***Past-and-Future* Background Briefing:**

Background Briefing:

Stoics and Cynics in the Early Roman Empire

Topics
- Introduction: Political and Social Transitions
- The Graeco-Roman Philosophical Potpourri: Founders, Movements and Schools
- Personal and Pragmatic, Eclectic and Political
- The Problem of the Just Ruler

Abstract

The political transition from the Roman Republic to the early Empire created a turbulent environment for philosophy and philosophers. The Stoic school and the Cynic movement, in particular, reacted differently to the political reality of leadership under a single Princeps and then the growing autocracy of the early emperors. Both had to cope with the problem of maintaining the individual's autonomy and liberty in these changing conditions. Cynics rejected the authority of such leaders, and focused on a number of exemplars as patterns of the truly free and self-sufficient human. Their ideas influenced Roman literature, especially satire, diatribe, and the historical critiques of the decadence of the age. Stoics, though in part forming a 'philosophical opposition' within the Senate (e.g. Thrasea and Priscus), thereafter came to focus on influencing emperors towards a just, and therefore justified, rulership. These ideas found reflection in writers as diverse as Cicero, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, and Dio Chrysostom. Though the issue of *libertas* under an autocrat was never fully resolved, both traditions influenced later Christian and Medieval thought. They were essential elements in the huge interaction of Greek and Roman cultures that laid many of the intellectual foundations of the medieval and modern worlds.

1. Introduction: Political and Social Transitions

The group of thinkers and writers we label as 'stoics' and 'cynics' had a profound role on Roman social, literary, and political life. Beyond their intrinsic philosophical and ethical worth, the influence of these groups on political life in the Late Republic and Early Empire is worth outlining in some detail. Many of the conceptions developed by earlier philosophers in the classical and Hellenistic periods were adapted under the changed contexts of the Roman imperial system. Furthermore, much of the original writing of the Stoic philosophers has been lost, and are only preserved in later writers and commentators such as Cicero, Seneca and Diogenes Laertius. However, the overall level of influence of Stoicism can be judged the fact that by the second century CE the emperor Marcus

Aurelius (121-180 CE) would emerge as a confirmed Stoic, himself writing a major collection of philosophical maxims, the *Meditations*, that remains widely read even today.

Beyond this, a large number of Stoic philosophers and 'fellow travellers', whether slaves, poets or Senators, were prominent thinkers and exponents of this way of life. Among these we can include Publius Rutilius Rufus (a Roman exile), Cicero (a 'fellow traveller'), Cato the Younger, Porcia Cato (the wife of Brutus), Seneca (a Stoic philosopher, money-lender and tycoon), Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus (dissenting Roman Senators), Musonius Rufus (exiled philosopher), the Etruscan poet and satirist Perseus, the writer Lucan, and Epictetus, a former slave turned philosopher (Holiday & Hanselman 2020; Ogilvie 1980). In this brief analysis we will focus on the impact of some major Stoics and Cynics down through the late Republic and into the first century CE, and assess their often-complex relations with the structures of political power. If at times some of them formed an ardent 'Stoic opposition' to autocrats such as Julius Caesar and Nero (Ogilvie 1980; Holiday & Hanselman 2020), others such as Cicero and Seneca sought to shape political debate in Rome and to influence leaders through their writings and teachings as a form of moral persuasion.

In the case of Cynic philosophers, their significance does not reside only in their writings or theories. Their social practice, the way they directly tried to put their ideas into action, form the major contributions that constituted their tradition. Figures as Diogenes of Sinope (mid-fourth century BCE), Crates (late 4th & early 3rd century BCE) and Bion (early 3rd century BCE) lived their lives in ways that reinforced the legacy they left after them. They became exemplars to a way of life and thinking that was more of a 'movement' than a rigid system of dogma (Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996). Largely at odds with the certitudes of other philosophies, these thinkers and activists provided a critique of the rulers and the dominant mores of the Graeco-Roman world. Though not so much a coherent school as an eclectic mix of attitudes under the late Republic and early Empire, Cynic ideas remained important, especially as a form of social and political critique denouncing excess and servility (Bosman 2012; Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996; see further below). In this they sought to deface and debase the 'false currency' of sham wisdom and conventional values at odds with nature (Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996). Cynic ideas found reflection in major writers such as Diogenes Laertius, Lucian, Dio Chrysostom and in the genres of satire and diatribe, while Cynic teachers of the second century CE included Peregrinus, Demonax and Oenomaus of Gadara (Ogilvie 1980; Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996). They also made a foundational contribution to the development of cosmopolitan ideas, seeing humans as not bound just to one city or homeland, but truly free as citizens of the cosmos. Hence Diogenes could see himself as not just city-less, *a-polis*, and homeless, *a-oikos*, but as a citizen of the universe, *cosmopolites,* living from day-to-day as a free wanderer (Diogenes Laertius VI.63; Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996).

An 18-19th century Italian Onyx representing Diogenes the Cynic's encounter with Alexander the Great.[1]
Alexander had asked whether there was some favour he might grant the poor philosopher, who replied 'Yes, you can stand a little to one side out of my sun' (Plutarch *Alexander* 14)

For the purposes of this analysis, Stoics and Cynics include not only the major philosophers of each movement, but also Romans who closely followed or were strongly influenced by these traditions. Cato the Younger and Brutus were said to be adherents, at least in part, of the Stoic doctrines (Plutarch *Brutus* 1 & 29, though Brutus was also attached to the Platonic ideas of the New Academy, *Brutus* 2), while the poet Horace, though a follower of Epicurus (possibly via the philosopher Philodemus of Gadara), also makes several references to Stoicism (Horace *Epistles* 1.4; Yona 2018; Ogilvie 1980), including a satire where a slave berates those enslaved by their desires and fears:

> Wretch, you who order me around serve another,
> Like a wooden puppet jerked by alien strings.
> So who is free? The wise man: in command of himself,
> Unafraid of poverty, chains, or death, bravely
> Defying his passions, despising honours, complete
> In himself, smoothed and rounded, so that nothing
> External can cling to his polished surface, whom
> Fortune by attacking ever wounds herself.
>
> Horace *Satires* 2.7, translated by A.S. Kline.

The idea of training oneself to be invulnerable to Fortune (Tyche) was also a Cynic attitude, reported of early figures such as Diogenes, Crates and Metrocles (Diogenes Laertius VI.63; Goulet-Caze 1996).

Cicero (106—43 BCE), too, was highly eclectic in his ideas, but was probably mainly influenced by the 'New Academy', which claimed to be the genuine inheritor of Plato's philosophy, following the

[1] Public Domain image, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/198587).

thought of Philo of Larissa (Ogilvie 1980). Cicero's general stance was not so much a strict scepticism, but rather, following Philo, 'a modest fallibilism, which permitted the philosopher a wide range of opinions, subject only to recognition that any one of them might be mistaken, and authorized truth or approximation to the truth' (Long & Sedly 1988, pp448-9). However, many of Cicero's political and ethical notions were strongly influenced by Stoic doctrines, e.g. *De Officiis* I.VI for the use of knowledge in the conduct of social duties. Likewise, in Cicero's study of the Republic and its laws, influenced by both Plato and Zeno, he accepted the notion of a mixed constitution, but modified it to give more power to the wiser elements in the state (Cicero *The Republic* V.8; see further Ferguson 2024). Part of the problem for Cicero was the new conditions facing Rome as it expanded its geographical and cultural boundaries: -

> By Cicero's time, the task of promulgating an international code of political and military ethics had become pressing: the Roman conquest had largely extinguished independent civic life and had sapped civil religion, melting the cities into a polyglot empire whose elite was suffused with the popularized philosophy or "theology" of a wide variety of competing Greek sects (Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics, Peripatetics, Old and New Academics and so on). . . . . In rising to the occasion, Cicero laid down some of the most influential, and surely the most oft-quoted, pronouncements ever made on the moral limits of war, on the duties of civil societies towards one another and on the obligations of citizens toward non-citizens. (Pangle 1998, p239)

Plutarch also records that Crassus was said to be fascinated by Greek philosophy, and to have kept a servant trained in the Greek philosophy (Plutarch *Crassus* 3). Likewise, the Academic Arius Didymus was the Emperor Augustus' friend and teacher, while Suetonius, infamously, became Nero's teacher and minister (Suetonius *Nero* 7; Samuel 1988, p286). In these cases, it is difficult to tell what sustained effect such teachers had on the political lives of these around them, but it was clear that such ideas had currency among even hard-headed political elites.

