things are not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and whatever are not our own actions. (1)

It is probable that Epictetus developed this conception of the control that each of us has over our mind as a result of his early life as a slave. Physically controlled by a master with few possessions or liberties we can imagine Epictetus taking solace from the notion that he had the freedom to think whatever he chose. His master could regulate his movements. His poverty might prevent his physical comfort. He was however internally free to hold whichever opinion or judgment he wished about his life and the people in it.

Despite being born a slave, Epictetus had permission to study philosophy under the Stoic tutelage of Musonius Rufus.[10] From these beginnings Epictetus developed his own writing focus on themes of integrity, self-responsibility, and personal freedom. The consensus among commentators is that Epictetus intends his consequent philosophy to be more than a collection of mere theoretical considerations (Long 2002, 181; Seddon

2005, 9; Stephens 2007, xiv).[11] The contrary motivation is that people apply his insights to day-to-day life. Epictetus demands that the point of any philosophy should be its practical use (Epictetus 2014, 2.16, 1–47). In this regard his philosophy directly responds to his concern expressed in *Discourses* that "we fail to practise the application of our judgements about things that are good and bad" (2.16). By utilizing a philosophical outlook in everyday experience Stoic thought here literally becomes a guide to better living. The practical advantage for Epictetus of distinguishing between internal control and external lack-of-control is that appreciating what we can control will help in avoiding frustration and suffering. What occurs physically or socially does so externally to us beyond our personal jurisdiction. Epictetus hence warns that it is dangerous to entrust our sense of self to such aspects of life for if we do "we fall prey to fear, or fall prey to anxiety" (2.16, 11). We should instead concern ourselves only with what the mind internally controls.

Epictetus' demand to avoid needlessly concerning oneself with things that are beyond our control seems to be relatively reasonable. The question lurks within this assertion though of whether such insulation or isolation of the mind from its "external" environment is actually possible. Is there really an internally sheltered self over which you have a total control while you are concurrently immersed in socialized and externalized environments? To explore this question Émile Durkheim's (1887–1917) sociological conception of a socially constituted self or subjectivity can provide an interesting counter-perspective. Durkheim is useful because of the reflection he offers on portrayals of purely internal or external constitutions regarding one's subjectivity and mind.

The Social Role in Individual Consciousness

Often identified as one of the founders of sociology,[12] Durkheim's work is concerned with how societies maintain cohesion in an era where traditional religious and other bonds were changing. Within this theme Durkheim explores whether an individual's thoughts and behaviors are socially predictable and patterned and if so what this says about the source or origination of those thoughts and behaviors. Through various studies on faith and ritual, suicide, and labor,[13] Durkheim questions to what extent the individual mind authors one's orientations. What he proposes instead is that populations pass on templates for how to think and act from generation to generation. We are all for Durkheim inescapably receptive to