More generally, Greek culture and literature had an enormous impact on Roman intellectual life during the Republican period. Greek language, poetry, theatre, history and rhetoric profoundly influenced all Roman forms of expression from the 3rd century BCE onwards (Ogilvie 1980). The circle of Scipio Aemilianus, for example, included Greek historians and philosophers, just as the tutors of Tiberius Gracchus (163-133 BCE) included the Stoic philosopher Blossius of Cumae (Plutarch *Tiberius Gracchus* 6). The question we might ask, for example, was what influence, such a tutor might have had on Tiberius Gracchus' political life. Answers to this question cannot be readily found in our ancient sources; Blossius may have been merely an ornament in rounding out the Gracchi brothers' education, but it is likely that such an education would have helped provide critical insights into the weaknesses of the Roman social system, insight on which both brothers acted in promoting revolutionary reforms, leading eventually to their deaths (Dudley 1941). Blossius' political actions were not based entirely on Stoic conceptions: his democratic and later revolutionary impulses (when he joined the rebellion of Aristonicus in Asia Minor) were probably based on 'family traditions of allegiance to the Campanian democratic party' and in part on utopian views linked to the cult of the Syrian Sun-God (Dudley 1941, pp96-99). We can compare these 'revolutionary' trends with the more 'cautious conservatism of Scipio Aemilianus' which as more in line with the 'new model' Stoicism of Panaetius (Dudley 1941, p97). Greek philosophy, then, was part of the general social context of the Gracchian reforms, but not its direct cause.

Elsewhere, we find other Roman statesmen being enchanted by other strands of Greek philosophy. There seems to have been some slight revival of Aristotle's physical and biological philosophies after Sulla brought back the library collected in his school at Athens, the Lyceum, to Rome (Plutarch *Sulla* 26). The works of Aristotle and Theophrastus were now more easily available to Romans, and further influenced professional philosophers during the late Republic. Taken as a whole, this influence of Greek literature and philosophy was one of the largest transmigrations and translations of a cultural system into another language that the world has ever seen. But this was no simple conquest of Romans by Greek ideas, but rather a Latinisation of Greek philosophy into new operational modes of thought and governance that informed an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan empire (Beard 2015 & Beard 2023).

Generally, philosophy, at first mistrusted as a foppish Greek affair, had come to be viewed as a worthwhile addition to polish a Roman gentleman's training, but was held to be far less important than rhetoric and oratory. There had indeed been something of an intellectual battle between rhetoric and philosophy, which certainly goes back to the classic disputes between Isocrates and Aristotle in Athens. By the early 4th century BCE, across Greek cities the sophists were a class of wandering teachers who specialised in higher education, usually for political and career purposes. Their main tool was rhetoric combined with a loose use of logic which enabled 'the weaker argument to look the stronger,' a false charge even made against Socrates but which he stoutly refuted (Plato *The Apology* 19). Through thinkers such as Hippias of Elis, Gorgias, and Protagoras of Abdera the sophists also developed an explicit attack on the attempt of philosophy to find certainty. Sophists argued that there were always two sides to a question and that in the end man was the measure of all things, including truth. Plato attacked such positions, but also admitted that a true rhetoric, one which demonstrates absolute truth by means of true principles and a convincing psychological methodology, could be developed in support of justice (Plato *Gorgias* 504d-e; Kennedy 1963, p16).

The scepticism of the early sophists, combined with an implicit view of natural moral law such that 'what is also is what ought to be', allowed the sophists to develop a plausible and saleable moral philosophy that was particularly appealing during the social and military crises of the later 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Ironically, their doctrines were to go on and form part of the current which created the radical social critique of Cynic thought, and underlay much of the later Sceptical position. These debates were also an impetus for developing the natural law arguments of Stoicism that could rise above such moral relativism (Flew 1979). Sophistic argumentation also leant itself to training not just politicians and ambassadors, but later on also to Roman lawyers, ministers and advisors to emperors (see Bowersock 1969).

Thus began the long debate between the claims of either rhetoric or philosophy as a proper higher education, with Isocrates and his followers attacking Plato's position, as well as that of the early Aristotle. For Plato rhetoric could only be as beneficial as the content it was dealing with, and was dangerous when used to persuade people to falsehoods. Socrates argued that a true dialectic had to be based on viewpoints and arguments which people truly believed, allowing them to gain genuine insights from argumentation (Seeskin 1987; Ferguson 2023) Furthermore, Plato enumerated two basic principles which sought improve the practice of rhetoric; first, that the speaker should offer an

initial definition of the nature of his topic, and second, that he should carefully divide his topic up into its component parts but deal with these systematically as part of an organic whole (Dixon 1971, p12).

Cicero, though a prominent lawyer and a master in the persuasive arts, lamented that philosophy and rhetoric, two halves of a necessary education, had been split. For him, a genuine statesman needed oratory, a knowledge of philosophy, ethics, politics and dialectic in order to be truly effective (Rawson 1985). Later in his life Cicero spent much of his time expressing the key conceptions of Greek philosophy through a variety of works, including the *Academica, On Divination, On Ends, On Fate,* and *On the Nature of the Gods*, while works such as the *De Officiis* and *The Republic* injected these into Roman political contexts. For Cicero, persuasion and truth should go hand in hand. However, the way that any such truth should be approached or lived had already received vigorous debate for several centuries in the Greek world, leading to the emergence of diverse schools and movements in the Hellenistic period.

2. The Graeco-Roman Philosophical Potpourri: Founders, Movements and Schools

Greek philosophy moved into diverse channels during the Hellenistic age. Essentially, philosophy had evolved beyond the legacies of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, though dealing with many of the same issues. It often claimed justification for a viewpoint by re-interpreting these masters, increasingly in the context of moral or political guidance for everyday people as well as for political elites.

Socrates, of course, has been immortalized by the writings of his young pupils Plato and Xenophon, whose works created a tradition which was passed down through the Academy he founded. They would enjoy a major rebirth when joined to religious and cosmological conceptions in the Neo-Platonist synthesis of the 3rd-4th centuries CE, with the movement continuing down into the 7th century CE (Wildberg 2021; Plotinus *The Enneads*). Socrates, however, left more than the rationalistic, formal and utopian tradition found in Plato. Socrates did not himself write down his philosophical ideas. Instead, he pursued philosophy through the public and radical questioning of social behaviour and commonly held ideas. Indeed, the early dialogues of Plato show Socrates ‘as a man with deep moral convictions and as someone who strove to get others to share them’: he was engaged in a form of persuasion, using dialectic to shift the respondents’ mind to a path of less falsehood (Seeskin 1987, p8; see Plato *Apology* 30a, 36c). Indeed, the Socratic method itself might be something rather different than the type of systematic philosophy which Plato engaged in later in his life. As noted by Seeskin: -

> The conclusion . . . is that the Socratic method is neither subject, nor object, nor situation neutral: it requires a dialogical encounter in which the moral worth of the participants is at stake. To the degree that this encounter is the paradigm for understanding thought in general, discovery, intellectual advancement, always has had a practical dimension. If Socrates is right, there is no special branch of learning devoted to moral education. All education worthy of the name imposes a moral test . . . (1987, pp149-50; see further Ferguson 2023)

It is exactly this aspect of Socrates' life that is taken up by the Cynic philosophers. They imposed a kind of moral and social test on individuals and upon the cities in which they lived, using humour, satirical, disruptive actions, and apparently stupid responses to develop a critical attack on the artificial modes life they saw around them. Thus, when Plato described Diogenes of Sinope (circa 404-323 BCE), one of the first major Cynics, as 'A Socrates gone mad', he was making an insightful statement (Diogenes Laertius VI.54). The term Cynic itself, derives from the Greek term for dog; in a perhaps mythical encounter with Alexander the Great, Diogenes explains that he was called a dog because he would 'fawn on those who give me anything, I yelp at those who refuse, and I set my teeth on rascals.' (Diogenes Laertius VI.60). Cynic, here, is not the same as its casual modern English usage for someone who simply distrusts and disbelieves others, disparaging ideas and values as always overridden by self-interest. Rather, it was a critical approach to life focused on what is natural for a human being. As summarised by Helmut Koester: -

> The founder of Cynic philosophy, Diogenes of Sinope . . ., who was called "the dog" (*kyon*) because of his impudence, hesitated at nothing when he wanted to demonstrate his rejection of cultural values and bourgeois conventions. Diogenes proclaimed no specific philosophical doctrine, nor did his successors; but later Cynics were often influenced by Stoic philosophy. Their frugality and impudence were chiefly expressions of their repudiation of the conventions of society. On the positive side they stressed following only natural standards of behavior, acted as pastoral counsellors, and volunteered to work for others. Cynic philosophy was not based upon the formulation and handing down of doctrines, but upon the creation and transmission of striking examples for behavior. (Koester, I, 1987, p153-154)

Cynics came to be regarded as philosophical watchdogs, stripping away unnecessary and untenable ideas and practices. This notion is already found in Plato's *Republic*, where there is a detailed and perhaps humorous account of why philosophers and dogs are alike (*Republic* 2.375a).

The key notion of the Cynic doctrine was that one should live in accord with nature, without worrying about a host of unnecessary, and indeed dangerous, secondary distractions. This allowed one to live completely, and without slavish dependency on others, or in a slavish surrender to one's own inflated desires. In such a condition of nature, man could find self-sufficiency and autarky, thereby being prepared for every eventuality, for every fortune. Such a person was not the citizen of the puny and insufficient city-state, but indeed a citizen of universe, a *kosmopolites* (Diogenes Laertius VI, 62-3; Pangle 1998, p242). The Cynics were often itinerant teachers, wondering throughout the Graeco-Roman world with no more than their cloak, leather wallet, a stick, and their sharp tongues. By the mid-third century we find the following (un)popular image of the Cynic in an Epigram from the poet Leonidas of Tarentum: -

> Wallet and hard old goatskin,
> flask and staff for his treat,
> empty purse of dogskin,
> hat for his blasphemous head,
> these are the spoils that Famine
> won from Sochares - dead.
>
> (in Ferguson 1973, p84; Sochares was a Cynic who died of starvation)

Another important Cynic, Crates, gave away his fortune to enjoin a life of simplicity, attacking the hedonistic and selfish way of life that was common for the richer classes of the Hellenistic world (Ferguson 1973, p85). He, too, claimed the entire world as his country, fortress and home (Diogenes Laertius VI.98). Indeed, crates was nicknamed 'the Door-Opener' because he would walk into private homes, uninvited, and teach the inhabitants (Diogenes Laertius VI.86). Bion of Borysthenes followed a similar social philosophy, once again pointing to the notion of self-sufficiency based on a simple life lived in accord with the limits and abilities of nature (Ferguson 1973, p86). From the third century BCE the Cynics also made use of the diatribe, a persuasive, popular discourse without technical language, designed to influence ordinary people and attack opposing views (Koester, I, 1987). Some of these ideas on the simple life were taken up the Roman writer Varro, especially in his Menippean Satires, which were written circa the 70s BCE (Rawson 1985, p283), though Varro has watered their doctrines down and accepts the worship of gods and other accepted social practises.

By the late Republic the image of the socially disruptive Cynic had become commonplace, even among the political elite. Brutus describes a Roman Senator, Marcus Favonius (circa 90-42 BCE), as having a cynical, outspoken and impertinent manner and that 'he might profess the philosophy of a Cynic, but all that he really had was the impudence of a dog' (Plutarch *Brutus* 34). Likewise, many elite Romans were cautious of those who paraded their philosophical beliefs too openly by rejecting normal social comforts, as can be seen in the following advice in a letter of Seneca (the younger, 4 BCE - CE 65):

> Avoid shabby attire, long hair, an unkempt beard, an outspoken dislike of silverware, sleeping on the ground and other misguided means of self-advertisement. The very name of philosophy, however the modest the manner in which it is pursued, is unpopular enough as it is: imagine what the reaction would be if we started disassociating ourselves from the conventions of society. Inwardly everything should be different but our outward face should conform with the crowd. (Seneca *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* V.1-5)

Nonetheless, under the early Empire, the image of Cynics remained an important foil in philosophy and politics:

> The usual picture of the imperial Cynics is two-sided: on the one hand, a great number of uneducated charlatans who shamelessly heaped abuse on passers-by in the urban centres of the empire but scandalized the Cynic way by their moral depravity; on the other hand, Socratic figures such as Demonax and Demetrius who lived frugally according to Cynic principles and were respected across philosophical divides. . . . It seems more productive to break down Cynicism into its component parts and to accept that someone could claim to be a Cynic even if he or she were only true to one or two of these parts. Cynicism – in the briefest terms – was known for (1) a compact set of principles derived from nature; (2) a radical way of life in adherence to these principles; (3) ruthless criticism of societal follies; (4) humour and wit; and (5) literary inventiveness (Bosman 2012, p794)

Cynicism was also at odds with the assumptions of an empire that prided itself on its power and wealth, forming a strong social critique that influenced a wider literary audience, including moralists and satirists that wished to denounce and the corruption, indulgence and excess of the age in which they lived (Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996).

Alongside the Cynics two major doctrinal philosophies emerged during the early 3rd century; those of Epicurus (Epicureanism) and Zeno (Stoicism). Stoicism is named after the Stoa, the 'painted colonnade' at Athens, where Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE) and his pupils used to gather to discuss and teach their particular views on philosophy. Zeno had first trained under the Cynic Crates, but soon moved away from the 'ethical extremism' of Cynicism, finding some place for conventional social values (Long & Sedley 1988, p3). Developed by thinkers such as Cleanthes and Chrysippus, Stoicism became centrally concerned with the way a person could live a morally good life in accord with nature. The emphasis on man's given nature may perhaps have been derived from Crates, but was developed into a more complete, self-supporting system of thought. For Zeno, impressions from our sense may either be genuine, or false (i.e. phantasms). Man, however, has the mental ability, using reason and past knowledge, to assess whether an impression is true or false. For Zeno, true knowledge is grasped by the mind of man (Cicero *Academica* 2.145). A true impression 'is an affection occurring in the soul, which reveals itself and its cause' (Chrysippus, in Long & Sedly 1988, p237). It is an impression capable of grasping its object (Long & Sedly 1988, p250). The Stoics developed the idea that the mind will be able to accord, literally grasp, a true impression, which is not so much a perception as a cognition. This acceded-to-cognition becomes the criterion of truth (Diogenes Laertius VII.54). It is a unique human ability, and is the basis for the creation of a true and systematic body of knowledge, *episteme*, that is, epistemic and systematic knowledge. It takes us beyond mere sensations, and beyond mere opinions, *doxa* (Long & Sedly 1988, p160). This, of course, goes against the primacy (the reality) of Universals, or forms, as posited in Platonic thought. For the Stoics, there are no Ideas in the Platonic sense, instead the mind of men uses concepts (Long & Sedly 1988, p179). The Epicureans attacked this Stoic view, arguing that impressions could not be true or false, only later judgements concerning them. The Sceptics in the Academy attacked a different point: they felt that a foolish man would accede to false impressions, not knowing that he is doing so. The credence-to-impression would then fail as a criterion for truth (Sextus Empiricus *Against the Professors* 7.151-7, in Long & Sedly 1988, pp254-5).

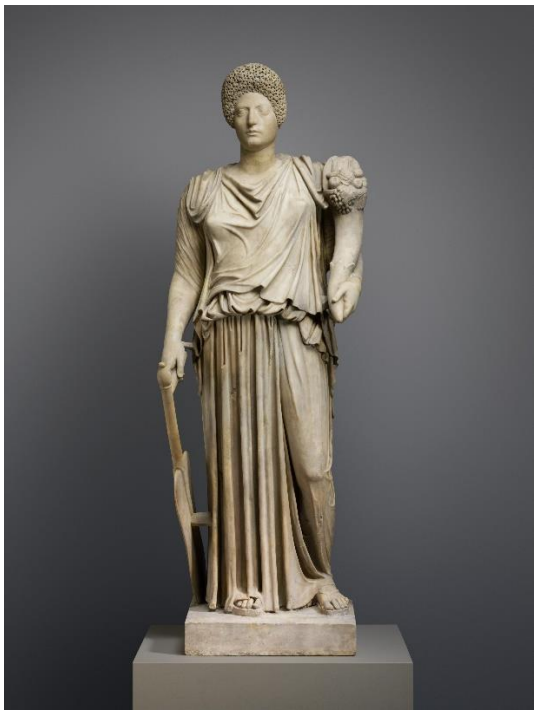
For the Stoics all the matter, the stuff in the universe, is imbued and mixed with an intelligent principle which is called 'god' or 'reason' (Long & Sedly 1988, p7, p273; Diogenes Laertius VII.134). In other formulations, it is viewed as a kind of divine breath, *pneuma*, which is dispersed through the universe, making it a divine, intelligent being, which might be called Zeus, or the Logos. The Cosmos periodically returns to a purifying and ethereal state of fire, then recreates itself (Diogenes Laertius VII.137). In this world, humans, though not really free, can find happiness by attempting, in accord with the rational element in themselves, to live in harmony with their nature. Distracting passions and false judgements need to be set aside, and the causal order of the universe has to be discovered and accepted. This involved the Stoics in the creation of a rigorous dialectical methodology, and in the creation of a strict code of conduct aimed at decreasing human unhappiness. Certain things are held to be good; prudence, justice, moderation, and courage, while their opposites are held to be bad and to be avoided. All other issues: wealth, reputation, even the manner of death, are matters of relative indifference or at best only preferred for what the good result they produce (Diogenes Laertius VII.101-3; Cicero *On Ends* 3.17; Long & Sedly 1988, pp360-1).

The Stoics, it can be seen, had a different view of the world and man's place in it to the early Cynics. Freedom from suffering and pain, which are decreed by the inexorable workings of Providence in

the divine order, can only be achieved by a proper use of reason to understand the real limitations of the human condition. The kind of Providence we are talking about is not the blind working of an unknown Tyche, as we can seen from Epictetus (55- c.135 CE):

> Whenever you find fault with Providence (*provoia*), only consider and you will recognize that what happens is in accordance with reason. 'Yes,' you say, 'but the wicked man is better off.' In what respect? In money; for in respect to that he is superior to you, because he flatters, is shameless, lies awake nights. What is surprising in that? . . . I would have the rest of you always remember, then, and be ready to apply the following truth: That this is a law of nature for the superior to have the better of the inferior, in the respect in which he is superior; and then you will never be indignant. (Epictetus *Discourses* III.xvii.1-7).

The best in man is his reason, and perfect reason was held to be "man's peculiar good" (Seneca *Letters* 76.9-10, in Long & Sedly 1988, p395). The human psyche, by its very nature, was a fragment of the divine reason, and needed to avoid being entangled with unnecessary emotions, and to not pursue morally indifferent attainments. Nor should we desire those things which are beyond our control (Epictetus *Discourses* III.xxiv), but instead engage in normal human activities in so far as we can without disturbing our soul. Therefore, under conditions of extreme pain, mutilation, or incurable illness, a wise man may commit 'a well-reasoned suicide both on behalf of his country and on behalf of his friends' (Diogenes Laertius VII.130), a doctrine that was probably well known to prominent Romans such as Cato, Cassius and Brutus, all of whom committed suicide rather than face defeat and capture during the civil wars following the death of Julius Caesar.



Roman marble statue of Tyche-Fortuna, 1-2nd century CE,[2]

Adapted from Greek originals, this goddess holds a cornucopia of good harvests, and a steering paddle. Though Fortune could not be controlled, humans could choose how to adapt to it.

[2] Public Domain image, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/255112).

The notion of the cosmopolitan nature of man, at home in every country, with a shared human nature common to all races and all classes, had been taken up forcefully by the Cynics and then by Stoic philosophers (Stephens 2018). However, the Hellenistic schools, generally, had turned more towards the fate of the individual, rather than towards expounding complete political systems. This was somewhat problematic, since the emphasis on private individuals, or *idiotes*, indicated a private person who was a non-participant in public life, with rather negative connotations in ancient Greek usage, leading to its later evolution into the word for 'idiot' (Sears 2022). This emphasis was partly based on what could be controlled. The individual soul, with its rational mind, was held to provide a more satisfactory level at which to solve philosophical and ethical problems. Neither the *polis* nor a Republic could systematically provide an environment which ensured human happiness or excellence (contra Aristotle & Plato). Instead of inventing a utopian state, an ideal and perfect epistemology, or even a workable constitution, the Stoics, Cynics and Epicureans at first argued for particular attitudes towards life that would generate the least pain and the greatest clarity of thought. They emphasised the need to situate the individual amid his place in the universe and in relation to nature. This ethic had to be adapted (by Cicero and Seneca, among others) to conform with Roman notions of civic duty and public life. i.e. serving others, in part by seeing the *patria*, the homeland, as part of a wider *oikoumene*, embracing the entire inhabited earth (Kleingeld & Brown 2019; Geus 2016).

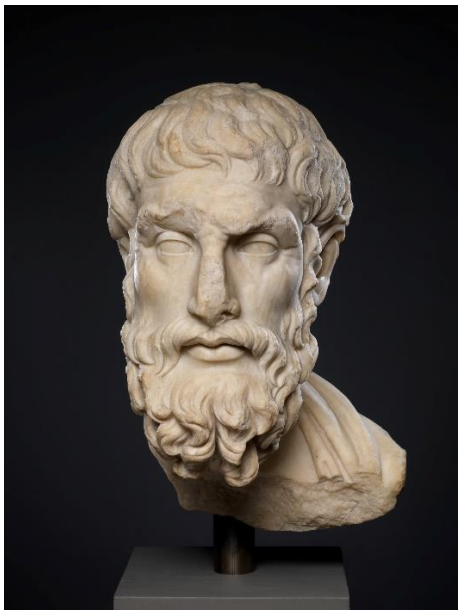
The conceptions of the Stoics came under attack by the more sceptical positions taken in the 'New Academy' by sceptic thinkers such as Carneades, who argued that to every proposition an equal and counter proposition could be generated. If this was so, then the Stoic conceptions of the world were uncertain and their ethical formations equally shaky. Therefore, the wise man should abstain from such judgements, i.e. engage in *epoche* as well as *ataraxia* (literally = 'suspension from judgement' and 'freedom from disturbance'). However, Carneades was willing to allow that humans could make reasonable judgements and make decisions from 'probable impressions' (*probabilis*), with varying degrees of certainty (Allen 2024).

3. Personal and Pragmatic, Eclectic and Political

The second major challenge to Stoicism was developed by Epicurus (341-271 B.C.). In summary, the Epicurean position includes the following features: -

> All that has independent existence is body, which is shown to consist of an infinity of atomic particles, and infinite space, much of it void. Secondary properties do exist too, but parasitically on these. Our world, like literally countless others, is the accident and transient product of complex atomic collisions, with no purposive purpose or origin or structure, no controlling deity. And the soul, itself a complex atomic conglomerate, perishes with the body. With these conclusions, physics can eliminate the psychologically crippling fear of divine intervention in this life and retribution in the next. Cognitive certainty is attainable through the senses, combined with a set of natural conceptions and intuitions. . . . Despite our ultimately atomic construction, we are genuinely autonomous agents, capable of structuring our own lives in accordance with the one natural good, pleasure. Epicureanism's means of teaching us to maximize the pleasantness of life include eliminating fears of the unknown; recognizing the utility of mutual benefits and non-aggression; and mapping out the natural limits of pleasure, any attempt to exceed which is merely counterproductive. (Long & Sedly 1988, pp6-7)

Epicurus and his followers adopted a personal philosophy which emphasised the reasonable satiation of normal human pleasures and friendship, shunning both broader political and social concerns (Lane 2023). He further developed the atomic theory of Democritus into a materialistic philosophy in which the existence of gods and the afterlife were both doubted. His school had been situated in the 'Garden' in Athens, but Epicureanism soon spread throughout the Mediterranean world and influenced the Romans from the 2nd century BCE onwards. Cassius (died 31 BCE), one of the assassins of Julius Caesar, was also a follow of the doctrines of Epicurus, and debated with Brutus against a superstitious belief in ghosts or evil phantoms (see Plutarch *Brutus* 36-38). The Roman poet Virgil (70 BCE-19 CE) was influenced as a young man by the thought of Epicurus as transmitted via Siro at Naples (Ogilvie 1980). The philosophical poem by Lucretius (born 99 CE), *De Rerum Natura*, presents a coherent world-view based on these doctrines. Nonetheless, Epicureanism, with its strong denial of civic and political virtues, was generally viewed with suspicion in the late Roman Republic and early Empire, with Stoicism finding stronger purchase in the minds of many Romans.



Marble Head of Epicurus, a Roman second century CE,[3]
One of numerous Roman copies of a Greek 3rd century BCE original.

Likewise, the theories of Zeno and Chrysippus were brought down to a more pragmatic level by thinkers such as Panaetius (185-110 BCE) and Epictetus (died 135 CE). This ethical brand of Stoicism argued that humans could never know or fully understand their personal or collective fate, and therefore should cease to strive for worldly or ideal ends, but instead calmly accept their condition. There is a focus on an accepting attitude to life, promoting a tolerance of ourselves and others. Epictetus had once been a slave and came from Hierapolis (in Phrygia), and had lived in Rome but was later on expelled by the emperor Domitian. He then went on to found a school in Nicopolis (western Greece), and taught the historian Arrian who published his lectures as the *Dissertations* (Koester, I, 1987). This patient attitude, of accepting good and hard times with equally calm, has flavoured the meaning of the ordinary meaning of the word 'stoic' in English. However, we might

[3] Public Domain image, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248475)

remember that the lives of most of these Stoic Romans was far from poor and they usually lived lives of relative luxury, having numerous servants, slaves, town houses and country estates. Seneca, for example, was an extremely rich magnate and gave lavish banquets on special cedar tables (Cassius Dio *Roman Histories*, 61.10).

By the time of the early Empire the clear-cut divisions between the different schools had begun to blur. Cicero, for example, was also influenced by Platonic and Epicurean notions, though in the main turning them towards a more pragmatic version of Stoic thought (Pangle 1998). Likewise, Pliny the Younger was influenced by Stoic conceptions, though he would not be regarded as a firm adherent of this philosophy (Arnold 1911, p117). As noted by Samuel Dill: -

> The marks of demarcation between them [the schools] faded; men were less inclined to dogmatise, and began to select and combine elements from discordant schools. In this movement the eclectic and the sceptic had very much the same object in view - the support and culture of the individual life." (Dill 1919, p290).

The distinction between Stoic and Cynic became somewhat blurred. The Cynic might be stereotyped by his social disruption: a poor, wandering figure haranguing plebeians and emperors alike, using vehement language and actions to make his point. Such a social image does not apply to all Cynics, however. The cultured Demetrius, who discoursed with the Stoic senator Thrasea, made eloquent criticism of both the emperors Nero and Vespasian. Indeed, Dudley argues that during the first century CE Stoic and Cynic philosophers were 'practically indistinguishable, alike in their rationale and their propaganda' (Dudley 1937, p137). Therefore, the modern term 'Stoic opposition' is better viewed as a more eclectic philosophical rejection of the corruption of political power in the hands of dominant autocrats from the time of the late Republic onward. This opposition was not really a political 'party' or even a clique: it was dispersed and often underground movement. Based on individual acts of protest or writings, it was unable to galvanize either the Senate as a political collective or the urban masses as a class (see further below). It became focused not just on the good life for the individual, but how liberty could be sustained under increasingly powerful autocrats.

4. The Problem of the Just Ruler

Cicero had argued that the victories of the Roman people were at first maintained by their justice and excellence at governance: -

> . . . the truth is that as long as the empire of the Roman people was maintained through acts of beneficence rather than injustices, wars were waged either on behalf of allies or for the empire, wars were terminated with clemency or only the necessary harshness, our senate was a refuge for kings, populaces, and nations, our magistrates and rulers strove to win glory only from the equitable and faithful defense of provinces and allies; and thus our rule could more truly be called a paternal protectorate of the entire earth rather than an empire. This policy and discipline declined gradually, and in truth after Sulla's victory we abandoned it. (Cicero *On Duties* 2.26-28, in Pangle 1998, p256).

Under the realities of the Principate, however, discussions shifted generally towards the idea that the monarchy of a just autocrat was the best type of government since it avoided civil war and maintained

the ‘Augustine’ peace. In this light, we can find a Stoic thinker such as Seneca supporting one man rule in his *De Clementia*. Addressing the young emperor Nero, Seneca argues: -

> For he is the bond by which the commonwealth is united, the breath of life which these many thousands draw, who in their own strength would be only a burden to themselves and the prey of others if the great mind of the empire should be withdrawn . . . Such a calamity would be the destruction of the Roman peace, such a calamity will force the fortune of a mighty person to its downfall. (*De Clementia*, I.4.1)

This statement was made in hindsight, after the long series of wars, starting with the Sulla-Marius conflict from 83 BCE onward that had culminated in the even more severe civil war between Octavian and Mark Antony. Public recognition of the relative peace under the rule of Augustus, and even under lesser leaders such as the emperors Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius, should not be under-estimated. This concept of the best and highest leader is discussed in relation to an original state of nature in one of Seneca’s letters: -

> But the first men and those who sprang from them, still unspoiled, followed nature, having one man as both their leader and their law, entrusting themselves to the control of one better than themselves. For nature has the habit of subjecting the weaker to the stronger . . . (Seneca *Epistle* XC).

Seneca here repeats the by now well-established notion of the just king, ruling by consensus and for the common good. These ideas were promoted as models by Seneca, and later on by Dio Chrysostom, who had been expelled from Rome by Domitian, but was later on recalled and tried to influence the emperor Trajan, circa 104 CE (Dio Chrysostom *Second Discourse on Kingship* 71-2; Koester I, 1987).

Not all were quite so happy with this solution. Epictetus (died 135 CE), a freed slave and among contemporary Stoics very critical of the Imperial system (Millar 1965, pp143-7), argued that there was no substantial difference between a slave and emperor if both their souls were in bondage. However, he was willing to admit that emperors had a place in maintaining the worldly order: -

> Do you philosophers, then, teach us to despise our kings? - Far from it. Who among us teaches you to dispute their claim to things over which they have authority? (Epictetus *Discourses* I, XXIX, 9-10).

At first glance, then, it seems surprising that Stoics and other philosophers of the early empire would form an opposition to the Principate as developed by Augustus. However, the apparent later support for kingship was moderated by a number of factors. First, the ruler must have the highest moral values, being not only the most powerful, but the best of men. Seneca adds: -

> . . . among men, the best is regarded as the highest. That is why it was to the mind that a ruler was assigned; and for that reason the greatest happiness rested with those peoples among whom a man could not be more powerful unless he were the better. (Seneca *Epistles* XC, 4)

Continuing this theme, Dio Chrysostom’s *First Discourse* concludes with a tale comparing the difference between the ‘Peak Royal’ and the ‘Peak Tyrannous’ which ‘appear to be practically one and undivided, inasmuch as they are seen from a distance . . .’ (*First Discourse on Kingships* 68).

Put simply, kings and emperors should rule in the wider interests of the state and humanity, and must be distinguished sharply from self-interested tyrants (Ogilvie 1980).

The Stoics, then, could only support one-man rule in so far as it lived up to these ideals or they could try to influence it to do so. This was one of the points of difference between an unbending figure such as Cato, who had never accepted the dominance of Caesar, and other figures such as Cicero and Brutus. Cicero, certainly, had hoped to influence Caesar, first by his notion of the *concordia ordinum* (Cicero *De Re Publica* III.xiii.23), and secondly in his pleas for a truly benign rule based on *clementia* (forbearance and forgiveness) combined with wisdom. Brutus, at first associated with Caesar's government as praetor, was willing to help govern the Roman state under Caesar, but perhaps soon felt that the man's pride and dominance had become too great. Since Caesar was neither the wise Stoic ruler nor could be readily influenced, opposition was the only resort left. The motivations for killing Caesar, were of, course, only to a small degree based on such philosophical doctrines, but was more widely based on need for Roman elites to have competitive access to meaningful roles in high office, especially the consulship (Syme 1974; Wirszubski1950). Caesar's death, however, neither restored the free working Republic, nor consistently brought more noble leaders into power.

A Silver denarius, coinage issued by Brutus in 54 BCE.[4]

The head is the goddess Libertas, representing liberty, while on the obverse Lucius Junius Brutus, Consul in 509 BCE, is shown surrounded by lictors bearing axes, indicating his authority to administer the law. This Brutus led the rebellion that ejected the Etruscan king Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, thus founding the Roman Republic. The coin was part of a propaganda campaign against the growing power of Pompey the Great, but ironically, the younger Brutus would join in the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE.

Similar comparisons can be made in attitudes to the emperor Nero. The philosopher and writer Seneca had been a tutor of the young Nero before he became emperor, and then, along with Burrus (commander of the Praetorian guard), became one of his main ministers in government. Seneca's *De Clementia* is a powerful appeal to Nero to use his power with mercy, but it highlights the concept that the power of the Princeps was now limited only by the ruler's self-restraint. The 'philosophical director' can only try to influence such a ruler. In this view, neither direct opposition nor revolution are workable alternatives. Earlier Stoic theory, as represent in the *De Officiis* of Cicero (see Griffin

[4] Public Domain images courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248034).

1976, p343), regarded public office as a service to fellow men, a duty which can only be avoided on certain grounds. Seneca also, in his letter 105, also states that a 'philosopher should not dissociate himself from the usages and customs of the Society' (in Wistrand 1979, p96), nor take on the shabby clothing, long hair, unkept beards and outspoken criticism of wealth that some philosophers engage in (Seneca *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* V), perhaps a dig at wandering Cynics who engaged in such displays. This meant that even under corrupt or evil emperors they still wanted to find some way to serve the state.

Yet Seneca soon found that he wished to withdraw from this public role under Nero. His attempts to influence the young emperor had become ineffective, as Nero's murder of his own mother, Agrippina, indicates. Seneca went so far as to actually help write Nero's hypocritical speech to the Senate, describing Agrippina's treasonous attempt to murder him, thereby justifying her execution (Tacitus *Annals* XIV.44). This shows how far Seneca was unable to live up to his own ideals, let lone to guide Nero to those values. In his later work *On Leisure*, (*De Otio*), Seneca argues that if the State is (morally) destroyed and beyond salvation, the Sage should not risk himself in vain (Wistranda 1979, p99). He makes this argument in detail:

> Though in this matter the two schools—the Epicureans and the Stoics—differ greatly, really the different paths of both lead to leisure. Epicurus says: "The sage will not take part in politics unless it is unavoidable." Zeno says, "The sage will take part in politics unless it is unavoidable." Both seek leisure as a consequence, both for good reason; this reason, however, extends broadly. If the commonwealth is so corrupt that it cannot be helped, if it is overrun with evils, the sage will not strive against trifles nor will he be useful if he expends himself for nothing. If he has too little influence [*auctoritas*] or power [*uires*], the commonwealth will not allow him to act; if illness impedes him, just as he would not launch a worn-out ship onto the sea, and just as he would not enlist himself for military service if a cripple, so he would not embark on a journey which he knows to be unwieldy. Therefore even one for whom all the options are still open is able, before he has experienced any bad weather, to remain in safety and commit himself continuously to liberal studies [*boni artes*] and spend his leisure freely, a cultivator of virtues, which can be practised even by those farthest from public life. (Seneca 3.2-4, translated by Tomothy Chandler)

In 65 CE, Seneca would be forced to commit suicide on the orders of Nero, who resented his withdrawal, was envious of Seneca's great wealth, and suspected him of treachery (Tacitus *Annals* XV.58-67). Moreover, it is clear that Seneca of claim of balancing Stoicism, wealth, and political power did not convince everyone. As noted by the historian Cassius Dio:

> Seneca was also held to account, one of the charges against him being that he was intimate with Agrippina. [It had not been enough for him to debauch Julia, nor had he become better as a result of exile, but that he went on to make advances to such as woman as Agrippina, with such a son.] Not only in this instance but in others he was convicted of doing precisely the opposite of what he taught in his philosophical doctrines. He brought accusations against tyranny, yet he made himself a teacher of tyrants; he denounced such of his associates as were powerful, yet he did not hold aloof from the palace himself: he had nothing good to say of flatterers, yet he had so fawned upon Messalina and Claudius's freeman . . . .While finding fault with the rich, he himself possessed a property of seven thousand five hundred myriads; and though he censured the extravagances of others, he kept five hundred three-legged tables of cedar wood, every one of them with identical ivory feet, and he gave banquets on them. In mentioning these details I have at least given a hint of their inevitable adjuncts, - the licentiousness in which he indulged at the very time that he made a most brilliant marriage, and

> the delight that he took in boys past their prime (a practice which he also taught Nero to follow). (Cassius Dio *Roman Histories*, 61.10, trans. by Herbert Baldwin Foster)

The writer and rhetorician Lucan (39-65 CE), nephew of Seneca, also rejected the principate on Stoic grounds. He had studied Stoic philosophy under Annaeus Cornutus and wrote a clear rejection of the imperial system in his epic work on the civil wars of Pompey and Caesar:

> The world suffered an irreparable disaster, because when we lost at Pharsalus was more than life and property; Roman liberty lay prostrate and Caesar's swords sufficed thereafter to cower generation after generation. But do we great-grandchildren of the combatants really deserve to be born slaves? Are we cowards that we fear to die? No, this is a punishment for our fathers' fears: fortune who gave us tyranny should also have given us a chance to take to the field against our tyrants. (Lucan *Pharsalia* VII.638-46, trans. by Robert Graves)

Though at first promoted by Nero in minor offices, Lucan would soon fall foul of the emperor's jealousy, and in turn began satirizing Nero's poetic pretentions (Graves 1956). He was thereafter implicated in the Piso conspiracy and was forced to kill himself in 65 CE.

Likewise, the senator Publius Clodius Thrasea Paetus (died 66 CE) was a follower of Stoic doctrines, and had even written a eulogy for Cato and celebrated the birthday of Brutus, one of the assassins of Julius Caesar (Ogilvie 1980). Upon hearing Nero's speech on the death of Agrippina, Thrasea 'who had been used to pass over previous flatteries in silence or with brief assent, then walked out of the Senate, thereby imperilling himself, without communicating to the other Senators any impulse towards freedom.' (Tacitus *Annals* XIV.12). Thrasea was not allowed to retire in peace. His withdrawal was taken as direct criticism. Since Thrasea apparently did not enter the Senate for three years, and did not take the oath of allegiance to the Princeps (Tacitus *Annals* xvi, 22), he began to be attacked by others in the Senate. A certain Marcellus made these accusations: -

> I miss the presence of an ex-consul in the Senate, of a priest when we offer our vows, of a citizen when we swear obedience, unless indeed . . . Thrasea has openly assumed the part of a traitor and an enemy. In a word, let the man, wont to act the senator and to screen those who disparage the prince, come among us; let him propose any reform or change he may desire. (Tacitus *Annals* XVI.28).

This withdrawal and silence were treated as treasonous. Nero ordered his death on the pretext that he had become almost the head of a party planning conspiracy, but more likely because of his independent spirit (Tacitus *Annals* XVI.22-32).

This resistance to emperors continued under the Stoic Helvidius Priscus, son-in-law of Thrasea (died 75 CE), who refused to acknowledge even the relatively benign emperor Vespasian by his imperial titles, and during Priscus' praetorship left the emperor 'unhonoured and unmentioned in all his edicts' (Suetonius *Vespasian* XV). Priscus had been seeking to have those who had informed on Thrasea condemned, but this move, after fierce debates in the Senate, had been crushed by an amnesty (Tacitus *Annals* IV.6-45; Dudley 1937). Indeed, this effort by Priscus may have been a more general move to find some solidarity in the Senate against sycophant prosecutors, aiming at a more active and revived senatorial class. Priscus was exiled and then put to death, probably because he argued

that the emperor should act only with the Senate's consent and had insisted on free speech in his role as senator, as indicated by a passage in Epictetus:

> For when Vespasian sent and commanded him not to go into the senate, he replied, "It is in your power not to allow me to be a member of the senate, but so long as I am, I must go in." Well, go in then, says the emperor, but say nothing. Do not ask my opinion, and I will be silent. But I must ask your opinion. And I must say what I think right. But if you do, I shall put you to death. When then did I tell you that I am immortal? You will do your part, and I will do mine: it is your part to kill; it is mine to die, but not in fear: yours to banish me; mine to depart without sorrow. (Epictetus *Discourses* 1.2, translated by George Long).

Vespasian also expelled the Cynic Demetrius, who accosted and insulted him publicly, and when insulted again at a later stage merely replied by calling him a 'good dog', i.e. a pun on the root meaning of 'Cynic' (Cassius Dio, LXV,13; Suetonius *Vespasian* 13). In contrast, we find the later emperor Domitian killing the Stoic adherents Junius Rusticus and Herennius Senecio because they wrote in praise of Thrasea and Priscus, and in 93 CE banishing all philosophers from Rome and Italy (Suetonius *Domitian*, 8, 2-4).

We can see then, that despite of the wishes of some philosophers and senators to withdraw from danger, Cicero was correct to argue that "The Sage never stays outside of politics" (in Wistrand 1979, p98). Both Thrasea and Seneca had been killed because their prestige meant that their philosophical attitudes and actions had direct political implications. These men had reputations that earnt them a certain level of respect and indirect authority: their silence or retirement were equated with the withdrawal of consent and therefore a direct attack on imperial rule.

Although the later Stoics admired 'Republican' exemplars such as Cato, this does not mean that they were agitating for a direct return to the conflict-ridden political system of the late Republic. Indeed, Republican terminology and institutions had already been coopted under the Principate, at least in appearance. Augustus was quite willing to promote himself as a restorer of Republican institutions, religious offices, and temples, as he claimed in 27 BCE and as reflected in later coinage from circa 22 BCE (Turner 2015; Ogilvie 1980; Syme 1974). The Principate borrowed the titles and symbols of the Republic and then the Empire gradually made use of the rationalism and duty-ethic of Stoicism.

The implicit theory of the Principate did not fully equate with Greek or eastern concepts of 'kingship'. While relying on the support of the Praetorian guard and provincial armies, the emperors still called upon Republican fictions to bolster claims for their unique *dignitas* and *auctoritas,* a mixture of reputation, honour achieved through deeds, and relational authority. The coins of these emperors regularly included references to consular, proconsular and tribunician powers. Nor was the issue of the succession assured in the early Principate. Although emperors such as Augustus might wish their descendants to follow them, this could be only done by pushing their nominated relative or another nominee through existing offices (often setting aside legal age limits), by establishing their command of armies, and by allocating them the power of republican institutions. None of the first five emperors were directly succeeded to the throne by their physical sons. To achieve the transition from one leader to the next, as in the succession of Tiberius after Augustus' death, required enormous compliance by

diverse actors, including the Senate, the Praetorian guard, the border legions and their generals, as well as powerful governors and 'leading men' that might make a bid for power.

Therefore, during the 1st centuries BCE and CE any moral attack on great Roman leaders was also a political attack, undermining their prestige and therefore their *dignitas* and questioning their authority and *imperium*, i.e. their right and power to command. This was an age where *auctoritas* and charisma remained important in maintaining stable rule. Hence figures such as Julius Caesar and Augustus built up their prestige through having held numerous political and religious offices, through receiving triumphs, and being granted other honours. Caesar's holding of the singular office of dictator for life (*dictator perpetuo*), his posthumous divine status, Octavian's unusual new title of Augustus (Beard 2023), his holding of ongoing consular powers and tribunicial powers for life, of being sole censor, were all aimed at increasing this prestige and authority (Ogilvie 1980). Religious aspects were more emphasised in the ruler cults of the east, but came turn full circle with the exceptional divinisation of Caligula within his own life-time. In such a setting, the prized *parrhesia* ('free speech') of Cynics and Stoics alike would be seen as license that attacked these foundations, a threat almost as dangerous as a blade. Such license could result in flogging, exile, book-burning and/or death (Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996; Ogilvie 1980), depending on the particular Emperor. 'Free speech' had been described by Diogenes of Sinope as the most beautiful thing in the world, (Diogenes Laertius VI. 69), but under the empire it was a dangerous luxury.

The emperors following Caligula stepped back from ordering their deification while still alive, and came to recognize that raw power had to be cloaked in civil forms. However, in turn, they were subject to sycophancy and more subtle forms of panegyric which sought to set standards for their conduct. We find Pliny the Younger making the following statement in his Panegyric to the emperor Trajan: -

> It is therefore with increased confidence . . . that I make this my earnest prayer: 'If he rules the State well and in the interests of all,' first preserve him for our grandsons and great-grandsons, then grant him one day a successor born of him in the image of the adopted son he is, or if fate denies him this, guide and direct his choice to someone worthy to be adopted in your temple on the Capitol. (Pliny *Panegyric* 94.5).

Such a prayer, though concerned with the contiguity of peaceful imperial rule, is therefore conditional upon good rule ('if he rules the State well and in the interests of all'), making it the only basis for such continuity. This is compatible with Stoic notions of governance as the greatest service, and also implies some kind of moral contract between the ruler and his subjects. This 'settlement' between philosophy and political power involved a serious trade-off in the loss of a positive *libertas* versus gaining the benefits of stability and peace. The 'philosophical opposition', when not trying to influence the Princeps towards better rule, was a movement of protest, rather than a revolutionary ideology. Likewise, Roman political thought was more comfortable with the promotion of a mores-based Republican order but soon adapted to the idea of an empire led by autocrats they sought to influence, rather than promoting a truly universal, cosmopolitan world order (Pangle 1998). However, despite this, Hellenistic visions of positive kingship and eastern ruler-cults began to create a social landscape in which certain Emperors could be seen as vehicles of providence, first in the

provincial Imperial cults and then under the Christianising empire from the fourth century CE onwards.

Stoics and Cynics, taken as a whole, represent serious bodies of intellectual thought and fascinating exemplars of action, seeking to give people power over their own lives regardless of external conditions. This was tested to the full under the Roman empire, but even emperors needed to coopt others to set up institutions that could reproduce themselves over time, manage a huge territorial empire, cope with succession problems, and sustain a capable administration, though this was increasingly staffed by Greeks, slaves and freedmen (Mouritsen 2011; Ogilvie 1980). Stoicism became a major resource to address such issues, and many of their ideas would be taken up by the early Christian thinkers. Cynicism, too, with its emphasis on self-reliance, poverty and asceticism, found some acceptance within ancient and medieval Christianity, and thereafter retained cache as an oppositional and counter-cultural discourse willing to challenge brute power (Branham & Goulet-Caze 1996). Both were essential elements in the huge interaction of Greek and Roman cultures that laid many of the intellectual foundations of the medieval and modern worlds.

Bibliography and Further Reading

Ancient

CASSIUS DIO *The Complete Works of Cassius Dio*, trans. by Herbert Baldwin Foster, Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2014

CASSIUS DIO *Dio's Roman History*, trans. E. Cary, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1968

CASSIUS DIO *Roman History*, 9 volumes, trans. Earnest Cary, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1914-1927

CICERO De *Natura Deorum & Academica*, trans H. Rackham, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1979

CICERO *De Finibus*, trans. by H. Rackham, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1931 [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Finibus/1*.html]

CICERO *De Officiis*, trans. W. Miller, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1975.

CICERO *De Re Publica & De Legibus*, trans. C. Keyes, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1977

DIO CHRYSOSTOM *Discourses*, trans. by J. Cohoon, London, Heineman, 1932

DIOGENES LAERTIUS *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 vols, trans. R. Hicks, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1970

EPICTETUS *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian*, 2 vols., trans. W. Oldfather, London, Heineman, 1926

EPICTETUS *The Discourses of Epictetus, with the Encheridion and Fragments*, trans. George Long, London. George Bell and Sons 1890

Q. HORATIUS FLACCUS (HORACE) *Horace, Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929 [Access via https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman]

HORACE *The Satires*, trans. A.S. Kine, Poetry in Translation, 2005 [https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceSatiresBkIISatVII.php]

LONG, A.A. & SEDLEY, D.N. *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Volume 1, Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*, Cambridge, CUP, 1988

LUCAN *Pharsalia: Dramatic Episodes of the Civil Wars*, trans. Robert Graves, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956
MALHERBE, Abraham J. (ed.) *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977 [https://pls.nd.edu/assets/153536/the_cynic_epistles.pdf]
MUSONIUS RUFUS *That One Should Distain Hardships: The Teachings of a Roman Stoic*, trans. by Cora E. Lutz, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020
PLATO *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, trans. Hugh Tredennick & Harrold Tarrant, London: Penguin, 1993
PLATO *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 3, trans. W.R.M. Lamb, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967
PLATO *The Republic*, trans. A.D. Lindsay, London: Heron Book, n.d.
PLINY *Letters and Panegyric*, trans. B. Radice, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1975
PLOTINUS *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, London: Penguin 1991
PLUTARCH *The Age of Alexander*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert, London: Penguin, 1973
PLUTARCH *Fall of the Roman Republic*, trans. R. Warner, London: Penguin, 1985
PLUTARCH *The Makerssu of Rome*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert, London: Penguin, 1965
SENECA *Ad Luculium Epistulae Morales*, trans. R. Gummere, Vol II, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1962
SENECA *De Clementia, in Moral Essays*, trans. J. Basore, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1928
SENECA *On Leisure*, trans. by Timothy Chander, *COLLOQUY text theory and critique, 23*, Melbourne: Monash University,] 2012, pp215-222 [https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1764312/seneca.pdf]
SENECA *Letters from a Stoic*, translated by Robin Campbell, London: Penguin, 1969
SUETONIUS *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. R. Graves, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984
TACITUS *Annals and the Histories*, trans. A. Church & W. Brodribb, Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952

Modern

ADCOCK, F.E. *Roman Political Ideas and Practice*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1964
ALLEN, James "Carneades", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), Summer 2024 Edition [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/carneades/]
ARNOLD, E.V. *Roman Stoicism*, Freeport, Books for Libraries Press, 1911
BEARD, Mary *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, London: Profile Books, 2015
BEARD, Mary *Emperor of Rome: Ruling the Ancient Roman World*, London: Profile Books, 2023
BOSMAN, Philip R. "Lucian Among the Cynics: The Zeus Refuted and Cynic Tradition", *Classical Quarterly Vol. 62 no. 2*, 2012, pp785–795 [doi: 10.1017/S0009838812000316]
BOWERSOCK, G.W. *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
BRANHAM, R. Bracht & GOULET-CAZE, Marie-Odile (eds) *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996
CLARKE, M. *The Roman Mind: Studies in the History of Thought from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius*, N.Y., Norton, 1968
DEVINE, Francis "Stoicism on the Best Regime", *Journal of the History of Ideas, 31*, 1970, pp323-336
DILL, Samuel *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, London, Macmillan, 1919
DIXON, Peter *Rhetoric*, London, Methuen, 1971
DUDLEY, Donald *A History of Cynicism*, Hildesheim, G.O.V., 1937
DUDLEY, D.R. "Blossius of Cumae", *The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 31*, 1941, pp94-99

FEARS, J. *Princeps A Diis Electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor As a Political Concept at Rome*, Rome, American Academy at Rome, 1977

FERGUSON, John *The Heritage of Hellenism*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1973

FERGUSON, R. James "Socrates and Plato in Historic Context: From Dialogue to Dialectic", *Past and Future Backgrounders*, 2023 [https://www.past-and-future.com/_files/ugd/3e47fd_c8201a2735104175b5c879e2be7246b3.pdf?index=true]

FERGUSON, R. James "Cicero: Crises of Humanism and Republicanism", *Past and Future Background Briefing*, 2024 [https://www.past-and-future.com/_files/ugd/3e47fd_e4fc55ca189b4c81bbdf6e3a6c29cb8c.pdf?index=true]

FLEW, Antony (ed.) *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, London, Pan, 1979

GEUS, Klaus "Oikoumene/Orbis Terrarum", *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: OUP, 22 December 2016 [https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.8008]

GOULET-CAZE, M.-O. "Religion and the Early Cynics", in BRANHAM, R. Bracht & GOULET-CAZE, Marie-Odile (eds) *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996

GRAVES, Robert "Introduction", Lucan *Pharsalia: Dramatic Episodes of the Civil Wars*, trans. Robert Graves, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956, pp7-24

GRIFFIN, Miriam *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1976

HAMMOND, M. "Res Olim Dissociabiles: Princeps Ac Libertas; Liberty Under the Early Roman Empire", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, Vol. 67*, 1963, pp93-113

HARRIS, B.F. "Stoic and Cynic Under Vespasian", *Prudentia, 9*, 1977, pp105-114

HOLIDAY, Ryan & HANSELMAN, Stephen *Lives of the Stoics: The Art of Living from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius*, London: Profile Books, 2020

KENNEDY, George *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1963

KLEINGELD, Pauline & BROWN, Eric "Cosmopolitanism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Winter 2019 Edition [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/cosmopolitanism/]

KOESTER, Helmut *Introduction to the New Testament: Vol. I, History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, N.Y., Walter de Gruyter, 1987

LANE, Melissa, "Ancient Political Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), Summer 2023 Edition [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/ancient-political/]

LONG, A. A. "The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics", in BRANHAM, R. Bracht & GOULET-CAZE, Marie-Odile (eds) The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996

MILLAR, Fergus "Epictetus and the Imperial Court", *JRS, Vol. 55*, 1965, pp141-48

MOURITSEN, Henrik *The Freedman in the Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011

OLGIVIE, R.M. *Roman Literature and Society*, London: Penguin, 1980

PANGLE, Thomas L. "Socratic Cosmopolitanism: Cicero's Critique and Transformation of the Stoic Ideal", *Canadian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 31 no. 2*, January 1998, pp235-262

RAWSON, Elizabeth *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic*, Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1985

SAMUEL, Alan E. *The Promise of the West*, London, Routledge, 1988

SANDBACH, F.H. *The Stoics*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1975

SEARS, Matthew A. "If you don't want to be an 'idiotes,' you have to do more than just vote: The Ancient Greeks disdainfully called an apolitical person an 'idiotes'", *The Globe and Mail*, July 15, 2022

SEESKIN, Kenneth *Dialogue and Discovery: A Study in Socratic Method*, Albany, State Uni. of N.Y. Press, 1987

STEPHENS, William O. "Refugees, Exiles and Stoic Cosmopolitanism", in Simkins, R. A. & Smith, Z.B. (eds) *Religion and Globalization, Journal of Religion and Society Supplement 16*, 2018, pp1-19

SYME, Ronald *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974
TOYNBEE, Jocelyn "Dictators and Philosophers in the First Century A.D.", *Greece & Rome, Vol. 13*, 1944, pp43-58
TURNER, Aimee "Kings on Coins: The Appearance of Numa on Augustan Coinage," *Journal of the Classical Association of Victoria, Vol. 28*, 2015, pp70-83
WILDBERG, Christian, "Neoplatonism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Winter 2021 Edition [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/neoplatonism/]
WIRSZUBSKI, C. *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome during the Late Republic and the Early Principate*, Cambridge: CUP, 1950
WISTRAND, Erik "Stoic Opposition to the Principate", *Studi Classice, Vol. 18*, 1979, pp93-101
Yona, Sergio *Epicurean Ethics in Horace: The Psychology of Satire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018

Internet and Media Resources

The History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps provides a wide range of podcasts on Greek, Roman, Christian and European philosophy at https://www.historyofphilosophy.net/all-episodes

Metzger, Doug *The Literature and History Podcast*, ongoing, and index of episodes can be found at https://literatureandhistory.com/index.php/episodes/all-episodes [This is a detailed series of podcasts includes treatments of many Latin and Roman writers, including Catullus, Horace, Virgil, Propertius, Ovid, Seneca, Petronius and Juvenal]

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides a wide range of authoritative article on ancient philosophers, their movements and school at https://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html

Human-Mind Crafted:
NB This backgrounder was not written with the aid of AI software or generative tools.

For general access to this and further background briefings, articles, educational works and essays, visit the *Past-and-Future* website.